



IMPACT OF NON –COOPERATION MOVEMENT IN GUNTUR DISTRICT WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO PALNAD PEASANT AGITATION

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ABSTRACT

The paper is intended to study the factor leading to the Peasant agitation in Palnad region, and the impact Non-cooperation movement was started by Gandhi. It also explains how the Colonial forces suppressed the agitation. The Peasant agitations during 1920-22 were an integral part of Non-cooperation Movement in Andhra. Despite their initial spontaneous character, they were later integrated into the "logic of Gandhian Nationalism", as in the case of no-tax campaigns in Guntur and Chirala.-Perala during the these period. All forms of peasant protests against forest regulations are confined to illicit grazing of cattle and sheep in the reserves, collection of fuel and manure leaves without authorization, destroying of forest boundaries which led to frequent friction between peasants and the forest subordinates, social boycott of forest and revenue officials and sporadic assaults on subordinate officials of the forest department which resulted in many cane charges, police firing, imposition of punitive forces and Taxes and so on.

KEYWORDS : Pullari, Grazing, Kisthi, Munsiff

Introduction

The Peasant agitations during 1920-22 were an integral part of Non-cooperation Movement in Andhra. Despite their initial spontaneous character, they were later integrated into the "logic of Gandhian Nationalism", as in the case of no-tax campaigns in Guntur and Chirala-Perala during the these period. All forms of peasant protests against forest regulations are confined to illicit grazing of cattle and sheep in the reserves, collection of fuel and manure leaves without authorization, destroying of forest boundaries which led to frequent friction between peasants and the forest subordinates, social boycott of forest and revenue officials and sporadic assaults on subordinate officials of the forest department which resulted in many cane charges, police firing, imposition of punitive forces and Taxes and so on. Here the movement was more militant, because the exploitation by the colonial administration was more intensive and consequently the anti-colonial feeling among the people was also quite strong.

The paper is intended to study the factor leading to the Peasant agitation in Palnad region, and the impact Non-cooperation movement was started by Gandhi. It also explains how the Colonial forces suppressed the agitation. In 1919, 1920 and 21, when rains failed, the people were subjected to severe economic hardship. They subsisted on leaves, roots, bark, and jungle berries. Conditions did not improve much since the times of Poet Srinatha, who described Palnad as the land of small stones and little temples, scorpions and snakes.

Impact of Non Co-Operation Movement

The impact the movement was confrontation between the people on one side and the forest administration and the police on the other, especially after the Nagpur Congress, the people of Palnad became extremely defiant of the government. Gali Mallikarjuna Sastry carried the gospel of non-violent, Non-cooperation movement to the four corners of Palnad. In the Mutukur village under the leadership of a person called "China Gandhi" people organized themselves to defy the government. Ranga Chenchayya, a Vysya, did intensive propaganda and made social boycott of the government officials. In Rentachintala, Nalam Mattupalli Sresti did Congress propaganda¹. The Guntur District Congress Committee also evinced keen interest in the forest affairs of Palnad. In its General Body meeting held on November 10, 1921, Anche Sivayya Chowdary presiding, it was resolved, that the defiance of forest laws in Palnad should henceforth be conducted under the auspices of the Congress. The executive committee of the Guntur D. C. C. meeting on November 14, 1921 resolved to start camp in Palnad to prepare the people for civil disobedience and send thirty enthusiastic people to do Congress propaganda². Gali Mallikarjuna Sastry as an observer took part in the deliberations.

The Palnad Conference was held on August 15- 17, 1921 at Karampudi. Thousands from all villages assembled to hear the leaders and obtain advice regarding their confrontation with the government. The villagers were prepared to graze cattle in the forest without paying grazing fee, thus inaugurating civil disobedience. Social boycott of the government officials was ultimately decided. The government itself accepted that the cause of trouble in Palnad were unfavourable season, great shortage of fodder and water, strict enforcement of forest rules and the non-co-operation agitation³.

New Forest Rules and Regulations

With the rising tide of non-co-operation in the District the government was determined to implement forest regulations rigorously in Palnad. In the 'Reserves' a grazing tax of Re. 0-12-0 (Re. 0.75) on each cow and Re. 1-8-0 (Re. 1.50) on each buffalo for every six months was imposed. The goats were declared as enemies of the forest and they were not permitted to enter them. 3 Any person found in the forest without a permit was prosecuted⁴.

