

CHAPTER – 5

NON-COOPERATION MOVEMENT:

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Chapter – 5

Non-Cooperation Movement:

I

The Main Stream - Gandhi Idea - Deviations and Additions

At last the War ended. During the War years the Allies proclaimed that the war was to defend democracy and that after the war all their colonies and peoples would get back their right to self-determination. This proclamation of the Allies gave a renewed fillip to nationalism in the colonies. But after the war the Allies particularly the English showed no indications of putting an end to colonialism; on the contrary they became intent on curbing the newly awakened nationalism. The British government now adopted the policy of applying a strong dose of repressive legislation. One such virulent application was the enactment of the Rowlatt act --- the so-called no court, no jury and no appeal act by virtue of which all persons suspected of anti-government activities were subject of arbitrary arrest without trial. In Gandhiji's words the Rowlatt Act was an open challenge to all the Indians.

After the Rowlatt Bills were passed in spite of all-India intense opposition Gandhiji decided to oppose it with an all-India hartal. The hartal was called for April 6, 1919. In consequence of this hartal there occurred on

April 13, 1919 the Jallianwalla Bagh massacre, an unimaginable firing on an unwarned and unarmed crowd who after their *Baisakhi* celebrations assembled in the Bagh to attend a public meeting. The net result of the firing was that several hundred were dead and several thousand were wounded. This was not all. The devilish massacre was followed by humiliating orders. Besides there were flogging in public, confinement of the arrested in cages, and hand-cuffing of Hindus and Muslims in pairs demonstrating secular unity and so on. In addition to all these the government proclaimed martial law to restrict the free movement of the people and their free exchange of opinions. This was how Amritsar became a hell; and a great fear now overpowered all Punjab. This reign of terror stunned all India. But to the British Government these were merely the off-shoots of a 'preventive murder'. The Hunter Committee appointed by the Government to enquire into the Punjab disturbances was merely an eye wash as this was done only with a view to suppressing the eruptive outbursts of the nationalists. Now the Congress and its top ranking leaders were to think what was to be done. It is striking that this what was to be done, did not convey a passive mood as to all the nation it was an active affair. Particularly this time the humiliations and indignities of the nation became unbearable and intolerable. At this crucial stage Gandhiji was to lead the nation and the movement. It was at

this situation the grave Khilafat question and the mental anxiety of the Muslims born out of the belying of the war time promises of the Allies became very much tense. Now Gandhiji's attention was slowly drawn to the Khilafat agitation.

During the war the Allies, particularly Britain, to purchase the loyalty of the Muslims offered assurances of generous treatment towards Turkey. But during the close of the war when Turkey was totally devastated the Allies decided to dismember the Ottoman Empire in the face of Lloyd George's war time promises; and according the Greek and Italian army landed in Turkey which foreshadowed the destruction of the Empire and the Caliphate and the irreligious disgrace of the Caliph, the spiritual supreme of the Muslim world. Now the Muslims felt sure that the poor dishonoured position of the Caliph would surely affect their position under imperialist domination. This anxiety of the Muslims resulted in the birth of the Khilafat Movement in India.

The Khilafat agitation drew the sensitive attention of Gandhiji. He felt sure that the Khilafat demand to restore the Sultan-Caliph to his former position was a just demand and that he was unjustly deprived of his legitimate political and religious authority over his dominions. Gandhiji decided to help the Khilafat agitation. In this respect his primary aim was to

unite the Hindus and the Muslims, and there by to make the Indians one single nation bent on putting joint pressure on the government in order to make it realize the justness of their demands and objectives.

In November 1919 Gandhiji as President of the All India Khilafat Committee suggested that if the Government would do no justice towards Turkey the Khilafat Committee would resort to boycott and non-co-operation against the ruling power. Early in 1920 deputations of the AI KC were sent to the Viceroy and to the Prime Minister with the demands for restoring the former position of the Caliph-Sultan along with his former dominions. To the Khilafat leaders and to Gandhiji also the curt and point blank reply of the Prime Minister was that Turkey would get the same treatment as would get the defeated Christian powers. On May 15 the humiliating peace terms of the Treaty of Sevres were known. Being sorely aggrieved Gandhiji on May 17 urged upon the Muslims to adopt 'non-co-operation' as the only effective remedy for the rude and inconsiderate attitude of the British Government towards Turkey and the Muslim world. On May 28 the Central Khilafat Committee following Gandhiji's advice adopted 'Non-co-operation' as the only practical line of action. At this stage Gandhiji decided to start the Non-co-operation movement on the Khilafat issue. It was thus the Non-cooperation Movement Started on August 1920.

