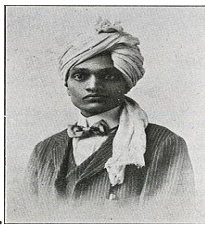


BACKGROUND TO CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE AND ROLE OF HINDUSTANI SEVA DAL IN BRITISH BOMBAY

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This paper is purely based on primary sources i.e. Archival Files of Home Department Special and throws light on the activities in British Bombay organised by Hindustani Seva Dal in protesting British policy which prepared the very background for Civil Disobedience Movement launched by Gandhiji in 1930. There are so many Political parties in India and their small wings such as Student's wing, Youth wing, Women wing, SC/ST wing etc. During Congress movement a Wing called Hindustani Seva Dal, the auxiliary Volunteer organization of the Indian National Congress was founded on 1st January, 1924 as per the Kakinada Session of the Indian National Congress, 1923. There was a Flag Satyagraha in Nagpur and many Satyagrahis were arrested and were sentenced. Many more Satyagrahis tendered apologies British Officers to avoid rigor imprisonments. But only the activists of Hubli Seva Mandal refused to do so. Then after the INC authorities came to know the need of such organization within Congress. The Dal faced much initial opposition from Congressmen, who were opposed to the idea of creating a militia like organisation in the Congress, seeing it as a threat to the idea of civilian dominance and as being inconsistent with the idea of non-violence.¹ Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru was elected as the President and Dr. N.S.Hardikar as Secretary. Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay was closely associated with the organisation, especially in the 1930s.²



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1. Photo of Dr. N.S.Hardikar of November 1915, issue of The Hindusthane Student

2. Pandit Nehru in the Uniform of Hindustani Seva Dal Volunteer

This Dal was following the orders of Indian National Congress and was training its Youths at all India level for the resistance movement against the British in India. This Dal carried out so
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many activities in whole of India. The significance of the Dal in the Civil Disobedience Movement can be gauged from the fact that in 1934, when the Movement came to an end and the colonial authorities lifted the ban on the Congress and its organisations, they continued to proscribe the Dal.³ But my paper focuses on the foundation and the activities carried out by the Dal in Bombay only between 1928-30. The original files from the Maharashtra State Archives, Mumbai have been referred for this paper.

The Branch of it was also opened in Bombay Presidency on 24th May, 1928. Its branch in Bombay had its office in Congress House.⁴

Hindustani Seva Dal

Objects:-

- 1) To train and organize the people of India for national service and disciplined sacrifice with a view to the attainment of Swaraj by peaceful and legitimate means.
- 2) To enroll and bring under uniform discipline all existing Volunteer organizations in the country and establish new ones whenever necessary.
- 3) To raise the standard of national efficiency by systematic physical culture.

Officers for 1928:-

President: Pt. Jawahrlal Nehru, Ananda Bhuwan, Allahabad.⁵

Treasurer: Mr. Wamanrao Naik, Muktagram, Begampet (N.G.S. Railway)

General Secretary: Dr. N.S. Hardikar, Hubli (Karnataka)

Under Secy.: Mr. B.G. Lokare, Hubli (Karnataka).

Activities in Bombay City:-

There was one meeting held in Congress House on May, 24 1928 which was attended by Pandit Jawahrlal Nehru, Subhash Chandra Bose, Dr. Hardikar, Shaukat Ali, Dr. Savarkar, Mrs. Sarojini Naidu and Athale from Satara. The Congress Committee sanctioned Rs. 5000/- for the expenses of the Dal for opening new centres of the Dal.⁶

The Dal had its Academy of Physical Culture at Bagalkot, Dist. Bijapur. When Pt. Nehru visited this academy, he was so impressed by it and sent a letter to the Provincial Congress Committees in the country. In his letter he wrote,

“The young boys that have been through some course training from the age of seven onwards were a fine straight backed and disciplined lot and did credit to the Seva Dal. I trust that Provincial Congress Committees will take full advantage of the services of the Seva Dal and will thus build up a trained band of disciplined volunteers in each PROVINCE.”⁷

The newspaper ‘Hindu’ published in Sindhi language wrote on 10th and 11th October, 1928 about the need of Universal Military Training. By this article it is clear that what Hindustani Seva Dal proposed to Independence by Peaceful means is seemed to be violated. The paper further states, “India’s population is thirty two crores or nearly 1/5 of the total population of the world—but people receive no military training. Some training is better than no training at all.”⁸

