

MODERN ODISHA

The Non-cooperation Movement in Odisha

By **Brajabandhu Mahanta** • July 19, 2017 • 9 min read

Three significant events, the Rowlatt Acts, the Khilafat movement, and the Jalianawallabagh massacre, occurred shortly after the conclusion of World War I, prompting Indian nationalists to take action against the British. The Rowlatt Acts were enacted to curtail Indian freedom, and the Government of India Act, 1919, fell short of Indian aspirations. Protesting the Jalianawallabagh massacre and the Khilafat Movement, the Congress decided in a special session held in Calcutta in September 1920, under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi, to launch the Non-cooperation movement against the British Government. Gopabandhu attended this special session in September 1920 and returned imbued with staunch nationalist ideas. Although Madhusudan Das initially aligned himself with the Congress, he later withdrew due to his inability to secure support from Congress leaders for the merger of Odia tracts. He maintained a strong interest in the Odia movement. Following that, when Gandhi launched the Non-cooperation movement in 1920, there was virtually no Congress organisation operating in Odisha. In response to Gandhi's clarion call in 1920-21, Gopabandhu Das virtually restarted the Congress movement in Odisha. Pandit Gopabandhu Das, Bhagirathi Mahapatra, Jagabandhu Singh, Jadumani Mangaraj, Mukunda Prasad Das, Niranjana Patanaik, and Harekrushna Mahatab were among the delegates from Odisha who attended the Nagpur Session of the Indian National Congress in December 1920, which ultimately passed the Non-Cooperation resolution. This Congress session resolved to establish Provincial Congress Committees on a linguistic basis. As a result, even though Odisha was not a separate province at the time, a separate Provincial Congress Committee was formed for it. Soon after the Nagpur Congress session, Jagabandhu Singh presided over

the Utkal Union Conference in Chakradharpur. Gopabandhu Das proposed a change in the outlook of the Utkal Union Conference during this conference. While he believed that the unification of all Odia-speaking areas was critical for Odias, he believed that Odisha should not remain isolated from the mainstream of national consciousness as represented by the Congress. He proposed that in addition to the conference's accepted objectives, the aims and objectives of the Indian National Congress be accepted as those of the Utkal Union conference. "This was passed by the Conference, despite the fact that a number of people, including the conference's president, abstained from voting in protest.

On 24 January 1921, upon his return from Chakradharpur, Gopabandhu addressed a public meeting in Cuttack, exhorting 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 Non-cooperation movement. Gopabhandhu was President, Ekram Rasool was Vice-President, Bhagirathi Mahapatra was Secretary, and Brajabandhu Das was Joint Secretary of the Utkal Provincial Congress Committee. (1) Gopabandhu Das, (2) Jagabandhu Singh, (3) Nilakantha Das, (4) Gopabandhu Choudhury, (6) Niranjan Pattanaik, (6) Harekrushna Mahatab, (7) Bhagirathi Mahapatra, (8) Dharanidhar Mishra Banaprastha, (9) Nilakantha Das Chaudhuri, (10) Atal Bihari Acharya On the other hand, District and Sub-divisional Committees have been established in Puri, Cuttack, Balasore, Sambalpur, and Ganjam, under the leadership of the following individuals.

- Harekrushna Mahatab is located in the Balasore district.
- Cuttack district's Jadumani Mangaraj-Kendrapara Subdivision.
- Cuttack district's Rajakrushna Bose-Jajpur Subdivision.
- Subdivision of Bhagirathi Mahapatra – Cuttack Sadar with headquarters in Alakashram, Jagatsinghpur.
- Puri District – Jagabandhu Singh and Krupasindhu Mishra
- Nilakantha Das is a resident of the Sambalpur district.
- Niranjan Pattnaik – District of Ganjam
- Odisha's Response to the Non-Cooperation Movement