The non-cooperation phase of the national movement in Contai was very much striking for its varied contour and varying configuration. During the short period from August 1, 1919 to February 12, 1920 Contai along with all Midnapore was agitated and constrained by the imperial designs and by the Gandhi-led '*asahayoga satyagraha*'. As a result the all India Non-cooperation Movement was provided from the very beginning with a solid supporting background.

The administration of Bengal had been considering since 1904 that the Midnapore district was unmanageable for one district magistrate. That is why on the basis of the recommendations of the District Administrative Committee the Bengal government decided to make a partition of Midnapore¹. The partition plan was made public on January 26, 1915. Since then protests arose and agitations were formed in various circles land owners and lawyers raised a hue and cry as the partition of the district would undermine their economic interests². Nationalists including a section of prominent Congressmen read in the partition scheme the sinister imperial design for crushing the political activities of the Midnapore people and for weakening their participation in the national movement. This time the local weeklys like *Nihar* and *Medini Bandhab* warned the people about the evil

design of the partition plan and asked them to protest unitedly against 'the terrible scheme of partition'. Otherwise 'the satanic government' would destroy them³.

On August 1, 1920 the Non-cooperation Movement started. All the nation was now filled with a new enthusiasm. On seeing the growth and force and vehemence of the Movement in the district of Midnapore the government made it known through an announcement that for administrative convenience and also for financial considerations the partition scheme of Midnapore would remain suspended⁴. This announcement of the government was a victory for Midnapore. Now the nationalists of Midnapore felt sure that their moderate techniques of warfare would surely help them attain their desired end *swaraj* if the non-cooperation methods were sincerely followed.

The introduction of the Union Boards in the district of Midnapore pushed Contai towards a new movement. Along with the Gandhi-led Non-cooperation Movement which was running on in full swim there started in Contai the Sasmol-led anti-Union Board Agitation which had no connection with the all India national movement.

By the middle of 1920 the Bengal Government Act 1919 and on the recommendations of the District Board of Midnapore and the local Board of Contai and Ramnagar thanas of the Contai sub-division for the general well-

being of the village people. The government expected that the Union Boards would contribute to rural development and they would undertake public utility services. They would promote health of the rural masses. They would build and maintain roads, bridges and waterways. They would take care of primary education and free health services plus the general comfort and convenience of the rural masses. The official propaganda for all these and many other beneficial works the government drive towards the establishment of the Union Boards was welcomed by the people and the local weeklys. But very soon it was clear that the government did not sanction money for the Boards to discharge the public utility services. So the Boards were to raise their resources locally by the imposition of extra taxes. As a result people were agitated and their agitations led to the formation of a local movement.

It was at this time Birendranath Sasmol on realizing the anti-Union Board sentiment of the people, organised powerful agitations through general meetings and the local weekly against the introduction of the Union Boards. In the meetings Sasmol held out before the public that the taxes likely to be imposed under Act might be seven times higher than the prevailing Chowkidari rate. In the meetings people told in one voice that they would not pay the Union Board taxes, and they were ready to face any

sort of punishment that the government would inflict on them for not paying the newly imposed union rates⁵.

In this situation the government officers applied armed pressure on the tax-payers who refused to pay new union rates. The officers started attaching the movable articles of the tax-payer in September 1921 the attaching operations went on unabated for about three months. During the operations the tax-payer submitted to attachment their articles without any violence as this was the dictate of their leader Sasmol. The operations met a ludicrous end as cart men and labourers were in the beginning unwilling to carry the articles to places of auction. Besides it was an irony that there was nobody to bid the attached articles. After a thorough study of this tense situation the District Magistrate reported to the Bengal Government that would not be wise to continue Union Boards in the district and it was also the report that to delay any longer in respect of the withdrawal of the Union Boards would be to throw Midnapore in the arms of the non-co-operators altogether. In view of these considerations and reports the Union Boards were dissolved in the district of Midnapore.⁶

The Contai Union Board Boycott Movement was a grand success. Truly it was a great victory for Contai and so also for Midnapore. The boycott movement though passive by nature, was a direct challenge to the

British administrative authority, and made the authority surrender to the peaceful non-violent boycott movement of Contai. The movement had a great bearing on the subsequent history of Contai. The movement brought new actors on the political scene, and it expanded the constituency of national politics. It is striking to note that the women of Contai gladly and willingly submitted their articles to attachment, and they became much more glad when the attachment operations were stopped by government notices, and they got back their attached goods. This is how the women of Contai learned the first lessons of being the *lavan* heroines of the 1930 movement. It for these reasons the Anti-Union Board Agitation remains unparalleled in the history of the contemporary mass movements of Bengal.

