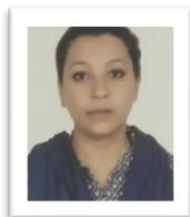


# Whirlpool of Non-Cooperation Movement in the Region of Bihar

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## Abstract

This story covers the region of Bihar, during the days of Non-Cooperation Movement, launched under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi. This paper tries to states that how in the region of Bihar, the Non-Cooperation Movement, was propagated, and highlighted the role of local leaders in propagating the cult of the non-violent struggle. With the emergence of the movement, the elections were boycotted in the region and also the period witnessed the emergence of the National schools. It deals with how the movement initiated by Gandhi captures the ignorant minds and the opposition of the Congress to the Vidyanand's movement because of its limited and conservative politics in the region of Bihar. Gandhi ji had never supported the struggle based on the violence, but whole heartedly supported the peasant's cause but there were several occasions on which he deviates itself bfrom the local movements because of its violent nature.

**Keywords:** Banies, BPCC, Kories, Kurmis, Mofussil, Raiyats, Swaraj, Zamindar.

## Introduction

"As between Gandhiji and Bihar, it was a matter of 'he came, he saw, he conquered.'<sup>1</sup> Mahatma Gandhi had already sown the seeds of non-violent struggle in the region of Bihar during the Champaran satyagraha in 1917. In July, an announcement was made by Gandhi regarding the inauguration of the Non-Cooperation movement on 1<sup>st</sup> August. In the special session of the Congress in Calcutta, Lala Lajpat Rai delivered the Presidential address which was most remarkable in its text. It includes extensively the political situations prevailing in India, particularly in Punjab, because of Jallianwala Bagh Tragedy and imposition of martial law, the muslim agitation for Khilafat, deteriorating economic and social condition, due to British rule in India, the efforts made by the Indian leaders to gain political aims, and finally the modus oprendi adopted by the Indian masses during the establishment of the movement.<sup>2</sup>

The Khilafat movement was led by Ali Brothers- Maulana Mohammed Ali and Maulana Shaukat Ali.<sup>3</sup> Gandhiji gave much emphasis on Hindu-Muslim unity. Syed Hasan Imam, Sachidananda Sinha and other senior members of BPCC, strongly opposed these resolutions expressing their doubts over it.<sup>4</sup> On 31<sup>st</sup> July 1920, a meeting was held in the office of Searchlight<sup>4</sup>, Patna where the BPCC approved the policy of non-cooperation in order to redress the national wrongs and decided to support the Khilafat issue.<sup>5</sup> A Committee was formed with Mazharul Haq, Rajendra Prasad and Shah Mohammed Zubair as its members to give practical effects to the Non-Coopeartion movement in this region.<sup>6</sup> Long before the Nagpur session where the Congress met to ratify the resolution on the Non-Cooperation, the local leaders of Bihar toured the whole province, organized meetings to propogate the Non-Cooperation.<sup>7</sup> As soon as Maulana Shaukat Ali arrived in Patna,. Prominent persons present on the station were-Sheik Abdur Rehman, Maulvi Mubarak Ali Khan, Babu Murari Prasad, Mr. Natai Chander Ghosh, Maulavi Hafiz Rehmatullah, Dr. Mahmood, Pandit Bal Govind Malviya, Mr. Kamaladhari Lal, Dr. Rohatji, Mr. A.M Khawaja, Mr. S.M Sami etc. Maulana Shaukat Ali was garlanded profusely and procession was formed and taken out through the city with the deafning shouts of "Allaha O Akbar," "Bande Matarm," "Maulana Shaukat Ali ki Jai," and "Hindu-Musalman ki jai."<sup>8</sup>

A public meeting was arranged in Mr. Mazharul Haq compound in the evening. The feature of this meeting was that the people gathered from moffussil. All about ten thousand people were collected.<sup>9</sup> Several Resolutions were passed on that day.