Mahatma Gandhi's appeal drew widespread support, including in Odisha. In Odisha, a large number of young people have left their schools, colleges, and government service. N. Kanungo, H.K. Mahatab, Nabakrushna Choudhury, and R.K. Bose abandoned their studies at Gandhiji's invitation and joined the Non-cooperation movement. Gopabandhu Choudhury resigned as deputy collector, a lucrative position. Bhagirathi Mahapatra, a well-known lawyer at the time, resigned from his legal practise to join the movement. Surendra Nath De, a police sub-inspector, and Muhammed Hanif, an excise sub-inspector, both resigned their positions and joined the non-cooperation movement. Mahendranath Verma and Achutananda Purohit, two promising Sambalpur lawyers, have ceased practising law. Raja Krushna Bose, on the other hand, abandoned his medical studies and joined the movement. The Odisha Congress workers committed themselves wholeheartedly to carrying out Gandhi's non-cooperation programmes in Odisha under the leadership of Gopabandhu Das. The weekly newspaper Samaj, founded by Gopabandhu, was instrumental in disseminating nationalist ideas during Odisha's Non-cooperation movement. Two institutions, Swaraj Ashram in Cuttack and Alaka Ashram in Jagatsinghpur, were established by Odisha Congress leaders to train Congress volunteers and workers. Additionally, the students established Swaraj Sevak Sangha in Cuttack to carry out non-cooperation programmes. Gopabandhu's efforts to integrate Odisha into the nationalist movement were not in vain. Throughout Odisha, an unprecedented outpouring of enthusiasm for the INC was observed.

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Odisha's Non-Cooperation Programs

Non-cooperation entailed the British Government ceasing all cooperation in all areas. The non-cooperation movement's programme of action was divided into two phases. The programme's initial phase included the following:

- student and teacher boycotts of schools and colleges
- boycotting British products
- a lawyer-judge boycott of the courts, and
- a boycott of government-provided services, etc.

The second phase of action included the following:

- Khadar's promotion
- Hindu-Muslim coexistence
- the abolition of untouchability, and
- promoting national education by establishing national schools and colleges.

Picketing and burning of foreign cloths were carried out in every district of the state as a show of protest. At Jaleswar in the Balasore district, the picketing of foreign cloth was completely successful. The Congress workers fined a dealer of foreign cloths for dealing in foreign cloth in Jaleswar. Swaraj Mandir's Congress workers also demonstrated vigorously against foreign cloth shops in Balasore.

The first visit to Odisha by Mahatma Gandhi

Mahatma Gandhi paid his first visit to Odisha in March 1921. His visit provided a tremendous boost to Odisha's Non-Cooperation movement. The people of Odisha greeted him with open arms. Each railway station was densely packed with people eager to catch a glimpse of their leader, i.e. Gandhi Mahatma. He arrived in Cuttack on 23 March 1921 and addressed a large gathering on the Kathjodi river bed in the evening. In his speech, he urged the people of

Odisha to contribute to the Tilak Swaraj Fund in order to obtain Swaraj. Apart from promoting Hindu-Muslim unity in the state, he established goals for the people of Odisha, including the following:

- enrollment of one lakh members of Congress,
- distribution of one lakh Charkhas (wheels that spin) and
- collection of rupees three lakhs for the Tilak Swaraj fund.

Certain newspapers, such as “The Samaj” and “Utkal Sevak,” were instrumental in inspiring the common man to join the national movement. His visit heightened the common man’s fervour and enthusiasm for the cause of Odisha’s nationalist movement. Harekrushna Mahtab emphasised Gandhi’s emphasis on Swaraj as a people’s birthright. In 1921, Gopabandhu travelled to Calcutta to recruit Congress members from the city’s Odia labour population. His energising address to the Odias in Calcutta had a profound effect. At Gopabandhu’s command, a large number of Odia labourers left shops carrying foreign articles. Their refusal to carry foreign cloth was so successful in Calcutta’s Burrabazar area that business came to a halt. In Odisha, several national schools have been established. On the other hand, Gopabandhu’s Satyabadi School was converted into a national institution. Madhusudan-Biswal, Damodar Mohanty, and Atal Bihari Acharya established another national school in Cuttack’s Nayabazar district. This school’s curriculum included Hindi, Ayurveda, spinning, weaving, and carpentry. At Jagatsinghpur, another national school of education was also established.

