

MODERN ODISHA

National Movements in Odisha

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National Movements in Odisha: In the second half of the nineteenth century, India experienced the rise of an organized nationalist movement formed in response to the threat of foreign domination. British rule directly and indirectly fostered the material, moral, and intellectual conditions necessary for the Indian nationalist movement's emergence. As a part of the nation, Odisha mirrored these developments.

Nationalism in Odisha evolved along two distinct paths: first, the unification of all Odia-speaking regions, and second, the integration of Odisha into the mainstream national movement alongside the rest of India as national awakening intensified. This paper will focus on Odisha's nationalist movement. Despite local divisions and issues, the history of

nationalism in Odisha reflected the broader forces driving the all-India freedom struggle against the British Raj.

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Swadeshi Movement in Odisha

In 1905, the Swadeshi Movement ignited in Bengal as a protest against the partition of the province, sending ripples of influence throughout Odisha and its intellectuals. Protest meetings expressing solidarity with the Bengali movement were held in Cuttack, Puri, Balasore, Sambalpur, and other key locations. Influenced by Bengal's Swadeshi agitators, who emphasized the boycott of foreign goods and the promotion of indigenous production, Odia intellectuals rallied to the cause.

Janaki Nath Bose, Biswanath Kar, and Dhirendera Nath Choudhury became torchbearers of the Swadeshi message in Cuttack. A pivotal meeting took place on August 20th, 1905, at Cuttack's Municipal Hall, presided over by Babu Janakinath Bose. It was here that [Madhusudan Das](#) issued a resounding call to the people of Odisha to boycott imported goods, particularly Manchester cloth and Liverpool salt, in favor of domestically-produced alternatives.

Swadeshi's message reverberated through Balasore and Puri as well. Abdus Sobhan Khan and Fakir Mohan Senapati organized large public meetings in Balasore that September to galvanize the movement. In Puri, Haris Chandra Ghose and Dhanpati Banerjee led student processions through the town, ardently persuading businesses to sell only Swadeshi goods and boycott foreign imports. According to Pandit Godabarish Mishra, a bonfire fueled by foreign clothing was lit in Puri as a powerful symbolic gesture. Moved by the cause, countless residents of Balasore and Cuttack pledged to abstain from using foreign clothing, salt, and sugar.

According to the Utkal Dipika, the ideals of the Swadeshi movement spurred a revival of traditional weaving. Weavers in Sambalpur, Banpur, Sukinda, and Basudebpur responded by producing fine handloom textiles. In a show of support, men and women of the upper classes embraced locally made textiles, donning Berhampuri pata and Maniabandha sari for festivals and celebratory occasions. During the Dasserah festival, locally made clothing became the preferred choice for many. Inspired by Swadeshi principles, Madhusudan Das founded the Utkal Tannery and an Art Ware in Cuttack. To further promote indigenous goods, an exhibition was held in Cuttack Town Hall on August 7th, 1907, coinciding with the anniversary of the Swadeshi Sabha in Calcutta.

The Surat Split of the Congress in 1907 weakened the Moderate faction and paved the way for a group of nationalists led by Gopabandhu Das to emerge in Odisha. Gopabandhu's arrival transformed the political landscape of the state; he embodied the fervent spirit of the ultra-nationalist movement. Initially, he served as a devoted follower of Madhusudan Das. However, an ideological rift developed between Madhusudan and Gopabandhu, ultimately leading to Gopabandhu's rise within the movement.

The Swadeshi movement's emphasis on national education resonated deeply with Gopabandhu, and it spurred his action. On August 12th, 1909, he founded the Satyabadi Vana Vidyalaya in Sakhigopal, Puri. Modeled after the Deccan Education Society, this institution marked a turning point in the development of Odisha's national consciousness. Satyabadi School gained a powerful reputation, guided by a group of dedicated and talented teachers that included Pandit Nilakantha Das, Pandit Lingaraj Mishra, Acharya Harihar Das, Pandit Godabarish Mishra, Pandit Krupasindhu Mishra, and Gopabandhu himself. These educators introduced a new model of education tailored to the needs of Indian society.

