

MODERN ODISHA

The Civil Disobedience Movement in Odisha

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In December 1929, the INC's Lahore session declared complete independence as a goal to be achieved through Civil Disobedience. The Congressmen of Odisha celebrated the 26th January 1930 as the day of independence, and Gopabandhu Choudhury read out the declaration of independence in Cuttack. Several Congressmen from Odisha resigned from the Bihar and Odisha Legislative Councils and the Central Legislative Assembly during this time period in order to participate in the Civil Disobedience Movement.

Gandhiji began his march from the Sabarmati Ashram to Dandi on 12 March 1930, with 78 followers, for manufacturing salt in violation of British-imposed salt laws. Odisha Congress leaders such as Gopabandhu Choudhury and Harekrushna Mahatab planned to launch a similar agitation in Odisha over the British Government's salt law violation. 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 tasked with organising the movement. On the other hand, Harekrushna Mahtab and Surendranath Das of Balasore rallied the villagers of Inchudi's neighbouring villages to join the salt agitation. On 6 April 1930, Gopabandhu Choudhury, Acharya Harihar Das, and twenty-one Satyagrahis marched from Cuttack's Swarajya Ashram to Inchudi in Balasore. On 8 April 1930, Gopabandhu Choudhury was arrested in Chandol for addressing a meeting in Cuttack on 23 March 1930. Acharya Harihar is now the Satyagrahis' next commander. The Satyagrahis, led by Acharya Harihar, arrived at Inchudi in Balasore on 12 April 1930. They were joined by a large number of Satyagrahis from various parts of Odisha, including Puri, Ganjam, Sarnbalpur, and Baripada. Despite police harassment, the

Satyagrahis manufactured the contraband salt on 14 April 1930 in Inchudi. Following that, Acharya Harihar and his associates were arrested, as was Surendra Nath Das. Despite the police oppression, salt manufacturing continued there for several days. On April 20, led by Ramadevi and Malati Devi, a large number of women participated in the Salt Satyagraha at Inchudi. The Salt Satyagraha at Inchudi was a resounding success. It was ranked second only to Gandhi's Dandi Satyagraha.

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Salt Satyagraha in various locations throughout Odisha

The credit for organising this Salt Satyagraha goes to Surendra Nath Das, the local Congress leader in Balasore. Other locations in Odisha where this contraband salt was manufactured include Sartha (Balasore district), Kujang (Cuttack district), Kuhudi, Singheswari, and Latra (Puri district), and Huma (Ganjam district). Mathura Mohan Behera, Karunakar Panigrahi, and Nilamber Das organised the Satyagraha in Sartha. Nilakantha Das and Jagannath Rath organised the salt Satyagraha in Puri district. Biswanath Das, Niranjan Patnaik, and Sarala Devi led the Satyagraha in the Ganjam district. At Kujang, 500 women participated in the manufacture of contraband salt, led by Rani Bhagyabati Devi of the Kujang royal family. Civil disobedience was also practised in other ways, including boycotting foreign cloth, picketing in front of excise shops, refusing to pay Chowkidari tax, and spreading Khadi. Students in high school and college also took an active role in the Civil Disobedience Movement. The volunteers were subjected to physical harassment by police. Nonetheless, the manufacture of illicit salt continued. The common man sided with the Satyagrahis. The leaders were apprehended and imprisoned by the government. On 26 April 1930, H. K. Mahtab and Gopabandhy Chaudhury, the U.P.C.C.'s president and secretary, were arrested in Balasore and sentenced to eighteen months of solitary confinement. In connection with the Civil Disobedience Movement, the Congress offices and ashrams were seized.

Odisha's civil disobedience movement comes to an end

On 5 March 1931, the Gandhi-Irwin Pact came into effect, and Congress decided to participate in the Round Table Conference's second session in London. Numerous Congress leaders and volunteers from Odisha were released from jail as a result of this agreement. In Balasore and Cuttack, they were greeted with heroism. Gandhi returned to India from the London Round Table Conference in late December 1931, broken-hearted. Following that, Odisha, like the rest of India, resumed civil disobedience. The Government repressive measures included arresting Congress leaders and seizing Congress offices in the districts of Puri, Cuttack, Sambalpur, and Balasore. Due to the British Government's repressive

measures, Congressmen such as Surendra Nath Das, Nilambar Das, Binod Kanungo, and Surendra Nath Patnaik, among others, conducted an underground movement in Odisha. However, Mahatma Gandhi suspended the Civil Disobedience movement on 7 April 1934, and it was also quelled in Odisha. Thus, the Civil Disobedience movement gained momentum, aided by the women leaders. Between 1934 and 1940, the Utkal Pradesh Congress Committee and Congress workers in Odisha devoted themselves to Gandhiji's various constructive programmes, including the Charkha programme, the abolition of untouchability, the Kisan and Harijan movements, and others. Gandhi visited Odisha in May 1934 on a Harijan tour. He travelled to Puri from Jharsuguda. However, he did not enter the temple of Lord Jagannath, as it was not accessible to the Harijans of Odisha.

Odisha's Individual Civil Disobedience Movement

However, the Indian National Congress's Ramgarh session in March 1940 resolved to launch an Individual Civil Disobedience Movement. Additionally, it was decided to pursue the Gandhian constructive programme with vigour and to avoid any form of cooperation with the British Government. Congress volunteers received training in civil disobedience and Gandhi's constructive programme at the Bari training camp. Simultaneously, the Utkal Pradesh Congress Committee established four departments to carry out party work in the state. The departments were as follows:

- The Programme Department, chaired by H.K. Mahtab;
- The Harijan Department, chaired by Radhakrishna Biswas Roy;
- The Minority Department, chaired by Maulana Muhammad Atahar; and
- The Charkha Department, chaired by a UPCC subcommittee.

On 27 September 1940, the Utkal Pradesh Congress Committee appointed H.K. Mahtab as general director of the Odisha Individual Civil Disobedience movement and empowered other Congress leaders with near-dictatorial powers to reorganise the Congress in their locality. On 1 December 1940, at the direction of the Congress high command, the Congress Party of Odisha began the Individual Civil Disobedience Movement. H.K. Mahtab faced arrest the following day after delivering an anti-war speech at Remuna. Additionally, nine others

were arrested in this case, including Bodhram Dubey, Sadasiva Tripathy, Sarala Devi, Lokanath Misra, Nityanand Kanungo, Mohan Das, Nabakrushna Chaudhury, Radhakwshria Biswas Roy, and Biswanath Das. Those who were unable to offer Satyagraha took up Gandhian constructive work. Individual Civil Disobedience had ceased to exist by the beginning of March 1941.

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