Non-Cooperation movement was making a progress in the province as it can be witnessed from the election of the Provincial Councils, in which a 'very small percentage of voters exercised the franchise,' which was only possible because of Mr. Gandhi's movement. In urban areas only 27.3% of the Hindus and 12% of the Muslims casted their votes and in the rural area the percentage of votes was much higher that is 41.8% of the Hindus and the Muslims 28.3% casted their votes.<sup>10</sup> Mahatma Gandhi's short visit to Bihar in December 1920, was accompanied by Maulana Abul Kalam Azad and Maulana Shaukat Ali<sup>11</sup> greatly influenced the region as at the dawn of the year 1921, some national schools emerged and some existing ones were nationalized as they denied to get affiliation from the university and rejected government grants.<sup>12</sup> Gandhiji during his visit to Patna laid the foundation of a national college and Bihar Vidhyapeeth.<sup>13</sup>

The movement started gaining momentum both in urban and rural areas by January 1921. Panchayats were established in many places.<sup>14</sup> Despite the fact that it was not the part of the Congress programme, the anti-liquor movement was in a full swing throughout the entire province by January 1921.<sup>15</sup> Champaran and Dharbanga districts the Sabhas and Seva Samities.<sup>16</sup>

Once again the anti-planters agitation was witnessed on the scene and the factory managers had to face problems created by their servants and the labourers which worsened the relations between them.<sup>17</sup> Nationalist organized meetings on large scales. Around 56 meetings were organized between 25<sup>th</sup> January and 5<sup>th</sup> February 1921 in Muzaffarpur district alone.<sup>18</sup>

The first organized struggle against the greatest landlord of Bihar, that was the Dharbanga Raj started under the leadership of Swami Vidhyanand<sup>19</sup> in 1919-20. The zamindari covered 12 per cent of the total permanently covered area of north Bihar which included Dharbanga, a part of Muzaffarpur, Purnia, Sharsa and part of North Bhagalpur districts.<sup>20</sup>

The Swami was highly inspired with the Gandhi's personality and the techniques he adopted during the Champaran Satyagraha in 1917-18. He had the ability to organize the political protest and his religious appeal publicized his cause.<sup>21</sup> He took up the cause of the tenants of the north Bihar and the special feature of this movement was that it was the movement of the downtrodden tenants as they were very badly affected by the price hike during those years.<sup>22</sup>

Vidhyanand's movement during 1919 and 1920 was comprised of two sets of grievances. Firstly it was against the behavior of the amlas who were known for their 'dishonesty and oppressiveness' and secondly it was directed against the management of the Dharbanga Raj which denied the peasants of their rights and privileges.<sup>23</sup>

These small tenants gave militant support to the movement. On 2<sup>nd</sup> October 1919, at Narar in Madhubani, under the leadership of Anirudh Singh, one of Vidhyanand's associate, a meeting was organized in which about 5000 people gathered and

sent a telegram to the Lt. Governor to set up an enquiry commission.<sup>24</sup>

Vidhyanand attended the annual session of the Congress in December 1919 but the Congress delegates paid no heed to his campaign.<sup>25</sup> On 5<sup>th</sup> February people collected from Supaul area and forwarded their demands such as- not to increase the rents in the permanently settled area, providing common grazing lands in the villages, unrestricted rights to sell trees and right to build houses and dig wells in the area without the permission of the landlords.<sup>26</sup>

Again in April 1920, he attended the meeting of the Provincial Congress and put forward his demand to set up an enquiry committee to take up the sufferings of the tenants of the Dharbanga Raj. But all in vain.<sup>27</sup> The Congress did nothing and this attitude of the Congress was supposed to be the important cause of disintegration from the Vidhyanand's movement.<sup>28</sup> Once again Swami tried to gain the support of the Bihar Congress, but his hopes and expectations were shattered when Bihar Provincial Conference put forward his demand of an enquiry committee on command of Babu Rajendra Prasad, who described 'Swami as fraud with hidden motives.'<sup>29</sup>

