

Freedom Struggle in India: Midnapore, 1905-1934

Sanjib Bera

Ph. D. Research Scholar

Department of History, Seacom Skills University, Bolpur, Birbhum, West Bengal,

Abstract:

The present work attempts a detailed study of the Freedom struggle in India: Midnapore, 1905-1934, in south-western District of Colonial Bengal. The emergence of Indian Nationalism was the result of the major contradictions between the interests of Indian people and those of the colonial rule in India. Its institutional shape had a taken with the foundation of the Indian National Congress in 1885. It launched an anti-British struggle since its foundation to gain constitutional rights within the colonial state apparatus. This District was greatly influenced by the National Thinking as well as Bengal. Many branches of Political Organizations spread which were formed in the second half of 19th century. Even, some secret societies were also founded in Midnapore District as well as in Calcutta. Especially Midnapore District took second important role after Calcutta in Anti-partition Movement in 1905. Until the arrival of Mohondas Karamchand Gandhi (Mahatma Gandhi) it failed to mid the secondary contradiction line in the semi-feudal and semi-capitalistic economy of the subject country. Under his leadership the political constituency went beyond the limit of the urban elites since 1920. The nature of the political agitation changed movement assumed a mass character. All short of socio and economic exploitations became the target of the movement. Since then it was not merely battle for the political Freedom. But an organized attack on the vested interest in Indian society as well. Millions of men and women were mobilized in it in different ways. It succeeded in mobilizing the urban petty bourgeoisie along with the big bourgeois, urban poor, landed middle class and the peasantry of all categories. Through the Anti-partition Movement, Non Co-operation Movement, Civil Disobedience Movement it reached at the grass-root level.

Keywords: *Nationalism, Extremist, khaddar, Tamluk, Midnapore, Bengal.*

Introduction:

Midnapore a District of south Western part of colonial Bengal had been the experimental ground of the Freedom Struggle in 1905-1934. This district under study had been the fore runner in the Freedom Struggle since 1905 anti-partition Movement, 1920-22 the Non Co-operation Movement what brought the common people of the district to the Congress was local issues. The success of the District Congress Committee rested in forming the united front against the colonial rule on the local question of the district as well as its caste structure.

Midnapore District was probably one of the districts in Bengal where the Nationalist Movement created and sustained social alliances among the contending classes in the context of the anti-imperialist struggle. The District of the Congress made history by gating involved a large rural woman in the struggle for Independence. The local congress leadership dominated by the 'Mahisya' caste succeeds in translating the aspiration of the drivers' classes, castes and groups into predominantly anti-imperialist movement. The leaders used the local issues like establishment of Union Boards in 1919, Chowkidari Tax in 1930 to launch the anti-imperialist Movement through the Non Co-operation Movement, Civil Disobedience Movement. My objective of the study under the research work was to locate the Freedom Movement in a Bengal District – Midnapore, 1905-1934. Lot of literature had already cropped up about the National Movement of the District of Midnapore.

Research Methodology:

Quantitative and Qualitative two methods will be followed in dealing with the study. Objectivity will be taken as tool to study the subject matter. To revile the truth different sources will be applied in writing the subject matter under study. To revile the truth course examination will be followed on the basis on the available sources materials. Three types of sources will be applied. Primary, Secondary Sources besides interview will be taken from the relevant persons involved in the movements under study. The primary sources collected from the state Archives as well as National Archives – various evidential documents which are collected from Government's archives, as well as police records.

Growth of Nationalism:

Great uprising of 1857, popularly known as Sepoy Mutiny, should be treated as the first war of Independence wages by the Indian people and the most important outcome of Sepoy Mutiny was the British Government took over the administration in India from The East India Company by the Queen Victoria's proclamation at 1st November, 1858. Time of company's rule spread of English education, which opened up the door of western thought, wisdom and ideals for the Indian peoples. Lord William Bentinck introduced English language as a Government language at 1835. In 1857, the year of the Great Mutiny, University was founded in Calcutta, as well as Bombay and Madras. Some young students coming out of these institutions began to occupy responsible positions in administration, business and in other walks of life.

