

Reflection of Non-Cooperation Movement in the Princely State Tripura

Dr. Subhash Debnath

Assistant Professor, Holy Cross College, Agartala

Abstract

Under Mahatma Gandhi's guidance, the Indian liberation movement entered a new phase in the 1920s. The 1920s marked a significant shift in India's freedom struggle, moving from individual leaders and small groups to a broader, more inclusive, and non-violent mass movement. Gandhi's appeal for widespread involvement in the nonviolent, non-cooperation campaign reached even the most isolated regions of the nation. And unlike other princely domains of India, the small princely state of North East India, the princely Tripura also witnessed some repercussions to that.

Since ancient times North East India portrays a different socio-cultural and economic entity than the rest of the Indian subcontinent. Despite the prolonged difference, north east India was always connected with the mainstream of Indian socio-political settings. As a result, the princely Tripura was not completely isolated from the nationalist politics and the freedom struggle of India.

Mahatma Gandhi organized the Khilafat and Non-Cooperation movements, which sought to overthrow British colonial control in India. Early in 1921, these demonstrations gathered traction in the Princely state of Tripura, which was governed by a native king under British influence. Additionally, during this period, the spirit of nationalism was sparked in the princely domain of Tripura, where the people of Chakla Roshnabad actively joined in the nationalist movement led by Gandhi and the Indian National Congress and rebelled against the colonial administration.

Keywords: Gandhi, Liberation movement, non-violent mass movement, princely, North East India, Khilafat and Non-Cooperation movements, Chakla Roshnabad, Princely Tripura.

1. Introduction:

The year 1920 is a very pivotal moment in Indian history. A significant transformation took place in the country's socio-political landscape at that time. This is the time when Mahatma Gandhi for the first time assumed the leadership of the Indian National Congress after his return from his long sojourn in South Africa. As a result of his direct entry into the freedom struggle of India, a new political outlook and strategy were outlined with Congress politics towards the freedom struggle. It was the year when Mahatma Gandhi called his first nonviolence mass movement called Non-Cooperation movement. The effects of this movement were not restricted within British India, but its effect reached the remotest part of the country, which included various princely states as well. And unlike other princely domains of India, the small princely state of North East India, the princely Tripura also witnessed some repercussions to that. Although Gandhi never visited this remotest corner of India, nor was he connected with the people of Princely Tripura by any means. But still, his ideas reached and his actions had some

impact in the minds of people of Princely Tripura. And in these regards, the present paper is an attempt to analyze the influence of Gandhi's non-cooperation movement in the princely state of Tripura.

2. Literature survey

There is a paucity of historical works on North East India, especially about Indian nationalism and its connection with north east India. Though there are some scholarly works that talk about the History of Assam and Indian nationalism, but with regards to the other states of north east India i.e. Princely Tripura there is an acute shortage of literature. For a considerable period of time the topic like North east India's contribution to Indian nationalism has been neglected in the works of historians and no proper historical investigations have been done on such topic. Thus, the paper attempts to understand the effects of Indian nationalism and the Gandhian movement on princely State Tripura. Though there are shortages of historical works on this subject, nonetheless, based on certain government records and a few scholarly works the present paper tries to investigate the role of princely Tripura in the Non-Co-Operation Movement launched by Mahatma Gandhi in 1920.

There are a few primary and secondary sources that were very helpful in this effort. 'British Relations with the state of Tripura' written by Dr. Hirendra Kumar Sur is one such book. The book extensively highlighted the various perspectives of the British relationship with the princely court Tripura. It also threw some glimpses on the element of Indian nationalism and impact on north eastern states especially Princely Tripura. The works of R. C. Maunder i.e. 'History of Freedom Movement' was also helpful in formulating some ideas on this topic. An article on "Socio-political Activities of Students in Tripura Before 1945 A.D" written by Mr. Nayem Hussain also gives some glimpses on the involvement of princely Tripura in the Non-Co-Operation movement of 1920.

A few primary sources such as The Administrative Report of Tripura 1911-12 to 1921-22 A.D, Vol. 2 and the government record on 'Khilafat and Non- Co-operation Movement-Agitation in Tripura' kept in the Secretariat; Agartala were extensively helpful for writing this paper. The details of action and activities launched in various parts of the princely Tripura in the non-co- Operation movement are recorded in those reports.

Based on the above mentioned primary and secondary sources the paper tries to investigate the role of princely Tripura in the country's freedom struggle, especially in the non-cooperation movement started by Gandhi. By doing this, the present paper tries to make a bridge between the mainstream history of Indian's freedom struggle and the history of Princely Tripura. For a long time, the History of Tripura is seen as an isolated development and not as a part and parcel of India's history, hence this paper tried to minimize this research gap in the existing literature. .

