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Satishchandra Samanta in Civil Disobedience Movement

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Abstract:

When Gandhiji started the Salt Satyagraha in 1930, almost every part of India supported the movement and even the coastal areas of Midnapore, a district in West Bengal started the Salt Satyagraha with great enthusiasm. Among the five Sub-divisions of this district Tamluk, Contai, Midnapore Sadar, Ghatal and Jhargram, Tamluk, and Contai Sub-divisions took the foremost role. The foremost widespread role of violation of the salt law was the Norghat Salt Centre in Tamluk and Pichhabani Salt Centre in Contai. However, in breaking the salt law at Narghat Salt Centre, there was a special reflection of the skillful leadership and thinking of Satishchandra Samanta, a prominent Congress leader of Tamluk Sub-division Mahishadal police station. Apart from the satyagrahis of Tamluk Sub-division or other Sub-division of the district, many volunteers from outside the district like 24 Parganas, Calcutta, Dhaka, Chittagong, Faridpur, Barisal, Mymensingh etc. joined in this salt centre. Therefore, in terms of salt preparation and its prevalence in Narghat Salt Centre, this salt centre is known as the 'Dandi of Tamluk Sub-division'. Also, Satishchandra Samanta and the Sub-divisional leaders of Tamluk Sub-division gave an extraordinary form to the Salt Satyagraha by opening salt law disobedience centres at different places. But the British government, under the Emergency Act, arrested prominent leaders of the Tamluk and Contai Sub-division earlier. It should be noted that despite the arrest of the leaders and indescribable police brutality, the salt law disobedience movement did not stop. On the other hand, the whole of Midnapore including Tamluk became intoxicated and joined the salt law disobedience movement. At that time, the British government detained Satishchandra Samanta in Midnapore Central Jail, Rajshahi Central Jail and Dumdum Special Jail. But despite this, it was not possible to suppress Satishchandra Samanta. Not only was he in jail as a political prisoner, but his many aspects of human service became evident, and he also thought ahead to plan and implement a larger movement. It is to be noted that during the Civil Disobedience Movement, the leaders of Midnapore, Tamluk and Contai Sub-Divisional along with Satishchandra Samanta on one side held on to the ideal of non-violent satyagraha. On the other hand, the tyrannical three district magistrates were killed by the revolutionaries. Thus, the revolutionaries of Midnapore proved - life is very insignificant compared to freedom. In spite of this, the Civil Disobedience Movement was rampant throughout the Tamluk Sub-division. For this reason, a comprehensive discussion

and interpretation of Satishchandra Samanta based on local information is absolutely necessary.

The paper highlights the role of Satish Samanta in the civil disobedience movement and the salt Satyagraha which was successful only in the Contai region of Midnapore

Keywords: Satyagrahi, Bandemataram, Strike, Sarbadhinayak, Satyagraha, Camp, Volunteer, Ordinance, Distillation, Chowkidari, Diploma, Engineering, Revolutionary, Gandhian, Extremist, Constructive, Dandi.

After Gandhiji's Dandi campaign began on March 12, 1930, Congress leaders became particularly active in starting Salt Satyagraha camps and salt production centres in Midnapore district. At this time Tamluk Sub-division Satishchandra Samanta, Ajay Kumar Mukhopadhyay and other Congress leaders left the constructive activities of the 'Deshbandhu Palli Sanskar Samiti' (1925-30) in Nimtauri and took full responsibility for conducting the Salt Satyagraha and Civil Disobedience Movement¹. It may be noted that a meeting of Congress workers of the district was called on March 19, 1930, in Midnapore town to prepare for Civil Disobedience Movement. Congress workers selected from each Subdivisional centre marched to Midnapore town to attend this meeting and the course of action of the movement was decided. Sushil Kumar Dhara, one of the members of the padayatra and a Congress worker from Tamluk Sub-Division, gave a detailed account in the first volume of his autobiography 'Prabaha'².