Nationalism in Midnapore District:

The second half of Nineteenth century Nation and National thoughts spread in India as well as Bengal also Midnapore District. Rishi Raj Narayan Basu, Headmaster of Midnapore Collegiate School till 1851 to 1866, popularly was known “Grandfather of Indian Nationalism”, who laid the foundation of Nationalism and National thinking of Midnapore as well as Bengal. (1) He influenced the young men like Gynendra Nath Bose, Satyendra Nath Bose, Pyarilal Ghosh, Hemchandra Kanungo and encouraged them in patriotism. Also Midnapore District was greatly influenced by the National thinking which spread by Raja Rammohan Roy, Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar, Sri Ramkrishna, Swami Vivekananda, Debendra Nath Tagore, Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, Aurobinda Ghosh, Surendra Nath Bandhopadhay, Bipin Chandra Pal as well as Bengal. There was a custom to set up an Association to practice moderate politics and such a trained started from third decade of Nineteenth Century. This influence was also traced in Midnapore. Under the leadership of Surendranath Banerjee, Indian Association was formed in 1876, at Contai sub-division as well as Calcutta and its twenty nine branches were set up in Medinipur Sadar, Ghatal, Ramjibanpur, Tamluk, Contai, Mahishadal, Mugberia, Marishda, Chandrakona and other places in this district.(2) Medinipur District made its link with Indian congress from the very beginning. In 1901, State Level Conference of Indian National Congress was held in Burdige town at Midnapore town, Surendra Nath Banerjee, Krishna Kumar Mitra , Janaki Nath Ghosal joined here.

Anti-Partition Movement in Bengal:

The Second half of Nineteenth century many political organizations were establish in Bengal Presidency. Indian National Congress (1885) was most important of them. It took most a great role in India’s Freedom Movement. British Government wants to stop this Radical work of Indian National Congress. British Government took Divide and Rule policy to stop the work protest of Indian National Congress and break the friendship of Hindu and Muslim population of Bengal. In 1904, Governor of Assam, Andrew Fraser and Home Secretary Mr. Risley came up with a proposal to divide Bengal in two parts. Officially the reasons adduced for the partition proposal was “administrative convenience”. This partition plan was published in Journals and Newspapers like Bengalee, Hitabadi, Sandhya, Sanjibani and in English newspapers likes the Englishman, the Statesman, the Pioneer. At least three thousand protest meeting were held in different parts of Bengal during on December, 1903 to October, 1905 and five hundred to fifty thousand people had attended in each of these meetings. (3) Krishna Kumar Mitra suggested Boycott of British goods in his weekly newspaper ‘Sanjibani’. (4) On 20th July, 1905, an order was published in which the partition proposal received Government recognition and finally partition of Bengal was effected on 16th October, 1905, by lord Curzon Viceroy of India. (5)

Anti-Partition Movement in Midnapore District:

A strong base of Nationalism and anti-Imperialism movement was formed in Midnapore and it became clearer in the Day of Swadeshi Movement. On 7th August, 1905, a protest meeting held in Calcutta Town Hall to accept the proposal for Boycott of British goods, also a meeting was held at the Bailly Hall of Midnapore town against this separation on the same day. Students and Young Men moved about town and surrounding villages under the leadership of Jnanendra Nath Bose and Satyendra Nath Bose, Students stores were built for supplying indigenous items, Picketing were arranged before the shops where foreign goods were sold and meetings, strikes,

road-rally and 'Arandhan' and 'Reksha Bandhan' were also arranged on 16th October, in support of Swadeshi or Banga Bhanga Birodhi Andolan. (6)

Role of News Papers:

In those days, Bengali youths were getting influenced by heavy dose of militant write ups appearing regularly in Bengali Newspapers likes Sandhya, Jugantar and Bandemataram (7) were widely circulated in Midnapore. Also, being inspired with the spirit of Nationalism, a Newspaper was started by Debdas Karan named 'Medini Bandhab'. (8) 'Mukti Kon Pathe' and 'Bartaman Rananiti' were provocative articles which expounded the techniques of Guerilla Warfare. (9)