In Julakallu and Kallagunta people could not pay grazing tax, and they had to sell their cattle at cheap rates. As they had no other occupation, they were reduced to under poverty and begging. The forest officials were mostly corrupt. The villagers of Wutacherla had to spend most, of their income towards bribing the officers and also towards fees to the lawyers to wriggle themselves out of the prosecution cases which the police brought against them. On February 16 and 17, 1922 the revenue authorities, accompanied by the police constables, went to Ramapuram and Jangameswarapuram and insisted upon the people paying taxes of three installments within twelve hours. When the villagers pleaded helplessness and requested for more time, the Tahasildar indulged in foul language and threatened the people with dire consequences. In Jattipalem, the people were denied access to water in the forest stream. When their cattle were drinking water, they were impounded by the forest authorities. The villagers of Jangameswarapuram, Ramapuram, Jettipalem and Minchalapadu were unable to pay grazing tax, the Collector of Guntur proceeded to these villages with Armed Reserve and Mounted Police in February 1921 and detained their cattle in very large numbers⁵.

Social Boycott of Government Officials

With the government attitude towards grazing tax becoming stiff the people decided upon social boycott of not only forest officials but also of revenue officials. The Deputy Tahsildar in Macherla could not obtain milk for his children. When the District Collector of Guntur camped at the outskirts of Macherla, his peons could not secure eggs for him, and they had to get them from Guntur, When the Collector wanted to make his orders known by the beat of

drums, the village Munsiff made the submission that all the drums in the villages were either damaged or out of order⁶. The Deputy Tahsildar Ponnada Koteswararao, tried his best to secure coffee for the Collector but all his attempts proved failure. The forest and revenue officials could not secure food anywhere in Macherla as the hoteliers refused to serve them. In the beginning the social boycott was confined only to the forest officials but as the revenue officials secretly passed on some of their supplies to the forest officials, the people extended social boycott to the revenue officials also. The social boycott became such a great success that the District Collector, Guntur, had to ruefully report to his superiors in the Fort. St. George, Madras that "It was impossible to get either supplies or 'Bundles' either for the Collector or for the District Superintendent of Police⁷.

No-Tax Campaign

The imprisonment of the three Muslims viz. Nabi Saheb, Chintapalli Hussain Saheb and John Ahmed and the sentence of one year simple imprisonment passed on Unnava Lakshminarayana and Madabhushi Vedantam Narasimhacharyulu infuriated the people. They practically launched a no-tax campaign by sending their cattle into the reserved forests without paying the usual Pullari (Tax). Many clashes occurred between the people on one side and the police and the forest officials on the other. When the cattle were impounded, the people overpowered the police and rescued their cattle. The inhabitants of Jattipalem forcibly rescued from the pound over a hundred cattle which had been found grazing without permits and had been impounded by the Forest Department⁸. In Mutukur the people went frequently in to clashes with forest officials. Forest rules were constantly defied by the inhabitants of this village. In Jangameswarapuram a person who had been arrested under Section 188O.P.C. was forcibly rescued by the villagers. The condition of Palnad created a great problem to the government, and the District Collector conceded that in Palnad "Several villages have proclaimed Swaraj".

Assassination of Kanneganti Hanumanthu

But the most serious confrontation between the people and the government occurred on February 26, 1921 in Minchalapadu, which was a hamlet of Kolagutla village. The people of this village were of Telega, Golla, Odiga and Harijan castes, Telega being the dominant caste. Their main occupations were agriculture and cattle rearing. There were so many cases of people rescuing their cattle seized by the Forest Department that the forest officials expressed their complete helplessness to deal with the situation. So a party of Reserve Police consisting of twenty men and two Head Constables under a Sub-Inspector, G. V. Raghavayya, were sent to stand by the forest officials. The forest party found one hundred and twenty buffaloes and fifty goats in the reserve forest to the south of Minchalapadu, and intended to drive them to the Mutukur pound. They arrested two grazers and a woman who were in charge of the cattle. But as the party was passing Minchalapadu with the cattle the villagers stopped it and rescued one arrested person and thirty buffaloes⁹. They also succeeded in driving away all the goats. At this stage the Karanam of Kolagutla of which Minchalapadu was the hamlet persuaded the villagers to withdraw from the scene and stop their attempts to rescue their cattle.

According to the Collector of Guntur, H. A. B. Vernon, the people regrouped and attacked the government party with greater force. About two to three hundred people including women began pelting stones. The government version runs thus: "As this particular locality abounds in sharp stones, which are very dangerous missiles and as the Sub-Inspector was of opinion that the situation was becoming serious, he drew up the Reserve Police in line with the cattle and the forest officers behind them and ordered them to fix bayonets for 'mob firing', and all to load with buck-shot. He then warned the crowds three times in an audible manner to disperse, as they were an unlawful assembly, and warned them that he would fire. As this had no effect on the mob that persisted in their assault, the Sub-Inspector ordered the Reserve to fire a volley and one man

was observed to fall. The mob, however, did not disperse and still kept on pelting the police with stones. The Sub-Inspector therefore ordered six constables to load with ball and the remainder with buck-shot and ordered the six men who had loaded the bolt to fire a volley. As a result of this two more men were observed to fall, and the mob ran away. This occurrence took place between 4 and 5 in the after-noon"¹⁰.

