

Quit India Movement in Cachar: A Historical Study.

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ABSTRACT: Quit India Movement was the last movement organised by the Congress party against the British Government. The net result of the movement in Barak valley was that the prominent Congress leaders were arrested. Arun Kumar Chanda was arrested at Calcutta on 9th August, 1942. The arrest of Arun Kumar Chanda created resentment in the valley. The Middle Class leaders organised protest, meetings and demonstration. Arun Kumar Chanda was the first to offer Satyagraha in the Silchar Court compound thrice uttering anti-war slogans in the presence of about 10,000 people. He was arrested and convicted to one year imprisonment and a fine of Rs.100.¹ While in prison Arun Kumar Chanda came in contact with the famous revolutionary leader of Manipur, Irabat Singh who was deeply touched by his personality, liberal and democratic attitude.²

KEYWORDS: Quit India Movement, Barak Valley, Middle Class, Satyagraha.

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I. INTRODUCTION

The Congress workers formed a war council to launch a widespread *Satyagraha*. The local Jamiat-ul-ulema workers offered co-operation to the Congress. On 31st August a group of middle class women Satyagrahis under the leadership of Saralabala Devi picketed the Sylhet Court and one of them, Snehalata Devi occupied the District Judge's chair and when the Superintendent of Police tried to lead out of women volunteers, he was man-handled by a Congress worker.³

On 2nd and 5th September the leaders and about 67 under trial prisoners escaped from the Habiganj jail. Police stations at Lala and Badarpur and Biswanath were targets for mob attack.⁴ Mass leadership campaign was started by the 'Quit India Movement' or famous 'August Revolution in 1942'. The basic principle of this movement was 'Non-violence' led by Gandhiji. Beside Congress Bengal volunteers, the representatives of the society of *Anushilan* and *Yagantar*. 'RCPI' and 'RSP' was also involved into the movement.⁵ It was the only movement that every class of society actively participated. In Sylhet it was started by the students union. Some of the students of Sylhet Murari Chand College, like Naba Kumar Bhattacharjee, Harinarayan Das, Rshidesh Ranjan Das, Pravash Chanda Dey, Akhil Chandra Datta organised a Forward Bloc society at Hostel Campus. Near about 384 personalities were imprisoned at Sylhet district Jail. The revolutionary works were also campaigned by Sarala Bala Devi, Md. Mubarak Ali, Labanya Kumar Choudhury (Engineer), Ibrahim Chautala and Sachindra Mohan Dutta. Here again the leadership was primarily dominated by the Middle Class Intelligentsia. They played a dual role because sometimes they chose the way of revolutionary terrorism, sometimes followed the path of Non-cooperation. All the communities supported the middle class leadership because it was a mass movement which Gandhiji declared it as an open revolution.⁶ The main slogan of Gandhiji to the people of Nation was "Do or Die". In Barak Valley, from 1938 to 1942 Karuna Chakraborty worked actively. In 1942, Pramendra Mohan Goswami, a student of second year started his political career and

¹ Jyotirmoy Sen, "A Concise History of the Freedom Movement in Cachar" (unpublished) (see for further details Jahar Kanti Sen, Amalendu Bhattacharjee, Biswatosh Chowdhury, *Arun Kumar Chanda, A Biographical Sketch*, Golden Jubilee Celebration Committee, Faculty of Science 1945-99, Gurucharan College, Silchar, Assam 1st edition 15th January 1999), pp. 14-15.

² Nirod Gupta, *Sadhinata Sangramer Smriti*, Publisher Nirmalendu Gupta, Silchar, 1947, p. 82.

³ Home Poll, File No 18/8/42, FR Assam, 2nd Half of August, 1942.

⁴ Home Poll, file Nos. 18/8/42, 18/11/42 FRS, Assam, August-September 1942; Nirode Gupta, *op .cit*, n-36, pp. 211-216.

⁵ *Maitri Bani* (Bengali) Silchar, *August Biplab*, Golden Jubilee, Chief editor - Saraj Das, 1995, p. 3.

⁶ *Ibid*, p. 5.

was involved in various political activities up to independence. Bhupati Chakraborty also actively participated in the movement of 1942. Nabakumar Bhattacharjee from 1936 onwards was actively involved with many organisations. At that time he was a student of Public School at Karimganj. According to his statement, there were two students union at Sylhet viz, 'Student Association' and 'Student Federation'. Saroj Kumar Das stated that 'Quit India Movement' had widely spread throughout the Surma Valley. He himself had joined this movement as a volunteer. Moreover, Mohitosh Purkayastha a very well-known personality also worked during this historic period of time.⁷