The Jallianwala Bagh massacre, the Punjab tragedy, the proclamation of the Martial Law in Punjab and its consequent brutal indignities and inhuman humiliations led disconcerted India towards the stage of a volcano before eruption. In addition to all these there was the Khilafat wrongs which unbearably hurt the Indian Muslims. The dismemberment of the Ottoman Empire and the dishonour of the Sultan-Caliph, the spiritual supreme of the Muslim world, deeply aggrieved the Muslims. In this situation the age-old maxim 'Reject the ruler who misrules' seemed to them the only pointer to their future course of action. Under the circumstances Gandhiji by making

an ingenious blending of the Moderate and Extremist ideologies drew the attention of the Congress to the justness of the Khilafat issue. He also suggested that to vindicate national honour and to prevent repetition of similar wrongs it was an utmost necessity to attain *Swaraj*. This time Gandhiji clearly asserted that this *Swaraj* would be attained within the Empire with the means of *asahayoga* i. e. no co-operation with and the demonic ruler i. e. to the colonial government. It was in this context on August, 1920 Gandhiji started the non-co-operation Satyagraha on the Khilafat issue. This time he assured that if the people would implement the non-co-operation programme wholeheartedly and sincerely *Swaraj* would be ushered in within a year.

Swaraj within a year --- this assurance of Gandhiji made India a new land with new nationalists and new common people. The assurance awakened India out of years of slumber beset with indignation and despondence and dependence. Now it was the question how *Swaraj* would be attained. By this time it was clear that *Swaraj* could not be attained by constitutional and legal means but by peaceful and legitimate means as Gandhiji suggested i. e. by the implementation of the Non-co-operation Programme. And this NC P had two aspects: one, positive and the other negative. The important items of the positive aspects were constructive

works concerned with the promotion of *Swadeshi* like the revival of hand-spinning and weaving, removal of untouchability, prohibition of liquor and national education. And the 'exiting items' of the negative aspect were the boycott of legislatures, law-courts and government and semi-government educational institutions.

According to the directives of the AICC some significant changes were introduced in the organizational structure of the Congress. The Congress knew it for certain that to conduct the Movement a compact organization was necessary. The organization would work round the year and would reach down to villages by the formation of village committees. Over the village committees there would have union committees, circle committees, sub-divisional committees, and district committees and so on in an ascending order. This constitutional change made the Congress a far more representative body. Now the Congress was in no way a distant affair. Its membership was open to all who were eighteen or above, who had adherence to the Congress principles and who paid four annas as membership subscription per annum⁷. As a result the members of the Congress rose by leaps and bounds. The Congress was now fundamentally changed in respect of outlook and policy. A wave of emotional sensation swept over the country. A Congressite was now not merely a member of the

Congress but one committed for any sacrifice in respect of fulfilling the non-co-operation programme. In this changed all-India perspective of the national politics Contai participated in the Non-co-operation Movement with high hopes for attaining *Swaraj*. The Contai Congress adopted wholeheartedly the Non-co-operation Programme as an all India phenomenon. From the beginning Contai put much stress on both the constructive and boycott aspects of the Movement viz. boycott of law courts, boycott of government aided institutions and boycott of British goods particularly Lancashire cloths.

It was at this time Birendranath Sasmol, an eminent Bar-at Law of the Calcutta High Court renounced his lucrative income in response to the Non-co-operation Programme, and dedicated himself to the service of the nation. Sasmol's example was readily followed by lawyers. In Contai Bipin Bihari Adhikari, a pleader, Surendranath Das, a mukhtear, and Udaynarayan Mandal a mohorar (a pleader's clerk), all of the Subdivisional Court, relinquished their practices⁸. This was not all. Many others of the Contai court followed suit. It was at this situation the Contai Congress set arbitration boards/courts and village panchayets for settling private disputes. This time the Congress volunteers dissuaded the litigants from going to law

courts and asked them to get their disputes settled in arbitration courts and in panchayets.⁹

