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Civil Disobedience Movement : Struggle Amidst Subjugation with Special Reference to Madhya Prant

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The Civil Disobedience Movement was a serious challenge to the British imperialism. The clouds of despair vanished from the sky of Indian politics by this movement and the nation spurred with new motivation in the freedom struggle. The Central Province and Barar also extended significant contribution in this decisive movement. The year 1927 and the Madras Session, both are significant because two new leaders emerged on the political screen of India. Until then, Gandhiji had not yet returned to active politics and Motilal Nehru was engaged in the parliamentary works. After the discontinuation of the non cooperation movement, the parliamentary activities of the Congress did not let the zeal of the masses diminish during the period of despair. The farmers and laborers were restless. Revolutionary activities had begun again. The masses were giving their silent support to revolutionaries like Bhagat Singh. There was unprecedented awakening among the youth, especially the students and youth committees had been established in almost all the provinces, but they lacked leadership. During these days, Subhash Chandra Bose was released from the Mandle jail of Burma and Jawaharlal Nehru also had returned from England. Both started challenging the senior leaders in their own unique ways due to which the political scenario started taking a new form. On seeing J M das on C R Das's chair, Subhash Chandra Bose took Jawaharlal Nehru's help. Both the leaders threw themselves into the work of 'freedom' and 'socialism'. The members of the Youth League also started regarding them as their leaders. The labor class also started looking up to them for the progress of their objectives.

At the time of the Madras Session of 1927, Motilal Nehru was in Europe. Gandhiji was present in the session as a mere spectator. Jawaharlal Nehru presented many proposals of independence and against war-like imperialism

with the cooperation of the League. Almost all the proposals were passed. They were accepted as the authorized proposal of the executive body. After this, both Subhash Chandra Bose and Jawaharlal Nehru continued to struggle and fight for total freedom and they established the 'Freedom League' for independence of India'. In this way, in 1927, while there was communalism and Hindu-Muslim riots had started on one hand, on the other hand, all the attempts of breaking the constitution through constitutional methods by the Swarajya Party also came to an end. The staunch imperialist Birkenhead proved to be a medium to infuse new enthusiasm to the national movement in India.

On 20 January, 1928, Brijlal Biyani presented the proposal to boycott the Simon Commission to which T J Kedar, B G Khaparde, Dr. M B Khare, G S Gupta, Umesh Dutt Pathak and Mahant Lakshmi Narayan etc gave their consent. Thus, the Congress not only boycotted the Simon Commission, it also accepted the challenge firmly that the Indian leaders present the outline or format of the constitution by unanimous consent. The Congress also gave a solid response to this. In 1929, while on one hand the committee formed by Motilal Nehru demanded India to be granted the 'status of dominion', on the other hand the youth under the leadership of Jawaharlal Nehru also were demanding total freedom or 'Poorna Swarajya'. The Civil Disobedience Movement launched under the chairmanship of Jawaharlal Nehru in the Lahore Congress was a powerful attempt to achieve this goal².

On 26 January, 1930, 'independence day' was celebrated in entire India. All the members of Congress present in the provincial assemblies also celebrated 'Independence Day'³. In February 1930, the publication of the daily newspaper 'Lokmat' from Jabalpur, with Seth Govind Das as the manager and Dwarka Prasad Mishra as the editor and weekly newspaper 'Swarajya' from Khandwa, with Siddhanath Madhav Agarkar as the editor was started. In February 1930, Mahatma Gandhi wrote a letter to the then Governor General Lord Irwin and presented 11 demands. The Congress passed the proposal of total independence. When Lord Irwin did not pay any attention towards this, Gandhiji decided to start the Civil Disobedience Movement.

In the Central Province, the Civil Disobedience Movement started in two phases. The first was the Salt Satyagraha and the second was the Jungle

Satyagraha. To break the Salt Law, Gandhiji started a march with his followers and supporters on 12 March, 1930 from Sabarmati Ashram at Ahmedabad and reached Dandi on 6 April, 1930 after covering a distance of 325 kilometers in 24 days. He prepared salt on the beach of Dandi and broke the Salt Law. With this the Civil Disobedience Movement started⁴.

With the violation of the Salt Law by Gandhiji, all the Congress committees were declared as illegal. As soon as the Congress committees were dissolved, all of them were converted into war committees⁵. War committees were formed at the provincial level also. Proposals were passed regarding the Satyagraha to be started by the war committees of Hindustan and Marathi Central Province. Seth Govind Das was the chair person and Dwarka Prasad Mishra was the minister of the Hindustani Madhya Prantiya war committee⁶. Following the Salt Satyagraha, Salt Law was being breached in every place. There was lack of natural facilities and means of breaking the Salt Law in Madhya Prant and Barar. So salt water was boiled to make salt, which was a very expensive method⁷. Many efforts were made to attract the attention of the people towards this movement like, organizing a mass meeting and reading banned or prohibited literature, boycott of foreign clothes and articles, propaganda of khadi, silent march and efforts to improve the condition of Harijan, etc. through these various actions, the attention of the masses was drawn and as a result, it was converted into a mass movement⁸.