3. Princely Tripura and its early connection with National Movement

Princely state Tripura consist of two parts namely the hill Tripura regarded by the British as 'Hill Tipperah' and plain Tripura popularly known as 'ChaklaRoshanabad'¹ (Now Comilla, Bangladesh) or Land of light' consist of 570 square miles of Comilla, Noakhali and Sylhet of the then Colonial Bengal (nowadays in Bangladesh), which once was an integral part of Tripura. From the 18th century onwards, Tripura began to lose possession of her own territory of ChaklaRoshanabad. First in the hand of Mughal

¹ Sur, H.K British Relations with the state of Tripura, Naba Chandra Prakashani, Ramnagar Road No-2 (West), 1986, P. 26

ruler in 1722² and later on passed into the hand of British East India Company in 1761³. However, the estate called ChaklaRoshanabad remained in the hand of Tripura kings but as a Zamindary till the partition of India in 1947. Thus, Tripura kings had two designations such as independent ruler of Hill Tipperah and a Zamindar of Chakla Roshnabad first under the Nawab of Bengal and later under British Government.

Since ancient times North East India portrays a different socio-cultural and economic entity than the rest of the Indian subcontinent. Despite the prolonged difference, north east India was always connected with the mainstream of Indian socio-political settings. In colonial India, most of north-eastern India, especially Assam, came directly under the British Empire along with the mainland of India. On the other hand, in the Princely states of Tripura and Manipur, the British Government appointed Political Agents in order to exercise their political control indirectly. As a result, the princely Tripura was not completely isolated from the nationalist politics and the freedom struggle of India. Moreover, the influence of the revolutionary activities of the neighbouring East Bengal was observed in the princely state of Tripura, especially in the Plain land of Tripura known as Chakla Roshanabad. For example, in a passing reference, Ranjit Kumar De, in his book "Socio-political Movements in India," mentioned that responding to the call of Bengal leaders for the anti-partition movement, some people of Hill Tripura adjacent to the districts of Bengal took part in the anti-partition movement. On 16 October 1905, Hindus and Muslims in Hill Tippera observed a day of protest. They expressed their dissent through activities such as singing patriotic songs and organizing processions with slogans like 'Vande Mataram', a nationalist slogan popularized during the independence movement⁴. In 1906, a branch of the Anushilan Samiti was formed in Agartala through the efforts of individuals like Nishikanto Ghosh, Priyanat Banerjee, Kshitish Banerjee, Satyaranjan Bose, Jnan Mukharjee, and Matilal Mitra. Numerous activities by Bengal revolutionaries were conducted in Tripura not only for political purposes but also because it provided a safer shelter for them. Regarding the activities of Anushilan Samiti in Tripura, Dr. R.C. Majumdar noted the activities of Anushilan Samiti in Tripura, stating, "For training its members, the Anushilan had two farms in Belonia and Udaipur in Hill Tipperah"⁵. Henceforth, the Princely Tripura was not free from the mainstream Indian National movement. However, the lives of indigenous people of princely Tripura remain mostly unaffected.

4. Tripura and Non-cooperation movement

The 1920s ushered in a new era in the freedom struggle of India, under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi. The 1920s marked a significant shift in India's freedom struggle, moving from individual leaders and small groups to a broader, more inclusive, and non-violent mass movement. Gandhi's call for mass participation in the non-violence non-co-operation movement reached to the remotest part of the country. And in these regards the Princely Tripura was not an exception to that. Although Gandhi never visited Tripura, the Non-Cooperation Movement (1920-1922) had a significant impact on the region. Gandhi's ideas and messages reached Tripura through newspapers, pamphlets, and travelling activists, inspiring locals to join the freedom struggle especially the plain land of Tripura, where the people were already hypnotized with the nationalist ideology.

² Ibid, 34.