Sasmol with some teachers and eminent nationalists undertook a wide tour in the district during which he addressed hundreds of meetings explaining the aims and objectives of the NCP. In his addresses Sasmol stressed mainly on two particular items of the Programme viz. reconstruction of villages and nationalization of education¹⁰. They also appealed to the people to work sincerely for the removal of untouchability and unjust caste-distinctions and also for temperance and Hindu- Muslim amity.¹¹

The appeals of Sasmol in respect of the revival of cottage industries particularly hand-spinning and weaving *khadi* industry greatly impressed the people of Contai.¹² The non-co-operator nationalists over and again made it clear to them *khadi* would help them attain economic self-sufficiency and it would thus remove their poverty, and build a sound village life. In a few months after the adoption of the NCP *khadi* was introduced in the national schools as an extra-curricular subject. The wearing of *khadi* became a condition of Congress membership. In the upper levels of the society men and women in *khadi* costumes were paid *sutrayanga* high respect. Besides the character of *khadi* was now greatly changed. *Khadi* now assumed the character of a religious rite. It was seen in every Congress meeting the

spinning-rite was observed with solemn grandeur for at least five minutes. *Khadi* became a very popular feature in Bengal life. For the spread of the *khadi* industry the Contai Congress distributed *charkhas* to needy persons and encouraged cotton growing variously. In all the *thanas* of Contai *khadi* centres were set up. In villages non-co-operator volunteers spoke high of the usefulness of the *charkha*. This time Bengali poets like Nazrul Islam and Satyendranath Dutt extolling the merits of the *charkha* writes: the *charkha* is the symbol of India's desire for self-government i.e. for 'swaraj'. According to Nazrul, in the mild rattling of the *charkhas* is sung the arrival of the chariot of *swaraj*; in Dutt's words the *charkha* is all wealth, all livelihood, and in the *charkhas* of Bengal there is the dazzling flash of gold. In a similar spirit it is sung probably by an old woman that the *charkha* is her dear husband and her son and also her grand-son, and it is the benignity of the *charkha* that has made her so affluent as to keep an elephant tied at her door.¹³

One exciting item of the Non-co-operation Movement was the boycott of Government aided educational institutions and the establishment of national institutions where students after leaving the Government schools might continue their education. In response to the call of the Congress students left schools and teachers resigned their services. Practically a wave

of nationalization of education began to sweep all over the country. This time B. N. Sasmol and some eminent persons of the locality, were dead against the prevalent system of the western education, Sasmol condemned. They took the lead in respect of introducing a national system of education that would promote the moral and spiritual well-being of the students and the welfare of the people of India. In a meeting held on February 1921 at Saraswatitala of Contai Sasmol declared that his palatial building of Contai would henceforth be used for all the purposes and services relating to the nationalization of education. The meeting made a great impact over Contai. Now national schools from ten-class high schools to upper and even lower primary schools sprang up readily at different places¹⁴. In this connection two national mention may be made of two national schools of importance, one at Kalagachia P.S. Khejuri (March 1, 1921) under the initiative of Jagadish Chandra Maity and the other at Contai town on March 7, 1921. In the syllabi of the school there were provisions for three types education viz. academic, technical and agricultueal education.

The boycott of law courts created a sort of dead lock in respect of settling civil and criminal disputes. That is why private arbitration courts/boards were set up for the settlement of private disputes. Respected and influential local persons were appointed arbiters to settle the disputes. After

one or two hearings of the appellants and defendants the cases were in most cases satisfactorily solved. Iswarchandra Mal, Srinath Chandra Jana, Taraknath Pal, Girish Chandra Rana of the Contai arbitration boards made a good name for their satisfactory solution of land disputes¹⁵. As a result Contai arbitration courts became very popular in the subdivision. So in Contai it was highly felt that arbitration courts were great contribution of the Non-co-operation Movement.

During the movement the Contai Congress took some attempts to uplift the status of women in society, particularly in the upper class Hindu society. It was that for some social evils like illiteracy, early marriage and polygamy they were reduced to second class citizens, and there was developed a sense of inferiority in them. So they were mostly indifferent to the national movement and their participation to the movement was negligible¹⁶. The Contai Congress with a view to raising their status in families and their place in the society took attempts to provide them with education and means of livelihood, and to make them aware of performing their duties towards fulfilling the programme of village reconstruction¹⁷. As a result the Contai women were found gradually preparing themselves for the coming waves of the national movement. There is no denying in the fact

that the Contai Congress thus paved the way for making the heroines of the *Lavan Satyagraha*.

