*Indian Freedom Struggle– Qualities & Strategies 2.5*

**Natives Beaten by Police in Salt Raid**

The below articles were written by an European eye-witness reporter

By WEBB MILLER, United Press Staff Correspondent

United Press International (UPI) Archives

Wednesday, May 21, 1930

DHARASANA, India, May 21, 1930 (UP) - Prayers said as white-clad volunteers knelt in the moonlight and an impassioned speech by the poetess-leader, Mrs. Sarojini Naidu, opened the mass attack of 2,500 independence demonstrators today on the Dharasana Salt Works.

The poetess, wearing a rough, homespun robe and soft slippers, but no stockings, exhorted her followers to the raid in which 260 of them were injured and which brought about her own arrest.

"Although Gandhi's body is in prison, his soul goes with you," she cried in an impassioned voice as she sent the volunteers to the attack.

The volunteers formed into columns, with their leaders carrying ropes and wire cutters. They advanced slowly for half a mile - a ghostly procession - toward the salt works.

The 400 police clutched their clubs and about 25 of them revealed their rifles as the volunteers approached. There were a few cheers and then the leaders who had ropes attempted to lasso the posts holding up the barbed wire, intending to uproot them. The police ran up and demanded that they disperse. The volunteers refused.

Police charged, swinging their clubs and belaboring the raiders on all sides. The volunteers made no resistance. As the police swung hastily with their sticks, the natives simply dropped in their tracks.

Less than 100 yards away I could hear the dull impact of clubs against bodies. The watching crowds gasped, or sometimes cheered as the volunteers crumpled before the police without even raising their arms to ward off the blows. With almost unbelievable meekness they submitted to the clubbing and were carried away by their comrades who had collected a score of stretchers.

As the attacks continued, stretcher bearers were overworked. Other volunteers joined, using blankets as stretchers for the injured who were falling so fast that the volunteers established a clearing station a hundred yards from the pans.

I counted 42 injured lying on the muddy ground and a few others who were unconscious and writhing in pain.

After police had driven the raiders back, leaders altered their tactics and started stretching themselves on the ground or sitting in front of the police as closely as they could press to the entanglements. They were warned repeatedly by police, who then struck the men sitting in front of them. The volunteers who were hit simply reeled over on the ground - without making a cry or an effort to defend themselves.

Police also altered their tactics and started dragging the volunteers about 100 yards away to the edge of the ditch, where I stood. Some of the volunteers were hurled bodily into the ditch, splashing mud on everyone nearby.

The men who were so treated did not make a sound but submitted without protest or resistance. Sometimes police became angered and in a few instances they kicked men who were sitting before the entanglements. The crowd of volunteers massed a short distance away and taunted the police, although their leaders implored them to remain silent.

Mrs. Naidu directed operations from a point near the front of the struggle. She commented briefly on the raid and promised to make a statement after it was over. A few minutes later a British official, accompanied by three police, approached and placed her under arrest.

As the heat increased at noon the operations slackened. About 20 doctors and nurses were working over prone men stretched in the shade of a mango tree in a nearby thicket.

Doctor Shah said he had treated about 200, mostly for minor injuries. I counted more than 200 in a nearby shack and saw more arriving.

Many of the volunteers were college students or clerks from all part of Gujerat. Many spoke English. I was the only American correspondent at Dharasana and they talked freely to me but I was refused auto transportation by native drivers because I wore foreign clothes, which have been boycotted.

Source:

Webb, Miller. “Natives beaten down by police in India salt bed raid,” 21 May 1930.<http://100years.upi.com/sta_1930-05-21.html>

**Gandhi’s Salt March Campaign: Contemporary Dispatches**

Webb MILLER (Special UP Correspondent for India)

*The New York World-Telegram*, Dharasana Camp, Surat District, Bombay Presidency

May 22, 1930

Amazing scenes were witnessed yesterday when more than 2,500 Gandhi ‘volunteers’ advanced against the salt pans here in defiance of police regulations. The official government version of the raid, issued today, stated that ‘from Congress sources it is estimated 170 sustained injuries, but only three or four were seriously hurt.’

