

## The Contribution of Communities in Malda to Protest Movement during 1905-1947: A Study of Regional Politics.

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**Abstract:** In the colonial period, Malda was known as a very active political arena. Malda was one of the strong centres of insurgency of Sannyasi and Fakir. From 1761 onwards, the revolt intensified in Malda under the leadership of Majnu Shah. After Majnu Shah, these objects, led by Ramzani and Jaruri Shah and looted the property of zamindars and British merchants in Malda. Deputy Magistrate, Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay mentions the protestors of the Sannyasi revolt off North Bengal in his novel Anandamath, during his stay at Makdampur in Malda. After 1860, there was a strong centre of the Indigo uprising. Morad Biswas, Suhas Biswas, Ratan Mandal and Lalchand Saha led the organizers of the anti-indigo raiyat movement in Malda. According to Hindoo Patriot Patrika, 'The village headmen or mandals whose names appear as leaders in the records of the Indigo disturbances are too numerous to recite.'<sup>1</sup> After the Indigo revolt (Neel Bidroho), the Wahhabi and Faraizi movements spread to the northern part of Bengal. Wahhabi movement spread to Kaliachak, Harishchandrapur, Ratua and Old Malda in Malda under the leadership of Rafiq Mandal. By 1872, the rush of the Wahhabi movement in Malda had decreased. The Sannyasi and Fakir Movements, the Wahhabi and Faraizi movements, and the Indigo revolt all influenced the local society of Malda from the late eighteenth century onwards. Many activists in Malda engaged in the protest movement in 1905 through the Swadeshi movement and the National Education, the Quit India campaign etc. The Khadi cloth and Satyagraha movement spread among the local people of Malda. In 1932, Communist activists spread Marxist ideology in the rural part of Malda. After 1937, communal conflict in Bengal politics and its impact can be seen in Malda politics as well. The Hindu Mahasabha Movement was started against the communal activities of the Muslim League under the leadership of Shyama Prasad.

**Keywords:** Anusilan Dal, Satyagrahis, Satyam Shivam Sundaram, Communist Party, Hindu Mahasabha, Muslim League

Malda became one of the popular centres of anti-British activities in the 20th century during the Partition of Bengal in 1905. *The Musalman Patrika* mentioned a Swadeshi meeting in South Malda.<sup>2</sup> More than 6000 people attended the meeting. Radhesh Chandra Seth from Malda, a propagator of the Swadeshi movement and Maulvi Mohammad presided over the meeting.<sup>3</sup> Later, at a Conference, the proposal to create *Anna Raksha* and *Dharmagola* in Malda was accepted.<sup>4</sup> And Malda became a stronghold of the extremist movement during British rule.

Malda made a special contribution to the mass movement in colonial Bengal.<sup>5</sup> There was no women's organization in Malda at that time. However, Mrs Surendra Bala Roy was imprisoned in Malda. Mrs Surendra Bala established a girls' school in Malda which was named *Kanya Shikshalay* and Mrs Tarubala Sen was in charge of raising money.<sup>6</sup> The Swadeshi movement impacted here. The National School was formed at the initiative of Amarendra Krishna Bhaduri, Adityanath Maitra, Bipin Bihari Ghosh, Radhesh Chandra Seth, Baldev Anand Giri and others.<sup>7</sup> The Malda National Education Society was established in 1907 at the initiative of Binay Kumar Sarkar and the National Education Council.<sup>8</sup> At the initiative of Binoy Kumar Sarkar, *Maldar Gambhira Gaan* became a medium of Swadeshi political propaganda.

Hans Gopal Agarwala, a resident of Old Malda, formed the 'Anusilan Dal' in 1926.<sup>9</sup> Saryu Prasad Bihani was the President of Malda District Congress. He was a Gandhian activist till his death. *The Gandhi Hindu Shala*<sup>10</sup> was established at Malda in 1922 under his leadership.<sup>11</sup> *Charka, khadi, Gamoudhag*, exclusion of untouchability and picketing of alcohol and *Gaza* shops were common in Malda district as a part of the program of the Congress movement. Bhupendranath Jha, Debendranath Jha and others took initiative in this regard. Bhupendranath Jha took the initiative to promote consciousness of the national movement among the Muslim community.<sup>12</sup>

Subodh Kumar Mistra of Pipla in Malda associated the common people with the political movement through the promotion of *khadi* and rural development and established *Pipla Pally Samity*. Through this association, he inspired the youth of the village to weave, prepare *khadi* cloth, and establish libraries and schools. Many youths came forward to work on fabric. Pipla village was recognized as the best developing village in West Bengal.<sup>13</sup> In 1938, Bijay Kumar Dasgupta took charge of a sub-centre under the Silk Production Center of Malda. From this time he became involved in the life of the poor peasant and working-class people in the village.<sup>14</sup>