The first man to fall at the police firing was Kanneganti Hanumanthu. The second who fell dead was Ellampally Seshudu, agricultural labourer and servant of Hanumanthu. The third casualty was the side of the Sub-Inspector of Police. When the news was communicated to the District Collector, H. A. B. Vernon, he proceeded to Minchalapadu between 3 and 4 in the morning of February 21, 1922, accompanied by the District Superintendent of Police¹¹, District Forest Officer, Captain Machonochie and the Military force. The village was surrounded and an identification parade was held. Twenty eight men and nine women were identified as having taken part in the affray, they were arrested.

The District Collector of Guntur, Vernon, determined to crush Non-cooperation movement arrived in Palnad taluq and sent the Sub-Inspector of Durgi, Raghavayya Naidu, with military to Minchalapadu hamlet of Kolagutla to impound the cattle of people who did not pay grazing tax. There was altercation between the officers and Kanneganti Hanumanthu. Thereupon, the police fired at him and twenty six pellets were lodged in his body. Later, after a wordy duel he died at 12 in the night¹², this inscription was raised by Atmakuri Punnayya on the explicit wishes of Hanumanthu's wife. After the autopsy was conducted Hanumanthu's body was buried on the outskirts of Kolagutla village on 27th February, 1922. Four days later it was exhumed by the members of Hanumanthu's family and after religious rites was buried in Kolagutla village near the banks of the stream Dantaivagu fifteen yards away from the Local Fund Road.

Government Mounts up Pressure

The next morning the Collector and the District Superintendent of Police accompanied by the military surrounded the village to make arrests. All male population was taken out of the village. Then some police people entered the houses of the villagers and carried with them whatever they found there - cash, jewels, clothes etc. Even ghee and rice were not left behind. Kanneganti Gangamma reported loss of articles worth Rs. 100/-. The Mounted Police terrorized the people who were subjected to all sorts of atrocities. Most of the female members of the village sought refuge in the jungles to spare themselves. Those that could not "cape was treated with the butt ends of the guns, and their feet were crushed under the jack-boots. The women were subjected to every humiliation¹². Some of the Government officials themselves were taken back at the atrocities of the police and the military, and reported the matter orally to the District Collector, Vernon. Instead of bringing the guilty to book the Collector replied: "They came here only for these purposes in a manner highly reminiscent of the Hunter Committee findings on the Jallianwalabag.

Enquiry Commission on Palnad Incident

The Collector Vernon exonerated the Sub-Inspector of Police for the shooting order. The Collector wrote to his superiors in the Fort St. George: "I am of opinion that the Sub-Inspector carried out his duty with bravery and discretion that he refrained from firing until the last possible moment and when he did fire, did not continue longer than was absolutely necessary". Later, the government made large scale arrests. The arrested were lodged in Macherla sub-jail for two months and Narasaraopet sub-jail for another two months¹³. They were later brought to trial in the court of Deputy Collector Jambunatha Iyer, Kanneganti Nagayya, Nallabothula Venkayya, Enugula China Narasayya, Miryala Narasaya, Miryala China Krishnamma, Miryala Pitchayya, Nallabothula Yellakondayya, Enugula Veereyya, Kanneganti Venkatayya, Oddi Venkataswamygad, Kosani Kotayya, Kandarapu Venkatesugadu,

Kandarapu Gurivigadu, Beerneedu Rosigadu, Beerneedu Yellamanda and Baerneedu Venkatesamgadu were convicted and sentenced to various terms of imprisonment ranging from one month to one year. Seven women-Polapula Kotamma, Miryala Mangamma, Yerragorla Bamma, Kota Aude- mma, Enugala Ramamma, Miryala Kotamma and Konda Venkamma were fined Rs. 75/- each. Even young children, Miryala Chinnayya aged sixteen years and Miryala Bangarayya aged ten years, were fined Rs. 75/- each. China Ammigadu, another boy of very young age, was sentenced to one and half month's imprisonment¹⁴.

Conclusion

With the repression let loose by the government and with the withdrawal of the Civil Disobedience Movement in Andhra and other parts of the Guntur district, especially in Pedanandipadu, the Palnad Forest Satyagraha was considerably weakened. The Colonial Government mount up pressure on events occurred in Palnad region in general and Minchalapadu in particular the Government slowly was restored their grip over the area. By March 4, 1922, the government in its communication issued for publicity could say that most of "the villagers are now paying up their grazing fees". But, the Minchalapadu incident influence the national attention. Peoples were inspired by the sacrifices of the Kanneganti Hanumanthu and other patriots this will leads to the unity among the peoples of Guntur district. The Andhra Provincial Congress Committee setup separate enquiry Committee on Minchalapadu incident, to know the facts about the death of Kanneganti Hanumanthu.

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