

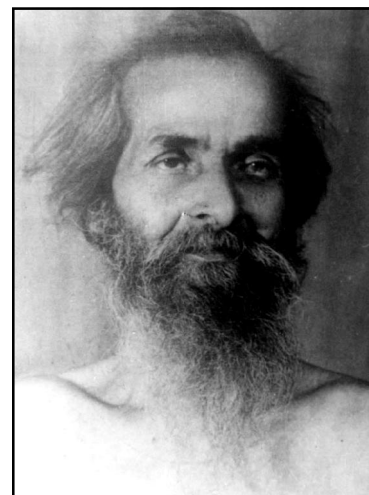
The Role of Acharya Harihar in Civil Disobedience Movement

Dr. Trinath Hota

The resolution of Indian National Congress in its general session at Lahore endorsing Purna Swaraj or complete independence held out a direct threat to the British government and it was feared that the resolution might lead a secessionist movement and cause wide spread violence. The Viceroy, Lord Irwin, was advised by the Secretary of State to observe restraint and have dialogue with responsible leaders of the Congress. But before any dialogue could take place, Gandhi decided to start the Civil Disobedience Movement. In a meeting with Rabindranath Tagore at Sabaramati Ashrama, he told that he was furiously thinking for a planned agitation in accordance with the Lahore Resolution.

On 26th January, 1930 the nation took the Independence Day pledge to carry out Congress instructions for establishing 'Purna Swaraj' or Complete Independence. In February, the Congress Working Committee met at Sabaramati Ashrama and authorized Gandhi to fashion out a programme of the Civil Disobedience Movement and prepare a course of action. Shortly after the Congress Working committee meeting, Gandhi decided to launch the movement by breaking the salt laws of the Government. This is known as the 'Salt Satyagraha'. Under the existing salt laws, the British Government did not permit Indians to produce salt and instead forced them to use the Government-supplied salt. Gandhi decided to break the salt laws as an act of 'Civil Disobedience'.

Before the Salt Satyagraha had begun, Gandhi thought of informing the Viceroy about his programme of action. He wanted to impress the Govt. that he was all for the Non-violent ways to achieve 'Purna Swaraj'. Writing to the Viceroy, he accused the British rule of progressive exploitation by a ruinous and expensive military and Civil Administration, which had reduced



India politically to serfdom and had sapped the foundation of our culture. He proposed to the Viceroy for negotiations for the redressal of the grievances of the Indian people, failing which he would launch the Satyagraha. The Viceroy refused for any talk with Gandhi outright and pointed out that Gandhi was planning for an agitation which was certain to turn violent and hence, dangerous to public peace. Seeing no encouragement in the reply of the Viceroy, Gandhi finally decided to go ahead with his Satyagraha with the following observations- "On bended knees I asked for bread and I have received a stone instead. India is one vast prison house. I repudiate this law (Salt Law) and regard it as my sacred duty to break the mournful monotony of the compulsory peace, that is

chocking the heart of the nation for want of free vent.”

The Civil Disobedience Movement began with Gandhi breaking the Salt Laws with 78 of his followers at Dandi on the sea shore of Gujrat. On 12th March, 1930 he started the historic ‘Dandi March’ from the Sabarmati Ashrama and covered the distance of 241 miles by 5th April, 1930. On the way he was greeted by thousands of people who had come from their villages and towns to have a glimpse of him. The people of Orissa should feel great that a young man of twenty years old named Motibas Das of Balasore went from Swaraj Mandir to join in ‘Dandi March’. On 6th April, 1930 Gandhi reached Dandi coast and picking of a handful of salt, he defied the Government Salt laws. His action was hailed by many congress leaders who were present there and by all Indians.

Being ordered by National Congress Committee the Utkal Congress Committee decided to break the Salt Law. So they decided the place ‘Inchudi’ as the fittest place for Salt Movement with following causes:

1. The salt prepared from the coastal areas, Inchudi can be sold in Balasore market

which was nearest marketing place.

2. There was no facility of communication from Inchudi to Balasore. The road was muddy. So any vehicle or police van would not reach that place soon. So it would be troublesome for English Officers to oppose the Salt Law breakers.

3. Another cause was that a lot of villages are adjacent to Inchudi. By which a number of workers can join Salt Movement. It would be easier for huge gathering.

