



**CHARUCHANDRA BHANDARI:
A GANDHIAN FREEDOM FIGHTER AND SOCIAL REFORMER**

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RESEARCH ARTICLE



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Abstract

Charuchandra Bhandari (19 October 1896 – 24 June 1985) was a prominent Indian freedom fighter, lawyer, politician, and follower of Gandhian philosophy. He played a significant role in the Indian independence movement, especially in South Bengal and the Sundarbans, and later worked to promote social reform movements like *Sarvodaya* and *Bhoodan* in West Bengal. In this research paper life and activities of Charu Chandra Bhandari has been analysed with the help of the primary and secondary sources.

Keywords: *Salt Satyagraha, Khadi, Bhoodan, Sarvodaya*

Charuchandra Bhandari (19 October 1896 – 24 June 1985) was a prominent Indian independence activist, lawyer, Gandhian, and a key leader of the Kisan Mazdoor Praja Party (KMPP) in West Bengal. He was highly involved in the Sarvodaya movement and was a close associate of Acharya Vinoba Bhave and took an active part in the Bhoodan Movement.¹ He was born on 19 October 1896 in Shyambasur Chak village in an affluent Bengali Mahishya family to Jogendranath Bhandari and Sailabala Debi under Kulpi police station in Diamond Harbour subdivision of South 24 Parganas, British India (present day West Bengal, India). His schooling was from Hatuganj high school and subsequently he completed his I.A from Ashutosh College and B.A from Ripon College, Calcutta. Thereafter, he completed his M.A in Economics and also, LLB from the University of Calcutta.² He was a lawyer by profession.

Charu Chandra Bhandari played an active and committed role in the Non-Cooperation Movement (1920–1922) under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi, especially in Bengal. He joined the Indian National Congress and worked to popularise Gandhi's call for non-violent resistance against British rule. Bhandari actively supported the boycott of British goods, institutions, and titles, encouraging people to withdraw cooperation from the colonial government. He promoted the use of khadi and Swadeshi products, urging people to adopt simple living and self-reliance, central ideas of the movement. Through meetings, speeches, and local organisation, he helped mobilise students, workers, and villagers, spreading nationalist awareness at the grassroots level. His participation reflected Gandhian values of truth, non-violence, discipline, and sacrifice, which later shaped his lifelong public service.

It was 1930 to expand the market for salt imported from Britain, a ban was imposed on salt production in this country. In protest, the Salt Satyagraha movement began, and its waves swept across India. The Salt Satyagraha movement was not confined to Dandi in Gujarat alone. Responding to Gandhiji's call, countless people established strongholds of the Salt Satyagraha movement in the vast region of South 24 Parganas. Baruipur, Harinavi, Karanjali, Nila, and Diamond Harbour were some of these places. These centers were led by influential revolutionaries of the time. For example, Bhavani Mishra and Prabhat De were in charge of the Baruipur center, Ashutosh Dalui managed the Nila region, and Narendranath Bhattacharya, who later became the pioneer of the communist movement, Manabendra Nath Roy, was in charge of Harinavi. There are hundreds of such names, which are now nothing more than a forgotten chapter in Bengali history. Charuchandra Bhandari was in charge of Diamond Harbour. Charuchandra Bhandari led the movement in South Bengal and the Sundarbans under the instructions of Mahatma Gandhi.³

When the Salt Satyagraha movement was at its peak, Charuchandra Bhandari, responding to Mahatma Gandhi's call, left his legal practice and joined the movement. As a result, he was imprisoned. The story of the cruel atrocities committed by the British government can be found in Gagan Chandra Jana's article, 'Khadibrati Charuchandra'. He wrote, 'For the offense of not saluting

the then (1933) British government, Gurudev Charuchandra Bhandari was sent to Hijli as a third-class prisoner. There, he had to endure rigorous imprisonment (RI). Like us, he too had to wear shackles on his feet and waist. Furthermore, a harsh punishment was imposed on him: he was made to wear a standing hand-cuff. What an unbearable punishment! As soon as he mentioned needing to urinate, he would be whipped mercilessly with a stingray whip.’