After returning from Midnapore, Congress workers of Tamluk Sub-division Satishchandra Samanta, Ajay Kumar Mukhopadhyay and Sushil Kumar Dhara formed a committee to conduct the Civil Disobedience Movement i.e. Salt Satyagraha in the Sub-Division. Mahendranath Maiti became its president and Satishchandra Chakraborty became its editor. On the other hand, a volunteer camp was set up in a part of Tamluk Rajbari. Satishchandra Samanta became the Acharya of this camp and Sushil Kumar Dhara became the Vice Chancellor³. It is noted that not only Tamluk Sub-Division, but many volunteers from other Sub-division of the district like Ghatal, Midnapore Sadar, Jhargram and Dhaka, Chittagong, Faridpur, Barisal, Mymensingh, Calcutta, 24 Parganas etc. also participated in this camp⁴.

On April 6, 1930, Gandhiji launched the famous Salt Satyagraha in Dandi. On this day, a special group of six selected satyagrahis of Tamluk (Indrajit Singh, Khsudiram Dakua, Rakhil Chandra Nayak, Abinash Chandra Das, Kunjbihari Bhakta Das) headed by Hansdhvaja Maiti marched from the camp at Rajbari in Tamluk to the Narghat Salt Centre⁵. At this salt centre, the satyagrahis defied the British government's salt laws by making salt by chanting 'Bandemataram' and 'Bharat Mata Ki Jai'. On 10th April 1930, there is an extensive reference in this matter in 'Anand Bazar Patrika'. On the second day (April 7th) of the Lavan Satyagraha, a group of 30 satyagrahis led by Honghwaja Maiti marched from Tamluk with tricolor flags and joined the Narghat Salt Centre⁶. But police brutality and various physical tortures continued on Satyagrahis.

Satishchandra Samanta led the satyagrahi party on the third day (8th April) of the start of Satyagraha at Narghat Salt Centre. But he had to suffer unspeakable torture at the hands of District Magistrate James Paddy and the police⁷. Even the loyal, present audience was not spared. It is to be noted that a 'Nimki Police' named Bhushanchandra Samanta of Sarberia village of Mahishadal police station was disturbed by this torture and resigned from the police job and joined the satyagrahis. Therefore, he was arrested by the police and sentenced to 3 months imprisonment⁸. It may be mentioned in this context that James Paddy was shot dead by revolutionaries Bimal Dasgupta and Jyotijivan Ghosh of Midnapore (April 7, 1931) due to James Paddy's inhuman torture⁹.

Meanwhile, Ajay Kumar Mukhopadhyay, secretary of the Tamluk Sub-division Law Disobedience Association, was arrested (April 15, 1930). He was sentenced to 1 year and 3 months in prison¹⁰. In protest against this, under the leadership of Satishchandra Samanta, a strike was observed in the entire Tamluk Sub-division. Therefore, the British police arrested Satishchandra Samanta. And in the trial, he was sentenced to 1 year imprisonment. At that time, the British government imprisoned him in Midnapore Central Jail, Rajshahi Central Jail and Dumdum Special Jail. Sushil Kumar Dhara has highlighted Satishchandra Samanta's leadership and many aspects of human service during his stay in Midnapore Central Jail in the first volume of his autobiography 'Prabaha'¹¹. It is to be noted that the Congress leader of Sutahata police station Khsudiram Dakua was unable to walk when he contracted tuberculosis in jail. He was cured in the service of Satishchandra Samanta. In the words of Khsudiram Dakua - At that time, Satishda used to take me to the prison hospital every day on his shoulders and give me medicine. I survived because of Satishda's care. All those words, his words cannot be forgotten. As long as I live, I will always think of him lying in bed, Satishada was not a man but a god, he was a true lover of humanity¹².