The teachers at Satyabadi School focused not only on molding their students into ideal citizens but also engaged in social reform efforts within the surrounding villages. For nearly 40 years, the school stood at the forefront of Odisha's political, social, and literary spheres. Its teachers and alumni proved their value as engaged citizens, educating the people of Odisha about the broader Indian national movement.

The Swadeshi movement gave way to a more extremist phase within the national struggle. Under the leadership of Jatindranath Mukherjee, known as Bagha Jatin, radical Bengali youths carried out acts of terrorism. They utilized the jungles of Balasore and Kaptipada as bases for their raids against British institutions. However, Bagha Jatin was killed in a police encounter, and his comrades Manoranjan and Hiren were executed. In connection with these Bengal revolutionaries, three young men from Odisha – Atal Bihari Acharya, Sasanka Mukherjee, and Bairagi Tripathy – were arrested.

The Non-cooperation Movement in Odisha

The end of World War I saw a surge in nationalist sentiment as three significant events—the Rowlatt Acts, the Khilafat movement, and the Jalianawallabagh massacre—ignited Indian opposition to British rule. The Rowlatt Acts threatened Indian liberties, while the Government of India Act of 1919 failed to meet Indian demands for greater autonomy. In a special session held in Calcutta in September 1920, the Congress, under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi, responded by launching the Non-Cooperation Movement. This included protests against the Jalianawallabagh massacre and support for the Khilafat Movement.

Gopabandhu Das, attending this pivotal session, returned to Odisha with renewed nationalist fervor. While Madhusudan Das initially aligned with the Congress, he later diverged due to a lack of support for the unification of Odia-speaking territories. Nonetheless, his focus on the Odia movement remained strong. With virtually no existing Congress organization in Odisha, Gopabandhu Das essentially revitalized the movement following Gandhi's 1920 call for non-cooperation.

Key figures in Odisha's movement attended the Nagpur Session of the Indian National Congress in December 1920, which formally adopted the Non-Cooperation resolution. These delegates included Pandit Gopabandhu Das, Bhagirathi Mahapatra, Jagabandhu Singh, Jadumani Mangaraj, Mukunda Prasad Das, Niranjana Patanaik, and Harekrushna Mahatab. This session also established the framework for Provincial Congress Committees based on linguistic lines. Even though Odisha was yet to be recognized as a separate province, the foundation was laid for its own Provincial Congress Committee.

Soon after, at the Utkal Union Conference in Chakradharpur, presided over by Jagabandhu Singh, Gopabandhu Das pushed for a shift in the conference's focus. While emphasizing the importance of unifying Odia-speaking regions, he passionately argued that Odisha must not remain isolated from the broader national movement embodied by the Congress. His proposal to align the Utkal Union Conference with the aims of the Indian National Congress was met with resistance, with some attendees, including the president, abstaining from voting. However, his vision ultimately prevailed.

On January 24, 1921, upon his return from Chakradharpur, Gopabandhu addressed a public meeting in Cuttack. He exhorted students to join the Non-Cooperation Movement. In March 1921, Mahatma Gandhi visited Odisha and appealed to the people of Cuttack, Puri, Bhadrak, and Berhampur to join the movement.

The Utkal Provincial Congress Committee

The following were the office-bearers of the Utkal Provincial Congress Committee:

- President: Gopabandhu Das

- Vice-President: Ekram Rasool
- Secretary: Bhagirathi Mahapatra
- Joint Secretary: Brajabandhu Das

District and Sub-divisional Committees

District and Sub-divisional Committees were established in Puri, Cuttack, Balasore, Sambalpur, and Ganjam. The following individuals were the leaders of these committees:

- **Balasore District:** Harekrushna Mahatab
- **Cuttack District:**
 - Kendrapara Subdivision: Jadumani Mangaraj
 - Jajpur Subdivision: Rajakrushna Bose
 - Cuttack Sadar Subdivision: Bhagirathi Mahapatra (with headquarters in Alakashram, Jagatsinghpur)
- **Puri District:** Jagabandhu Singh and Krupasindhu Mishra
- **Sambalpur District:** Nilakantha Das
- **Ganjam District:** Niranjana Pattnaik