Gandhi had declared to break the Salt Law on 6th April, 1930 in all provinces. According to this proclamation Gopabandhu Choudhury and Acharya Harihar were chosen by Central Committee to lead Civil Disobedience Movement. As decided Gopa Babu and Acharya Harihar with 21 Satyagrahis started from Swaraj Ashrama, Cuttack at 6.30 a.m. towards Inchudi, 10 miles from Balasore. As the tradition the Satyagrahis were greeted with *dhupa*, *dipa* and sandal paste and they were garlanded by Smt. Rama Devi, Malati Devi, Kokila Devi, Kiranabala Sen etc. Gopabandhu Choudhury was arrested just at the beginning of their historical journey. Acharya Harihar led

as the leader of the Satyagrahis. Being attracted by the leadership of Harihar a lot of women Satyagrahis also joined Salt Movement with vigour and zeal. On the ways the Satyagrahis were greeted by the villagers who came in thousands. Acharya Harihar with his followers was reciting the patriotic song composed by Viplavi Poet Birakishore Das-

*“asare aji asa asa
daria dakhala kari jiba kie asa
sara bharatare hahakara
ame pakei debure pakei debu”.*

(Oh, our friends come and join us. We will go to take the possession of ocean. It will create havoc in the whole country.)

They reached the Permit building in Balasore on 12th April, 1930 early morning. This Permit building belonged to Gouridatta Marwadi. The Satyagrahis were using that building as a resting place. In the evening of 12th April, 1930 Acharya Mahashaya with his followers prayed to God. After sometimes they started their historical journey from Permit building towards Inchudi. On the way the young and old ladies were waiting with candles. From Balasore to Inchudi the way was lighted with candles. No body felt that it was a night. They greeted

Acharya Harihar as well as his followers with all offerings and their bodies were covered with flower garlands. The high honour given to Harihar was a matter of jealousy on the part of kings. Such an honour to Acharya Harihar bestowed by all types of people irrespective of caste, colour, creed and sex was the first and last of its kind in history of Orissa. The slogans of Rama Devi, Malati Devi, Kokila Devi, Janhabi Devi, Subhadra Mahatab, Kiranabala Sen etc. dragged women to accompany them.

Being informed the police force was present there. Their presence was a trouble to the Satyagrahis. The Satyagrahis made a secret plan. On the 12th night of April, 1930 they were assembled near Paschima Thakurani at Inchudi. Their secret decision was that Baikunthanath Das would act as a goddess. Accordingly Baikunthanath Das became Kalisi and told in a loud voice, “who has made my temple impure ? I will eat them.” After hearing these words the coward policemen left that place. This plan made it easier for the Satyagrahis to break the Salt Laws.

They reached the bank of Inchudi on 13th April, 1930

early in the morning. That was the day of Mahavisuva Sankranti. The Oriyas observe that day as the beginning of the year. Acharya Harihar finished his prayer. Just at 8 a.m., Acharya Harihar the leader of Satyagrahis broke the Salt Law by collecting salt from the place Tundara, just before Inchudi. From the place of Badi and Gula the surface of the river Dhubagandi eastern side of Inchudi, the Satyagrahis collected the salt and kept on the floor of Paschima Thakurani. Then Acharya Harihar with twelve Satyagrahis proceeded towards Inchudi to break the salt law. At that time the Superintendent of Balasore District, Police Inspector, the Sub-Inspector and the Choukidars about twenty police officers were present at Inchudi. Many people from urban and rural areas were assembled to see the first disobedience movement at Inchudi. In the meantime the leader Acharya Harihar first collected the handful of salt from the ocean. After seeing this the Inspector of Police told, “you have no right to collect salt from the ocean. Why are you taking law in your hand by going against the Salt Act” ? To answer this leader Acharya Harihar told, “ we know that we have no right to collect salt

as prescribed in Salt Act. But we are doing this Civil Disobedience Movement knowingly after conveying to you all properly. So this is not a matter of astonishment. Our aim and objective is to break this Salt Act by disobedience”.

