



## The role of local leaders in the Freedom Movement of Jalpaiguri District, (1905–1947)

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### Abstract

This article explores the significant yet underrepresented role of local leaders in the freedom movement of Jalpaiguri district between 1905 to 1947. It traces the evolution of anti-colonial activism in the region, beginning with the response to the Partition of Bengal and the Swadeshi movement, and progressing through the Non-Cooperation, Civil Disobedience, Quit India, and Tebhaga movements. The research highlights key figures such as Srinath Hore, Khagendranath Dasgupta, Makhanlal Bhowmik, Charuchandra Sanyal, and many others, whose grassroots leadership mobilized diverse sections of society—including students, women, peasants, and local entrepreneurial classes—in collective action against British rule. The study also underscores the unique efforts of women and marginalized groups, as well as the social unity fostered by cross-community collaboration. By documenting both peaceful and revolutionary forms of resistance, this article underscores Jalpaiguri's enduring legacy in the broader context of Bengal's and India's independence struggle, filling a scholarly gap by accentuating local agency and sacrifice in national liberation movements.

**Keywords:** Jalpaiguri district, local leaders, freedom movement, swadeshi, non-cooperation, civil disobedience, quit india, tebhaga, revolutionary activities

### Introduction

“The land and people of Jalpaiguri district have a long history, which includes the history of parts of Assam, Cooch Behar, and Rangpur district. It is noteworthy that after the Second Anglo-Bhutan War of 1864–1865, the British formed the Western Duars district from the territories seized from Bhutan. However, this district survived for only four years. On 1st January 1869, the British government abolished the Western Duars district and created Jalpaiguri district by adding parts of Rangpur district.” Although Jalpaiguri district was created in 1869 during the British rule, the contribution of the people of this district in the history of India's national movement is undeniable. The period 1905-1947 was a very important period in the history of India and Bengal. Because several important national liberation movements took place during this period. Among the national liberation movements that developed at that time were Swadeshi and the Partition of Bengal, non-cooperation, civil disobedience, and the Quit India Movement. These movements had more or less the same impact in different parts of India and Bengal as well as in the Jalpaiguri district. Even various prominent freedom fighters, personalities like Chittaranjan Das, Gandhiji, Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose, Dr. Bidhan Chandra Roy came to this region at different times. However, the political and economic movements organized in Jalpaiguri district are still neglected. It may be mentioned that no concrete efforts have been made so far to highlight the political aspirations of the people of Jalpaiguri district and their participation in the nationalist movement. This article discusses various anti-British or national liberation movements that took place in the region between 1905 and 1947.

The first expression of the anti-British movement in the Jalpaiguri district occurred in 1905. That year, on July 20, the British government decided to partition Bengal. In protest against this decision, the anti-partition movement began across the entire Bengal province, and its impact was also felt in the Jalpaiguri district. The leaders of the

movement in this region included Srinath Hore, Makhanlal Bhowmik, Adyanath Mishra, Kishori Moulik, Akshay Moulik, Ramesh Chandra Chakraborty, Chunilal Pramanik, Jyotirindranath Singha, and Jogesh Chandra Ghosh <sup>[1]</sup>, among others. After the partition of Bengal in 1905, the Swadeshi movement further encouraged the early growth of national awakening, and it spread widely throughout this area. In 1905, in Dinbazar of Jalpaiguri, foreign cloth was publicly burned for the first time. The local police tried to disperse the crowd through baton charges and arrested several participants. Among those arrested were Durgadas Chakraborty, Adyanath Mishra, and Anand Biswas <sup>[2]</sup>, along with several others. When they were released two weeks later, a group of youths led by Jogesh Chandra Ghosh received them warmly. Freedom fighter Khagendranath Dasgupta remarked that “during this time, the practices of boycotting foreign goods, avoiding foreign schools, and adopting the Swadeshi mantra began <sup>[3]</sup>.” In 1906, the young men of Raikat Para in Jalpaiguri promoted the spirit of nationalism through various forms of social service, physical training, and cultural events <sup>[4]</sup>. That year, August 1 was observed as National College Day. On the same day, the boys of the Shivaji Club organized events such as football matches, races, and sword-fighting demonstrations. Club member Januruddin Ahmad showcased remarkable swordsmanship. As the program ended, everyone began chanting “Vande Mataram <sup>[5]</sup>.” Thus, the spirit of nationalism began to resonate among the common people. The movement in Jalpaiguri advanced further in 1907 with the establishment of a national school <sup>[6]</sup>, which was founded mainly to challenge British educational policies. Those who helped establish this national school included Shashikumar Niyogi, Tarini Prasad Roy, Joychandra Sanyal, and Trailokyanath Moulik, among others <sup>[7]</sup>. The school was inaugurated by Radhakumud Mukhopadhyay and Binay Sarkar. The main educational objectives of this institution were the recitation of patriotic poems, the adoption of indigenous learning, the promotion of trade, and public