Odisha's Response to the Non-Cooperation Movement

Mahatma Gandhi's call for non-cooperation resonated deeply within Odisha, inspiring a wave of action. Young people across the state boldly abandoned their studies, colleges, and government jobs. N. Kanungo, H.K. Mahatab, Nabakrushna Choudhury, and R.K. Bose heeded Gandhi's call, leaving their educational pursuits to join the movement. In acts of significant sacrifice, Gopabandhu Choudhury relinquished his position as deputy collector, and the respected lawyer Bhagirathi Mahapatra left his legal practice. Even those within the colonial system joined the cause: police sub-inspector Surendra Nath De and excise sub-inspector Muhammed Hanif both resigned their positions to embrace non-cooperation. Promising Sambalpur lawyers, Mahendranath Verma and Achutananda Purohit, ceased their legal work. Raja Krushna Bose, a dedicated medical student, also joined their ranks.

Gopabandhu Das provided strong leadership, ensuring that Gandhi's plan for non-cooperation was implemented throughout Odisha. He founded the weekly newspaper *Samaj*, which played a vital role in spreading nationalist ideals. The Swaraj Ashram in Cuttack and Alaka Ashram in Jagatsinghpur became training grounds for Odia Congress volunteers and workers. Students, inspired by the movement, formed the Swaraj Sevak Sangha in Cuttack, further propelling the non-cooperation programs.

Gopabandhu's mission to unite Odisha with the broader nationalist movement was a resounding success. Across the state, the Indian National Congress witnessed an unprecedented surge of enthusiasm and support.

Odisha's Non-Cooperation Programs

The Non-Cooperation Movement aimed to disrupt British rule through a comprehensive withdrawal of cooperation across numerous spheres of society. Its tactics unfolded in two distinct phases:

Phase One: Disrupting the Colonial System

- **Student and Teacher Boycotts:** Aimed at undermining British-run schools and colleges.
- **Boycott of British Goods:** A symbolic gesture of economic protest.
- **Lawyer and Judge Boycotts:** Challenged the legitimacy of British legal systems.
- **Boycott of Government Services:** Withdrew cooperation from various governmental functions.

Phase Two: Building an Alternative India

- **Promotion of Khadi:** Encouraged self-reliance by supporting the production and use of traditional, handspun cloth.
- **Hindu-Muslim Unity:** Fostered communal harmony, considered vital for Indian independence.

- **Abolition of Untouchability:** Promoted social equality and challenged discriminatory practices.
- **National Education:** Established alternative schools and colleges fostering Indian values and identity.

Actions in Odisha

Across the state, the movement's tactics were energetically implemented. In every district, the picketing and burning of foreign cloth became powerful symbols of protest. Jaleswar, in the Balasore district, demonstrated particular success in opposing foreign cloth. In one instance, Congress workers even fined a dealer who continued to sell foreign goods. In Balasore, the Swaraj Mandir's Congress workers also organized vigorous demonstrations against shops selling foreign cloth.

The first visit to Odisha by Mahatma Gandhi

Mahatma Gandhi's first visit to Odisha in March 1921 ignited the state's Non-Cooperation Movement. The people of Odisha welcomed him with immense enthusiasm, thronging railway stations to catch a glimpse of their revered leader. On March 23rd, 1921, Gandhi addressed a massive gathering along the Kathjodi river in Cuttack. His speech rallied the people, urging them to contribute to the Tilak Swaraj Fund to attain self-rule (Swaraj). He also emphasized Hindu-Muslim unity and set specific goals for Odisha:

- Enroll one lakh Congress members
- Distribute one lakh charkhas (spinning wheels)
- Raise three lakhs rupees for the Tilak Swaraj Fund

Local newspapers like "The Samaj" and "Utkal Sevak" played a crucial role in inspiring the masses to join the national movement. Gandhi's visit fueled the passion and commitment of Odisha's people to the nationalist cause. Harekrushna Mahtab underscored the inspiring effect of Gandhi's message that Swaraj was the inherent birthright of the people.