Anti-Partition Movement in Tamluk:

Tamluk sub-division in Midnapore District also joined this Movement. In Tamluk town a largely attended meeting was held in the spacious compound of Rakshit Bati, Sri Kali Prasanna Kabya Bisharad, editor of 'Hitabadi', as its president. Other bigger meeting was held in Brahma Baroari in 1905, which was presided over by Raja Surendra Narayan Roy and foreign clothes collected at the meeting were kept in a heap in front of the meeting and Kali Prasanna Kavya Bisharad himself set fire to the heap. (10) Also another large meeting was held at Byabatter Hat in Mahisadal Thana. In this meeting opened the Patriotic and National song was sung by Sri Shrutinath Chakraborty, famous Headmaster and Educationist of later years, who was then a Student of Tamluk Hamilton High School. (11) In 1908, a group of volunteers under the leadership of Rajendra Nath Bhunia and Kunja Behari Bhakta were picketing against sale of foreign clothes and bangles in village fare in Bamunara Village and ladies present in the fair also threw away the bangles worn by them. (12) In this period, many 'akhras' (Gymnasium) were established in this district. In Tamluk town young Surendra Nath Rakshit had founded some sort of a Gymnasium in the spacious courtyard of his home popularly known Suren Gymnasium for physical exercise, practice Kusti, Lathi Khela. Khudiram Bose came to Tamluk in 1901, with his brother-in-law, Amritlal Roy, he stayed here from 1901 – 1904, he was also joined the Gymnasium. In 1904, Khudiram Bose joined the Mainstream of Extremist Movement in Midnapore. Hem Chandra Kanungo, "probably the most remarkable figure among the first revolutionary generation." (13)

Non Co-operation Movement:

Gandhiji want to build up a powerful Mass Movement for achieving the 'Swaraj'. In Session of Calcutta Congress in 1920, Gandhiji took a proposal for starting a Non Violence Non Co-operation Movement, some leaders opposed this idea. But this proposal was accepted with majority in session at Nagpur, December, 1920. In 1920, a District Congress Committee was formed in Midnapore with Birendra Nath Sasmal as its president, Satkari Pati Roy as its secretary. (14) Same time in Tamluk also a sub-divisional Congress Committee was formed with Mahendra Nath Maity as its president and Chandi Charan Dutta as its secretary.

Role of Midnapore District:

Large number of students joined this Movement in Midnapore District. The authorities of Calcutta University had said that more than fifty thousand students had left their classes during the Non Co - operation Movement. (15) The huge students of Tamluk sub-

division who joined this Movement, as Sri Gunadhar Hazra, Ajoy Kumar Mukherjee, Satish Chandra Samanta, Kumar Chandra Jana, Ramani Mohan Maity, Sripati Charan Boyal, Ananga Mohan Das, Ramesh Chandra Kar. Also, they were took part in Satyagraha Program - Picketing before shops selling foreign liquor and foreign cloths. In village self-Government act of 1919, the Government of Bengal had proposed introduction of Union Boards in the villages. Government of Bengal did set up total of 227 Union Boards in Midnapore District in April 1921. (16) Birendra Nath Sasmal then decided to organize a 'No Tax' campaign throughout the District. (17) Sumit Sarkar also says that "the best organized of the village Movement was the anti-union board agitation in the Contai and Tamluk sub-divisions of Midnapore District led by Birendra Nath Sasmal. (18)

National Schools in Midnapore District:

In Midnapore District, action was taken to establish National vernacular schools. In this period Kalagechiya and Kanthi (Contai) National Schools (10th Standard), Mirjapur, Banamali Chatta, Bayenda, Bhabanichalk, Manikjor (Manikjor Kamini Kumari High School) National Schools (6th Standard) Bamunia, Padmatamli National Primary Schools (4th Standard) of Contai sub-division, Anantapur and Kankurda (10th Standard) National Schools of Tamluk sub-division were established in various places of this District. These schools were approved by National Council of Education, Jadavpur. (19) Students and Teachers of these schools tried to popularize 'Charka' and 'Khaddar'.

