



CHAPTER - IISOLAPUR MILL WORKERSANDINDIAN FREEDOM MOVEMENT.

*can't* When we study the history of Indian freedom movement in Solapur ; we can't separate the role of Mill Workers from the general freedom movement in Solapur. The masses from all classes took active part in this movement, and the mill workers played an important role in this movement. Moreover the city of Solapur became famous in Indian freedom movement due the glorious sacrifices made by the Mill Workers at the time of imposition of Martial law in 1930.

Solapur city has a historical background as it is one of the three districts which were under the influence of Maratha power. Solapur fought upto the last point of the struggle against the Britishers in the last Anglo-Maratha war of 1817-18. Solapur is the last city in Maharashtra to go under the British rule and it is also the first city to be free from the British rule.<sup>(1)</sup>

Nationalist activities in Solapur during the Tilak era :

During the last quarter of 19th century, signs of political discontent became manifest among the English educated middle classes. This was also the result of frequent recurrence

of famines that caused distress to the peasants. Vasudev Balawant Phadake who might be said to be the first revolutionary product of this conditions had, it is said, a few associates in Solapur, but they did not make any palpable headway. Towards the close of the 19th Century, Ranade and Tilak represented two lines of thinking over political issues in Maharashtra and Ranade's role in that field was subsequently taken over by Gokhale, <sup>e</sup> Except for the single-handed revolutionary attempt by Limaye who had collected a few weapons in 1908 but who soon escaped the police search. After him right upto 1920, the educated class of Solapur usually adopted a middle of the rode policy; and followed it without fear or favour; some inclining towards Gokhale than towards Tilak. Mallappa Warad, Rao Bhadur Sathe, Rao Bahadur Mule, Dr. Kirloskar and Rambhau Sane, a pleader of Barshi, were some of the political leader of in Solapur during that period, Sathe and Kirloskar inclining towards the moderates and Warad in his heart of hearts towards Tilak. Among the leaders of public life in those days must also be counted the names of Hirachand Nemchand and Mr. Kakade, the editor of the oldest Marathi newspaper of Solapur 'Kalpataru'. Warad and Hirachand distinguished themselves as the prominent participants in the public life of the city. There are many hospitals and other charitable institutions of which they have been the principal donors. It may be pointed out that the

present monumental palatial building of Solapur Corporation is a standing tribute to the memory of Mallappa Warad.<sup>(2)</sup> After 1920, the Mill workers began to organise and occasionally went on strike, and the effective political leadership of it was provided by the communist leaders in the country.

*rapidly* Though the Indian National Movement was started early in the 20th Century in Solapur, it spread very fast only after the advent of Mahatma Gandhi in the Indian National Movement as a leader of Indian National Congress. With the growing political awakening in India ~~the~~ reflections of political movements had been influencing the city of Solapur and Solapur Municipal Corporation.<sup>(3)</sup>

Before it there were several strikes in Solapur specially the strikes of 1890, 1892, 1894. But they were limited and mild. In March 1908, the nationalist leader Lokmanya Tilak visited Solapur. The people in Solapur heartily went to welcome Mr. Tilak and there was a public meeting held in Solapur at ~~that~~ time. In that meeting the labour class was conspicuous by its active participation.<sup>(4)</sup> Another important event in the year 1908 was ban on the newspaper 'Swarajya'. Mr. Limaye the editor of 'Swarajya' was arrested and punished in Solapur.<sup>(5)</sup> In 1918, Mr. Tilak again visited Solapur and his public meeting was held.<sup>(6)</sup> But the first remarkable event regarding the workers' participation in national movement was the strike of 1920. It is true that this strike was fought mainly against the oppressive