Dr. Hardikar compared Dal with various Scout movements in India and Russia. The Scout movement was a harmful institution because it was creating cowards and slaves to serve the cause of the British Empire and not of India. He openly said that he would crush the Scout movement in a few years.⁹

T.W.Keem, Secy. of Chinese Patriotic League sent a secret letter from Canton to Hindustani Seva Dal which was recovered by CID dated 11th January, 1929. Mr. Keem proposed that China, India and Japan must come together for Asian leadership to retard the Occidental Imperialism in the Orient.¹⁰

The Bombay PCC at a meeting held on the 16th November, 1929 resolved that immediate steps should be taken to organize “a strong and efficient volunteer corps for the city of Bombay and equip it with proper military training.”

Dr. N.S.Hardikar organized a Press conference in Bombay on 11th January, 1930. It is proposed to open a half-day training camp from 23rd February for two weeks (6 pm to 8 a.m.) for Bombay Suburban District under personal supervision of Dr.Hardikar. In response to this appeal about 50 Congressmen gathered at the Congress House on February 1st, 1930. Prof. D.R. Gharpure was elected to the chair. After discussions, Juhu was selected as the training camp from February 23rd to March 10th to train volunteers in riding, swimming, cycling and military drill.¹¹

Dr.Hardikar addressed the meeting on 11th February,1929 with 60 Congressmen in Jinh Hall. He emphasized on organizing a training camp, ‘Bombay Volunteers’ under the direct orders of Indian National Congress. He advised them to buy their Khaddar uniform from the Dadar Khadi Bhandar for Rs.6 only.¹²

Hindustani Seva Dal Camp Bombay, on February 18 gave out a pledge to its volunteer in reference to Civil Disobedience Movement read as follows.

PLEDGE of Bombay Hindustani Seva Dal volunteers

1. I desire to enlist in the non-violent Army of the Dal and pledge myself to the following:-
2. I am in complete agreement with the following creed of the Indian National Congress. Viz. “The attainment of complete independence by the people of India by all legitimate and peaceful means.”
3. As long as I remain a member of the non-violent Army I shall maintain non-violence in words and in my actions.
4. I shall endeavour to promote to the best of my ability, unity and fraternity amongst all castes and communities of India.
5. I shall endeavour to the best of my ability to use Swadeshi goods.
6. I shall wear hand-spun and hand-woven cloth alone to exclusion of all other cloth.
7. I am ready to go to jail in occasion arises, for the Independence of the nation or to suffer assault or even to lay down my life.

8. I shall not demand, in case I am sent to jail, either from INC or from the HSD, any maintenance for my family.

9. I shall implicitly obey the orders of my superiors.¹³

Hindustani Seva Dal Training Camp, Bombay

Dr. N.S.Hardikar arrived in Bombay from Poona on March 9th, 1930. He was received at the V.T. by Y.J.Meherali and about 60 volunteers. Dr. Hardikar opened the camp at Lakhamsi Nappoo Hall on the evening of March 9th when 75 volunteers were present. They were examined for physical fitness after which uniforms were distributed. The working hours of the camp have been fixed from 7 p.m. to 7:30 a.m. daily.¹⁴

About 150 volunteers assembled at the Congress House on March 9, 1930. They were drilled for an hour by Y.J.Meher Ali and went in procession to Madan House (Head Quarters of the Youth League) by giving loud slogans.

On March 12th at 6:15 p.m., about 200 volunteers performed at 45 minutes drilling at Congress House and then started a procession along with Y.J.Meher Ali at Charni Road, Lamington Road, Sandhurst Road, Back to Congress House. They were present at the ceremony of hoisting the national flag by K.F.Nariman. They also took part in picketing shops on their way on 12th March, 1930.