When Satishchandra Samanta was in Rajshahi Central Jail, he met Maharaj Trailokya Chakraborty and Pratulapati Ganguly, the leader of the revolutionary party called 'Anushilan'. On this basis, Satishchandra made advance plans with Maharaja Trailokya Chakraborty to carry out the feudal revolution. Accordingly, they were pulling the characterful and bright boys from among the teenagers who were in the jail. Sushil Kumar Dhara, the co-prisoner of Satishchandra Samanta, has mentioned in detail in his autobiography 'Prabaha' first volume in this context¹³. On the advice of Satishchandra Samanta, Sushil Kumar Dhara became known as the Ward Monitor or Sardar of Jail. The reflection of which is observed in the movement of forty-two. Seeing all these activities of Satishchandra Samanta, Rajshahi Jail authorities transferred him to Dum Dum Special Jail. Here he met the revolutionary hero Gunen Sen, a member of the Anusilan Samiti. Meanwhile, Sushil Kumar Dhara was also shifted to Dumdum Special Jail by the jail authorities. Here, on the advice of Satishchandra Samanta, Sushil Kumar Dhara learned Stick playing and Sword playing from Gunen Sen. On this basis, Sushil Kumar Dhara became the Sarbadhinayak (Commander-in-Chief) of the 'National Army' of the Tamralipta Jatiya Sarkar which was established in Tamluk Sub-division during the 1942 Quite India Movement.

While leaders like Satishchandra Samanta, Ajay Kumar Mukhopadhyay, and Sushil Kumar Dhara were incarcerated in jail, the British police started arresting leading activists one by one. Therefore, new workers came to fill their vacancies and opened camps in various parts of the Subdivision and encouraged the people to make salt. But during this time, the police disbanded the mob by lathi charges which led the movement more intense. A statistical source makes the point clear that 12,256 satyagrahis were imprisoned all over India during the Salt Satyagraha. Of these, 1,426 were imprisoned in Midnapore alone¹⁴. Therefore, the then temporary governor of Bengal identified this movement of Midnapore as 'practically a rising'¹⁵. Despite this, Satyagrahis used to collect salt-rich soil and collect salt water by Distillation method and boil it in the fire to make salt. It is to be noted that seeing the spread of Civil Disobedience in Midnapore district (June 16, 1930), the then Secretary of the Government of Bengal, H.W. Emerson, in a report sent to the Governor, wrote about Midnapore: It is clear from the number of villages which have participated in the Congress movement in this district that the roots of this movement are deeply rooted in this district, with the result that the entire population of the villages are salt law violators and every house has become a Satyagraha camp¹⁶.

At that time, the district authorities thought that the salt law disobedience movement would die down on its own. But as it was not, the British Government adopted the policy of inhuman repression. The Reign of Terror according to the Amritbazar newspaper, began in Tamluk, Contai, and Ghatal Sub-divisions due to brutal repression by District Magistrate Paddy¹⁷. At that time Gandhiji wrote - He was surprised and saddened by the monstrous behaviour of the police in suppressing the Civil Disobedience Movement in Midnapore. According to him, the police brutality is worse than the Punjab massacre of 1919¹⁸. Again, Jawaharlal Nehru wrote in this context - Many incidents will be widespread in the war of independence, but the monstrous behaviour of the police during the Civil Disobedience of Midnapore can never be widespread¹⁹.

The Simon Commission Report was published during the Civil Disobedience Movement (1930). Based on this report, the First Round Table Conference was held in London (November, 1930 – January, 1931). Meanwhile, it became clear to the British government that India's political problems could not be solved by excluding the National Congress. On this basis the Gandhi-Irwin Pact was executed (March 5, 1931). By agreement - the government refrained from applying repressive policies and agreed to release the prisoners held.