II. AN OVERVIEW OF THE MOVEMENT

Both Surma Valley and Barak Valley during the outburst of the movement played a very significant role. In Sylhet district revolution turned into a very mass movement. The Congress leaders formed a revolutionary society. The main leading personalities in this were Kedar Nath Bhattacharjee, Binode Behari Chakraborty, Nirode Kumar Gupta, and Birendra Kumar Das, students' leader Harinarayan Das, Jatindra Ranjan Deb, Premendra Goswami, Deva Prasad Sen, Anil Shome and Charubala Deb. Under the leadership of Congress leaders, August revolution spread from village to village in the Surma Valley. In Silchar, Communist leader Achinta Bhattacharjee was arrested in the very beginning. Nikunjya Behari Goswami observed that in Cachar no mass revolution was organised. Still some among others like Srimati Jyotsna Chanda came out in the street and joined the movement whole-heartedly in Barak Valley. From Surma Valley near about 25 leaders and workers were kept in police custody viz. Sarala Bala Devi, Purnandu Kishore Gupta, Jatindra Nath Bhadri, Kedar Nath Bhattacharjee, Naresh Nandini Dutta, Binode Behari Chakraborty, Labanya Kumar Choudhury, Gopal Chandra Das, Nikunja Behari Bhattacharjee, Durga Pada Das, Jitendra Sharma, Uma Chakraborty, and Lili Das. They organised and played a memorable role in this movement.⁸ The movement spread almost all over the eastern part of Bengal and Assam. A group of leaders stopped the official function of the Zilla Committee. The students of Brahmaputra and Surma Valley took up a leading role for the cause of Independence. They were guided by Sachindra Mohan Datta (Laku da) who was also a torch bearer of the 'Chatra Samaj' for the growth of revolutionary spirit against the Government. Several anti-Government programmes were launched to sabotage the machinery of Government and as a result British after this movement changed their outlook towards Indians. The movement continued almost one year. This was the last political venture in India against British Raj.⁹ In May, 1944, Gandhiji was released from jail and the Congress called off the movement urgently to discuss the Indian question with Lord Wavell. Wavell announced his plan in June 14, 1945. According to this plan an interim Government was to be formed and power transferred to the Indians. The intention of Government to curb the spirit of Indian National Movement against the British. In India both Congress and Muslim league worsened their political relation with each other. No new political measures did solve this issue and Jinnah declined to accept anything except the partition. Congress rejected the demand of Jinnah. As a result Wavell's plan failed.¹⁰ In the mean time Coalition Government failed and Saudulla Ministry came into power in Assam. In 1941, Governors rule was introduced in the province. But in 1942 again Saudulla Ministry came into Power in Assam. From Cachar Congress party won a great victory. The two successful candidates like Satindra Mohan Dev and Nibaran Chandra Laskar from Silchar and Maulavi Abdul Matlib, Mazumdar and Bidyapathi Singh from Hailakandi participated to the Legislative Assembly. Arun Kumar Chanda successfully came out for the central legislature without contest. Originally the valley did not produce any movement independently. The collaboration of the leaders in Barak Valley with all India level and their visit in the valley inspired the people to gear up their natural strength. The leaders of the Barak valley understood the root cause of their backwardness of the society. That is why their role mainly was to organise the society in the field of socio-political, education-cum cultural upliftment to the role model of Bengal, and Sylhet. The impact of the national movement was felt in this valley through the role of these leaders. At this juncture, Arun Kumar Chanda breathed his last on April 26, 1947 in Calcutta. The final achievement before his death was the establishment of Gurucharan College in Silchar in 1935.¹¹

⁷ *Ibid.*, P-8; Jalal Uddin Mazumdar, "Sampradayikata-Bharatchara" Smarak Grantha, 9th August, District Youth Congress Committee (I), Congress Bhavan, Park Road, Silchar, Assam, pp. 1-5.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

¹⁰ S N Sen, *op. cit.*, n-1, pp. 292-305.

¹¹ *Saptak*, (Bengali weekly) 14 Shrawan, BS 1348, 30th July, 1941, Silchar; *Azad*, (Bengali weekly), 15th August, 1974, Silchar;

D. Datta (ed), *Cachar District Record*, Vakil Patti, 1969, pp. 54;

III. AN HISTORICAL ANALYSIS

In the meantime, Churchill, the leader of the conservative party of England was replaced by the leader of the labour party, Clement Attlee, who had fought the election on the issue of giving complete independence to India. During this time, Mahitosh Purkayastha was selected as the secretary of the *Cachar Zilla Congress Committee*. In 1947, Congress Committee of both Cachar and Karimganj was transferred from Bangia Pradesh to Assam Pradesh Congress. But it was opposed by Mahitosh Purkayastha. He was also appointed the general secretary of the 'Surma Upatakya Cha Sramik Congress Committee'. His real political activities started after Independence.