Vidhyanand in his speeches had a militant tone. According to the Government officials, the demonstrations held in the Dharbanga district were designed to excite feeling against zamindars and planters which can lead to serious rioting.<sup>30</sup> Under an umbrella of his agrarian campaign, Swami Vidhyanand attacked the management of Bhawara factory and announced a meeting to be held on 22<sup>nd</sup> June at Kothia Durmi less than half mile from the factory which raised the excitement among the ryots and can lead to the breach of peace between the Swami's supporter and the Bhowara factory.<sup>31</sup>

The Commissioner of Tirhut Division forwarded a notice to the Government on 16<sup>th</sup> July informing about a meeting to be held at Kothia Durmi on 31<sup>st</sup> July and 1<sup>st</sup> August. Raiyats were invited from all over the countryside and the district altogether. It was also stated that the meeting was to be presided by Mr. Mazahar-ul-Haqq and would be attended by Babu Rajendra Prasad and Swami Vidhyanand. The object of the meeting was to take up the grievances of the raiyats against the indigo planters and the zamindars, but the wording of the notice indicates that the intention of the meeting was "to be demonstration in force, of the nature of a counter-check quarrelsome, to the action of the factory supporters on the 22<sup>nd</sup> June."<sup>32</sup>

Vidhyanand attracted large number of villagers as it was evident from the fact that about 15,000 to 20,000 people attended the meeting held at Supaul Sub-division of Bhagalpur, the region where communication was very poor.<sup>33</sup> According to the Dharbanga Police Superintendent, "there is no doubt that this man is following the footsteps of Gandhi and inflaming the minds of Ryots against the Dharbanga Raj as Gandhi did in Champaran against the planters." Again he reported after few days that "the movement was developing rapidly and that Vidhyanand's

influence over both Hindus and Muslims was 'increasing steadily'.<sup>34</sup>

The last two National Congresses met at Delhi and Amritsar played a very special role in arousing political activity among the peasants by admitting 'kisan' delegates 'free and everything found'.<sup>35</sup> Under the presidentship of Rajendra Prasad, on 28<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup> August the 12<sup>th</sup> session of the Bihar Provincial Congress was held at Bhagalpur, which was attended by significant number of peasants for the first time apart from the professional class.<sup>36</sup> The authorities were really worried about the excitement generated by Vidhyanand. The administration up to some extent secretly supported the Dharbanga Raj to suppress the movement but most of the time it stayed aloof from the matter.<sup>37</sup>

The Congress opposition to the Vidhyanand's movement was because of its limited and conservative politics in Bihar.<sup>38</sup> The movement was attacking the zamindari system and purely a reformist one which took up the sufferings of the peasants at large. Congress on the other side was under a fear that it will not be limited to the zamindari of the north Bihar but it magnify the entire zamindari system, which would lead to the ill-effects on their interests.<sup>39</sup> The Congress leaders do not want to lose their privileged position in rural Bihar and so it was natural to them to discourage the anti-landlord movement.<sup>40</sup>

The Congress tried to manipulate the whole situation by providing the tenants with the lip service to convince them for the movement launched by the Congress. "This mobilization of the peasantry was done for the political reasons, that is, to help consolidate the position of the Congress vis-à-vis British imperialism." For this they had to show that they were also concerned with the economic problem as well.<sup>41</sup>

The clause of the 'no-rent campaign' in the non-cooperation agenda took an effective response throughout country particularly the rural India. The Non-Cooperation Programme launched under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi attracted large number of kisans, primarily because of the scheme of non-payment of taxes.<sup>42</sup> The Congress attempt was to organize the peasantry on the political grounds and for the peasants 'swaraj' meant struggle against heavy land tax.<sup>43</sup>

In some parts of Bihar, with the growing spirit of the non-cooperation movement peasants combined themselves in order to oppose the payment of rent to the landlords.<sup>44</sup> The situation was aggravated in the Saran district due to the non-cooperation call, and landlords on the other hand were "proceeding with their enhancement suits in right earnest."<sup>45</sup>