policy of the British Government and the exploiting mill owners. Although, the government suppressed this strike by using very cruel methods, it proved to be a beginning of political action of mill workers. In the same year the nationalist leader Lokmanya Tilak died on 1st August 1920. On that occasion the a public meeting was held condoling his death in Solapur.<sup>(7)</sup> On 3rd July 1925 the proposal of giving civic reception to the Governor of Bombay was put before the meeting of Municipal Council in Solapur. But the nationalist leaders in Solapur strongly opposed this proposal.<sup>(8)</sup> It is notable here that the national leader Mahatma Gandhi got his first civic reception by the Solapur Municipal Council on 26th May 1921. Thus the Municipal Council of Solapur showed its nationalist spirit. Thus the Solapur city started a new tradition in giving the civic reception to the Indians.<sup>(9)</sup> In 1925 the Municipal Council of Solapur gave reception again to Mahatma Gandhi. Similarly, in 1929 the members of National party in Solapur strongly opposed the proposal of according civic reception to the Governor.

#### CIVIL-DISOBEDIENCE MOVEMENT IN SOLAPUR :

In 1930 the proposal was put before Solapur Municipal Council to hoist the national flag on the building of Municipal Council House. This was to be done on the occasion of the famous ' Dandi Yatra ' started under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi. The national flag was put on the building of Solapur Municipality



on 6th April 1930. In this way Solapur became one of the first cities of India to put the national flag on the building of Municipality.<sup>(10)</sup>

After one month of this event, the ~~reign~~ was let lose by the imperialists in Solapur which had no parallel in the history of Indian National Movement.

The riots which shook the city of Solapur, on 8th May 1930 had their prelude in a series of varied activities organised earlier on a mass scale. When the news of Mahatma Gandhi's arrest broke out, a long procession by way of protest was taken out and people shouted slogans like " Down with the tyrannical Government." The procession started at 1-00 a.m. and gathered on its way hundreds of eager participants. Textile workers on their way to their Mills at 6'0 Clock in the morning saw the procession and joined it immediately.<sup>(11)</sup> They decided to go on strike and forgo their wages. For these workers who had gone on strike in support of their demands in 1920 under the leadership of a valient labour leader named Bhimrao the strike was already a familiar weapon. Under the changed circumstances of 1930, this Industrial weapon was harnessed in the cause of national independence.

The workers of Vishnu-Laxmi Mills were afraid of joining the procession because the mills were managed by the Europeans. When the procession reached precincts of **Vishnu** Laxmi Mills,

appeals were made to workers to come out and join them. But there was no response and the people in the procession started throwing stones at the mills. Some of the workers were forced to join the procession. The authorities of the mills sought the help of the police to disperse the excited crowds. Meanwhile, some people went to a place called ' Chauda Kamani ' and squated on the railway lines thereby detaining the Madras Mail. Stones were thrown on the train. The Anglo-Indian driver of the train apologised and the train was allowed to proceed. Hartal was observed throughout the city spontaneously.<sup>(12)</sup>

These incidents took place on the day the news of Gandhi's arrest reached the city. They cannot be described as an isolated outbreak of mob anger. Meetings were organised practically every day in the various parts of the city by young leaders like Dr. Antrolikar, Jagannath Shinde and Kurban Hussen. On the 6th May a group of people attacked the liquor shops in the city. Then District Collector Mr. Knight called a meeting of the leading citizens and made a general appeal to them to extend their co-operation to maintain law and order in the city. Those present at the meeting promised to extend their full co-operation to the collector. As a result, the mills and shops were opened on the same day. Even though the leaders had promised to help restore normalcy, people were in no mood to colige. Hence a group of people went to 'Chauda Kamani ', a place behind Vishnu-Laxmi Mills and started cutting

the Toddy trees. About 70 trees were cut down.<sup>(13)</sup> The days that preceded the historic movement of patriotic explosion on 8th May, 1930 fall into a pattern of their own. The meetings, processions, the speeches, the strikes that characterized the earlier days prefigure some of the aspects of the stormy events that shook the city on 8th May 1930.