Gopabandhu Das, motivated by Gandhi's words, traveled to Calcutta in 1921 to galvanize Odia laborers within the city to join the Congress. His electrifying speech profoundly impacted them, and many Odia workers responded by refusing to carry foreign-made goods. Their protest in Calcutta's Burrabazar area was so disruptive that it brought business to a standstill.

The movement inspired the establishment of several national schools across Odisha. Gopabandhu's Satyabadi School itself transformed into a national institution. Other national schools were founded in Cuttack's Nayabazar district by Madhusudan-Biswal, Damodar Mohanty, and Atal Bihari Acharya, and another emerged in Jagatsinghpur. These schools infused their curriculum with Hindi, Ayurveda, spinning, weaving, and carpentry.

The Kanika uprising

In 1922, the peasants of Kanika, a zamindari spanning the Cuttack and Balasore districts of Odisha, rose in revolt against the oppressive Raja of Kanika. Their grievances centered on the Raja's exploitative practices and the myriad taxes he imposed. Initially unconnected to the wider Non-Cooperation Movement, the Raja convinced the colonial government that Congress instigated the agitation, painting it as part of the anti-British movement. This led to a brutal government crackdown on the peasants of Kanika. Anyone speaking out against the Raja faced charges of treason. There were widespread reports of torture and sexual abuse against women. Wealthy individuals like Khandeita Roy and Ashwini Kumar Palei were stripped of their land and banished from the estate.

Congress Response and Its Consequences

Congress leaders, aghast at this unjust oppression, rallied to support the peasants. Gopabandhu and Bhagirathi Mahapatra attempted to hold a meeting in Bhadrak to protest the Raja's repression. Authorities forbade such gatherings; nonetheless, the leaders managed to convene, albeit with difficulty. Both were arrested and sentenced to six months' imprisonment. During this tumultuous period, arson attacks broke out in Cuttack and Balasore. In a notable incident, panicked Cuttack residents assaulted a police constable, badly injuring him. Even though Gopabandhu Das rescued the constable, provided him with

medical treatment, food, and Khadi clothing at the Swaraj Ashram, the constable later falsely accused Gopabandhu of assaulting him and forcing him to wear Khadi. This led to a two-year prison sentence for Gopabandhu Das and Bhagirathi Mahapatra. By the end of 1922, most Congress leaders in Odisha found themselves behind bars.

Legacy of the Non-Cooperation Movement

Despite the setbacks, the Non-Cooperation movement ignited profound political change in Odisha. Gopabandhu and his fellow leaders embarked on extensive lecture tours, educating the public about Congress programs and reinvigorating Odisha's political consciousness. The movement gained broad support; by late 1921, around 52,000 people had become members of Congress in Odisha.

Aftermath and New Paths

Following the suspension of the Non-Cooperation Movement after the Chauri Chaura incident in 1922, Congress divided into factions: those wanting to enter legislatures under the Government of India Act of 1919 and those committed to Gandhi's constructive programs and council boycotts. The Swaraj Party formed in Odisha in 1923, advocating for Dominion status and tactics of legislative obstructionism. Figures like Godavarish Mishra, Jagabandhu Singh, Radharanajan Das were elected from Odisha to the Bihar and Odisha Provincial Legislative Councils, while Nilakantha Das joined the Central Legislative Assembly.

Gopabandhu's Later Years and Legacy

After his release, Gopabandhu continued his dedication to the Odia Congress movement. H.K. Mahtab championed Gandhi's constructive programs in his home district and founded the influential weekly newspaper Prajatantra in Balasore in 1923. Madhusudan Das, once an opponent, joined Congress in 1924. Women leaders like Ramadevi and Saraladevi established women's branches to strengthen the party in Odisha. Gandhi's visits to Odisha in 1925 and 1927 inspired Congress workers and popularized his programs. Mahatab's efforts saw numerous Congress ashrams established across the Balasore district.

Gopabandhu joined the Servants of the People Society in 1926, founding a Cuttack branch and linking it to his newspaper Samaj. He was appointed vice-president of the Society in 1928. However, his untimely death on June 17th, 1928, marked a devastating loss for Odisha and its Congress movement.