Large number of peasants participated in the meetings arranged by the non-cooperators and the Kisan Sabha.<sup>46</sup> A mammoth meeting was held at Madhuban, on 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> Feb, 1921, which was attended by six to eight thousand cultivators from all parts of Purnia. Even the Government had to acknowledge its success in terms of its number and representation.<sup>47</sup> But it was quite disappointing for the gathering as it seldom touched the economic issues

and was more based on the political grounds. The Congress leaders like Dip Narayan Sinha, Hasan Arzu, Rajendra Prasad all of them propagate the non-cooperation programme. And in the agrarian matters they suggested to avoid confrontation with the landlords.<sup>48</sup>

Kisan Sabha leaders also organized a meeting at Nawabakhar in Saupaul subdivision of Bhagalpur, which was attended by seven thousand peasants. Raghubans Thakur, Sheoshanker Jha, Arikhar Singh, Swami Vidhyanand spoke at the meeting. The Resolutions were passed which are as follows- "that the raiyats should have a proprietary over the trees in their Nakadi lands, in every village a portion of land should be set aside for grazing purposes; that money order receipts should be treated as authorized documents and genuine receipts; that raiyats should be allowed to remit their rents for the whole year by money order either in one installment or in 'kist,' that the raiyats should refrain from quarrelling with zamindars and zamindars in return should not treat raiyats unjustly; that panchayats should be established to decide and settle all disputes arising between zamindars and the raiyats; and that the zamindars and the raiyats should be treated on the same footing."<sup>49</sup> After the resolution was passed two of the non-cooperation leaders propagate the non-cooperation at the session.<sup>50</sup>

The Congress in Bihar tried to mobilize the peasants on the political grounds and tried to divert their attention from the economic issues. As the bulk of the population was engaged in agriculture the congress attempted to draw their support in order to make it a successful mass movement.<sup>51</sup>

The peasants on the other hand were however not capable to completely stick themselves to the creed of non-violence preached by Mahatma Gandhi.<sup>52</sup> And thus violent scene occurred at various places. Chaturwa factory at Champaran was looted and burnt on 2<sup>nd</sup> November 1921 by a mob of five thousands persons. All of them shouted the slogans "Gandhi ji ki jai."<sup>53</sup> Such cases were also witnessed in other areas. In Muzaffarpur two factories were burnt down.<sup>54</sup> The tension shoots up over the grazing rights between the planters and the tenants. The planters accused the peasants that they grazed their cattles over their reserved grass.<sup>55</sup> There was no fear left for the European community and grazing on the factory land became common.<sup>56</sup>

Nationalism was accepted throughout Bihar in the form of non-payment of rents specially in north Bihar where the rents were with held on large scale. All over Bihar the tenants were awakened and stood against, even those who were pro-British.<sup>57</sup> In Purnia, the crops were looted in presence of a sub-Inspector and local police.<sup>58</sup> In Forbesganj, pond of a landlord was attacked and demolished by hundreds of people.<sup>59</sup> In Pupri, plam tress were damaged of Nanpur estate.<sup>60</sup> In district of Purnia, the tenants of Muhammadia zamindars refused to pay rents in some of the villages.<sup>61</sup>

"The agrarian movement in Bihar was deeply influenced by the spirit of the non-cooperation. Although the background of the agrarian movement

had already been prepared by Swami Vidhyanand and other peasant leaders, who in some cases tried to, and even exploited the movement for their election purposes.<sup>62</sup> The Peasants continued their struggle throughout 1922, and they were advised by Rajendra Prasad and the other Congress leaders to sort out their differences amicably with the landlords.<sup>63</sup>

It was very difficult for the Congress leaders in Bihar to continue their fight for peasantry for their socio-economic conditions, nor they restrict themselves from their movement. This can be seen even after the suspension of the non-cooperation movement as the Congress made an enquiry into the peasants grievances of the Patna Division where there was a clash between the biggest zamindar of Bihar, the Raja of Amawan and his tenants.<sup>64</sup>