On 6 April, 1930, the day of the breach of the Salt Law by Gandhiji, a rally was taken out by the Madhya Prant war committee under the leadership of Chairman Seth Govind Das and minister Dwarka Prasad Mishra from Kamaniya Gate to the historical Samadhi of Rani Durgavati. At the Samadhi, all the freedom fighters who had participated in the rally faithfully took a pledge to constantly struggle for the achievement of the objective of 'poorna swarajya'. The volunteers prepared salt with a scientific method in a public meeting and broke the Salt Law. In many places like Sihora, Katni, Mandla, Damoh, Raipur and the neighboring areas also, Salt Law was broken and thus the movement gained momentum⁹. Other people like Bhawani Prasad Tiwari, Sawaimal Jain, Satyendra Prasad Mishra from Jabalpur, Mahesh Dutt Mishra, Sitaram Dixit,

Dadabhai Nayak from Harda, Nitiraj Singh Chaudhry from Narsinghpur, Lala Arjun Singh, Shambhu Dayal Mishra from Hoshangabad and Salpekar from Chhindwada, etc also broke the Salt Law¹⁰. At this juncture, it is worth mentioning that on 15 April, 1930, in the meeting of the Raipur Madhya Prantiya Rajneetik Parishad, the name of Hindustani Madhya Prant was changed to its old name Mahakoshal on the proposal of Dwarka Prasad Mishra¹¹.

In Marathi Central Province also war committee was formed. The Chairman of this committee was M V Abhyankar and Jamnalal Bajaj, Mahatma Bhagwan Deen, Dr. m B Khare, Poonam Chand Ranka and Neelkanth Deshmukh were members. A team of volunteers from the Marathi region went to Bara and broke the Salt Law. So, a war committee was formed in Barar also. The Chairman of the Barar war committee was Veer Waman Rao Joshi and Brijlal Biyani was the Secretary. When Waman Rao Joshi was arrested, Babuji Ane became the chairman of the Barar war committee. On 21 April, 1930, the women volunteers broke the Salt Law under the leadership of Durga Bai Joshi. In this way, in every district, a war committee was formed to break the Salt Law¹².

Since there was no natural facility available in Madhya Prant and Barar to break the Salt Law, the volunteers were forced to adopt the expensive method of boiling the salted water to prepare salt. To prepare salt with this method, a place called Dahihanda of Akola district of Barar was decided upon. The salt prepared by artificial method was sold for the sake of the Congress Aid Fund. In this context, the most noteworthy sale was done in the meeting of Nagpur where salt was sold by Abhyankar to a book seller Poonam Chand for Rs. 251/-¹³. This process was adopted not only by the members of Congress, but also by non Congress people. The Responsive leaders and former legislators also took part in the Satyagraha and adopted this method. In this way salt was sold openly in sealed packets. What is worth mentioning is that those who purchased salt had to sign before taking the salt. Teams of 18-18 satyagrahis from various regions like Chanda, Bhandara, Vardha, etc were collected and sent under the leadership of V G Sahasrabuddhe for Salk Satyagraha. They were arrested. Every satyagrahi was sentenced to three months imprisonment and Sahasrabuddhe was sentenced to six months imprisoned¹⁴.

Though the government was not ready for the arrest of the satyagrahis, the war committee of the Mahakoshal Congress adopted other methods and compelled the government to arrest the satyagrahis. In this context, the leaders decided to break the government rules by reading prohibited literature. On 20 April, a huge public meeting was organized in which Seth Govind Das, Dwarka Prasad Mishra, Ravi Shankar Shukla and other leaders read excerpts from the prohibited literature and gave anti government speeches. In this meeting, eight boys from an orphanage brought along by Ravi Shankar Shukla wore saffron robes, tied red strips of cloth on their shoulders and sang two motivating songs. Some portions of the illegal literature 'Bharat Mein Angrezi Raj' and the illegal poem 'Ranbheri' were read in the meeting¹⁵. Seth Govind Das, Dwarka Prasad Mishra, Makhan Lal Chaturvedi and V D Bhargava etc were arrested with the objective of avoiding any kind of deep impact on the masses. They were sentenced to two years of rigorous imprisonment under the Act 124 A of Indian Penal Code. This arrest created havoc in Jabalpur. Meetings were organized in Sihora, Khitaula, Ganjtal, Majhauri Bazar and Slimanabad as a mark of protest and prohibited literature was read and the atrocities of the government were condemned¹⁶. On 4th May, 1936, the police officers arrested Gandhiji at around 12.45 under the Regulation of Ordinance of 1827. According to this Regulation, if a person proved to be a threat for any public system for a long time, then that person was to be kept under detention¹⁷. Gandhiji's detention, rallies, organizing of protest meetings breaking of the Salt Law and peaceful disobedience of the other prohibitory orders of the government proved as a green signal for the Civil Disobedience movement¹⁸.

Madhya Prant and Barar also did not stay far behind in organizing various programs of Civil Disobedience Movement. The daily newspapers 'Lokmat' and 'Karmveer' also contributed their bit. Apart from Madhya Prant and Barar, this newspaper became popular in other provinces also. Before the prohibition by the government under the Press Ordinance Act, this Newspaper helped a lot in spreading the message of the Congress in every nook and corner of the province. Instigative literatures were read in public meetings and Satyagraha was given a new form by violating the Jungle Law which became popular not only in Mahakoshal but also in Marathi Madhya Prant and Barar¹⁹

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