Kulapara and Durgachak of Nandigram P.S., Jukhia of Bhagwanpur P.S., Kadua of Ramnagar P.S., Bishnupur of Sabang P.S. and Amarshi of Patashpur P.S. were the main pioneers of 'Khadi' Centers. (20)

Civil Disobedience Movement:

History of Salt Tax is no less inhuman in British India. Sea water is the greatest source of Natural Salt in India. In colonial India the British traders had engaged in this profitable business. They had established many manufacturing units and warehouses in Tamluk and Contai sub-divisions in Midnapore District and had made huge profits by exploiting the 'Malangi' laborers. But rule of British Government manufacture of salt in any form became prohibited in India by the Indian people. Salt Law regulations enacted in 1899, empowered the Government servants to impose a fine of Rs. 50/- to any person manufacturing Salt. If any tenant of a Zamindar was found to manufacture Salt by heating Saline Water in Pots and Zamindar, knowing it, did not inform the Government, he was liable to be punished Rs. 500/- for each such pot of his tenant. (21) Gandhiji decided that he would initiate the Civil Disobedience Movement by breaking this inhuman Salt Law. On 12th March, 1930, Gandhiji started from his Sabarmati Ashram Bank of Sabarmati, near Ahmadabad, about 241 miles on his 'Historic March to Dandi' – a place on the Western Sea Coast, with 78 of his followers. On 5th April, 1930, Gandhiji reached Dandi and 6th April, 1930, they started manufacturing Salt and break Salt Law on Dandi Sea Beach. (22)

Salt Satyagraha in Midnapore District:

Midnapore District also joined this Movement as well as India, on 12th March, 1930, a Public Meeting was held in Tamluk Town, presided over by Sri Mahendra Nath Maity. In Tamluk sub-division a Committee was formed to conduct the Civil Disobedience Movement Mahendra Nath Maity and Satis Chandra Chakraborty as its president and Secretary.

This Committee decided to setup two independent Salt Satyagraha centers at Contai and Tamluk in Midnapore District. (23) Volunteers from various places of Bengal gathered here to protest against this law started salt Satyagraha on 6th April, 1930. One at Pichhabani in Contai and other at Narghat in Tamluk sub-division, along with fifty six centers opened in Contai for producing salt in unlawful way. Also, In Tamluk sub-division, nine centers started for this purpose within May, 1930.

Salt Satyagraha in Tamluk Sub-division:

A volunteer camp of salt Satyagrahis was set up on old palace of Tamluk Raj Bari and Satish Chandra Samanta became camp in-charge. In early morning on 6th April, a selected group of Young Satyagrahees on Raj Bari Camp, started from 'Bargabhima Temple' in Tamluk way to Narghat Coast and break the Salt Law. The procession covered a distance of about two miles with more than thirty thousand people participating in it. (24) Police came here and beating the volunteers, Satish Chandra Samanta injured badly on the 3rd day of the campaign. A total Hartal was observed in Tamluk town on 14th April, 1930, in protest against arrest of Jawaharlal Nehru. On 15th April, Ajoy Kumar Mukherjee, on 16th Satish Chandra Samanta and on 17th Kumar Chandra Jana were arrested and sentenced imprisonment. All of them were tried to setup a camp at Narghat Coast. (25)

Salt Satyagraha in Contai Sub-division:

