
**A Special Contribution of Mass Movement in Malda, a District of
Colonial Bengal during 1905-1947:
A Study of Regional Politics**

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***Abstract:**Malda has a long history of mass movement. There was a strong centre of the anti-Indigo movement. Morad Biswas, Suhas Biswas, Ratan Mandal and Lalchand Saha led the organizers of the anti-indigo raiyats movement in Malda. The Wahhabi and Faraizi movements spread in Northern part of Bengal after the indigo movement. Malda became a strong centre of the Wahhabi movement. By 1872, the tide of the Wahhabi movement in Malda had receded. The Sannyasi and Fakir Movement, Wahabi and Faraizi movements and the Indigo movement have all impacted on local society in Malda since the late eighteenth century and the whole of the nineteenth. The Swadeshi movement in 1905 and national education were a strong politically conscious part of the protest movement in Malda. The Khadi cloth and the Satyagraha movement were more popular activities for the local people of Malda. In 1932, Communist activists became strong in the rural part of Malda.*

***Keywords:**, Communist Party, Quit India Movement, Swadeshi Movement, Fakir Movement*

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Introduction

Malda became one of the popular centers 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.¹ More than 6000 people attended the meeting. Radhesh Chandra Seth from Malda, a propagator of Swadeshi movement and Maulvi Mohammad presided over the meeting.² Later, at a

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Conference, the proposal to create *Anna Raksha* and *Dharmagola* in Malda was accepted.³ And Malda became a stronghold of the extremist movement during the British rule.

I

Malda made a special contribution to mass movement in colonial Bengal.⁴ There was no women's organization in Malda at that time. However, Mrs. Surendra Bala Roy was imprisoned from Malda. Surendra Bala established a girls' school in Malda which was named *Kanya Shikshalayand* Tarubala Sen was in charge of raising money.⁵ 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.⁶ The Malda National Education Society was established in 1907 at the initiative of Binay Kumar Sarkar and the National Education Council.⁷ At the initiative of Binoy Kumar Sarkar, *Maldar Gambhira Gaan* became a medium of Swadeshi political propaganda.

Another active woman from Malda was Sudha Rani Chowdhurani of Shershami (Kaliachak) zamindar house. Many revolutionary Congress workers were sheltered at the home of Sudharani at Shershami.⁸ *Mahakali Pathshala*, an education centre was established by Bipin Bihari Ghosh, Radhesh Chandra Seth, Amarendra Bhaduri, Haridas Palit and others at Malda. *Mahakali Pathshalawas* introduced for the education of women at Malda. National education was the only way to acquire freedom from the British.⁹ Radhesh Chandra Seth went to the National Congress as the representative of Malda.¹⁰ In 1921, Malda became an active center of the Non-cooperation Movement. Those who associated with the Non-cooperation Movement were 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 Agalwala and Surja Prasad of old Malda.¹¹

Hans Gopal Agarwala, a resident of old Malda, formed the 'Anusilan Dal' in 1926.¹² Saryu Prasad Bihani was the President of Malda District Congress. He was a Gandhian activist till his death. *The Gandhi Hindu Shala*¹³ was established at Malda in 1922 under his leadership.¹⁴ *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.¹⁵

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Subodh Kumar Mitra of Pipla in Malda associated the common people with the political movement through 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.¹⁶ 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.¹⁷

II

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.¹⁸ 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.¹⁹ Surendra Bala Roy was first released due to 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.²⁰

Kaligram in Malda was the center 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.²¹ In 1926, the 'Saraswati' Library was established in a building in Golapatti by Dwarika Das and his followers.²²

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 satyagraha. As a result, the Satyagrahi group became enraged and beat up Magistrate Carter. In this case, Ram Madhab

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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.²³

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.²⁴

III

Kashishwar Chakraborty was inspired by the spirit of *Satyam Shivam Sundaram* organized by the Santals in *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.²⁵ Jitu Botka, Asu Santal, Arjun Santal of Banshari village in Dinajpur - were the leaders of the Santal movement. Originally, the aim of *Satyam Shivam Sundaram* Movement was to stop the rent of *jotedars*.²⁶ Jitu as 'Senapati Gandhi', Adina declared a rebellion against the oppression of the landlords and the British.²⁷ The Santal peasants started a protest movement with their indigenous bows and arrows against the police guns. Jitu's Santal Movement centered in the 'Adina Mosque'. The Jitu Santal Movement of 1932 became a headache for the District Magistrate and Viceroy Lord Wellin. 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 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.²⁸

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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.²⁹

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.³⁰

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.³¹ Ram Lakshman Pasyan, a prominent peasant activist from Harishchandrapur village was a participator 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).

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.³² After 1942, Bijay Kumar Dasgupta, previously known as 'Khadi' activist, left Congress Party and joined the RSP Party.³³

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.³⁴

In 1942, Quit India Movement started when many areas of 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.³⁵ 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

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Chowdhury, Kisan Mahaldar, Fani Bhushan Mahaldar, Basanta Mahaldar, Mohan Mistry, Banwari Mistri, Naresh Chandra Saha, Jogendra Nath Chowdhury and others contributed to the movement in 1942.³⁶

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 in 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 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.³⁷ Lal Bihari of Malda came from Sendia village of Madaripur *mahakumaat* 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 the dedicated workers and freedom fighters through his writings.³⁸ In this way, Malda became a strong centre of anti-British movement in colonial Bengal.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it can be said that in the first phase of the nineteenth century, the movement of the Sannyasi and Fakir gave strength to the oppressed peasants in the struggle against the Zamindars and the British. Later, the Indigo movement, the Wahhabi- Faraizi movement had a huge impact on the people of Malda. The people have been strongly in touch with national political activities since 1905. At various times, people were attracted to the Satyagraha movement of the Congress through the course of political events. Later, Leftist thinking influenced the local people of Malda. As a result, many leaders of Congress left the party and joined the Communist movement. The Swadeshi movement in 1905, the Non-cooperation movement, Civil-Disobedient movement, and the Quit India movement were strongly centered on Malda district. This influence of the movement spread from the national level to the rural level among the local people of Malda. From Malda, the common people of the society, the tribal, the peasant class and other intellectual

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groups all became protesters against British rule through the many mass movements. Through various political activities in Malda district, the political awareness of the people was promoted and they became partners in the active political movement in the pre-independence period.

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