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The Non-Cooperation Movement In Andhra Especially In Forest Regions

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Abstract

The Non-Cooperation Movement, started by Mahatma Gandhi using his weapon of non-violence, conveyed to all Indians what they really wanted in the fight for it. Andhra region, which received Gandhi's call, immediately instilled a sense of association and participated in the non-cooperation movement. In the forested regions of Andhra, people participated in a non-cooperation movement based on the call from the Andhra Congress Leaders. Palnadu region in Andhra organizes a social boycott not only for the forest department but also for all the local authorities for the revenue department. Rayachoti taluk of Cuddapah District in Andhra region comprised with forests. People suffered with the forest officials same as in palnadu area. The non-cooperation lecturers went about the villages of the taluk inciting the people to break the forest laws. In the Gudem of Godavari district, tribals fought against the British government under the leadership of Alluri Seetaramaraju.

Conditions that led people to participate in the Non-Cooperation movement:

The Non Co-operation movement played a prominent role in the history of India when there was no concept of a nation in India. It was the first time that all Indians united against the British and fought for independence. The Non-Cooperation Movement, started by Mahatma Gandhi using his weapon of non-violence, conveyed to all Indians what they really wanted in the fight for it. The British are constantly adopting new policies to retain full control over India. For that purpose they decided to use constitutional concessions to divide their opponents and divert attention from the mainstays of power which the British skillfully retained for themselves. The Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms or Government of India Act 1919 was thus prepared. Anita Inder Singh arguing that "The Constitutional reforms of 1919 and 1935 were aimed at preserving, not terminating empire." However, the Congress Party and the Justice Party decided to look into the reforms brought by the Government of India Act 1919.¹

The law requires that legislative elections be held in November 1920. So the leaders in the country and the state started motivating the people to participate in the election. However, a special meeting of the Congress in Calcutta in September 1920 changed the political situation in the country for the first time. However, a special meeting of the Congress in Calcutta in September 1920 changed the political situation in the country for the first time. At this meeting Gandhi decided to launch a non-cooperation movement. Accordingly, public representatives began to call for a boycott of the elections instead of participating in the elections.² Andhra region, which received Gandhi's call, immediately instilled a sense of association and participated in the non-

cooperation movement. In the forested regions of Andhra, people participated in a non-cooperation movement based on the call from the Andhra Congress Leaders.

Palnadu Forest Satyagraha:

Palnad is an area in Guntur district. Depending on the forests that exist here, people get everything they want. The people here have been subjected to many difficulties at the hands of the subordinate staff in connection with the administration of the forests. They had to pay high fees to graze their cattle, cut wood for fuel and collect leaf manure. As the Collector noted, conditions in 1921 were much worse due to unfavorable times, food and water shortages and more strict enforcement of forest rules. The people are angry over the negligence of the forest officials and the non-receipt of subsidies announced by the government. In addition, the famine of 1921 further affected the Palnadu region. So they actively grew up and as the whole atmosphere was overcharged by the ideas of cooperation, they decided to give some form of their dissatisfaction. What they did was to organize a social boycott not only for the forest department but also for all the local authorities for the revenue department. The expulsion included villages in and around Macherla. As a result the officers were unable to obtain the services of washers and barbers. The shopkeepers refused to sell those articles and the hotel keepers refused to serve food. Macherla Deputy Tahsildar had to go even without milk for her children. The District Collector who camped there was unable to supply or transport him or the District Superintendent of Police. When he wanted to convey his orders to the villagers by beating Tom-Tom, the village munsif informed him that all the drums used for tom-tom in the village were damaged. Social exclusion was a complete success.³

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Unnava Lakshminarayana and Vedantam Narasimhachari, two well-known leaders of Guntur, to visit the Palnad area. The people took them to the Collector's camp in a grand procession accompanied by the loud beating of drums. Collector got angry and take them to the custody. The imprisonment of the leaders infuriated the villagers and they launched a no-tax campaign. They sent their cattle into the reserve forests without paying the usual grazing fees. Government strengthened the number of forest guards and also stationed additional police in the area. There was a danger of the people coming into clash with them and mob violence breaking out. But Congress did not support to this satyagraha and saying that the violation of forest laws should be stopped.⁴

The concerned villagers were, however, unwilling to call off the campaign. They continued sending their cattle into the forests without paying the grazing fees. As observed by the Collector in one of his reports to Government, Swaraj was proclaimed in several villages. Clashes between the forest guards and the police who impounded the cattle and the people who were bent on rescuing them became frequent. Matters came to a head in February, 1922, when the no-tax campaign was at its height in Pedanandipadu firka.