The other movement which shoots up during the non-cooperation movement in Bihar was that of the caste movement for the upliftment of the middle caste agriculturist. Kurmis, Baniyas, Koeries, Goalas, the Kurmi Mahatos in Chottanagpur stood for the upliftment of their castes.<sup>65</sup> Goalas were the only one of them who improved them educationally and secured representation in local bodies.<sup>66</sup> Their dispute was with the zamindars regarding the restrictions imposed on free grazing and providing labour and produce at the privileged rates.<sup>67</sup> The Goalas retaliate and restrict their womenfolk to provide outdoor employment and checked their supplies.<sup>68</sup> The refusal of begari was strongly resented by the class of zamindars and they instruct social boycott of the Goalas.<sup>69</sup> In some cases even the high caste tenants helped the zamindars because of the wrong perception of the superiority.<sup>70</sup>

Most of the Goalas were tenants on the landlord's land. Apart from the social boycott, the landlords implied economic sanctions on them. Such as they were not allowed to use the common grazing lands, they were turned out of their cultivated area and many of them were forced to leave their houses which stood on the land of the landlord.<sup>71</sup>

The Congress failed to gain the support of the lower caste tenants in Bihar as the Congress has not extended their support to their movement. At the same time the peasants were aroused by the Congress leaders with false hopes which led to the quick enrollment of tenants particularly in the region of Champran and Saran.<sup>72</sup>

Peasants meetings were organized by the Kisan Sabha leaders under the leadership of Vidhyanand during the first half of 1920's. Their struggle was based on the two levels. Firstly they raised their problems in the Legislative Council so that the Government enact the legislation to eliminate their grievances. Secondly resolutions were passed regarding the peasants problems asking for the help from the Government, zamindars and the local boards.<sup>73</sup> Free and compulsory education for the peasants children, suspension of rents in the times of natural calamities and provision of agricultural loans were some of the demands put forwarded by the peasants in their resolutions.<sup>74</sup>

By 1920, the movement was not well organized as it was by 1930's but it was successful in

keeping the peasants question alive. The peasants however tried their best to hinder the enactment of the amended Bengal Tenancy Act in the Legislative Council as it was quite injurious to the Bihar tenantry.<sup>75</sup>

Viceroy, however advised both the parties to sort out the matter with trust and mutual understanding. But this not proved to be successful as "no amicable settlement of the differences between the landlords and the tenants could be arrived at."<sup>76</sup>

The inadequate electoral politics was soon realized by the peasants who led to violent acts. In Shahabad district serious riots took place between the estate servants of the Maharaja of Dumraon and the tenants of the diara village in which the Assistant Manager, Duff was killed.<sup>77</sup> The peasants anger could be witnessed in Gaya district when Tekari Raj Kutcherri was attacked in front of the police and resulted in murder and injuries of some of the tenants.<sup>78</sup>

The issues related to the amount and the mode of collection of the rents, begar, abwabs, the problem of the bakshat land really proved to be explosive by the end of 1920's. A great Sanskrit scholar and the renowned crusader Swami Sahajanand Saraswati, founded his ashram at Bihta and founded the Kisan Sabha to settle the peasants disputes amicably. He was a staunch Gandhain and had a strong believe in the Congress creed. His work was limited to the western part of the Patna district as the landlords in this area practiced much oppression on their tenants and the other reason apart from this was to send raiyat representatives to the Council from west Patna district.<sup>79</sup>

#### **Objective of the Study**

To know the developments of the non-cooperative Movement through out the country and how it catches the mind of the masses and regulates the movement in the local areas. The study throws light on how the grievances of common people turned into a National struggle.

#### **Conclusion**

Thus the activities throughout the region of Bihar witnessed the culmination of the Non-Cooperation programme with great energy and vigour. It is really noteworthy that the masses were involved with true spirit of non violence against such a sinner government. This massive task was achieved by the Congress on the local platform as well.

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78. *Ibid.*, p.66. FR(II), March 1929.
79. *Ibid.*, pp.66-7.
80. Sharma K.K, p.67. Saraswati Sahajanand, *Mera Jeevan Sangharsh (The Struggle of my Life)*, Patna, 1952.pp.317-322.