Thereafter the police forcibly took away the salt from their hand. Still then Acharya Harihar with followers repeated the same thing, then the Police arrested Acharya Harihar with four Satyagrahis. Thereafter another four started to break the law. Although there was strong resistance from the police, the Civil Disobedience of salt movement continued. The women Satyagrahis made a plan. To oppose the tyranny of the Police, the women Satyagrahis made a circle into which the police dared not to enter. There they started to heat the salt water and prepared salt in their pot. The pleasure out of this work was beyond description. Only the eye witness could describe the joy of the Satyagrahis. Some collected the salt by their handkerchief and went to sell in the Balasore town. The Satyagrahis batch by batch collected salt. The Police also arrested them. On 14th April, 1930, the Satyagrahis from different parts of Orissa joined

to break the Salt Law. Lauhastambha Vahini from Cuttack, Patitapavana Vahini from Sambalpur and Ganjam Vahini from Ganjam, Sambalpur Vahini' from Sambalpur and Gujurati Vahini were united at Inchudi to break the Salt Law.

The Leadership of Acharya Harihar influenced another important Satyagrahi Sri Surendranath Das. Surendra Babu surprised the people of Orissa. The Police tried to arrest him. After collecting salt he kept it in a big pot in his village, Bhimpur, near Inchudi. After taking meal he was ready to go and sell the salt in Balasore town. On 14th April at 10 a.m. police had the Gherao to arrest Surendra Babu. He made an interesting plan. He told his wife Gouri to give him all the ornaments and a costly Saree. He put on the ornaments with Saree and came out with a big pot of salt to sell in Balasore town. But after covering fourteen miles he was caught by the police at the police station, Motiganj. He was arrested and taken to Police station. All the ornaments were robbed by the police officers and he was fined Rs.50/- and set free. But after some days he was again arrested.

On 15th April, the Satyagrahis sold the salt on lotus leaf in front of Balasore Collectorate Office. The Police tried to pollute the salt. Still then the Satyagrahis not only sold the salt but also they sold lotus leaves. About eleven Satyagrahis were arrested.

The case against Acharya Harihar and other Satyagrahis was tried. The leader Acharya Mahashaya and the Satyagrahi advocate Gokulananda Dey were sentenced to six months imprisonment. Babu Gunanidhi Mohanty and Chakrapani Rout were imprisoned for three months. Babu Niranjana Sahu, Gokulananda Mohanty and Dasarathi Mohanty were sentenced to one month imprisonment each. On 17th April, 1930 Acharya Harihar with others were sent to Cuttack jail from Balasore.

Many women led by Rama Devi and Malati Devi continued their Satyagraha up to 20th April, 1930. The Police patrolling at Inchudi and nearby places was going on. On 11th May, 1930 a heart touching incident occurred. A fourteen year old village boy from Atihlabad named Sadhu Charan Mohapatra violated the Salt Law and collected salt. Being encouraged five hundred

villagers accompanied Sadhu Charan. The Police was able to arrest only five Satyagrahis including Sadhu Charan. They were imprisoned for four months with fine of Rs. 50/-. They were sent to Cuttack Jail. Thereafter the Magistrate ordered to send them to the school of reformation at Hajaribag. But on the request of mother Parvati Bewa and other Satyagrahis Sadhu Charan was set free. In fact the patriotism of the fourteen year old boy, Sadhu Charan could not be forgotten.

In Cuttack District, Kujanga was an important centre of Salt Satyagraha. In June, 1930, Rani Bhagyavati, Patamahadei of Kujanga along with five hundred women Satyagrahis violated the Salt Law. In Puri District the salt agitation was led by Pandit Nilakantha Das. In Ganjam District leadership was provided by Viswanath Das, Niranjana Patnaik and other Congress leaders. Thus the whole coastal Orissa was influenced by the campaign. In a broader Indian context the Salt Satyagraha of Orissa perhaps occupies the place next only to Gujrat. The leadership of Utkal Gandhi, Acharya Harihar played a role to fructify the cherished desire of Mahatma Gandhi. In Orissa

the Civil Disobedience Movement was wide spread. The village people came forward to join the movement. Another special feature of Civil Disobedience Movement was the participation of women and teenagers called Banar Sena.

Thereafter Acharya Harihar Das was sent to Hajaribag Jail from Cuttack Jail. Being a prisoner he was given to weave *sataranji* in the Jail. He was spinning with much pleasure. He was given the responsibility to impart the moral teaching from the Srimad Bhagavad Gita and the Upanisad. After six months he was set free from Hajaribag Jail in the month of September,

1930. It would be a tribute to Acharya Harihar on the occasion of celebration of Independence Day if the people of Orissa remember his memorable leadership in Civil Disobedience Movement.

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His Excellency the Governor Sri Murlidhar Chandrakant Bhandare planting a sapling in the Raj Bhavan garden on the occasion of Vana Mahotsav Week on 6.7.2010.