The Bombay City Special Branch of Police reported in its Weekly letter to Commissioner of Police, Bombay, "The Youth League of the Hindustani Seva Dal is definitely hostile to Government and revolutionary in its outlook. They do not believe in Gandhi doctrine of non-violence. Whether they will get sufficient recruits to be a menace to the public peace is doubtful, but if they do their processions and drilling ought to be stopped."¹⁵

Reception to Mr.Dhan Gopal Mukerji at Mole

On the morning of Tuesday, 25th March, 1930, the militia men of Hindustani Seva Dal marched to the Alexander Docks to receive Mr.Dhan Gopal Mukerji, then eminent Indian writer, who arrived in Bombay after eight years absence in America. The presence of the national 'Militia' at the Docks created a sensation. A strong pose of sepoys was lined up together with a no. of sergeants and one sergeant asked the Volunteers to leave the wharf.

Mr. Meher Ali who was in charge, refused to obey the order and asked the 'Militia men' not to move. The police inspector in charge explained that Special Passes were necessary for admission to get wharf. Mr. Meher Ali disputed the statement and maintained that no passes were necessary. Mr. Meher Ali remarked that the Volunteers did not propose to leave and if the Police wanted they could bodily remove them. After some time the senior Police Officer told Mr. Meherali that the Volunteers may remain where they were and the Police had no objection. He also got the Sepoys move on to another place.

After some time the S.S. 'Cracovia' breathed in and the National "Militia" accorded a very enthusiastic reception to Mr. Dhan Gopal Mukerji who later drove to the Taj Mahal Hotel.¹⁶

A Case of C.K.Narayan Swami and B.A. Kamat

On March 16th 1930 about 80 Volunteers of the National Volunteer Corps assembled as usual at the Congress House at 6 p.m. From there they marched in a file to the student's Brotherhood Hall, for the public meeting regarding Nasik Satyagraha. They left the meeting in batches of 12 men. The first batch headed by C.K.Narayan Swami with a National Flag crying revolutionary slogans halted near the Imperial Cinema where C.K.Narayan Swami addressed the people advocating the use of Khaddar and for public to support Gandhi. As the crowd was causing obstruction to traffic, at the instance of police C.K.Narayan Swami halted with his batch at the junction of Tribhuwan Road with Lamington Road and began to harangue the people. But here he challenged the police and said that he was out to break all those laws which prevented free movement, and free expression of thought. He was arrested u/s 22 of the Bombay City Police Act.

After his arrest one B.A. Kamat, the owner of a washing company in Girgaun, began haranguing the people. He was told to move on and on refusal he was also arrested. Both the accused were taken to the police station where they were offered bail. They refused to furnish bail and were locked up. Next morning they were prosecuted before the Bench of Honourary Presidency Magistrates at the Girgaun Police Court. C.K.Narayan Swami repeated his statement saying that he was out to break all those illegal and oppressive laws. Both the accused were convicted and sentenced to pay a fine of Rs.2/- each, or in default to suffer one day's simple imprisonment. They refused to pay the fine.

The court was surrounded with about 150 Volunteers of the Congress who cried revolutionary slogans but the Magistrate took no notice of them. On the termination of the case Y.J.Meher Ali took them out in procession to the Congress House. On the way they shouted revolutionary slogans and burnt one English made hat.¹⁷

On 17th March, 1930, a dozen Congress Volunteers had collected a crowd of people opposite the Portuguese Church. One Shiv Sharma was haranguing them and as the vehicular and pedestrian traffic was being obstructed, the police asked the volunteers to move on. They refused to obey and Shiv Sharma was arrested.

Again at 8 p.m. the same day about 30 Volunteers collected a crowd of 400 persons at Grant Road. Harischandra Ramchandra Bajaj was haranguing the crowd. The police asked them to move as there was obstruction to traffic but they refused. Harishchandra Ramchandra Bajaj, Balkrishnarao and Amritlal Jadhavji Dave were arrested one after the other for causing obstruction.

The six arrested Volunteers refused to furnish bail and therefore they were locked up. They were charged u/s 22 B rules 12 of the Bombay City Police Act and placed for their trial this morning before the bench of Honourary Presidency Magistrate consisting of Dr. Jadhavji Hansraj and Mr. C.S.Tarkhad. As soon as the Court sat and the accused were called out, they began to sing the national song "My Country Should be Free." The accused were ordered by the Court to stop

singing which they did after some time. The accused did not put up any defense but they only submitted a statement in which they alleged that the attack of the police on the Volunteers was shameless and unprovoked and the national militia and to suppress the Congress propaganda which was being carried on by them.