At this vital stage British sent a Mission consisting of three members called 'Cabinet Mission' in March 23, 1946 to discuss with the Indian political leaders regarding the issue of Independence. According to the plan, there should be union of India which would British India and the Native states. The Cabinet Mission rejected Jinnah's demand for Pakistan. The Muslim league also accepted the plan. The Congress leaders unanimously accepted the plan. But in Brahmaputra Valley that had been objected by some leaders because of the grouping of Assam with Bengal. Gopinath Bardoloi, the then Prime Minister of Assam submitted a memorandum to the Congress Working Committee; ultimately Gandhiji supported the proposal of Gopinath Bardoloi. In this period Congress got an overwhelming majority in the constituent Assembly election held in July 1946, but Muslim league publicly declared the withdrawal of the acceptance from the plan. Thus the last hope of transfer of power from British Government to the Indians ended in failure. In August 6, 1947, the Muslim League demanded a separate dominion 'Pakistan' by observing the 'Direct action'. As a result communal riots broke out. A simultaneous reaction was also had seen in the Muslim dominated areas of Cachar, Sylhet, Nowgong and Goalpara. They openly raised a slogan in favour of Pakistan. Leaders like Abdul Hamid of Sylhet were a strong supporter of 'Pakistan' and were key to league activities in Cachar and Sylhet. But some democratic minded Muslim leaders opposed it as an illegal step. Maulana Pir Muhammad Yakub of Badarpur had condemned the activities of the league and creation of Pakistan in strong terms.

Finally the constituent Assembly was setup. The Assembly elected Dr. Rajendra Prasad as its President, Jawaharlal Nehru declared his famous 'objective Resolution' which declared the Assembly firmly and solemnly, resolved that India would begin an 'Independent, Sovereign Republic'. This later became the basis of the preamble to the constitution of Free India. Thus India achieved Independence in February 20, 1947, Prime Minister Clement Attlee made an important announcement with definite intention to effect the transfer of power to the responsible Indian hands by a date not later than June, 1948. Lord Mountbatten succeeded Lord Wavell, as Viceroy in March 1947. The situation of India at that time was serious. Finally, June 3, 1947, after a prolonged discussion with both the groups of, Hindu and the Muslim leaders and their visit to London for consultation for the detailed partition was declared. A referendum would be held in North-west-frontier province in the Muslim majority district of Sylhet in Assam to decide whether it would join with India or with Pakistan. British Parliament introduced the Indian Independence Bill in 4th July, 1947. Within a fortnight the bill was passed by the British Parliament and Indian Independence Act, 15th July, 1947 came into being. Thus according to the provision of Indian Independence Act of 1947, two new dominions were setup, viz., 'India' and 'Pakistan'. C. Raja Gopalacharia remained in the office till the first President of the Republic of India was elected on January, 26, 1950 and till the new constitution was adopted and India became a Republic. Dr Rajendra Prasad became the first President of India.¹²The reaction of the Partition of India was a serious in this district. Majority of the political leaders were against the partition of the country and raised their demands for the independence of "united India". In February, 1947, a student's convention was held at Silchar; Major General A.C. Chatterjee a former I. N.A. personality, Niharendu Dutta Mazumdar, a youth leader and Dr. Amiya Chakraborty participated in this convention. In this convention, all the leaders adopted a resolution in favour of complete Independence on the basis of undivided India on 20th February. Side by side, Assam Nationalists Muslims Convention was held at Silchar under the initiative of a group of leaders. The president of the convention, Maulana Ibrahim conducted the inaugural function along with Md. Abdul Matlib Mazumdar. They passed a resolution demanding the independence of undivided India. About fifteen thousand Muslim cadres raised the nationalist slogan and paraded the streets of Silchar. The proposed partition of Sylhet by Lord Mountbatten created a stir in the Surma valley. The Member of Legislative Assembly, Satindra Mohan Dev at this vital stage convened a meeting with political leaders of Surma Valley at Silchar which was held on 8th June, 1947. A group of political leaders under the leadership of Basanta Kumar Das, Home Minister of Assam

Jahar Kanti Sen, Amalendu Bhattacharjee, Biswatosh Choudhury, 'Arun Kumar Chanda: A Biographical Sketch', Golden Jubilee Celebration Committee, 1949-1999, Gurucharan College, Silchar, p. 18.

¹² J B Bhattacharjee, *op. cit.*, n-7, pp. 282-89, S N Sen, *op. cit.*, n-1, pp. 292-97.

organised a meeting. These leaders organised meetings in several parts of Sylhet and protested against the partition of Sylhet excluding four thanas like Karimganj, Rathabari, Patharkhandi and Badapur was put to referendum. The Karimganj subdivision consisted of Karimganj, Rathabari, Patharkhandi and Badarpur was transferred to Cachar which was continued to be a part of Assam.¹³

IV. CONCLUSIONS

Thus it can be said that the Middle Class in Barak Valley during the period of colonial rule led the movement for Independence. Though the leaders of the valley had not started any independent movement but they were the pioneers to co-operate with the leaders of Indian National Movement. Several Sabha and Samiti were formed. Newspaper and Journals also side by side played a very important role. The leaders took this institution as a weapon to popularise various ideologies led by the National leaders like Gandhi, Netaji, Jawaharlal Nehru and many others. The middle class leaders in Barak Valley during the period of various colonial movements such as *Non-co-operation*, *Khilafat*, *Civil disobedience* and *Quit India* Movement under the direction of Indian leadership.¹⁴ These Middle Class had been enriched through movements like the renaissance, the reformation, the enlightenment and democratic reform.¹⁵ Thus Middle Class leadership in Barak Valley was an extension of greater Middle class community of India. Only difference was that they were National component and in Barak valley they were regional component of Middle Class as a whole.

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