Caste-distinctions and untouchability – these two social evils are quite contrary to the basic, elemental, moral and religious principles of a society and positively harmful to the spiritual and moral growth of the nation. On thinking of this elemental truth and bearing in mind the dictates of Gadhiji preached in respect of the Harijans the Contai Congress from the very beginning of the movement started campaigning against these two social evils. In religious assemblages there were very often Ramchandra's love for Guhak Chandal, Bhima's love for the aborigines and Chaitanyadeva's love for all men irrespective of their caste and creed and of their touchability and untouchability. Besides, they distributed free of cost Digindranarayan Bhattacharya's works on anti-caste-distinction and anti-untouchability viz. '*Jatibheda*', '*Sudrer Puja and Vedadhikar*', '*Aprsyatabarjan*' and '*Sri Gauranga*'. This time Contai Congress arranged some inter-caste marriages and introduced inter-dining. Now temple-entry and use of reserved tanks meant only for religious uses of the upper were allowed to all. As a result the two great social evils were abated¹⁸.

During the First World War the drinking of wine and the taking of hemp, opium and many other articles of addiction became a ruinous habit to

the people of Contai. The number of drug-addicts were gradually increasing. That was why the Contai Congress took various measures to put a stop to this practice. Picketing started at liquor shops. Some shops were forced to shut down. Drug-addicts were prevented from entering into shops meant for selling intoxicating drugs. It is pity that these attempts of the Congress and also of the picketers had little effect¹⁹.

The Non-co-operation Movement was withdrawn on February 12, 1922. All India was disillusioned, and dismayed on thinking of what worse would happen. But Contai did not lose heart on the basis of her experiences. She felt that only the first battle was lost and the war of independence would continue. It was because since the fifteenth century she had been dashed and ravaged times again by Muslim invasions, Maratha inroads and Bargi incursions. She withstood all those attacks. So after this historic 'retreat' Contai stood again with new hopes for a new bright future. Particularly like the fabulous phoenix that burns itself out of its own accord and creates its new form out of its ashes, Contai with new hope and new faith on the foundations of its newly constructed form and newly awakened national consciousness born out of the revolutionized millions of fighters of freedom devoutly dedicated herself to attain *Swaraj* which was deemed as the sovereign remedy for all their ills. The strength, solidarity and coherence of

their dedication to the service of the nation was historic, and this was repeatedly proved during the movements of 1930-32, and 1942. It was from the Non-co-operation Movement they learned the lessons of conquering the fear for the Raj and of marching ahead towards the path of attaining *Swaraj*. It may therefore be unhesitatingly opined that the Non-co-operation Movement revolutionized the people of Contai and also of India with the hope of bright *Swaraj*-days. The three Parallel Governments formed by the Contai people at Patashpur (October, 1942 – December, 1942), Khejuri (October, 1942 – December, 1942), and Contai (July, 1943 – December, 1943) were ample proofs of their revolutionary zeal and conviction. Truly speaking, this was the great contribution of the Non-co-operation Movement to the people of Contai.

II

Anti-Union Board Movement --- Currents and Crosscurrents (1920-21)

In the history of the national movement of India the Contai Union Board Boycott Movement is an event of tremendous political significance and of unique historical importance. Leaving aside all controversies and differences of opinions as to its intensity, gravity and nature it has been said that the Contai Movement was by far the most successful first Satyagraha in

India as it was an effective assault on the colonial state at the grassroots. Besides there is no denying the fact it was a direct challenge to the government authority. In other words it was a very powerful crunch which made the authority withdraw the Bengal Village Self Government Act which was very astutely designed by the government to strengthen administration at the grassroots.

By the middle of 1920 the Government in accordance with Section V of the Bengal Village Self Government Act of 1919 issued orders regarding the establishment of 227 Union Boards in the district of Midnapore. In consequence two Union Boards were introduced in Contai and Ramnanagar *thanas* of the Contai sub-division on the recommendation of the District Board of Midnapore and also of the Local Board of Contai.