A Flag and Stave Case

Before delivering the judgment the Court ordered the Police to clear the court of persons who had no cases on that day and as soon as the police officers and men began to clear the crowd; the Volunteers again shouted revolutionary slogans in the court. One Volunteer who was holding a tri coloured flag with a big bamboo stave in his hand attempted to trip the police by pushing the stave in between the police's legs...The police arrested him and in the attempt to take charge of the stave and the flag, the stave was broken. This was through other Volunteers interfering in his arrest and trying to snatch the stave from the police. General Commotion and disorder ensued and the Police had to arrest two more Volunteers. The three Volunteers arrested in the Court were (1) Narbheram Narsidas Popat (2) B.A.Kamat and (3) Harilal Varajlal Parekh.

These tactics of Congress Volunteers in collecting crowds at street corners and addressing Volunteers there on the non-cooperation movement had been very frequent and being done with a view to notoriety and to court arrest. They refused to move on when ordered and collected crowds for sympathy with the movement and caused always a hindrance to traffic there. The Police then used to arrest them.¹⁸

When arrested, these volunteers refused to furnish bails and elect to spend the night in the lock up until placed before Honorary Presidency Magistrate the following morning. In the above case tried in the Girgaon court, judgment was reserved until all the other cases had been disposed of and when it was delivered the sentence of the court was that each of the accused was fined Rs.2/-. They were then all questioned whether they would pay this fine and on their refusing, orders were issued that the accused should be detained until the rising of the Court and as this happened immediately after judgment had been pronounced it literally meant that the accused were not detained at all.¹⁹

Police Ruckus in the Court and Mr.V.A. Desai's Statement

A Volunteer Mr. V.A.Desai gave his statement before the Court, "This morning, I was anxious to meet my son who is advocate and practices usually in the Police Courts. When I went to Girgaun Police Court, I saw Mr. Yusuf J.Meher Ali and I wanted to ask him something about a note which he had not replied. He was busy for five volunteers before a bench of Dr. Jadhavji Hansraj and Mr. C.S.Tarkhad. I sat behind Sub-Inspector Tawde who was indulging in abuses of Congress leaders. Inspector Lyons was also sitting next to him."

"I protested against Tawde's remarks and he became wild and asked me to shut up. On Jadhavji asked inspector Lyon to clear the crowd and Inspector Lyon immediately caught hold of my hand and tried to drag me from the chair. I protested him and it all happened before their

Worships (Judges) Dr. Jadhavji and Mr. Tarkhad. I asked Inspector Lyon to take orders from the Court whether I should leave. Dr. Jadhavji very politely asked me if I had any case in the court. I said 'no' and he requested me to go. Immediately afterwards a Sergeant jumped over the railing behind which the public usually sit and with his stick freely attacked anyone and everyone. I was leaving the Court. The Sergeant who was standing near Inspector Lyon's ran after me and gave two blows with his stick on my back. Hardly how I gone two steps down, two constables ran after me and constable no.2476 caught me by the neck and constable no.364 gave a blow on my face. This happened when I was moved away on the staircase. After constable no.364 gave me the blow, constable no.2476 pushed me and I went tumbling to the ground floor. The police were freely using their hands and sticks on everyone and anyone in the gallery. They must have hurt about 150-200 people like this without giving any warning whatever."

"After going down I finished my business with Mr. Meher Ali who was marching his volunteers to the Congress House. On my return to the police court two sergeants who were stationed at the gate politely told me that they would not let me go in without the orders of Inspector Lyon who was in the police room which was bolted from inside and as no one would answer a knock. I had requested Mr. Nabiulla, advocate who was sitting in the pleader's room to kindly help me in placing my matter before the learned Magistrate to take a note of all what had happened and of the blows I had received. The learned Magistrate obliged me by giving me name of the Sergeant."²⁰

The case against three volunteers, Narbheram Narsidas Popat, Bhagwan Anant Kamat and Harilal Vrajlal Parekh was transferred by the Chief Presidency Magistrate, 4th court trial. The accused did not make any defense but put in a statement. They were convicted and sentenced as under.²¹

Harilal Vrajlal Parekh sentenced to pay Rs.25/- or in default 10 days simple imprisonment.

Bhagwan Anant Kamat—Rs.10/- or in default 10 days simple imprisonment.