The Civil Disobedience Movement in Odisha

The Indian National Congress's momentous Lahore session in December 1929 proclaimed complete independence as its goal, with Civil Disobedience chosen as the path toward achieving it. Across Odisha, Congress members celebrated January 26th, 1930, as Independence Day, with Gopabandhu Choudhury solemnly reading the declaration of independence in Cuttack. Several Odia Congressmen, heeding the call to action, resigned from their positions in the Bihar and Odisha Legislative Councils and the Central Legislative Assembly.

Inspired by Mahatma Gandhi's historic Dandi March, which began on March 12th, 1930, Odia leaders like Gopabandhu Choudhury and Harekrushna Mahatab planned a parallel act of defiance against the British salt laws. In March 1930, the Utkal Provincial Congress Committee decided to launch the Odisha Civil Disobedience Movement by manufacturing contraband salt at Inchudi, near Balasore. Gopabandhu Choudhury was entrusted with the movement's organization, while Harekrushna Mahtab and Surendranath Das rallied support from the surrounding villages.

On April 6th, 1930, an inspiring procession began. Gopabandhu Chaudhury, Acharya Harihar Das, and 21 Satyagrahis marched from Cuttack's Swarajya Ashram towards Inchudi. Despite his arrest on April 8th, Acharya Harihar emerged as the new leader. On April 12th, they heroically reached Inchudi, joined by Satyagrahis from across Odisha, including Puri, Ganjam, Sambalpur, and Baripada. Unfazed by police harassment, they defied the British salt laws on April 14th, 1930, by manufacturing contraband salt. Arrests ensued, including Acharya Harihar and Surendra Nath Das, but the spirit of resistance remained unyielding, with salt production continuing for several days.

A pivotal moment occurred on April 20th: led by the courageous Ramadevi and Malati Devi, a large number of women joined the Salt Satyagraha at Inchudi. Their defiance galvanized the movement. The success of the Salt Satyagraha at Inchudi resonated throughout India, seen as second only to Gandhi's historic Dandi Satyagraha.

Salt Satyagraha in various locations throughout Odisha

While Gopabandhu Choudhury and other key leaders provided inspiration, the success of the Salt Satyagraha in Odisha was due to the tireless efforts of local organizers like Surendra Nath Das of Balasore. The movement against unjust salt laws spread throughout the state:

- **Balasore District:** In addition to Inchudi, the village of Sartha became a center of resistance with Mathura Mohan Behera, Karunakar Panigrahi, and Nilamber Das at the helm.
- **Cuttack District:** Kujang saw defiance, with 500 women participating in salt production, led by Rani Bhagyabati Devi of the Kujang royal family.
- **Puri District:** Nilakantha Das and Jagannath Rath organized Satyagraha in Kuhudi, Singheswari, and Latra.
- **Ganjam District:** Biswanath Das, Niranjan Patnaik, and the inspiring Sarala Devi led the Satyagraha in Huma.

Odisha's Civil Disobedience Movement extended beyond salt production:

- Boycotts of foreign cloth, picketing of excise shops, and refusal to pay the Chowkidari tax were common acts of protest.
- High school and college students played a crucial role in spreading the movement.

The British government responded with harsh measures. Satyagrahis faced brutal physical harassment from police, yet the manufacture of illicit salt continued with unwavering determination. The public stood by the Satyagrahis, while leaders faced arrests and imprisonment. On April 26th, 1930, H. K. Mahtab and Gopabandhu Chaudhury faced arrest and were sentenced to 18 months of solitary confinement. Congress offices and ashrams

were seized.

Odisha's civil disobedience movement comes to an end

The Gandhi-Irwin Pact of March 5th, 1931, led to the release of numerous imprisoned Odia Congress leaders and volunteers, who were welcomed as heroes in Balasore and Cuttack. The pact also included Congress participation in London's second Round Table Conference.