³ Ibid, p. 27

⁴ De, RanjitKumar, "Socio-political Movements in India", Mittal Publication, New Delhi, 1998, p. 18

⁵ Majumdar, R.C., "History of Freedom Movement", Vol-II", 1975, p-286

Mahatma Gandhi organized the Khilafat and Non-Cooperation movements, which sought to overthrow British colonial control in India. These protests gained momentum in the Princely state of Tripura in early 1921, a territory ruled by a native monarchy under British supremacy. According to reports, several agitators attempted to collect subscriptions (support and funds) for the movement in April 1921 in Agartala. They were, however, driven back, suggesting that the princely state's administration was unwilling to give the movement a chance to take root. The situation became severe after the porter trouble at Chandpur (in British Tipperah) on May 26, 1921. This incident likely involved a confrontation between British authorities and local porters (labourers), which escalated tensions. Thus, the activists decided to boycott the Agartala market in response to the action of the Royal palace of giving food to the European staff. This demonstrates how the movement in Tripura was gathering momentum as activists attempted to galvanize people and take action against the princely authority, which they believed to be collaborating with the imperial British authority. The merchants in British Tipperah's Mogra and Akhaura Boycotted the Agartala bazaar. The boycott of Agartala Bazaar was an important step as it would impact the local economy and put pressure on the government. This issue later on transferred to the commissioner, who approved the idea of assigning escorts to transport supplies from Mogra and Akhaura. People in the Kailashahar, Dharmanagar, and Belonia Divisions of the state supported the Khilafat and non-cooperation agitation.

The Minister of the State informed to the British Political Agent: "The Collector of Kailashahar further reported difficulty in obtaining provisions from Shamsernagar and even stopping of carts for conveying goods from Shamsernagar to Kailashahar and refusal of shopkeepers to supply provisions to our people. The Collector of Belonia has reported an agitation on the Noakhali border urging people not to take out permits for export of forest produce from the Division⁶.

Further, the Minister observed: 'I am constrained to observe that the authority of law and order seemed to be dormant in the midst of the general excitement and people have begun to count upon the authority more of the agitators than of the Government. Meetings were held at various parts of the state including Ganganagar, Muktail and Manik bhandar moujas in Kailashahar Division. On receipt of the news of such meetings in the State the Political Agent in a letter requested the Minister of the State to prevent such meetings. The Deputy Commissioner of Sylhet remarked that although harmless doctrines were preached at some meetings, yet "there were dangerous innuendos underlying such outpourings."⁷

Accordingly, the princely court of Tripura issued several instructions and imposed a ban on such meetings. Reports from Kailashahar indicated that the agitators were convincing the grocers of Balaganj to halt the supply of food to Agartala due to the ration being supplied to the European staff of Akhaura Station from Agartala. It was requested that the Political Agent approach the Assam government to assist the Durbar in this matter by putting an end to picketing. In addition to that, an organization called 'Dharma Sabha' was established in Kailashahar with the explicit goal of supporting the Khilafat Non-Cooperation movement by boycotting the courts. This Sabha hindered appellants from attending the courts and initiated the trial of cases. However; the Durbar had taken prompt action to stop the activities of the Dharma Sabha⁸.

⁶ Agartala Secretariat, Pol., B-1,S-15, Khilafat and Non- Co-operation Movement-Agitation in Tripura. F 1-16 of 1931 T.E. (1921 A.D).

⁷ Op.cit Sur, H.K, P. 106.

⁸ Op.cit. Agartala Secretariat, Pol., B-1,S-15, Khilafat and Non- Co-operation Movement-Agitation in Tripura. F 1-16 of 1931 T.E. (1921 A.D).

Gandhi's Call for nationwide Boycott of foreign products as a part of Non- Cooperation Movement gained much importance in the princely state Tripura as well. As Mr. Nayem Hussain Wrote in his paper "the boycott upsurge rocked the student community of Kailashahar, Belonia and Agartala of princely Tripura. In these places the students participate in strikes however the Princely authority expressed his disappointment against such unrest. The students actively participated in Gandhian programme are Prafulla Kumar Bose, Satish Chandra Sarkar, Charucharan Chakraborty, Rohini Kumar Kar, Baradacharan Chakraborty, Barada Kanta Choudhury, Abdul Rahaman of Belonia, Abdul Latif, Nagendra Narayan Chowdhury, Madan Mohan Singha, Sourindra Mohan Ghosh of Kailashahar. The agitators shouted with the slogan like Gandhiji ki joy, Mohammed Ali and Saukat Ali ki jai⁹.

By chanting these slogans, the demonstrators express their strong opposition to British rule and to show their strong support for the Indian national movement to gain independence from colonial rule. These demonstrations in the princely State Tripura also indicate that the movement was garnering support even in areas not directly governed by the British. The Administrative report of Tripura also substantiates the fact 'Non-cooperation and khilafat movements...caused great excitement among the school going children, a large percentage of which were misguided to leave the schools ...A large number of private schools in the zamindaris were also affected.'¹⁰

The princely state Tripura indeed reflected Gandhian Swadeshi mentality, which emphasized self-sufficiency and the promotion of local industry and entrepreneurship. This was largely driven by the visionary leadership of Maharaja Birendra Kishore Manikya, who ruled at the time of Non-Cooperation movement led by Mahatma Gandhi. Though the princely court was under constant surveillance by British government but still the then ruler of Tripura, (princely state) maharaja Birendra Kishore Manikya showed greater interest in Tea Garden in his state during the time of Non- Cooperation Movement. It is learnt that the Maharaja of Tripura showed a greater interest with the energetic and educated young Bengalee people of Tripura including Chakla- Roshnabad, his zamindari Estate for establishment of Tea Garden in his State. But it is not clear whether the Maharaja was truly inspired by the nationalist feelings or not.