service <sup>[8]</sup>. The nationalist daily *Amrita Bazar Patrika* published strong criticism of the government's attitude toward the Jalpaiguri National School <sup>[9]</sup>. While the nationalists of Jalpaiguri district made considerable efforts to promote technical education in the spirit of Swadeshi art, a Swadeshi named Jajneswar Sanyal was sent to Japan for training in textile weaving. On his return from there, he joined the textile mill established by the Jalpaiguri nationalists and weavers were also brought from Madras to work in this factory. But as nothing was completed, the mill ran into losses and was sold to Mohini Mills in Kushtia <sup>[10]</sup>. Along the Karola river, the textile industry, the country factory was also destroyed by the workers due to the outbreak of malaria. The Swadeshi Bhandar and Yuvak Bhandar that were opened at this time also failed <sup>[11]</sup>. In Jalpaiguri district also, the armed revolution continued. In 1907, seventy years old Durgacharan Sanyal shot two Sahibs, Court and Smart, at Hili station for their misbehaviour <sup>[12]</sup>. He was sentenced to three years "probation. Another armed revolutionary, Birendra Dutta Gupta, was killed on 24 January 1910 by a policeman named Shamsul Alam <sup>[13]</sup> D.I.G was shot dead inside the Calcutta High Court. He is sentenced to death. However, after the annulment of the Partition of Bengal in 1911, the activities of armed revolutionary groups began to increase in this region. The eminent lawyer Bireswar Gangopadhyay is regarded as the founder of the first revolutionary organization in Jalpaiguri district. He later enlisted workers such as Kishori Mohan Maulik, Akshay Kumar Maulik, Makhanlal Bhowmik, and Ramesh Chandra Chakraborty <sup>[14]</sup>. With time, many young men of Jalpaiguri started joining secret societies. Near Rajbari Dighi in Jalpaiguri, a group of youths established a physical training center that also served as a secret base for the Swadeshi movement. They were encouraged in their work by Madhav Sanyal, Dinanath Goswami, Annadacharan Sen, and Jogesh Ghosh, among others. The revolutionary Atul Roy also established a secret base in Jalpaiguri <sup>[15]</sup>.