The news of the arrest of Veer ~~and~~ Nariman and shri Jammalal Bajaj, the treasurer of the congress reached Solapur on May 8, 1930 in the morning. As Nariman was a beloved leader of the youth, the leaders of the " Youth League " in Solapur like Dr. Antrolikar, Kurban Hussein, Kunjavihari and Jagannath Shinde decided to organise a huge procession as a protest against the government action.<sup>(14)</sup> All the leaders of Solapur joined the procession. The procession was over by 10-30 a.m. But some enthusiastic young men went to Roopabhavani ( on Solapur-Tuljapur road ) to cut the Today trees. This programme of cutting Toddy trees was neither pre-planned nor was it organised by the Congress Committee. The people went to Roopabhavani on their own. The behaviour of the people who had assembled near Roopabhavani to cut Toddy tree was not disciplined. Many onlookers also gathered there out of curiosity and excitement.



EVENTS LEADING TO IMPOSITION OF MARTIAL LAW :

An Armed Police force with some officers and Sergeant Hall then reached the place. They arrested some 7-8 persons. The Collector and District Magistrate Mr. Knight also reached the spot. When the people saw that the armed police had reached the spot they started throwing stones at the police. Some people started cutting telephone wire but they were detained. Some people started shouting slogans like " Gandhi Ki Jai." The Collector asked the people to stop cutting the Toddy trees and to stop throwing stones. But the people were not in a mood to listen to him. The people demanded that the names and addresses of the arrested persons should be announced to them and that they should be released. Mallappa Dhanshetti came forward and requested the collector to note the names and addresses of the arrested persons and to release them. He further told the collector that all those who were arrested were actually not involved in the violent acts. But the collector was not ready to accept this. " Suddenly a young boy rushed through the mob with a congress flag in his hand and stood before the collector". He also requested the collector to release the persons instantly. A sergeant who was standing by the side of the collector fired a shot at the young boy.<sup>(15)</sup> The young and innocent Shankar Shivdare fell down deeply wounded. The mob became furious and

started throwing stones and branches of trees at the police. The motor car of the collector was also stoned. The people were about to attack the collector and the D.S.P. But Mallappa Dhanshetti rushed ahead and protected them. The collector issued orders to his subordinates to note down the names and addresses of the persons and to release them. He left the spot after issuing the order. But while going the collector ordered the police to open fire and the police did so. Many persons were injured and three died.

The injured body of Shankar Shivadare was moved to the Civil Hospital in a police lorry. But Shankar died before he could receive medical treatment. Thus the death of the first martyr took place.

After the death of Shankar Shivdare a revengful attitude developed among the furious mob. The mob got into frenzy and attacked Mangalwar peth police chowki. The people had stones sticks and steel rods in their hands. There were four policemen in Mangalwar peth police chowki when it was attacked. But two of them ran away and escaped from the furious mob. The two constables who were beaten to death were Muslims. Chand Allauddin who was beaten severely was removed to the civil hospital but he died soon. The mob threw the furniture and records of files on the road. Another constable Waman Zambre was also attacked severely. There were photographs of King George and the Queen

in the chowki. Zambre was asked to take out these photographs and kick them. He did so to save himself. Then the mob searched out Dada Jaffar another constable who had hidden himself in the chowki. The some people brought kerosene oil and set the furniture and the records on the fire. Some people poured kerosene on the wounded body Dada Jaffar and threw it in the fire.<sup>(16)</sup> Rioting continued . The mob proceeded to the Law Court building with kerosens sticks and steel bars in their hands. On their way to the court they beat some two or three policemen compelled them to say " Mahatma Gandhi Ki Jay ". The court buildings were set on fire.<sup>(17)</sup> Foujdar Chawdi was also attacked. When the police heard the news that two policemen were beaten and one policemen was burnt the police from all the city police stations left their posts and ran home. Some of them even left the city.

When British officers heard the news of riots in the city they thought that their lives and the lives of their family were in danger. All the British men and women were taken to the Railway Station under police protection.

