

Bihar and the National Movement

"Bihar has played a highly significant and inspiring role in the successive phases of our national struggle till the attainment of freedom. In fact, Bihar's response to the country's clarion call for liberty in different periods was spontaneous, splendid and fruitful." K. K. Datta, Comprehensive History of Bihar, 1976.

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Jharkhand dekho desk : The Indian national movement is a subject of fascinating study. The British rule in India started with the acquisition of Bihar, Bengal and Orissa. Bihar remained a constant source of challenge to the British in India. The Revolt of 1857 was the first major revolt; Babu Kunwar Singh of Jagdishpur was the most notable figure of the revolt who wrote a glorious chapter in the history of India's First War of Independence by his unprecedented chivalry and historic sacrifice.. He actively led a band of armed forces of 4000 soldiers and recorded victories in many battles. He successfully occupied Arrah in July 1857 and later with the help of Nana Saheb defeated British forces at Azhamgar. A branch of Anushilan Samiti was established in Patna by Sachindranath Sanyal in 1913 and Bankimchandra Mitra of BN College was given responsibilities to lead the organization. Champaran Satyagrah was started in 1917 and was Mahatma Gandhi's first Satyagraha Movement (first Civil Disobedience Movement). M.K.Gandhi was accompanied by Dr. Rajendra Prasad, Brajkishore Prasad, Acharya Kripiani, Dr. Anugrah Narayan Sinha, Mahadeo Desai, C. F. Andrews, H. S. Pollock, Raj Kishore Prasad, Ram Navami Prasad, Shambhu Sharan and Dharnidhar Prasad. It was the first victory of Gandhi's Civil Disobedience battle. A branch of Swaraj Dal was formed in Bihar which was lead by Srikrishna Singh. For boycotting Simon Commission, the All Party Meeting was organized in the leadership of Anurah Narayan Sinha. State had given famous leaders like Swami Shahjanand Saraswati, Sahadeed Baikuntha Shukla, Bihari Bibhuti Anurag Narayan Singh, Maulana Mazhar-Ul-Haq, Loknayak Jaiparakash Narayan, Bhadra Yajee, Pandit Yamuna Karjee, Dr. Maghfoor Ahmed Ajazi. Upendra Narayan Jha "Azad" and Prafulla Chaki were also active revolutionary of Bihar.

No doubt the verdict of Plassey(23rd June, 1757) was in favour of the English East India Company. But their rising supremacy was challenged in the course of a few years, first by Mir Kasim alone(1762-63) and again in 1764 by a confederacy of three allies , Mir Kasim, Shuja-ud-daulah, the Nawab of Oudh, and Shah Alam II, Emperor of Delhi. A British military officer, with experience of Indian affairs, remarked in 1857: "From the days of Mir Kasim Ally, Patna had always been a rebellious city." ,Conjunction of some favourable circumstances helped the English to overpower the allies power at Buxar on the 23rd October 1764, and Buxar supplemented the work of Plassey in riveting the shackles of the Company's rule upon Bengal and Bihar."

The first seeds of resentment against British rule emerged when Maharaja Fateh Bahadur Shahi the chieftain of Huseypur in Saran district, initiated a struggle against the East India company in 1767. His revolt escalated in 1781 when various other zamindars and chiefs in South Bihar began to join his revolt including Raja Narain Singh and Akbar Ali. The British were able to successfully put down the revolt. Babu Kunwar Singh of Jagdishpur and his army, as

well as countless other persons from Bihar, contributed to the India's First War of Independence (1857), also called the Sepoy Mutiny by some historians. At the age of 80 years, during India's First War of Independence, he actively led a select band of armed soldiers against the troops under the command of the East India Company, and also recorded victories in many battles.

Under the British Raj, Bihar particularly Patna gradually started to attain its lost glory and emerged as an important and strategic centre of learning and trade in India. From this point, Bihar remained a part the Bengal Presidency of the British Raj until 1912, when the province of Bihar and Orissa was carved out as a separate province. When the Bengal Presidency was partitioned in 1912 to carve out a separate province of Bihar, Patna was made the capital of the new province.

Shaheed Baikuntha Shukla was another nationalist from Bihar, who was hanged for murdering a government approver named Phanindranath Ghosh. This led to the hanging of Bhagat Singh, Sukhdev and Rajguru. Baikuntha was commissioned to plan the murder of Ghosh. He carried out the killing successfully on 9 November 1932. He was arrested, tried, convicted, and, on 14 May 1934, he was hanged in Gaya Central Jail.