Narbheram Narsidas Popat—Rs.5/- or 7days simple imprisonment.

Statement of B.A.Kamat before Court

B.A. Kamat in his statement said "the police Sergeant insulted 33 crores of Indians by remarking that the national flag was not worth his boots. The volunteers who had collected in the court room shouted and clapped. The Magistrate warned them to be quiet otherwise they would be turned out. The accused refused to pay up the fines and went to jail."

"We were standing outside the courtroom in the Varandah with National flag in my hand. It is our duty to guard the National Flag at our lives. As the court directed to clear the crowd, we did so and the police officer suddenly pounced on us and tried to snatch away the National Flag from my hands. The two wounded and I held the flag fast. But we were insulted, brutally assaulted, kicked and violently pushed down the stairs. We however stick to our posts in spite of the grave provocation. The flag was snatched away forcibly. It was torn and the flag post broken. We were

put under arrest. I was so violently handled, treated and fisted and my jaw was almost jammed. In fact blood came out. And my companions were similarly treated and in addition got some kicks as well.”

As the volunteers were filing complaints against police brutalities, the Commissioner of Police sent a letter to Government of Bombay in following ways.

“Our conversation about Dr. Jadhavji Hansraj, I am to say that there is another point to which Government have been giving serious attention, namely the frequency with which some of the agitators are bringing cases against the police. It seems to Government that this is being done obviously with the intention of frightening the police and deterring them from their duty. Will it not be possible to press Magistrate hearing such cases to give compensation to the accused person.”²²

Hindustani Seva Dal., Training Camp, Matunga.

The Closing Ceremony of the training camp at Matunga was performed by holding a public meeting at the Congress House on March 25th. P.Sambamurti, the President of the Hindustani Seva Dal, presided and about 2000 people including the following were present.

- 1, Jammalal Bajaj 2. C. Rajgopalachariar 3. Mohiuddin Kasuri 4) Abid Ali Jafferbhai
5. Y.J.Meher Ali 6. Ganapatishankar Desai 7. Dr. N.S.Hardikar 8. K.F.Nariman
9. Jairamdas Daulatram 10.T.Vishawanathan 11.Shankerlal Bankar 12. Ekambaram Iyer
13. Swami Anand 14.Maulavi Muhammad Esmail

Certificates of merit and ‘Swatantra Bharat Badges’ were presented by the president to the 65 campers who were present at the meeting in uniform. Out of 80 campers who had undergone training, only 40 signed the pledge of the HSD, although the volunteers were to be trained in cycling, riding, swimming and parade, they were only given instructions in elementary squad drill. The camp arrangements, being inadequate, 30 volunteers out of 110 who answered to the roll call on the opening of the camp on March 9th, left the camp in disgust. After the distribution of certificates speeches were made by Dr. Hardikar, Sambamurti, C.Rajgopalachariar. Mohiuddin Kasuri, T.Vishwanathan and Shankarlal Bankar, exhorting people to enroll themselves as civil resisters.²³

The ‘F’ and ‘G’ Ward Congress Committee meetings

On March 27th S.B.Mahadeshwar of the F Ward District Congress Committee (Parel) led a group of volunteers in the mill area and asked the mill workers to enroll as Congress volunteers.²⁴

The President, G Ward District Congress Committee has issued the following appeal:-

The G ward Congress Committee’s picketing campaign in the Non-cooperation days and various other activities afterwards in spite of the lull in the country, brought for it the admiration of many. But now once again the call has come for the sacrifice and one finds no sufficient response. It is to be said that the “G” ward lacks courage and energy at the Supreme moment of the national struggle to be free? Awake, oh, old and tried workers—organize lest our dear G ward become with

back number. Youths and students awake and enroll in large numbers in the volunteer's band. Let once again the G ward be the leader in Bombay's offer of sacrifice. Workers and brothers in common bondage rise to the occasion and let us have our rightful place in fight.²⁵

Conclusion: The Hindustani Seva Dal created the stir among the Indian youth to participate in the Volunteer Corps. It run camps of training in physique and Lathi Drill. The volunteers also harangued the people on the streets of Bombay, got their sympathy and obstructed traffic. They were arrested and refused to accept bail and went to jail instead of paying fines. They also faced the Lathi charge of Police and filed cases against Police brutalities in the Courts of Bombay

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