#### MARTIAL LAW IN SOLAPUR. :

The atmosphere in the city was quite after 12 noon. But when everything was quite the police opened fire in various parts of the city. They started firing at 1 p.m. and it continued upto 7 p.m. Nine innocent persons were killed in the firing and

nearly twenty three persons were severely wounded. The strange part of it was these persons were in no way concerned with the killing of the policemen or with any of the violent acts. Persons who were merely watching the scene through the windows or from verandas were shot. " Karmayogi " has published a detailed list of persons wounded in the firing.

After the inhuman unnecessary firing, all the policemen and the officials left the city. Shri Ramkriahan Jaju, the leader of the congress provided volunteers to watch the city on the 8th, 9th & 10th of May, 1930. They tried to instill a sense responsibility of in the people. They appealed to the people not to believe in rumours. For three days the city was managed by the congress volunteers. It is said that there was 'Congress Raj ' for three days in the city. (18) Solapur Municipality had the congress flage hoisted on its building on the 6th April 1930, by great patriot Shri Bhopatkar. It was the first Municipality in Bombay presidency to unfurl the congress flag on its building.

On the 9th of May section 144 was clamped on Solapur and thus was followed by the proelamation of Martial law on the city on the 12th of May, 1930.

On the 10th May many rumours about the arrests and rape were spread in the city. <sup>The</sup> Atmosphere in the city was tense. Nearly 20-25 thousand people moved out of the city. Almost all the police had run away from the city leaving many police chowkis without the officers. Some government and police Officers were at the Railway Station under protection.

After this, Mr. Knight the collector of Solapur discussed with Mr. Hosten-Home Minister, Government of Bombay and Solapur was brought under Martial Law on 12th May 1930. Lt. Colonel C.P. Paige was appointed as Commanding Officer to deal with the situation. He started using his power by confiscating the property of persons who were suspected to have participated in the riot. (19)

The Military Officers found that the congress flags were hoisted on many houses and places in the city. So they arrested many people and beat them and also punished by the court on the same day i.e. on 13 May, 1930. Another batch of Military Officers went to the office of the Solapur Municipality and saw the congress flag <sup>was</sup> hoisted on the Municipal building. Shri. Motichand Shah, the President of the Solapur Municipality was working in the office. Colonel Paig went to him and told him that the hoisting congress flag was a punishable offence under martial law. Mr. Manikchand boldly told him that the congress flag was hoisted on the building according to the resolution of Municipal Councilors. He further told him that he could not remove it on his own responsibility. Mr. Manikchand was sentenced to 6 months imprisonment and fined Rs. 10,000/- (20) Mr. Tulashidas Jadhav - Secretary of the Solapur Congress Committee was going on a bicycle towards Mechanaki Chowk with

a Gandhi Cap on when the soldiers saw him they ordered him to remove Gandhi Cap. But he refused to do so. He was beaten severely and was sentenced.<sup>(21)</sup>

The government arrested four important leaders of the people, Shri. Mallappa Dhanshetti, Shri. Shrikasan Sarada, Shri. Jagannath Shinde and Shri. Kurban Hussain and they were held responsible for the murder of these police men. Mr. Shinde and Hussain were leaders of the workers. The prosecution of these four persons started on Thursday the 29th May 1930. Accused No. 1 was Mallappa Dhanshetti No. 2 was Shrikasan Sarada. No. 3 was Jagannath Shinde and No. 4 was Shri. Kurban Hussain. Sessions Judge Mr. Wadia was specially invited from Poona for this case. The case was tried for eight days on 6th June 1930 he gave his verdict. All the four persons were convicted and sentenced to death.<sup>(22)</sup>

An appeal was made to the High Court against the decision of the sessions courts. But the High Court also ruled that these four persons were sentenced to death.

*hear/* " All the people in the country were shocked to here the judgement. They tried hard to save their lives. In Bomba y the people passed a resoulution requesting the Governor to show mercy on the four persons. Shri Narayanrao Gunjal the member of Bombay Legislative Council submitted a petition to the Governor of Bombay and requested him to save the lives of

Dhanshetti and others on some conditions. Many associations sent telegrams to the government and requested the government to save the lives of four persons who were sentenced to death.