Pichhaboni, a village, seven miles from kanthi (Contai) was another center for producing salt in Midnapore District. On 6th April, the Satyagrahees had reached Pichhabani from Kumilla village under the leadership of Suresh Chandra Bandhopadhyaya. (26) In this afternoon a meeting held in Rasulpur village presided over by Jhareswar Majhi and another meeting presided by Headmaster of Gopalpur Primary School was held at the Pichhaboni Market. On 11th April, police came at Pichhaboni and massed up the salt fields, broke the pots, caned the volunteers, dipped them in salt water, also the leader Dr. Suresh Chandra Bandhopadhyaya, Jhareswar Majhi, Surendra Nath Das, Dr. Prafulla Chandra Ghosh were arrested. (26a)

Role of Women in Midnapore:

Almost in every part of Midnapore, preparation against Civil Disobedience was started. In Midnapore District, this Movement built a strong base. Shiulipur of Bhagwanpur P.S., Ghoramara of Mayna P.S., Baroduari of Nandigram P.S. were directed by women. In this Salt Movement, a great number of women were prisoner and mention must be made of Matangini Hazra, Prabhavati Maity, Laxmimoni Hazra, Charushila Jana, Surama Hota, Kiranbala Maity, Mayalata Das, Naribala Das, Jamunabala Devi, Subodhbala Kuiti, Indumati Bhattacharyya, Prabhavati Singha, Chikanbala Jana, Suhasini Devi, Satyabati Devi, Nityabala Gol, Nityabala Jana, Laksmirani Mukhopadhyaya and others of the Tamluk sub-division. (27) In Contai sub-division Jyotirmoyee Ganguli, Khemangkari Ray, Santi Das, Ashoklata Das, Indira Devi and Others. (28) In Midnapore sub-division, Charushila Goswami, Bindubala Sasmal, Nanibala Maity, Nibarani Das, Sateswari Bose, Sobhana Bose, Manorama Das, Sarajubala Das, Charushila Palit, Savitri De and Others. (29) To stop the devastating influence of this Movement Government declared ban on those organizations who were acting in favor of Civil Disobedience Movement May, 1930.

Revolutionary Terrorism in Midnapore in 1905-1935:

According to Sumit Sarkar, the first revolutionary group started about 1902, in Midnapore by Jnanendra Nath Basu. (30) Aurobindo Ghosh and Barindra Ghosh also used to come to Midnapore and stay with their uncles, Jnanendra Nath Basu and Satyendra Nath Basu. It appears from Barindra Ghosh's statement after his arrest in 1908, that some sort of a secret society had existed in Midnapore even before 1902, but it was from Aurobinda Ghosh that Bose brothers and Hem Chandra Kanungo had received their formal initiation. (31) Hem Chandra Kanungo was one of the founders of secret society of Midnapore, who sold out his property and left for Europe (Paris) to avail the knowhow of making bomb August, 1906. (32) Kanungo returned in January, 1908, with his luggage full of revolutionary materials – including a one hundred seventy four pages bomb manual and a one hundred fifty pages treatise on revolutionary organization as well as masses of Russian Literature. (33) Later, he joined Aurobinda's group, establishing a bomb training school in a crowded part of Calcutta. (34)

Medinipur Bomar Mamla:

The first bomb was made to kill Bampfylde Fuller, who was the Lieutenant Governor of East Bengal, but his effort failed. Next time, they took attempt to kill of Andrew Fraser near 'Narayangarh Railway station' on 6th December, 1907, but it was also failed. As a result of this incident, a case was started by Government, which is famous as 'Medinipur Bomar Mamla'. (35)

Alipur conspiracy Case:

And then Kingsford, the tyrannizing Magistrate of Muzaffarpur was targeted. In 1908, the revolutionaries, under the leadership of Aurobinda, decided to kill Kingsford for his repressive acts. As per Hem Chandra's recommendation the brave boy of Midnapore, Khudiram Bose was sent to Muzaffarpur (Bihar) with Prafulla Chaki – both trained by Hem Chandra. They threw a bomb on 30th April, 1908, at a carriage, which resembled that of Kingsford, but really belonged to one Mr. Kennedy, with the result that the wife and daughter of the latter were killed. Within two days of Kennedy murder practically the whole group had been rounded up by simultaneous searches and arrests at Calcutta and Midnapore. (36) Prafulla Chaki committed Suicide and Khudiram was sentenced to death by hanging 11th August 1908. Then the famous Alipur Conspiracy case was started. During this time Narendra Nath Goswami, who became an approver, was killed by Satyendranath Bose and Kanailal Dutta on 1st September, 1908, they were sentenced to death by hanging. Also, Hem Chandra Kanungo, Barindra, Purna Sen were arrested and sent to life time deportation. (37)