Satishchandra Samanta, after being released from jail as per the Gandhi-Irwin Pact, first took over the responsibility of organizing the movement at Tamluk Police Station. He pitched his camp at Dimarihat, almost in the middle of this thana. He lived there most of the time. Apart from giving instructions regarding agitation in various areas of Tamluk Police Station, he himself actively participated in Salt Satyagraha²⁰. It may be noted that Rakhachandra Maiti, a teacher of Deshbandhu Palli Sanskar Samiti, managed a salt centre on the banks of the Pratapkhalī Canal in Ganapatīnagar under the inspiration and instructions of Satishchandra Samanta. Also, many students and even young volunteers of

this samiti went to Union No. 11 of Panshkura Police Station under the instructions of Satishchandra Samanta and worked as per the instructions of Indumati Devi²¹.

During the Salt Satyagraha movement, leaders like Satishchandra Samanta, Ajay Kumar Mukhopadhyay and Kumarchandra Jana traveled around the Panshkura police station and held meetings at many places. During this time, they used to tell the people about the grief of subjugation and the all-out struggle that Gandhiji had started to get rid of that subjugation and called everyone for active support in this movement. Even in 1935, Satishchandra Samanta worked hard for a long time to remove the weaknesses of Panshkura thana organization²².

After the failure of the Second Round Table Conference (7 September, 1931 to 1st December, 1931) the new Viceroy Wellington began a massive crackdown on the mass movement. Because of this, the National Congress again started the Civil Disobedience Movement (January 3, 1932). Meanwhile, the British government imprisoned prominent leaders including Gandhiji (January 4, 1932) and declared the National Congress illegal. Therefore, when Civil Disobedience Movement started all over in India, not only law disobedience but also tax stop movement also started in Midnapore. That is, the defiance of the salt law, the movement to stop the chowkidari tax and the pituni tax, as well as the boycott of foreign goods, picketing in excise shops and the violation of exclusionary laws²³.

After the Civil Disobedience Movement started in the second phase, prominent workers of the district were arrested and detained under various sections of the ordinance. Mass arrests began across Midnapore district including the entire Tamluk Sub-division. But some leading local activists conducted the movement in hiding, avoiding the watchful eye of the police. At that time Satishchandra Samanta was arrested by the British police and beaten in such a way that he was bedridden for about 1 month. Finally, he was sentenced to 1-year imprisonment. Even after going to jail, he did not get relief, he was subjected to unspeakable torture. It is to be noted that none of the punishments provided in the barbaric prison code of the British government such as Ari Beri, Danda Beri Standing Handcuffs etc. were left out²⁴.

In this situation the British Government issued a White Paper (March, 1932) to weaken the national movement. Meanwhile, British Prime Minister Macdonald announced the Communal Award (August 16, 1932) to create a divide between Indian upper caste and lower caste Hindus. In protest, Gandhi started a hunger strike. Following in Gandhiji's footsteps, leading Congress workers across India began a hunger strike. At that time, Satishchandra Samanta started a hunger strike in the premises of Bargabhima Temple in Tamluk town. It is to be noted that Satishchandra Samanta also broke his hunger strike along with Gandhiji's hunger strike²⁵. In the end, Gandhiji and B. R. Ambedkar signed the Poona Pact (September 25, 1932). The British government also accepted this agreement. At this time, Gandhiji moved away from Civil Disobedience Movement and focused on Harijan movement. Since then, the law disobedience movement has left the nature of mass movement and the nature of individual law disobedience movement has become prominent.

After that, the chowkidari tax and rent movement started in Midnapore. Tamluk Sub-division was not far behind. Leaders like Satishchandra Samanta, Ajay Kumar Mukhopadhyay took the lead from the side of farmers and poor masses²⁶. It is to be noted that in this regard, the successful Anti-Union Board Movement and extended Anti-Chowkidari Tax Movement under the leadership of Midnapore district patriot Birendranath Sasmol transmitted strong spirit and fighting motivation to the people of Midnapore²⁷. During this time, common people were subjected to all kinds of torture of withholding rent and looting of houses, arson, physical torture, auctioning of immovable property for non-payment of rent. But the masses endured everything because of their immense faith in the leadership. In this context, Jadugopal Mukhopadhyay wrote in his book 'Biplabi Jiboner Smriri' - Tamluk and Contai Sub-districts in Midnapore did the impossible. The barbarity with which the English Government has perpetrated women and on the precincts of the Holy House can only be compared to the invasion of an enemy's country in war²⁸.