In North and Central Bihar, a peasant movement was an important side effect of the independence movement. The Kisan Sabha movement started in Bihar under the leadership of Swami Sahajanand Saraswati who in had formed the Bihar Provincial Kisan Sabha (BPKS) to mobilise peasant grievances against the zamindari attacks on their occupancy rights. Gradually the peasant movement intensified and spread across the rest of India. All these radical developments on the peasant front culminated in the formation of the All India Kisan Sabha (AIKS) at the Lucknow session of the Indian National Congress in April 1936, with Swami Sahajanand Saraswati elected as its first President.

This movement aimed at overthrowing the feudal zamindari system instituted by the British. Hindi weekly Hunkar was published from Bihar in 1940. Hunkar later became the mouthpiece of the peasant movement and the agrarian movement in Bihar and was instrumental in spreading the movement. The peasant movement later spread to other parts of the country and helped in digging out the British roots in the Indian society by overthrowing the zamindari system. The Quit India Movement 1942-1943 was extremely intense and widely spread in Bihar. It was marked by technique of mass contact, methods of mass mobilization and mass involvement.

The first Cabinet of Bihar was formed on 2 April 1946, consisting of two members, Dr. Sri Krishna Sinha as the first Chief Minister of Bihar and Dr. Anugrah Narayan Sinha as Deputy Chief Minister and Finance Minister of Bihar (also in charge of Labour, Health, Agriculture and Irrigation). Other ministers were inducted later. The Cabinet served as the first Bihar Government after independence in 1947. In 1950, Dr. Rajendra Prasad from Bihar became the first President of India.

Revolt of 1857 in Bihar
The revolt that began at Meerut on May 10, 1857 very soon spread to large parts

of northern India, including Bihar. There were three major developments in Bihar during July 1857. At Patna there was an uprising led by Pir Ali and his associates. The mutiny at Danapur, and the assumption of leadership of the revolt in the region by Kunwar Singh. On July 25, 1857 three regiments stationed at the major cantonment of Danapur on the outskirts of Patna rebelled. Most of the troops crossed the Son river into Shahabad, where they joined the rebels under Kunwar Singh who were then besieging a small European community at Arrah.

At the time of the revolt the Bihar province of the Bengal presidency consisted of the following six districts: Patna, Bihar, Saran, Shahabad, Tirhoot and Champaran. It needs to be underlined that these, along with Bengal and Odisha, were earliest large scale territorial conquests of the East India Company.

Bihar head enjoyed considerable importance in the trading activities of the European companies since the 17th century. Indigo production played a significant role in the colonial exploitation of the region (opium was the other major commodity of the colonial economy of Bihar). Under the East India Company a system of forced cultivation of indigo, and exploitation of the cultivators by European indigo planters and indigenous zamindars, was imposed in the country-side.

The first major incident in Bihar during the revolt was the Patna uprising of July 3, with Pir Ali at its forefront. On this date the Deputy Opium Agent of the Patna Opium Agency, Dr. Lyell, was killed. This was an attack on a major source of colonial revenue. Gangetic Bihar, together with the Banaras-Ghazipur region was the main area of opium production in the East India Company's territories. It is significant that this entire track was engulfed by the upheavals of the revolt.

Pir Ali was charged with Lyell's murder, convicted and hanged. William Tyler was the commissioner of Patna Division at this time. Apart from Ali, sixteen more rebels were hanged for their participation in the Patna uprising another seventeen were imprisoned with hard labour, and two were transported to penal settlements.

After the rebellion in Patna, sipahis of three of the regiments in Danapur mutinied on July 25th 1857. This may be set to mark the beginning of a widespread revolt in Bihar, which lasted for more than a year. On July 26th the troops reached Shahabad in an effort to organise themselves under the leadership of the octogenarian Kunwar Singh, Raja of Jagdishpur, who had already launched a movement against the British. Kunwar Singh, gathered a large number of followers, who included his brothers Amar Singh and Rtnarain Singh; His nephews Nishan Singh and Jai Krishna Singh; Thakur Dayal Singh and Visheshwar Singh. It may be mentioned here that whereas a section of the landlords of Bihar, including some very prominent zamindars, took part in the revolt, the bulk of the big landlords remained loyal to the colonial government and helped it in crushing the movement. Nevertheless the uprising was fairly widespread in the region, and did have strong popular support in several areas.

Kunwar Singh inspired the leaders in Chhotanagpur,

the Santal Parganas, and other parts of Bihar to carry on the struggle. After his death his brother Amar Singh led his followers, who held out bravely in different parts of Bihar. Their activities continued to be a cause of serious concern for the East India Company's administration. The forest area of Jagdishpur was the base of Amar Singh's military campaign. The struggle between Amar Singh and the British forces under Sir E. Lugard in the first half of 1858 assumed the epic dimensions. Engels took note of Amar Singh's military acumen in an article in the New York Daily Tribune (October 1, 1858). He saw Amar Singh as the one great hope of the continuation of the revolt. After the retreat of Nana Saheb into Nepal, Amar Singh went over to the Terai region to assume the leadership of Nana's troops, but was captured in December 1859. He was imprisoned by the British at Gorakhpur, but died of illness at Gorakhpur on January 3, 1860 before he could be placed on trial.