From 1920-21, the Non-Cooperation Movement initially did not attract much enthusiasm among the common people of Bengal. However, when Chittaranjan Das extended his support to the movement, it sparked great excitement and widespread participation across Bengal. Chittaranjan Das, popularly known as Deshbandhu, was the central figure of the Non-Cooperation Movement in Bengal. In 1920, he visited Jalpaiguri and stayed at the residence of Jagadindra Dev Raikat <sup>[16]</sup>. With the help of Jagadindra Dev Raikat, a large public meeting was organized in front of the Raikat House in November, which drew a massive crowd. That same year, the Jalpaiguri District Congress Committee was formed, with Jagadindra Dev Raikat as the President, Makhanlal Bhowmik as the Vice President, and Jyotish Chandra Sanyal as the Secretary <sup>[17]</sup>. Under their leadership, the Non-Cooperation Movement spread widely throughout the Jalpaiguri district. Other key leaders who took part in this movement included Khagendranath Dasgupta, Charuchandra Sanyal, Jogesh Dutta, Suren Maitra, Surendranath Bhattacharya, Biresanath Bhattacharya, Surendra Das, Samannoy Dutta, Pramoda Chakraborty, Ganesh Chakraborty, Moni Bagchi, Debananda Roy, Nagen Roy, and Surendra Das, among others <sup>[18]</sup>. The main programs of the movement included boycotting foreign clothes and goods. Even armed revolutionaries joined the movement with great zeal. Despite opposition from the

police and government officials, nearly ten thousand people from Falakata participated in the anti-British movement, publicly burning foreign clothes <sup>[19]</sup>. In Alipurduar, the Non-Cooperation Movement was led by Magha Deuniya <sup>[20]</sup>. Under his leadership, the people there launched a strong protest against paying taxes and rent to the British government. Other notable leaders of the Alipurduar movement included Rasik Ganguly, Jatindranath Ganguly, Jamini Chatterjee, Chandradeep Singha, and Lata Singh Barua <sup>[21]</sup>. They became famous for popularizing traditional Indian attire in rural areas — seven-hand-long dhotis, collared Punjabi kurtas, and Gandhi caps — as symbols of Swadeshi pride. Afterward, Chittaranjan Das, as the leader of the Swaraj Party, came to Jalpaiguri for the second time and began raising funds there. Khagendranath Dasgupta, Byomkesh Majumdar, and Makhan Sanyal traveled from village to village, collecting 50,000 rupees for the Swaraj Fund, along with a large amount of jewelry. The Muslim leader Munshi Md. Sonallah donated 1,001 silver coins to the Swaraj Fund, for which Deshbandhu conferred upon him the title "Amir-ul-Mulk <sup>[22]</sup>." Then, in 1925, Mahatma Gandhi and eight others came to Jalpaiguri District <sup>[23]</sup>. Among those accompanying him were Mahadev Desai, Satish Dasgupta, Babu Rajendra Prasad, and several other leaders <sup>[24]</sup>. Gandhi held a large public meeting at the J.Y.M. field, which was attended by a huge number of men and women. He emphasized the need for students to take initiative in the freedom movement and highlighted the importance of spinning the charkha. Gandhiji also visited the "Matri Mandir School," founded by Bimala Ray, daughter of Jalpaiguri's Rajbanshi Kshatriya leader Madhusudan Ray. (This school is now known as Kadamtala Balika Vidyalaya.) He blessed the institution during his visit <sup>[25]</sup>. April 13, 1928, remains one of the most significant days for the people of Jalpaiguri because on that day, Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose and Dr. Bidhan Chandra Roy visited the district. The former Jalpaiguri newspaper "Trisosttra" provides evidence of this event <sup>[26]</sup>.

In 1930, when the Civil Disobedience Movement began under the leadership of Gandhiji, its impact was felt in Jalpaiguri as well. A large number of people came forward in support of the movement. To suppress participation, the police arrested many. On June 15, Sriram Oraon Gango was arrested from Ramsai Hat for picketing. In Pachagarh, while participating in the movement, many including Bhogi Das, Bikhani Das, Fekuram Das, Haguya Das, Satyaram Das, Asharu Das, Monua Das, and Dakuya Das were arrested. From Jagaddal Hat, 14 satyagrahis including Pandit Rajen Mishra and Puran Das were detained. In August, a massive mass movement broke out at Dhupguri Hat. For picketing, Gopeshwar Das, Bibhal Chandra Roy, Dhepai Chandra Roy, Rajani Roy, and Govinda Roy were arrested by the police. In addition, Elahi Box from Boda police station, Nagendra Roy and Mati Roy from Debiganj, Nityananda Das from Tetulia police station, Suren Roy, Tarini Basunia from Rather Hat, Jogeshwar Roy from Madarihat, Chhaiunuddin Mia from Nagrakata, Suren Das from Falakata, Magha Deuniya from Kumargram, Kharga Narayan Roy and Durgapada from Domhani, and many others were detained by the police. Jalpaiguri town was also in turmoil that year. For sedition, Biren Dutta, Charuchandra Sanyal, Sachin Dutta, Swapakash Dutta, Jatin Ray, Anil Bagchi, Bijay Hore, Ajit Chakraborty, and several others were arrested. The police also detained more than a hundred leaders,