However, Gandhi returned from London in December 1931 disheartened by the conference's outcome. Civil Disobedience resumed in Odisha and across India. The British government unleashed another wave of repression, arresting Congress leaders and raiding party offices in Puri, Cuttack, Sambalpur, and Balasore. Despite these harsh measures, Odia Congressmen like Surendra Nath Das, Nilambar Das, Binod Kanungo, and Surendra Nath Patnaik defiantly organized an underground resistance movement.

Ultimately, on April 7th, 1934, Mahatma Gandhi suspended the Civil Disobedience Movement nationwide, including in Odisha. However, the spirit of the movement remained strong, with women playing vital roles in its advancement.

Constructive Programs and Gandhi's 1934 Visit:

Between 1934 and 1940, the Utkal Pradesh Congress Committee and its workers in Odisha devoted their efforts to Gandhi's constructive programs. These included the Charkha (spinning) program, the fight against untouchability, and the Kisan and Harijan movements. In May 1934, Gandhi embarked on a Harijan tour of Odisha, traveling from Jharsuguda to Puri. His refusal to enter the temple of Lord Jagannath, which barred entry to Harijans, was a powerful act of solidarity and protest against social injustice.

Odisha's Individual Civil Disobedience Movement

The Indian National Congress's pivotal Ramgarh session in March 1940 marked a decisive shift. The resolution to launch an Individual Civil Disobedience Movement and pursue Gandhian constructive programs with renewed vigor signaled a refusal to cooperate with the British government. In preparation, Odisha Congress volunteers received training in civil

disobedience and Gandhi's constructive programs at the Bari Training Camp.

Organizational Structure for Resistance

The Utkal Pradesh Congress Committee (UPCC) established four departments to streamline its efforts:

- **Programme Department:** Led by H.K. Mahtab, focused on planning the movement.
- **Harijan Department:** Chaired by Radhakrishna Biswas Roy, dedicated to fighting social injustice.
- **Minority Department:** Led by Maulana Muhammad Atahar, focused on outreach and unity.
- **Charkha Department:** Overseen by a UPCC subcommittee, emphasized economic self-reliance.

On September 27th, 1940, the UPCC appointed H.K. Mahtab as general director of the Individual Civil Disobedience Movement in Odisha, providing local leaders with extensive powers to reorganize their areas.

Odisha's Response

Following directives from the Congress high command, the Odisha Congress Party launched the Individual Civil Disobedience Movement on December 1st, 1940. The next day, H.K. Mahtab was arrested for an anti-war speech in Remuna. Nine others were also arrested, including Bodhram Dubey, Sadasiva Tripathy, Sarala Devi, Lokanath Misra, Nityanand Kanungo, Mohan Das, Nabakrushna Chaudhury, Radhakwshria Biswas Roy, and Biswanath Das. Those unable to offer Satyagraha directly participated in Gandhian constructive work. By March 1941, the formal Individual Civil Disobedience movement had concluded.

The Quit India Movement in Odisha

The British government's decision to drag India into World War II, coupled with fears of an imminent Japanese invasion, ignited a sense of urgency. Mahatma Gandhi launched the Quit India Movement, demanding an immediate end to British rule. On August 8th, 1942, the AICC adopted the Quit India Resolution in Bombay, a decisive declaration against British imperialism. Known as the August Revolution, this marked a watershed moment in the struggle for Indian independence.

The British government responded with swift and severe measures. Congress leaders across the country were arrested the following day, including Odisha's H.K. Mahtab in Bombay. He was imprisoned in Ahmadnagar Fort. All Congress institutions within Odisha were outlawed, and by August 10th, police had seized Congress offices. Prominent Congress figures at the district level faced arrest. This mass imprisonment of Odisha's leaders sparked widespread public outrage.

The British strategy, focused on tight control of urban areas, failed. Leadership shifted to a younger generation of students. Although the situation initially appeared calm, within two weeks, reports of unrest emerged from remote Odia villages – areas where police had limited reach. Students of Ravenshaw College led the charge, organizing rallies, boycotts, and protests in response to the arrests. Driven by a desire to act, their protests escalated to arson attacks on government buildings and even acts of sabotage against railways and telegraph lines.