About noon yesterday I visited the temporary hospital in the Congress camp and counted more than 200 injured lying in rows on the ground. I verified by personal observation that they were suffering injuries. Today even the British owned newspapers give the total number at 320 …

The scene at Dharasana during the raid was astonishing and baffling to the Western mind accustomed to see violence met by violence, to expect a blow to be returned and a fight result. During the morning I saw and heard hundreds of blows inflicted by the police, but saw not a single blow returned by the volunteers. So far as I could observe the volunteers implicitly obeyed Gandhi’s creed of non-violence. In no case did I see a volunteer even raise an arm to deflect the blows from lathis. There were no outcries from the beaten Swarajists, only groans after they had submitted to their beating.

Obviously it was the purpose of the volunteers to force the police to beat them. The police were placed in a difficult position by the refusal to disperse and the action of volunteers in continually pressing closer to the salt pans.

Many times I saw the police vainly threaten the advancing volunteers with upraised lathis. Upon their determined refusal to recede the lathis would fall upon the unresisting body, the volunteer would fall back bleeding or bruised and be carried away on a stretcher. Waiting volunteers, on the outskirts of the pans, often rushed and congratulated the beaten volunteer as he was carried off the field. It was apparent that most of the injured gloried in their injuries. One leader was heard to say, ‘These men have done a great work for India today. They are martyrs to the cause.’

Much of the time the stolid native Surat police seemed reluctant to strike. It was noticeable that when the officers were occupied on other parts of the line the police slackened, only to resume threatening and beating when the officers appeared again. I saw many instances of the volunteers pleading with the police to join them.

At other times the police became angered, whereupon the beating would be done earnestly. During several of these incidents I saw the native police deliberately kick lying or sitting volunteers who refused to disperse. And I saw several instances where the police viciously jabbed sitting volunteers in the abdomen with the butt end of their lathi….

Once I saw a native policeman in anger strike a half-submerged volunteer who had already been struck down into a ditch and was clinging to the edge of the bank. This incident caused great excitement among the volunteers who witnessed it.

My reaction to the scenes was of revulsion akin to the emotion one feels when seeing a dumb animal beaten: partly anger, partly humiliation. It was to the description of these reactions that the Bombay censorship authorities objected among other things.

In fairness to the authorities it must be emphasized that the Congress volunteers were breaking laws or attempting to break them, and that they repeatedly refused to disperse and attempted to pull down the entanglements with ropes, and that the volunteers seemed to glory in their injuries.

In eighteen years of reporting in twenty-two countries, during which I have witnessed innumerable civil disturbances, riots, street fights and rebellions, I have never witnessed such harrowing scenes as at Dharasana. The Western mind can grasp violence returned by violence, can understand a fight, but is, I found, perplexed and baffled by the sight of men advancing coldly and deliberately and submitting to beating without attempting defense. Sometimes the scenes were so painful that I had to turn away momentarily.

One surprising feature was the discipline of the volunteers. It seemed they were thoroughly imbued with Gandhi’s nonviolence creed, and the leaders constantly stood in front of the ranks imploring them to remember that Gandhi’s soul was with them.

*EDITOR’S NOTE: It is difficult to imagine now the brutality of the British efforts to repress Gandhi’s nonviolence campaigns, in India or South Africa. The 1930 press release given above must surely put us in mind of the recent police suppression of various Occupy sites worldwide. A number of sources quote news dispatches about the Salt March. This extract is representative and is taken from Richard B. Gregg, The Power of Non-violence, Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1934, pp. 34-37.*

*BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE: Webb MILLER (1891-1940) was one of the most renowned war correspondents of his day. In his Justice Ignited (Rowman & Littlefield, 2006), Brian Martin credits Miller’s reports of the Salt March as being instrumental in changing public opinion in favor of Gandhi. Miller was also the original for the journalist in Richard Attenborough’s film Gandhi (1982). The extract here is quoted verbatim in the movie.*

Source:

Miller, Webb. “Gandhi’s Salt March Campaign: Contemporary Dispatches (1/2) <http://www.satyagrahafoundation.org/gandhis-salt-march-campaign-contemporary-dispatches-12/> Posted on 30 May 2012 under Gandhi, History.