including Khagendranath Dasgupta. In Jalpaiguri District, Makhlanal Bhowmick declared at a meeting in the Madrasa field, "Breaking the Salt Law is our birthright." Charuchandra Sanyal published a booklet titled "How Will the Household Run?" A Harijan school was opened. The Dandi March movement started and the police arrested Dr. Dhiraj Mohan Sen, Rabindranath Sikdar, Lakhan Maulik, Hira Prabha Sen, Rajani Pramanik, and others [27]. Swami Jnanananda, a member of Bengal Provinces Congress Committee (B.P.C.C.), delivered a speech at a meeting criticizing the government's repressive policies and encouraged the people of Jalpaiguri District to break the Forest Law, stating that the government's forest law was as unjust as the Salt Law [28]. In 1931, after the signing of the Gandhi-Irwin Pact, many Congress workers were released through this agreement. Among the workers from Jalpaiguri district, Charuchandra Sanyal, Khagendranath Dasgupta, and Ajit Chakraborty were released from Dum Dum Central Jail [29]. The people of Jalpaiguri welcomed them like heroes. On March 19, under the presidency of Srinath Hore, Congress members organized a meeting at the Arya Natya Samaj Hall, where all the Congress leaders present demanded the release of the remaining prisoners. After the death of Pandit Motilal Nehru, Arya Natya Samaj organized a large public meeting in Jalpaiguri town. One of the most notable features of the Civil Disobedience Movement in the Jalpaiguri district was the participation of women. During this time, the Women's Congress was led by Mahendrabala Devi, Bina Chowdhury, Suresh Bala Sarkar, Bani Bhowmik, and Shrijukta Bhaduri, among others. In Jalpaiguri, women laborers organized a protest march, and for violating the provisions of the Emergency Ordinance, Hariprabha Sengupta, Shailabala Guha Thakurta, Shailbasini Devi, and Nonibala Maulik were arrested. Nonibala was arrested along with her nine-month-old child [30]. Additionally, in 1934, two revolutionaries from Jalpaiguri district, Sachin Bose and Nirmal Chakraborty, were arrested in connection with the Chittagong Conspiracy Case and were each sentenced to six years in prison. In the Titagarh Conspiracy Case, a revolutionary named Shankar Sanyal from Jalpaiguri was arrested but later released due to lack of evidence. Another revolutionary, Rabindranath Sikdar, was detained for three weeks for firing shots at the Governor of Bengal at Lebong, and later, under the Terrorist Act, he was sentenced to one and a half years in prison. In the Anderson Shooting Case, Bhavanidas Chakraborty was arrested by the police [31].