The Union Board was the lowest unit of administration and as such it was vested with some powers and duties. Each Board consisted of nine members – six elected by the village people and three nominated by the government. The Board worked through *chowkidars* and *dafadars* who were attached to the police *thana* within which the Board was situated. The Board was to pay their salaries and the cost of necessary equipments, but it had virtually no power over them. They acted only as pivots of rural administration as they reported regularly to the governmental authorities the

ins and outs of villages relating to the maintenance of its normal health and social discipline.

The Union Board was bestowed with the task of performing some services relating to public well-being. It was indicated in the provisions of the Act that the Board was to promote health and comfort of the village people. It was to maintain roads and bridges and waterways. It was to look after the promotion of primary education in villages, and to settle the disputes of villagers.

At the initial stage of its introduction it seemed that the Act was to modernize the Bengal village life by giving it better municipal, sanitary and other arrangements of the West. For all these the upper strata of the village society and even the common people welcomed the Act and expected its quick implementation. Two local journals *Nihar* and *Medini Bandhab* and also the *Amrita Bazar Patrika* supporting the Act spoke high of its seemingly beneficial provisions. But very soon they spoke ill of it as it became evident to them that the primary objective of the Act was only to assert the governmental authority at the grassroots. The publicity of public well-being through utility services seemed to them only a hoax as it did not sanction money for the Boards to undertake works for rural improvement. To the contrary it empowered the Boards to raise their resources locally by

the imposition of taxes on the village people. It was at this juncture people thought that the BVSG Act could in no way benefit them. That is why they became prone to resist the introduction of the Act in spite of their having no proper leadership and necessary organization. First of all they made repeated appeals to the government to repeal the Act. But on seeing that their appeals bore no fruit they started organizational activities caring little for dire consequences with which some of the 'honoured' members of some Union Boards threatened them.

It was at this situation Birendranath Sasmol, a highly renowned learned lawyer of Contai, felt the pulse of the people and the nature of their agitation, and then he planned to utilize the anti-union board sentiment of the people with a view to giving it a positive content to the campaign for non-co-operation.²⁰ First of all to register his protest against the institution of the BVSG Act. Sasmol published articles in the *Amrita Bazar Patrika* on October 21 and 22, 1921.²¹ Besides he wrote a letter of protest to Jnanankur De, the then S.D.O. of Contai in which he detailed the flaws and inconsistencies of the Act.²² He wrote, the BVSG Act was "a direct negation of Self-Government" as it did not allow the Board to spend all the incomes of the state within its jurisdiction. As such the Act could in no way be taken as a measure of Self-Government but of "self-civilization" in the European

sense.²³ Nevertheless the whole spirit of the Act to civilize the village folk of Bengal at their own expenses impels one to name it as “Bengal Civilizing Act”.²⁴

Sasmol wrote, the Government did make no provision for rural improvement by sanctioning money for the Board. But it allowed each Board to raise Rs. 600 as the amount of its new taxation. Strangely enough an average union consisting of 20 villages would then get only Rs. 30 per annum i.e. two rupees and a half per mensem for its public utility works. The picture of rural improvement would thus seem ridiculous.²⁵

Sasmol wrote, the Union Board could make only 50% increase of the existing *Chowkidari* tax. It was likely that the increase would go on and on until it reached the maximum of seven times of the present figure.²⁶

While detailing on the implications of the provisions of the Act Sasmol wrote that the Act would artfully erode the traditional autonomy of village administration through its system of penetration of foreign bureaucracy into the rural area.

With these pointed arrows in hand Sasmol started campaigning against the institution of the Union Boards, particularly against the imposition of tax-increase and union rates. He made an extensive tour over the Subdivisions of Contai, Tamluk and Ghatal. Everywhere he was warmly

welcomed by the people who were dead against the introduction of the Union Board and its new tax system.²⁷ In one meeting held on August 14, 1921 Sasmol declared that he himself would not pay the Union Board taxes caring little for any punishment for his non-payment of the taxes. Then it was felt that Sasmol was right in his explanation over the Board system, and so he was to be followed thoroughly.²⁸ As a result in the villages of the Contai Sub-division and in other places anti-union board *samitis* were organized. In most cases the villagers being assembled in *Haribasars* took the vow in the name of God Hari that they would not pay new union rates paying no heed to what worse might come upon them for this their anti-government activity.²⁹ They were determined not to pay taxes except the *Chowkidari* tax and that they would pay *chowkidari* tax only under a receipt under the *Chowkidari* Act.³⁰ As a counter propaganda the sub-divisional officers of Contai and Ghatal made it publicly known that defaulters would be arrested and their movable belongings would be attached.³¹ It is strange to note that wherever the attach-parties went women blew conch-shells and men villagers raised *haridhvani* to inform the people that they would submit to the attach-parties their articles without any opposition as this was the advice of their *deshapran*. Again in reply to the attachment-activities the *satyagrahis* displayed posters in *hats* and *bazaars* and even along public