Medinipur Yuba Sangha:

To explain the Characteristics of this patriotic Movement and to elucidate the relevance of students' participation it, a club was established named 'Milan Mandir' in 1924, at Midnapore Town School, which was supported and patronized by Parimal Kumar Roy, Pulin Bihari Maity, Birendra Nath Maji, Santosh Kumar Mishra and Haripada Bhowmik, Prafulla Kumar Tripathi . One more Association was formed by the effort of these persons, 'Medinipur Yuba Sangha', in February, 1928. Prafulla Kumar Thipathi also published a weekly Newspaper was 'Parashu'. Raja Debendralal Khan of Narajor was the president of this Yuba Sangha. (38) In this phase, member of Bengal Volunteer Groups, Dinesh Chandra Gupta (Famous Martyr) came to Medinipur and tried to expand his activities as he was a student of Midnapore College. After

his staying in Midnapore, young groups tried to make contact with Bengal Volunteer Groups, which was the cultural organization of Dinesh Chandra Gupta. In the way of time, Bengal Volunteers Groups became a powerful organization of Midnapore. Three District Magistrates were killed by this group. (39)

District Magistrates Murdered in Midnapore:

James Paddy, the District Magistrate, thought of dividing Midnapore in two parts. On, 7th April, 1931, Bimal Dasgupta and Jyotijiban Ghosh, killed the District Magistrate, Mr. James Paddy. After this event, both of them fled to Kolkata. On 29th October, 1931, Bimal Dasgupta again came to exposure, as he attempted to kill Villiers, president of European Merchants' Association at Kolkata. He was punished with rigorous imprisonment for ten years. He could not be accused of killing Paddy for lack of evidence. (40) On 30th April, 1932, Mr. Robert Douglas the second District Magistrate of Midnapore was killed with bullets by young patriots, Pradyot Kumar Bhattacharyya, Student of Midnapore College and Pravanshu Sekhar pal in the Zillah Board Office. On 12th January, 1933, Pradyot Kumar Bhattacharyya was punished by hanging in Midnapore Central Jail and Pravanshu Sekhar Pal remained anonymous or untraced. (41) On 2nd September, 1933, two boys of Midnapore, Anath Bandhu Panja and Mrigendra Nath Dutta shot down Mr. Burdge, the District Magistrate, within the safe police line campus. These two brave boys were gunned down by the bodyguards of Mr. Burdge. (42) Just after this incident a case was started against Kamakhya Ghosh, Braja Kishor Chakraborty, Nanda Dulal Singha, Sukumar Sengupta, Sanatan Ray, Nirmal Jiban Ghosh, Ram Krishna Ray. Braja Kishor Chakraborty, Ram Krishna Ray and Nirmal Jiban Ghosh were punished by death sentence and other accused were given lifetime imprisonment. (43)

Conclusion:

Midnapore District of Bengal Province in Colonial India is evidently a forerunner of Freedom Struggle during the first half of the twentieth century. Mainly Tamluk and Contai sub-divisions started playing a significant role during India's Freedom Movement. Midnapore District was greatly influenced by the National thinking as well as Calcutta. At first Midnapore District organized the Secret Societies and Gymnasiums in Colonial Bengal, joined the Extremist Revolution and Bomb incident in Anti Partition Movement to Civil Disobedience Movement in Midnapore as well as Bengal Province (1905-1934). Also Midnapore District joined the Non Co-operation Movement. Two salt Satyagraha centers in Midnapore costal area of Tamluk and Contai sub-divisions took active role in Civil Disobedience Movement as well as in India.

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