In 1921, the Communist Party of India declared two objectives: to overthrow the bourgeois government through revolution; to establish proletarian rule by freeing the working class from the capitalist wage system and slavery. After that peasant, agitations to stop *Hattola*, labour movements, and strikes took place in Malda district.<sup>15</sup> Many young activists of Malda were associated with the Civil-Disobedience Movement and the 'Labon Satyagraha

Movement'. Subodh Kumar Mitra was notable among them. He was imprisoned while studying at Bhagalpur College. Surendra Bala Roy, daughter of Mohini Mohan Mishra, zamindar of Bhaluka, was also arrested for her involvement in the Satyagraha program at Patnitala in Dinajpur district.<sup>16</sup> Surendra Bala Roy was first released due to the special relationship of zamindar Mohini Babu with the district magistrate of Dinajpur. But she again joined the Satyagraha program and was sentenced to arrest and imprisonment. In those days, it was unthinkable for a woman to be imprisoned in this area.<sup>17</sup>

Kaligram in Malda was the centre of residence of the big families. Shri Charuchandra Sarkar, Monindra Nath Roy Chowdhury, Girindra Narayan Biswas, Krishna Binod Goswami, Gaur Chandra Sarkar and others joined the Non-cooperation Movement from Kaligram.<sup>18</sup> In 1926, the 'Saraswati' Library was established in a building in Golapatti by Dwarika Das and his followers.<sup>19</sup>

During the Non-cooperation Movement, a Satyagraha was started in front of a shop selling intoxicants by Nilmoni Biswas at Chanchal. M. O. Carter, Magistrate of Malda came to the spot in Chanchal and he approved the baton charge on the protesting satyagrahis. As a result, the Satyagrahi group became enraged and beat up Magistrate Carter. In this case, Ram Madhab Lahiri, Ram Pradyot Lahiri, Sudhanshu Lahiri, Charuchandra Sarkar, Jagbandhu Roychowdhury, Kanti Charan Sarkar, Girindra Narayan Biswas, Kamala Charan Sarkar and others were accused and imprisoned.<sup>20</sup>

Sachindra Nath Mitra of Harishchandrapur came in contact with the revolutionaries while he was studying in Bhagalpur and accidentally came in contact with the revolutionary Rash Behari Basu. Atul Chandra Kumar, Kshitish Chowdhury, Shri Naren Chakraborty, Shri Manik Jha and others were associated with the Malda Congress movement. Later, Atul Chandra Kumar became a follower of Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose. In the general election of 1937, he was elected to the Bengal Legislative Assembly by a large margin.<sup>21</sup>

Another active woman from Malda was Sudha Rani Chowdhurani of Shershahi (Kaliachak) zamindar house. Many revolutionary Congress workers were sheltered at the home of Sudharani at Shershahi.<sup>22</sup> *Mahakali Pathshala* is an education centre was established by Bipin Bihari Ghosh, Radhesh Chandra Seth, Amarendra Bhaduri, Haridas Palit and others at Malda. *Mahakali Pathshala* was introduced for the education of women at Malda. National education was the only way to acquire freedom from the British.<sup>23</sup> Radhesh Chandra Seth went to the National Congress as the representative of Malda.<sup>24</sup> In 1921, Malda became an active centre of the Non-cooperation Movement. Those associated with the Non-cooperation Movement were Pipla's (Harishchandrapur) Bhupendra Krishna Mishra, Debendranath Jha, Bhupendranath Jha of Bangitola, teacher Jatindranath Singh of Naghoria, Krishna Gopal Sen (Chatu Babu) and his wife Shriyukta Tarubala Sen of Bachamari, Satish Chandra Agarwala and Surja Prasad of old Malda.<sup>25</sup>