The Wahabi Movement

The Wahabi Movement was started by Syed Ahmed Barelvji in the early 1820s. He was a socio-religious reformer from Rae Bareli. The Wahabi movement was an Islamic revivalist movement centred in Patna, Bihar, and aimed to restore the original spirit of Islam. The movement also lays emphasis on condemning the deviations of Islam.

However, the Wahabi movement was suppressed by the British army. Wahabi refers to a discipline of Abdul Wahab of Najd (Arabia). Patna was an important centre of this movement for 40 years.

The Wahabi Movement was founded with the goal of overthrowing the British in Bengal and the Sikhs in Punjab. It aimed to restore Islamic power in the country. Abdul Wahab's (1703-1792) followers founded the Movement in order to free the Arab bedouin from the influence of Sufism. Eventually, the Wahabi movement took the form of a revolt similar to the Revolt of 1857 and turned into an armed struggle against the British army. As a result, the British army carried out extensive military operations against it. Syed Ahmed appointed food khilafas or spiritual wise regents to manage and maintain the movement in Bihar. Vilayat Ali, Inayat Ali, Shah Mohammad Hussain and Abdullah played a very important role in the movement belonged to the Sadikpore family of Patna. Patna acted as base camp, supplying large sums of money and innumerable recruits to Sittana. During the movement of 1857-59, Mr Taylor, the Commissioner of Patna division adopted extremely repressive measures against the Wahabi leaders of Patna whom he suspected of conspiracy against the government. Even after the death of its prominent leaders, Wilayat Ali, the disciples secretly carried on the work, Levy of money and recruitments went on as before, and the British government had to devote much of its resources and energy in countering the efforts of his protagonists during the succeeding decades. Although Wahabi movement at Patna was completely wiped out by 1870-71, it paved the way for further revolts.

Tribal Movement in Bihar/Jharkhand
Although the pre 1857 movements of the Kol (1831-1832)

and Santals (1855-1856) were suppressed, the discontent and unrest lingered among different sections of the tribal people and Santal, and there were occasional outbursts during the second half of the 19th century like certain agrarian disturbances from 1881 to 1895, Saphahor Movement (Kharwar Movement), movement under Birsa Munda (Also known as Birsa Bhagwan) in the Chhotanagpur region of Bihar, now in Jharkhand.

Birsa Munda was one of the earliest tribal reformers whose actions contributed to the freedom struggle as well. Birsa Munda was a tribal reformer, religious leader, and freedom fighter belonging to the Munda tribe. He amassed a large religious and informative movement against British rule in the 19th century in the erstwhile Bengal Presidency. Birsa is known for challenging the Christian Missionaries and revolting against the conversion activities along with the Munda and Oraon communities.

Birsa became a mass leader and began to be considered Bhagwan and Dharati Baba by his followers. He ignited the minds of the masses the Mundas, Oraons, other Adivasis and non-Adivasis responded to his call and joined the "Ulgulan" (great tumult) or revolt against the colonial power and exploitative diktus (1899-1900).

Birsa asked the people not to pay any rent and attacked the outposts of feudal, missionary, and colonial authorities. The tribals of Central and Eastern India waged an effective armed resistance against the British with traditional bows and arrows, but only the real exploiters were attacked, and the common people were not troubled.

Birsa Munda was captured by British police and lodged in jail at the age of 25, where he died in captivity on June 9, 1900. But Bhagwan Birsa Munda's spirited struggle did not go in vain as it compelled the British to take action on the plight and exploitation of tribals, which resulted in the Chhotanagpur Tenancy Act of 1908 for their protection.

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There used to be a great deal of enthusiasm in Bihar about the Congress in its early days during the period of 1885-1908. Interest in the Congress dwindled after few years. But very soon efforts were made by some genuine leaders to revive the Congress in Bihar. At a meeting held in 1908, under the presidency of Nawab Sarfraz Hussain Khan Bahadur, a Bihar Provincial Congress Committee was formed with its headquarters at Patna and branches in the districts. The Provincial Congress Committee used to hold a political conference. When the British government was trying to interesting the communal divide in India, Bihar presented a unique spectacle, and the

whole of India, of Muslims and Hindus working shoulder to shoulder in complete harmony inspired by common ideals and aspirations. The year 1912 is very important in the history of Bihar. In this year a separate province of Bihar was created in response to the legitimate demand of the local people. This year is also important for the fact that the 27th session of Indian National Congress was held at Bankipur, Patna for the first time in this historic land. Honourable art and Mudholkar was the president of this session of the Indian National Congress. From this session onward, Bihar began to play an active role in the successive phases of Indian nationalism.