Quit India movement in Koraput district

The arrest of Odisha's leaders failed to extinguish the spirit of the Quit India Movement. Popular uprisings erupted spontaneously across the state. Years of anti-war sentiment fueled by Congressmen and Socialists, combined with the wartime hardships faced by the people, laid the foundation for this surge of defiance – even amongst the hill tribes of Koraput district.

By the end of August 1942, civil disobedience escalated dramatically. In Odisha's remote villages, with no leaders to guide them, people believed the British administrative machinery had collapsed. This belief led to acts of violence, including attacks and arson against government buildings, post offices, revenue offices, P.W.D. bungalows, and police stations. Telegraph lines were cut in some areas.

The Quit India Movement's most powerful manifestation occurred in the largely Adivasi-populated district of Koraput. Fueled by deep-seated anger against the British, the Adivasis threatened to dismantle every government institution in the region. Recognizing the threat, the British resorted to suppressing the movement through the arrest of its leaders.

The Koraput revolt was sparked by two young boys who bravely preached revolution and carried Congress flags in Jeypore on August 13th, 1942. Their actions led to hartals (strikes) and campaigns against paying taxes. On August 16th, large gatherings organized by Congress workers swept through Koraput and several workers were arrested. The same day, a mob of 1,000 stormed a taluka office, prompting a violent police response. Congress workers, undeterred, continued picketing excise shops and those selling foreign goods.

Role of Laxman Naik

Among the many courageous figures in Odisha's Quit India Movement, Laxman Naik stands out as a symbol of extraordinary heroism. An ordinary man and a committed Congress member, he rose to lead resistance against British exploitation in the Koraput district. His leadership led to a no-tax campaign in 1936 and resulted in his arrest. Undeterred, he participated in the Individual Civil Disobedience of 1940-1941, earning him two imprisonments. On July 31st, 1942, he joined a crucial Congress meeting in Jeypore to strategize for the impending Quit India Movement.

Inspired, Laxman Naik assembled a 200-strong force armed with simple weapons to confront the British. On August 21st, 1942, his followers, dressed in Khadar and carrying Congress flags, marched through the jungle, destroying liquor stores and attacking the Mathili police station. Despite warnings, the crowd assaulted police officers, leading to injuries on both sides. Tragically, the police opened fire, killing four people and injuring others, including

Laxman Naik. He was arrested, transferred to Berhampur jail, and later executed on March 29th, 1943, on false murder charges. His legacy as a revolutionary and committed Congress member is undeniable.

Laxman Naik's influence extended beyond direct action. He mobilized his followers for constructive projects, including building roads, bridges, and a school in their community.

Uprising in Peppadahandi

Unrest continued throughout Koraput. In the final week of August 1942, a 4,000-5,000 strong crowd marched towards the Peppadahandi police station. Despite calls to disperse, the mob attacked. Tragically, police gunfire led to 12 deaths and 14 injuries, three of whom later succumbed to their wounds.

In the Cuttack district

The arrest of Odisha's Congress leaders fueled a wave of resistance in the Cuttack district, spearheaded by students from Ravenshaw College and other educational institutions. On August 15th, 1942, in a dramatic act of defiance, around 200 Ravenshaw students set fire to the college's office building. This led to the immediate arrest of student leaders Surajmal Saha and Bibhudendra Mishra, who were sent to Berhampur Jail.

Undeterred, UPCC activists continued the movement, spreading posters throughout Cuttack. These called for government officials to resign and urged citizens to withhold taxes and join the struggle. Prominent figures, including town lawyers, organized meetings where they condemned British repression and demanded the release of national leaders.

The movement took a violent turn in certain areas, with ordinary citizens engaging in arson and looting. This underscored the depth of anger and frustration against colonial rule.

The Cuttack district's Jajpur subdivision emerged as a hotbed of revolutionary activity during the Quit India Movement. Fueled by deep-seated resentment against colonial control, a large mob systematically targeted symbols of authority in August 1942. Their actions included:

- Arson: 26 police uniforms, six canal revenue offices, four post offices, five excise posts, six zamindari offices, and four P.W.D. bungalows were set ablaze, visibly attacking institutions of control.
- Infrastructure Disruption: Embankments, canals, and telegraph lines – key to colonial administration and resource extraction – were destroyed.
- Open Defiance: In Binjharpur, villagers attacked police escorting prisoners, demonstrating a refusal to submit.