From the beginning of 1934 the Civil Disobedience Movement became dull. In May this year, the Congress Working Committee unconditionally called off the Civil Disobedience Movement. During this time, Satishchandra Samanta spent 1 year studying and thinking about various subjects in his home. Along with that, he did some constructive work but not publicly. During this time, he realized the lack of medical treatment in the village. To meet this shortage, he bought homeopathy books and started free treatment among the poor. Not only that, he studied well for 4 years after getting admission in Calcutta Homeopathic Medical College to master this homeopathic treatment system well. But he did not get his medical diploma degree. Because one day he gave up his engineering studies at the call of the country and jumped into the Non-Cooperation Movement, so in 1940 he postponed his medical studies and returned to Tamluk to join a personal satyagraha²⁹. In this case it can be said that Satishchandra Samanta Senapati Gandhi conducted every work of life with deep respect and trust for Maharaj.

During the Civil Disobedience Movement, freedom struggle non-violent satyagraha and armed struggle existed in Midnapore district. It flowed in parallel yet separate streams but there was no particular connection between the two streams, or if there was, it was very tenuous. It should be noted that the main centre of the movement of non-violent satyagrahis was Tamluk and Contai Sub-division. Therefore, the Satyagrahis started a strong movement by opening salt production centres in various places including Norghat in Tamluk and Pichhabani in Contai, defying the British government's salt law. On the other hand, the activities of the revolutionary party were mainly centred on the city of Midnapore. It may be noted that the revolutionaries of Midnapore shot dead the District Magistrate James Paddy while he was watching an exhibition at Midnapore Collegiate School, Bimaldas Gupta and Jyotijiban Ghosh (April 7, 1931). District Magistrate Douglas was shot dead by Pradyot Bhattacharya and Pravanshu Pal during a meeting of the District Board (April 30, 1932). District Magistrate Barge was shot dead by Anathbandhu Panja and Mrigen Dutta in the police field of Midnapore (September 2, 1933)³⁰. Even so it can be said that one stream was complementary to the other. Because District Magistrate Paddy's brutal torture of

satyagrahis during Lavan Satyagraha prompted the revolutionary party to kill Paddy. Again, the unequalled bravery of the revolutionaries, their burning love for the country and their inflexible mental fortitude gave them the courage to stand tall despite hundreds of insults and tortures of the non-violent satyagrahis.

It is particularly noteworthy in this context that during the Civil Disobedience Movement, there was no dispute between the Tamluk Sub-division leaders regarding the conduct of the movement on these two lines. Noted historian Amlesh Tripathi writes - During this period there was a conflict between Gandhian Kumar Jana and extremist Ajay Mukherjee, Satish Samanta³¹. This information is completely wrong. Because at that time there was no 'Gandhist' or 'extremist' dissension like the Congress organization in Tamluk Sub-division. It is to be noted that after leaving college during the Non-Cooperation Movement in 1920, these quitters accepted the country's work as their only goal in life through the Congress Organization. There was no ideological conflict between them. In fact, mutual respect and courtesy and tireless efforts and hard work among these young workers established the Congress organization of the Sub-division on a firm foundation.

Judging by the magnitude and importance of the Civil Disobedience Movement in Tamluk Sub-division, it is a mass movement. Because not only Tamluk Sub-division, but people from other Subdivisions of the district and different parts of Bengal participated in Narghat Salt Centre as satyagrahis and volunteers. With their joint efforts, Narghat became the salt centre of 'Dandi of Tamluk Sub-division'. In this case, Satishchandra Samanta's extreme sacrifice and organizational achievement is the key. In fact, he became the leader of the people. This was reflected in the Quit India Movement and the establishment and management of the Tamralipta Jatiya Sarkar.

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