In 1942, the Quit India Movement had begun to influence Jalpaiguri just as it did in other parts of India. On August 9, when Gandhi and other Congress leaders were arrested, the people of Jalpaiguri strongly protested against this action. Many people from different parts of the Jalpaiguri district participated in the August Movement. School and college students boycotted classes and organized processions, meetings, assemblies, road blockades, and picketing to intensify the anti-British movement. Shops remained closed, strikes and hartals were observed as part of the movement. On September 1, 1942, a district-wide strike took place in Jalpaiguri [32]. Some shopkeepers who joined the strike were arrested and later released on bail after paying a fine of one thousand rupees each. Congress leader Charuchandra Sanyal was arrested for closing his dispensary and participating in the hartal [33]. Across the district, police repression continued. Without trial, Khagendranath Dasgupta, Rabindranath Sikdar, and Shashadhar were detained. In

Jalpaiguri, the mass movement gradually became more violent and destructive. Many individuals—including Mohit Maulik, Prasmon Roy, Biren Sanyal, Paresh Sarkar, Shailen Nag, Sadhan Roy, and Sachin Lahiri—were arrested on various charges [34]. One notable aspect of the Quit India Movement in Jalpaiguri was the participation of the Marwari community. Among the Marwaris who led the anti-British movement were Babulal Sharma, Indrajmal Agarwal, Tansukh Lal Maheshwari, Shivdev Sharma, Ramdin Daga, Satyanarayan Kanoria, Naren Laga, and Sitaram Kalyani. The authorities cancelled their gun licenses, refused to issue petrol coupons, and took strict measures against these local leaders; many Marwaris were even expelled from the district [35]. In the Alipurduar subdivision of Jalpaiguri district, the movement spread rapidly. It was led by Nalini Pakrashi and his associates Sunil Sarkar, Piyush Kanti Mukhopadhyay, Subodh Kumar Mitra, and Haridas Chatterjee. In places such as Falakata, Madarihata, and Kalchini Kumargram, the movement turned violent [36]—telegraph wires were cut and poles were broken by the agitators, disrupting communication. Everywhere, the slogan "British, Quit India" was chanted. Under the leadership of Sunil Sarkar, Ramanath Thakur, Deben Das, Lalit Roy, Gopal Roy, Swarnamohan Pandit, and Poatu Das, a large procession surrounded the Kumargram police station. Many leaders were arrested by the police, and several others—such as Sunil Sarkar and Pijush Kanti Mukhopadhyay—went underground [37]. Despite the government's harsh repression, the national struggle continued to advance with determination.

The people of Jalpaiguri district were never behind in any farmers' movement. The district was one of the main centers of the Tebhaga Movement that took place in 1946, which remains a source of pride for the people of this region. The movement was led by Charu Majumdar, Biren Pal, Madav Dutta, Biren Niyogi, Dipen Roy, Manoranjan Dasgupta, Gurudas Roy, Hara Ghosh, Dulal Basu, Samar Ganguly, and others [38]. Among the women leaders were Sagari Barman, Burima (Purneshwari), Tilak Tarini Nandi, and Shikha Nandi [39]. When communal riots broke out in 1946, their impact was also felt in Jalpaiguri. On August 15, 1947, when independence came along with the partition of the country, Jalpaiguri district too experienced its effects. The police stations of Tetulia, Boda, Panchagarh, Debiganj, and Patgram under Jalpaiguri became part of Pakistan [40]. However, the people of Jalpaiguri and the national freedom fighters strongly protested against the conspiracy of this division.

### Conclusion

The national movement in Jalpaiguri district from 1905 to 1947 formed an important chapter in India's struggle for independence. Although Jalpaiguri was located far from the main political centers, it played an active role in resisting British rule. After the Partition of Bengal in 1905, the Swadeshi Movement encouraged the local people to boycott foreign goods and support indigenous industries. Later, during the Non-Cooperation, Civil Disobedience, and Quit India Movements, students, tea garden workers, lawyers, and common citizens expressed strong support. Local leaders inspired people to protest peacefully, while many young men joined revolutionary activities. The participation of cultivators and laborers added a unique and powerful dimension to the district's struggle. The involvement of

people from all sections of society strengthened national unity and contributed to the collective awakening against colonial exploitation. Thus, the national movement in Jalpaiguri was marked by sacrifice, courage, and an ever-growing national consciousness, which helped shape the identity of the people and played a meaningful role in India's final victory of independence in 1947.

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