Kashishwar Chakraborty was inspired by the spirit of *Satyam Shivam Sundaram* organized by the Santals in the *Diara* area of Malda. In 1932, *Satyam Shivam Sundaram*, a traditional doctrine propagated by Kashishwar Chakraborty, united the leaders of the Swarajya Party in Dinajpur and united the tribal class.<sup>26</sup> Jitu Botka, Asu Santal, Arjun Santal of Banshari village in Dinajpur- were the leaders of the Santal movement. Originally, *Satyam Shivam Sundaram* Movement aimed to stop the rent of *jotedars*.<sup>27</sup> Jitu as 'Senapati Gandhi', Adina declared a rebellion against the oppression of the landlords and the British.<sup>28</sup> The Santal peasants started a protest movement with their indigenous bows and arrows against the police guns. Jitu's Santal Movement centred on the 'Adina Mosque'. The Jitu Santal Movement of 1932 became a headache for the District Magistrate and Viceroy Lord Wellington. In the end, the police gave the offer to Jitu for ending the movement. Despite the reluctance of Jitu and his party, the then-District Magistrate J.N. Talukder, S.P. Hiralal Saha and Abul Hayat Khan Chowdhury, zamindar of Kotwali, in the presence of Ashutosh Chowdhury, the zamindar of Malda English Bazar, accepted the agreement. But this discussion did not reach the stage of settlement. So, when Jitu was back in Adina, a zamindar of Malda, who was against this movement. Shot at Jitu from behind and then the movement was violated by Santal aggression. The armed police force then entered the Adina mosque. Many Santals including other leaders immediately fell to the ground in the Adina mosque and many Santal rebels were injured.<sup>29</sup>

From 1939 onwards, the Left workers' organization gradually became stronger in Malda. Subhash Chandra Bose came to Malda in 1939. At this time, the basement of the house of Niharendu Dutta Majumdar and Bimal Pratibha Devi provided shelter to the leftists. From there, anti-British leaflets and pamphlets were printed secretly through his press. But in *Malda Samachar*, there was a protest statement about the freedom struggle.<sup>30</sup>

During the Second World War, Subhash Chandra Bose formed the Forward Bloc in 1939, due to differences with Gandhi. As a result, many Congress leaders of Malda joined the Forward Bloc. Among them were local Congress leaders Atul Chandra Kumar and Debendranath Jha.<sup>31</sup>

From 1939 onwards, disheartened by the Congress movement more leaders and activists members of the district joined Communist politics. Pramath Nath Saha of Chapai Nawabganj was a member of the Anusilan Samiti in 1933 and was made captive at home in 1935. Then he was again captive at home in 1939. After being released, he joined the RSP (Revolutionary Socialist Party) and established the RSP office in Malda.<sup>32</sup> Ram Lakshman Pasyan, a prominent peasant activist from Harishchandrapur village was a participant in the Quit India Movement and was imprisoned for two years. Dipti Prakash Bhaduri, son of Onath Bandhu Bhaduri, a lawyer in the Munsif court in Chapainawabganj, later joined the CPI (Communist Party of India).

Dharani Dhar Sarkar of Gajole police station became acquainted with the Communist ideology during his captive period as a pioneer worker of the Civil-Disobedience Movement and after his release from prison, he joined the CPI and the publication of the Communist newspaper. Others like Motilal Bihani were the main workers of the Naghoria Conference of Krishak Sabha in 1939.<sup>33</sup>

In 1932, Manik Jha of Malda at the age of 18 was politically imprisoned and converted to communism while in prison. Then he joined the CPI after his release from jail. He strengthened the 'workers and peasants' organization in Malda. Deben Saha of Malda lived his life as a Communist activist.<sup>34</sup>

Like Dinajpur, there was no shortage of women active leaders in Malda. Surendra Bala Mishra, the third daughter of Mohini Mohan Mishra, the zamindar of Harishchandrapur, made a significant contribution as a freedom fighter in the district. She was married to the Roy family in Singhnandi village of Patnitala in Dinajpur. She imitated her husband Dyuthi Dhar Roy (Kachu Babu) and was a follower of Gandhi. Due to her hard work, consciousness was awakened among girls of the tribal Santals, Rajbansis (Desi) in the Dinajpur and Malda districts. In 1930, during the Civil-Disobedience Movement, Mrs Surendra Bala went to the first jail in her district. She was acquainted with Urmila Devi, the sister of Deshbandhu Chitranjan Das.<sup>35</sup> Lal Bihari of Malda came from Sendia village of Madaripur *mahakuma* at Faridpur, and contributed to the Congress movement by publishing newspapers. In 1912, Lal Bihari Majumdar started the weekly *Gaurdut Patrika*. *Gaurdut* was founded by Krishna Chandra of Old Malda. His compositions, rhymes and poems published in *Gaurdut*, encouraged the freedom fighters of Malda to join the independence movement. Lal Bihari used to inspire and support dedicated workers and freedom fighters through his writings.<sup>36</sup>

Prominent Congress activist and criminal lawyer of Malda, Amarendra Krishna Bhaduri left the Congress after 1939 to join the *Hindu Mahasabha* and was recognized as a district leader.<sup>37</sup> After 1942, Bijay Kumar Dasgupta, previously known as 'Khadi' activist, left Congress Party and joined the RSP Party.<sup>38</sup>