Dr. Munje B.S. Barrister M.R. Jayakar and Dr. Tej Bahadur Sapru, Maharaja of Bikaner and the Agakhan had gone to London to attend the round table conference. They called on Mr. Benn, Secretary of state of India and requested him to commute the death sentence of the four persons. Barrister Wilson, a well known lawyer from London submitted a petition signed by many citizens to the Emperor and requested to commute the death sentence. Barrister Chagala also submitted a petitions to the Viceroy signed by a petition signed by nearly two lakhs of people requesting him to commute the death sentence! (23)

Solapur Municipal Council also passed a resolution requesting the government to commute the death sentence. (24) Many people punished by sessions Judge Mr. N.J. Wadi for setting the Court Building of fire. Twenty persons were punished on the charge of creating disturbances near Rupabhawani on 8th May. Thus, Martial law in Solapur caused great difficulties to the masses and the British government let lose unprecedented reign of terror on the city population.

Numerous attempts were made from all corners of the country to save the lives of the four Martyrs of Solapur. Tatyasaheb Kelkar the then editor of 'Kesari' sent telegrams to those who were in London attending the Round Table Conference

and requested them to appeal to the authorities in London to cancel the death sentences. He raised the issue through Shri, Narayanrao Gunjal in the Bombay legislative council. He also wrote through the columns of the 'Kesari'. But all these efforts failed. Convinced about the inevitable fate the Martyrs Kelkar decided to see them personally in Yeravade Jail. On January 12, 1931 he got permission to see them Martyrs along with Seth Walchand Hirachand, In the meeting Tatyasaheb asked the last wish of the Martyrs. Shri. Jagannath Shinde one of the Martyrs said that they all wanted to meet Gandhiji at least once before they went to the gallows. After meeting the Martyrs Tatyasaheb Kelkar sent Mr. Walchand to Bombay requesting him to arrange for <sup>e</sup>him a meeting between himself and Mr. Hoston.

Accordingly the meeting was arranged between Kelkar and Mr. Hoston. Mr. Kelkar conveyed the last wish of the Martyrs and requested Mr. Hoston to arrange a meeting between the Martyrs and Gandhiji. He also requested Mr. Hoston to hand over the dead bodies of the martyrs to their relatives. But Mr. Hoston categorically refused to grant both the requests. He told Mr. Kelkar that he could not do either of the things. Mr. Hoston further told Mr. Kelkar that if the dead bodies were handed over to the relatives, the latter would take out a huge funeral procession which might in turn, lead to ~~the~~ riots, creating problems of law and order.

4157

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Then Mr. Tatyasaheb Kelkar sent a telegram to viceroy Lord Irwin and requested him to allow the martyrs to see Gandhiji and to handover the dead bodies to their relatives. But Mr. Irwin did not respond to the telegram. All the efforts having thus failed, Mallappa Dhanshetti, Shrikisan Sarada, Jagannath Shinde and Kurban Hussain were hanged on 12th Jan. 1931.

Following is the brief in formation the martyrs of Solapur :

1) Shri. Mallappa Dhanshetti : Mallappa Dhanshetti was working as clerk in the firm of Pandharkar. He is known as the leader of the congress. Actually he saved the life of Mr. Knight, was having good personality. First he was arrested under the military law. Later he sentenced to death.

2) Shri. Jagannath Shinde : Mr. Jagannath Shinde was known as the leader of Youth, he was a good orator. He took part in the activities of the congress party. First he was arrested under the martial law and he was sentenced to death.

3) Shri. Shrikishan Sarada : He was a rich person of the Marwadi community. He was not involved in politics . He always help the congress leaders. First he was arrested under the military law and was sentenced to death.