Home Rule Movement in Bihar

Home rule movement made its presence felt in Bihar. On 16th December, 1916, atom meeting held at Bankipur, Patna, it was decided to start a Home Rule League in Bihar. Muzhar-Ul-Haq was elected at its president. He delivered an inspiring speech stressing the need for the formation of the League. On 17th February, 1918, at another meeting held at Patna, it was decided to organize village campaigns and to collect subscription during February 1918. On 18th April, 1918, Annie Besant came to Patna. She was escorted from Patna station in a triumphal procession with 'Aarti'. On the way to the residence of Purnendu Narayan Sinha (one of the vice presidents of Home Rule League in Bihar). The local Home Rule leaders, Hasan Imam, Purnendu Narayan Sinha and Sarfraz Hussain Khan signed the latest manifesto at a meeting held at Ali Manzil in Patna. All these cost much anxiety to the commissioner of Bihar. The Home Rule Movement created a generation of ardent nationalists who formed in the backbone of the national movement in the coming years. The home rule leagues also created organizational links between town and country which were to prove invaluable in later years. By the idea of self-government, it generated a widespread pro-nationalist atmosphere in the country. The movement set the right mood for the entry of Mahatma Gandhi and take the leadership.

Revolutionary Nationalism and Bihar
While the Congress was following a constitutional path to attain there were other nationalists in India who preached radical ideas and followed revolutionary methods to attain freedom. The revolutionaries were inspired by Japanese victory over Russia in 1905. It generated hopes of liberation in different parts of Asia, including the Indian revolutionary nationalists. The partition of Bengal (1905) stimulated the Indian national movement. It provoked the revolutionary nationalists. In the words of Surendra Nath Banerjee, the partition 'humiliated' us but it also acted 'as a blessing in disguise'. It instigated the boycott and Swadeshi Movement which assumed a 'religious hue'. The 'Banda Mataram' song became in itself a 'religious mantra' magical word of power.

On 3 April, 1908, a bomb was thrown by Khudiram Bose, Bengali youth in his seventeen and Prafulla Chaki in Muzaffarpur. The bomb was meant for Mr Kingsford then District Judge of Muzaffarpur, who was Presidency Magistrate of Calcutta, and made himself extremely un-

popular by passing heavy sentences on political workers. But unfortunately to European ladies, the wife and daughter of Mr Pingle Kennedy, were killed and for this offense, Khudiram Bose was arrested and hanged on 11th August 1908, while his associate Prafulla Chaki shot himself dead. Deoghar was also an important centre of revolutionary activities. Here, training was imparted to nationalists and bombs were prepared at Sil's Lodge. Revolutionary cult was pleaded with the help of magic lanterns in different parts of Bihar and Jharkhand by nationalists, like Indunath Nandi and a few others. Champaran Satyagraha (Civil Disobedience Movement): It was from Bihar that Mahatma Gandhi launched his civil-disobedience movement, which ultimately led to India's independence.

Under Colonial era laws, many tenant farmers were forced to grow some indigo on a portion of their land as a condition of their tenancy. This indigo was used to make dye. The Germans had invented a cheaper artificial dye so the demand for indigo fell. Naturally, this created much anger and resentment.

At the persistent request of a farmer, Raj Kumar Shukla, from the district of Champaran, in 1917 Gandhiji took a train ride to Motihari, the district headquarters of Champaran. Here he learned, first hand, the sad plight of the indigo farmers suffering under the oppressive rule of the British. Alarmed at the tumultuous reception Gandhiji received in Champaran, the British authorities served notice on him to leave the Province of Bihar. Gandhiji refused to comply, saying that as an Indian he was free to travel anywhere in his own country. For this act of defiance he was detained in the district jail at Motihari. From his jail cell, with the help of his friend from South Africa days, C. F. Andrews, Gandhiji managed to send letters to journalists and the Viceroy of India describing what he saw in Champaran, and made formal demands for the emancipation of these people. When produced in court, the Magistrate ordered him released, but on payment of bail. Gandhiji refused to pay the bail. Instead, he indicated his preference to remain in jail under arrest. Alarmed at the huge response Gandhiji was receiving from the people of Champaran, and intimidated by the knowledge that Gandhiji had already managed to inform the Viceroy of the mistreatment of the farmers by the British plantation owners, the magistrate set him free, without payment of any bail. This was the first instance of the success of civil-disobedience as a tool to win freedom. The British received their first 'object lesson' of the power of civil-disobedience. It also made the British authorities recognize, for the first time, Gandhiji as a national leader of some consequence. Thus, in 1917, began those series of events in a remote corner of Bihar, which ultimately led to the freedom of India in 1947.

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