During this time, communal politics in Malda district became heated. The worthy leaders of the Krishak Praja Party were Fazlul Huq and the leader of the United Muslim League, Nazimuddin. Under their influence, Idris Ahmed of Nawabganj became the local leader of the Krishak Praja Party of Malda. He won the election in 1937 Malda South (Mohammedan populated area) by a narrow margin.<sup>39</sup>

The Muslim League was established in Malda in February 1938 at the decision of the Conference of the Muslim League at Bahrapur in Murshidabad in October 1937. Zahur Ahmed Chowdhury, a bar member, was elected President of Malda. Besides, other members were Iliyas Ahmed,

Mohammad Ziauddin, Laljan, Mujibur Rahman, Mubarak Ali and others.<sup>40</sup>

Communal tensions escalated at Malda in 1941 when Muslims attacked an ongoing procession of deities of Hindus in Shibganj. After that, in 1942 Hindu shops of Nawabganj were looted during the procession of Muharram by Muslims. This incident created a critical situation in Malda. The Deputy Magistrate of Malda took immediate steps to control the situation with the police force and later three Muslims were injured.<sup>41</sup>

Earlier in 1941, there was a dispute with the Muslims in Singabad. Devendra Narayan, the zamindar of Singabad, was blamed that he prohibited butchery of cows in his areas. These messages created a bad impact on Muslim society. So, they became violent and looted the shops of Hindus and local *hats* in Singabad at Malda. Communal tension of the 1940 decade earlier had already spread to the Malda district.<sup>42</sup>

After the 1937 elections, Fazlul Huq and Congress did not agree on the proposal to form the Bengal government, and later Fazlul Huq joined the Muslim League to form the Bengal government. This led to communal conflict in Bengal politics and its impact can be seen in Malda politics as well. The *Hindu Mahasabha* Movement was started against the communal activities of the Muslim League under the leadership of Shyamaprasad. Amarendra Krishna Bhaduri, Digendra Narayan Bhattacharya, Ashutosh Chowdhury, Shri Shivendu Shekhar Roy, Nandagopal Chowdhury, Surnath Chakraborty, Suryakant De and others were associated with this movement.<sup>43</sup> When Congress President Subhash Chandra Bose came to Malda in 1939, he spent some time there at Rajbari of Sri Mishra, and Prafulla Chandra Ghosh also came to that house.<sup>44</sup>

In 1942, the Quit India Movement started when many areas of the Malda district were involved in political activities. The activists of this movement were Shri Surendra Bala Roy, Subodh Kumar Mishra, Debendranath Jha, Ram Hari Roy, Bhupendranath Jha, Shri Bijay Das Gupta and others. Bomkesh Roy, son of Mrs. Surendra Bala Roy, led the attempt to remove the railway line and he cut off the entire district rail communication system during Quit India Movement.<sup>45</sup> About 250 activists were arrested in this movement. Bhabes Chandra (Mandal) Majumder, Jyotish Chandra Saha, Shri Shashibhushan Saha, Jogendra Nath Saha, Ram Prasad Chowdhury, Hariprasad Chowdhury, Kisan Mahaldar, Fani Bhushan Mahaldar, Basanta Mahaldar, Mohan Mistry, Banwari Mistry, Naresh Chandra Saha, Jogendra Nath Chowdhury and others contributed to the movement in 1942.<sup>46</sup> In this way, Malda became a strong centre of the anti-British movement in colonial Bengal.

### Conclusion

In conclusion, it can be said that through the movement of Sannyasi and Fakir, the oppressed peasants joined the protest movement in Malda. Through the

Indigo revolt, the Wahhabi-Faraizi movement, emerged the many activators and their influence was felt on the poor common people and peasantry of Malda. Since 1905, many protesting activators had emerged in the politics of Malda. The National School was formed at Malda by Amarendra Krishna Bhaduri, Adityanath Maitra, Bipin Bihari Ghosh, Radhesh Chandra Seth, Baldev Anand Giri etc. At various times, through political events, the common man was attracted to the Khadi weaving and Satyagraha movement of the Congress. Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose came to Malda and the spread of leftist thinking influenced the local people of Malda. As a result, many Congress leaders left the party and became involved in Communist activities. Communal conflict in Bengal politics and its impact on Malda politics. *Hindu Mahasabha* against the communal activities of the Muslim League under the leadership of Shyama Prasad. As well as the National movements such as the anti-Partition movement of Bengal, the Swadeshi movement, the Non-Cooperation Movement, the Civil-Disobedience Movement, the Quit India Movement etc. had increased the political awareness of the local workers of Malda and strengthened the anti-British movement in the pre-independence period.

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