The Kanika uprising

In 1922, a peasant revolt occurred in Kanika’s zamindari, which was closely linked to the Non-cooperation movement. Kanika’s zamindari was located in Odisha’s Cuttack and Balasore districts. The peasants of Kanika rose up against the Raja of Kanika, who levied various taxes and exploited the populace in numerous ways. Initially, the peasant revolt had no connection to the Non-cooperation movement. However, the Raja of Kanika convinced the Government that the agitation against him was orchestrated by the Congress as part of

the Non-cooperation movement. To quell the revolt, the government began a campaign of harsh oppression against Kanika's peasants. Speaking against the raja of Kanika constituted treason. Numerous people have been tortured, and women have been sexually abused. Not only did wealthy individuals like Khandeita Roy and Ashwini Kumar Palei lose their landed property, but they were also ejected from the estate.

Congress leaders protested this unjust oppression of Kanika's innocent peasants. To protest the raja of Kanika's repression, Gopabandhu and Bhagirathi Mahapatra convened a meeting in Bhadrak. The two leaders were prohibited from convening any public gatherings in the region. They did, however, manage to convene a meeting at Bhadrak, albeit with great difficulty. Both leaders were arrested and sentenced to six months in prison for convening this meeting. During this time period, arson attacks occurred in Cuttack and Balasore. On one occasion, panicked residents of Cuttack assaulted a police constable. The constable sustained serious injuries and was rescued by Gopabandhu Das. He was transported to the Swaraj Ashram, where he received medical treatment, food, and a Khadar cloth to wear. Later in the trial, the constable claimed that Gopabandhu assaulted him and compelled him to wear the Khadar cloth. Gopabandhu Das and Bhagirathi Mahapatra were sentenced to two years in prison on this charge. However, by the end of 1922, the majority of Odisha's Congress leaders had been arrested.

Despite its limitations, the Non-cooperation movement in Odisha sparked an unprecedented political uproar. The extensive lecture tours conducted by Gopabandhu and his associates familiarised the public with the Congress programme and reawakened the people of Odisha's political awareness. Unlike the Utkal Union Conference movement, the Non-cooperation movement gained widespread support. By the end of 1921, Odisha had enrolled approximately 52,000 Congressmen. Following the suspension of the Non-cooperation movement in the aftermath of the Chaurichaura incident in Uttar Pradesh in early 1922, the Congress party split into two factions: those who desired to enter the legislatures under the Government of India Act, 1919, and those who desired to carry out Gandhiji's constructive programme while boycotting the legislatures. In 1923, the Swaraj party was founded in Odisha. It sought Dominion Status and used such tactics as "obstructionism" in legislatures

and local government boards. Congress members such as Godavarish Mishra, Jagabandhu Singh, and Radharanajan Das were elected to the Bihar and Odisha Provincial Legislative Councils from Odisha, while Nilakantha Das was elected to the Central Legislative Assembly.

Following his release from prison, Gopabandhu devoted himself to the Odisha Congress movement. On the other hand, following his release from prison, H.K. Mahtab began implementing Gandhi's constructive programme in his home district. He also founded a weekly newspaper, Prajatantra, on 2 September 1923 in Balasore. Madhusudan Das, who had previously opposed the Congress and the Non-cooperation movement, joined the Congress at the Utkal Pradesh Congress Conference in Cuttack in 1924, presided over by Acharya Prafulla Chandra Roy, Bengal's eminent chemist. Ramadevi, Saraladevi, and others established a women's branch to bolster the Congress organisation in Odisha. Gandhiji paid two visits to Odisha in August 1925 and 1927, providing encouragement to Congress workers and popularising his programme. Numerous Congress Ashrams have been established in various parts of the Balasore district as a result of the initiative Mahatab. In 1926, Gopabandhu met Lala Lajpat Roy in Calcutta. Gopabandhu became a member of the servants of the People Society at his request. At Cuttack, Gopabandhu established a branch of the Servants of the People Society and affiliated it with his newspaper Samaj. Gopabandhu was elected vice-president of the Society at the Lahore meeting in 1928. However, he died prematurely on 17 June 1928, an irreparable loss for Odisha and the Congress organisation in Odisha.

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