In many villages the police were overpowered by the rescuing parties. At Veludurthi, for example, the reserve police were not only driven back but were also besieged in the bungalow where they encamped and it was with great difficulty that they were able to withdraw under cover of night. At Jattipalem over hundred cattle were rescued from the pound and the police were unable to do anything till the Collector and the District Superintendent of Police came there the next day and arrested several of the leading men.

It was only a few days after this incident that a more serious fracas occurred on the outskirts of Minchalapadu which according to the Collector "was notoriously bad for illicit grazing and for violent opposition even to the visits of forest officers." Here lived Kannuganti Hanumanthu, the leader of the campaign in the area. On the 26th February late in the afternoon the forest officers along with a Sub-Inspector of Police leading a party of twenty constables seized fifty goats and one hundred and twenty she-buffaloes and were driving them to the pound at Mutkur when they were attacked by a crowd of two to three hundred men and women. The majority of the livestock and goats were saved, but the cops continued to receive showers of sharp, pointed stones. Three people died and several others were injured as a result of the Sub-Inspector's order for his troops to open fire. Hanumanthu, the leader, and one of his attendants were among those who perished. The crowd then broke apart, only to reassemble in bigger numbers. In the meantime, late-night reinforcements from Mutkur gave the police a boost. The next day the District Collector visited the village and arrested 28 men and 9 women.⁵

The death of the leader, the large number of arrests that were made and the continued use of force by the police demoralized the inhabitants. Moreover, by the end of February the tempo of the Civil Disobedience Movement in the district grew weak as a result of the Bardoli resolutions. By 1st March, 1922, the Collector was able to report, "Most of the villagers are now paying up their pullari (grazing fees) and the villagers of Mutkur, which has been a particularly troublesome place both for nonpayment of Kist and pullari and for boycotting and molestation of forest officers, have expressed to me their fervent intention of turning a new leaf after I sent for them and warned them." Thus came to an end the forest Satyagraha of Palnad.

There were other areas besides Palnad where the people resolved on Satyagraha as a protest against the arbitrary nature of forest regulations. One such area was the Rayachoti taluk of Cuddapah. In his report on non-cooperation the district Collector stated in January, 1922. The non-co-operation lecturers went about the villages of the taluk inciting the people to break the forest laws... The outcome of this campaign was an extensive outbreak of lawlessness in the villages bordering on reserve forests. The boundary stones were removed in many places and people began to trespass into the forests defiantly, removing whatever they required. The forest subordinates were completely terrorised and were helpless to do anything. Cattle and goats were driven into the forests to graze without permits. There were actual proclamations with the abetment or connivance of local village munsiffs saying that all the people were free to go into forests and remove what they wanted. The villagers normally resolved that no house accommodation, provisions or any other kind of help should be given to the forest subordinates and that if any of the latter prevented the entry of the villagers into the forest, physical violence should be used against them. The situation became so serious that to restore normalcy the Collector got punitive police stationed in the most troublesome villages. This had its effect and the movement came to an end in the taluk.

Rayachoti Satyagraha:

Rayachoti taluk of Cuddapah District in Andhra region comprised with forests. People suffered with the forest officials same as in palnadu area. In his report on non-cooperation in the district the Collector stated in January, 1922.⁶ The non-co-operation lecturers went about the villages of the taluk inciting the people to break the forest laws. People in this area attracted with these lectures and started non-cooperation to the forest officers. The boundary stones were removed in many places and people began to trespass into the forests defiantly, removing whatever they required. The forest subordinates were completely terrorized and were helpless to do anything. Cattle and goats were driven into the forests to graze without permits. The villagers normally resolved that no house accommodation, provisions or any other kind of help should be given to the forest subordinates and that if any of the latter prevented the entry of the villagers into the forest, physical violence should be used against them. In such a catastrophic situation the collector had to work very hard to restore normalcy. Police mostly stayed in troubled villages and brought the situation under control.

Gudem Rebellion :

In 1921 Rama Raju went on a pilgrimage to Nasik in Maharashtra, and it was perhaps in the course of this journey that he came into contact with the Gandhian movement. On returning to Gudem, he began to preach temperance and to urge the hill men to settle disputes through their own panchayats rather than through the British courts. He adopted khadi and was said to speak highly of Gandhi, but to believe that Indian Independence could be attained only by force. The British claimed that Rama Raju sought to establish his own hill kingdom, but he does not seem to have adopted any regal titles and it was as a sanyasi, perhaps as a prophet armed, rather than as a king, that he was revered and followed. He began to promise hill men redress for their various grievances especially against Bastian, the hated tahsildar of Gudem. He also carefully builds up support among discontented and dispossessed members of the elite, men of the type that had provided the futurities of the past with so many of their leaders in Guerilla warfare.⁷

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