4) Shri. A. Kurban Hussien : He was the leader of Mill Workers in Solapur. He was the secretary of Youth Front. He was very powerful orator. He was a reformer in Muslim community. He strongly advocated Hindu-Muslim unity. He was the editor of a weekly called ' Ghazanfar ' meaning lion. He was first arrested under the military law. Then he was sentenced to death. (25)



The government had correctly anticipated that the death sentence when executed would lead to riots, as a precaution, many police and soldiers were posted on the road from Bundgarden to Yerwada Jail on 11th January 1931 itself. People numbering about three thousand tried to go to Yerwada Jail in procession. They shouted slogans " Give back the dead bodies of Leaders ". But the police stopped them at Bundgarden and started a wanton Lathi-charge. Hundreds of people were wounded. The two other long processions of bare headed persons were organized by Mr. N.V. Gadgil and Shri B.M. Joshi at Poona.

The condolence meeting following the hanging of Solapur patriots was preceded by a procession of the Youth league on January 12, 1931, at Shaniwar Wada in Poona under the chairmanship of shri N.V. Gadgil.

Many leaders like Premraj Verama, R.K. Khadilkar, G.T. Joshi, T.R. Deogirikar, H.M. Joshi, R.G. Bhide, C. N. Kanikar, S.M. Joshi and Shri. V. N. Paranjape also spoke on the occasion. Doubtless the news of the hanging of the Solapur patriots was received with a widespread feeling of resentment in different parts of the country. At Borsad a big procession was organised under the leadership of Mrs. Leelawati Asar. Many ladies had joined in the silent procession.

The majority of the meetings held during the week of the hanging of Solapur patriots were held to express sympathy with the Martyrs. The view taken by " Maratha " and 'Kesari'

that the persons executed were brave, innocent patriots whose lives had been sacrificed by the government in a spirit of revenge for what happened in Solapur was shared by agitators in Maharashtra and Karnataka. Meetings in his connection were reported from 17 districts and the largest attendance occurred in Belgaum and Dharwar districts. Besides Belgaum and Dharwar the following districts also held meetings condemning the executions in Solapur, Ahmedabad, Broach, Kaira, Panch Mahal, Surat, Thana, Bombay Suburban district, East Khandesh, West Khandesh, Nasik, Pona, Satara, Bijapur, Ratnagiri and Kulaba. Complete Hartal was observed at Karachi on January 14 in protest against the savage action of the government in hanging the Solapur Riot Prisoners. All the mills continued to work during the mourning. But the management of Vishnu and Laxmi Mills decided to close in the afternoon after midday. As the men in Solapur mill became restless at about 2. p.m. The management therefore ~~was~~ closed the mill. The remaining two mills Jam mill and Narsing Girji Mill continued working upto 5 p.m. photographs of Dhanshetti and Sarda were sold on a large scale in the town.

Newspapers like ' Kesari ' criticised the monstrous action of the government by writing an editorial under the heading " Irresponsible Government and Weak Public Opinion." other newspapers like ' Maharashtra from Nagpur. " The Bombay

Chronicle " and " Navakal " also expressed their resentment through their editorials. The editor of ' Maharashtra ' Shri. G. A. Ogale was sentenced to one years' rigorous imprisonment.<sup>(26)</sup>

Solapur Municipality passed a resolution and condemned the action of the government and expressed the feelings of gratitude towards the four Martyrs. In the month of March 1931, Mr. Hotson resigned his post of Home-member. Mr. Kazi a member of the Bombay Legislative Council from Ahmedabad moved a resolution in the council congratulating Mr. Hotson on his services to the Bombay presidency. At that time Dr. Vaishampayan who was a representative of Solapur in the Council strongly opposed this resolution and told the house that he could not support this resolution because Hotson was responsible for committing atrocities on the people of Solapur during the Martial Law period.

The atrocities committed by the army in Solapur did not deter the people of Solapur from taking part in the national freedom movement as the working class in Solapur joined Quit India movement of 1942 and the strike at the ~~time~~ of naval mutiny at Bombay in 1946.

Thus, the city working class made a significant contribution to the national freedom movement.

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