Young men organized defense associations, suggesting an intention to resist oppression beyond immediate acts of sabotage. On August 27th, 1942, the sheer scale of the uprising became clear: a 10,000-strong mob marched towards the Jajpur police station and S.D.O's office. Only through the brutal use of explosives from armed forces was the crowd dispersed.

Quit India movement in Balasore district

The Balasore district witnessed a surge of resistance during the Quit India Movement, with Congress workers mobilizing even in remote villages. Students played a pivotal role, abandoning their schools and staging protests throughout the district. The Balasore Zilla School was shut down, markets observed hartals (strikes), and picketing targeted Balasore courts and government offices.

Distributing pamphlets, Congress workers urged the public to engage in a calculated campaign of non-cooperation:

- Salt stock raids – symbolically defying colonial control of resources.
- Obstructing government officials – withholding information and services.
- Pressure on domestic workers and merchants – aimed at disrupting daily colonial infrastructure.

This organized resistance provoked a harsh response. Clashes between police and protesters erupted in various locations. On August 17th, 1942, a 5,000-strong crowd attacked the police station in Bhandaripokhari. They destroyed post office property,

infrastructure, and records. In retaliation, the British Government imposed a massive collective fine on twelve surrounding villages and arrested key figures, including Congress Parliamentarians Jagannath Das and Dwarakanath Das.

Tragically, a clash between police and protesters in Dhamnagar on September 21st, 1942, resulted in six deaths and five injuries, highlighting the extreme measures used to suppress the movement.

The Quit India Movement reached a dramatic turning point in Eram, a village in the Basudevpur region of Balasore district. It became a symbol of both resistance and the horrific lengths to which the colonial authorities would go to suppress it.

On September 28th, 1942, defiance was declared as villagers gathered and resolved to withhold taxes. News of this reached the authorities, who mobilized to arrest leaders. When police arrived, villagers responded with a resounding call, and a crowd of 5,000 strong, armed with lathis, gathered. Police orders to disperse were met with an attack. Hemmed in by the terrain, the D.S.P. ordered his men to open fire. This resulted in the deaths of 26 people and injuries to 54. Unofficial estimates put the death toll as high as 35 with over 100 injured. This massacre, akin to the Jallianwala Bagh tragedy in Punjab, transformed Eram into “Rakta Tirtha Eram” – a place of bloody pilgrimage.

Uprising, Repression, and Continued Resistance

A similar clash erupted in Khairadihi village on September 28th, with police gunfire claiming two lives. Yet, the movement persisted. After waves of arrests, Odisha’s Congress Socialist leaders went underground to continue civil disobedience.

The Quit India Movement in Odisha was a truly mass movement, finding widespread support in towns, villages, and among Adivasi communities and princely states. In several areas, including Papadahandi and Mathili (Koraput), Nimapada (Puri), Bhandaripokhari, Dhamnagar, Khaira, and Eram (Balasore), and Kaipara (Cuttack), it transformed into a militant, sometimes violent, upsurge.

The movement was both anti-colonial and anti-feudal. Attacks on zamindari estates in Kalkala, Darpan, Madhupur, and Kanika – including arson, looting, and the destruction of moneylender's records – reflected a broader rejection of oppressive structures.

Conclusion

The nationalist movement in Odisha, sparked by the Indian National Congress's founding in 1885, culminated in a momentous victory: India's independence on August 15th, 1947. Throughout this journey, Odisha's leaders and people offered unwavering support and actively participated in every major movement launched by the All India Congress Committee. The success of the Non-Cooperation, Civil Disobedience, and Quit India movements in Odisha stands as a testament to this dedication.

Odisha's unique contributions, from the early Utkal Union Conference to the defiance shown in remote villages during the Quit India Movement, played a vital role in India's freedom struggle.

Category: Modern Odisha

Tag: Civil Disobedience Movement, National Movements in Odisha, Non-cooperation Movement, Quit Indian Movement, Swadeshi Movement

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