thoroughfares threatening all concerned with the collection of taxes. Along with fearful posturing social boycott and ostracism went on. It was at this situation presidents and vice-presidents and a large number of members of the Union Boards resigned, and their number was daily on the increase. This was not all. A large number of *chowkidars*, *dafadars* and *tahasildars* also resigned.³² Therefore the authority fell difficulty in cases of attachments. No one was found there to carry the attached belongings to the Board's office or to the police station. Besides the auction of the attached goods became a mockery as nobody gave any bid for things put to any auction.³³ Referring to such an incident S. N. Ray, Joint Magistrate, Midnapore reports: "the far-reaching impact of the 'poisonous agitation', led by 'the Fact Sasmol' on the villages" and that "there is a stubbornness which is unusual and which springs from the belief, however it might have been inspired, that these boards mean extra taxation which they are not prepared to pay". It was in this situation the authority postponed the auctioning of the attached belongings of the defaulters.³⁴

The 'poisonous opposition' to the Union Boards led by 'the Fact Sasmol' became a bewildering problem to the authority.³⁵ Hence the authority began to ponder over it. Shortly after the institution of the Union Boards in the district of Midnapore Mr A. W. Cook, the District Magistrate

remarked that the government was now 'to defend a weak case' in the teeth of an organised opposition under the apprehension of increased taxation. And it was then he felt that by the implementation of the Act the authority was trying to turn the Bengal villages into Yorkshire towns, and that that was absolutely impossible and impracticable at the then condition of the villages which were in a process of disintegration.³⁶ Satyendra Nath Roy, the Joint Magistrate of Midnapore on November 11, 1921 wrote to the District Magistrate that the Sasmol-led agitators had throughout respect for the government, and that they were ready to pay *chowkidari* tax if they were granted old receipts. Therefore "I firmly believe that there are stormy times ahead and it is of utmost importance that we should choose our ground carefully before that times" i.e. before the agitators were thrown into the arms of the non-co-operators.³⁷

In view of the reports of top government officers pleading for the withdrawal of the BVSG Act and the anxiety over the merger of the Anti-Tax Movement with the Non-Co-operation Movement the Government had to withdraw the Union Boards in December 1921. Accordingly the newly instituted 227 Union Boards were dissolved in the districts of Midnapore, and by government notification the people concerned were allowed to get back their attached goods. This was how the Union Tax Boycott agitation, a

very typical agitation by its nature it was typical because it was conducted with all peacefulness and without any violence, came to an end.

The withdrawal of the Union Boards meant a loss of prestige to the Government and an enormous gain in prestige to Sasmol and his party. All through its tenure the anti-tax agitation was a passive movement. But it being a direct challenge to the government authority, the movement was not less vehement than any other active action. By nature, intensity and gravity it was a unique movement. It made the mighty colonial state surrender to the local pride. Bidyut Chakrabarty is cent percent right when he writes “...it brought new actors to the political scene” and those actors after their victory in the national front fought against vested interests in their socio-economic front in the villages and they were crowned with success.³⁸ At the initial stage the BPCC(Bengal Provincial Congress Committee) did not support Sasmol’s idea of the movement and even Gandhi by-passed Sasmol by saying that ‘Satyagraha is a complex phenomenon’. In spite of both these active and passive oppositions Sasmol did not flinch from his idea of launching on the Anti-Union Board Movement and started the movement at his own risk with an iron will and firm determination. Ultimately it was found, it was Sasmol’s ingenuity and able stewardship that overcame all desperations, and finally begot victory to the Anti-Tax Movement with the

withdrawal of the Union Board. It thus becomes a memorable incident in which the crust of the British administration in the lowest level of the administration was crunched. In this connection it is worth-quoting what Subhas Chandra Bose in his Indian Struggle writes: “The success of the No-Tax Campaign gained considerable strength to the people of Midnapore and popularity to their leader B. N. Sasmol”. In fine one cannot but note that this crunching at the crust of administration inspired later days oppositions and movements against the government’s illogical and insidious attempts to assert its authority over people.

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