Some young Bengalee Student from Princely Tripura left school and colleges in response to the call of Non-cooperation movement by Mahatma Gandhi as a part of national movement. Some of those young students formed an institution named "The House of Labourers Ltd." and started independent business in Comilla (Presently is a part of Bangladesh). The first president of the said institution was Prafulla Chandra Bhattacharjee who left college when he was a student of intermediate in science in response to the call of non- cooperation movement by Mahatma Gandhi. The then renowned and generous physician (homeopath) Mahesh Chandra Bhattacharjee was very much attached with the intention of the young energetic groups and he offered a loan to Rs. 22,000/- to the House of Labourers Ltd. without any interest to start with their business. Maharaja of Tripura also offers them to establish tea garden at different parts of Tripura. Those young groups were also much attracted with the offer of the then Maharaja of Tripura and they came forward to establish tea garden at Fatikchhari and kalkalia of West

⁹ Nayem Hussain, Socio-Political Activities of Students in Tripura Before 1945 A.D.' Online International Interdisciplinary Research Journal, {Bi-Monthly}, ISSN 2249-9598, Volume-09, Feb 2019 Special Issue (01)

¹⁰ Chakravarti Mahadev (ed.), Administrative Report of Tripura 1911-12 to 1921-22 A.D, Vol. 2, GyanPublication, New Delhi, 1994, p-26

Tripura in Sadar Sub-Division¹¹. With the course of time a good number of tea estates sprung up in various parts of Tripura run by the local peoples of princely Tripura.

It would be difficult to say whether the maharaja of Tripura was inspired by the spirit of nationalism and Swadeshi ideology of Mahatma Gandhi or not. Or what was the reason behind his promotion of tea estates in princely Tripura. But it is quite clear that these young energetic Bengali youths were inspired by Gandhi swadeshi ideology. Thus, they came forward to establish a tea garden at Fatikchhari and kalkalia of West Tripura. Therefore, the establishment of tea estate in Tripura is also a result of Gandhi's Non-Cooperation Movement.

5. Conclusion

The colonial authorities erected an imperceptible wall between 'British India' and 'Princely states'. Additionally, the Indian National Congress has maintained a policy of non-interference in the domestic affairs of princely nations from its founding. As a result, the princely states remained isolated from the mainstream Indian National Movement. However, the effect of nationalism and the charismatic leadership of Mahatma Gandhi went beyond the boundaries of British India and broke the shackles of the invisible wall created by British paramountcy. And in this process the spirit of nationalism also galvanised in the princely domain Tripura, where the local residents of Chakla Roshnabad resisted against the colonial government and actively participated in the nationalist movement organised by Gandhi and Indian national congress.

Reference

1. Agartala Secretariat, Pol., B-1, S-15, Khilafat and Non- Co-operation Movement-Agitation in Tripura. F 1-16 of 1931 T.E. (1921 A.D).
2. Chakravarti Mahadev (ed.), Administrative Report of Tripura 1911-12 to 1921-22 A.D, Vol. 2, GyanPublication, New Delhi, 1994, p-26
3. De, Ranjit Kumar, "Socio-political Movements in India", Mittal Publication, New Delhi, 1998, p. 18
4. Majumdar, R.C., "History of Freedom Movement", Vol-II", 1975, p-286
5. Sur, H.K British Relations with the state of Tripura, Naba Chandra Prakashani, Ramnagar Road No-2 (West), 1986, P. 106.
6. Bhattacharjee, Dr D. R & R.B Singh, Tea plantation and the tribes of Tripura, Tripura State Tribal, Cultural Research Institute and museum, Government of Tripura.
7. Nayem Hussain, Socio-Political Activities of Students in Tripura Before 1945 A.D.' Online International Interdisciplinary Research Journal, {Bi-Monthly}, ISSN 2249-9598, Volume-09, Feb 2019 Special Issue (01)

¹¹ Bhattacharjee, Dr D. R & R.B Singh, Tea plantation and the tribes of Tripura, Tripura State Tribal, Cultural Research Institute and museum, Government of Tripura.