However, his prison sentence ended that same year. He returned to his hometown. After that, it was no longer about the Salt Satyagraha, but about constructive work towards self-reliance in cloth production. Khadi production began. Following the ideals of rural reconstruction, he established ‘Khadi Mandir’ in Diamond Harbour for the development of the region. Clothes by spinning wheels were manufactured here and were distributed in 24 Parganas and neighbouring districts for sale.⁴ He was no longer alone; his well-wisher Bishwaranjan Sen came forward with a resolve to liberate the country. He opened various branch centers in villages to create employment opportunities. The Gauripur center was particularly important in this regard. In 1934, Gandhiji’s call came again. Under his instructions, the scope of ‘Khadi Mandir’s work was expanded. Other branch centers were established in five Harijan villages: Hatuganj, Madhusudanpur, Rajnagar, Dighir Par, and Jadabpur. Rural reconstruction was no longer limited; it spread like wildfire. Nirapad Mandal, Bhupal Chandra Kamar, Birendranath Singh, and Nilkamal Mandal came forward to help in this work.⁵

Then came 1936. There was terrible hardship throughout the Sundarbans. People’s suffering knew no bounds. The Madhusudanpur branch of the ‘Khadi Mandir’ came forward. In those days, yarn was spun using hand fans, spinning wheels, and small box-type spinning machines. Thus, employment was provided to some people through these spinning wheels. At that time, with the financial assistance of various individuals and organizations, spinning work and relief distribution for the distressed were carried out in these areas. Kanu Gandhi, Sadhan Chandra Mitra, Amritlal Chattopadhyay, and the Marwari Relief Society played a leading role in this matter.

Charu Chandra Bhandari played a significant and courageous role in the Quit India Movement of 1942, which marked a decisive phase of India’s freedom struggle under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi. Bhandari responded wholeheartedly to Gandhi’s call of “Do or Die”, actively participating in the movement in Bengal, especially at the grassroots level. He helped organise public meetings, protests, and nationalist activities, motivating people to openly challenge British authority. Despite widespread repression, he remained committed to non-violent resistance, following Gandhian principles even in moments of extreme tension. Like many leaders of the movement, he faced British surveillance, restrictions, and hardship, showing personal courage and sacrifice. His leadership inspired ordinary people—students, workers, and villagers—to join the struggle for complete independence (Purna Swaraj). In 1942, during the Quit India Movement, Charuchandra was arrested again. Along with him, Rajendranath Mandal, Haripada Jana, and Surendranath Singh, who were arrested from the Madhusudanpur center, were imprisoned.

As a disciple of Vinoba Bhave, he was a staunch promoter of the Bhoodan (land gift) movement in West Bengal and was associated with the Abhay Ashram. Charuchandra was closely associated with the organizational and service work of Mahatma Gandhi’s movement. He was also associated with the Abhay Ashram, which was inspired by Gandhian ideals and was founded in Comilla, Bengal (present-day Bangladesh).⁶ Charuchandra Bhandari was a notable disciple of Acharya Vinoba Bhave and was one of the main promoters of his Sarvodaya movement in West Bengal. According to him, co-operation is the basic principle of the village donation and land donation movement (Bhoodan movement). Charuchandra Bhandari tried his best to make the principles of Vinoba Bhave a reality. He helped in organising meetings, persuading landowners, and mobilising rural support, acting as a regional Gandhian worker aligned with Vinoba’s mission. He along with many others took a life vow at the Sarvodaya conference held in Gaya. He founded the West Bengal Bhudajajna Mandal at Diamond Harbour.⁷

Charu Chandra Bhandari was an important freedom fighter and Gandhian leader of Bengal who also played a significant role as a Member of the Bengal Legislative Assembly during the last phase of British rule in India. He was elected to the Bengal Legislative Assembly in the 1940s, representing the interests of rural people, peasants, and workers. As an MLA, Bhandari consistently raised his voice against British colonial policies and supported nationalist causes inspired by Mahatma Gandhi. Inside the Assembly, he worked for: Agrarian reforms and protection of peasants, Improvement of food supply and civil distribution systems, Welfare of rural and backward communities, Promotion of Khadi and Swadeshi industries. On 20 June 1947, during a crucial Assembly session, Charu Chandra Bhandari strongly supported the proposal for the creation of West Bengal as a separate province, at a time when the future of Bengal was being decided. His stand reflected his concern for political stability and the welfare of the people of Bengal.⁸ Even while being a legislator, Bhandari remained deeply committed to Gandhian principles, maintaining simplicity, honesty, and dedication to public service. His role in the Bengal Legislative Assembly showed how freedom fighters combined legislative action with mass movements to achieve national and social goals.

After India attained independence in 1947, West Bengal faced serious problems of food shortage, famine-like conditions, and refugee influx due to Partition. In this critical situation, Charu Chandra Bhandari was appointed the first Minister of Food and Civil Supplies of West Bengal in the cabinet of Dr. Prafulla Chandra Ghosh, the then Prime Minister of West Bengal (the title of Chief Minister had not yet been adopted). As Food Minister, Charu Chandra Bhandari worked sincerely to: Improve the food supply system in the state, prevent hoarding and black-marketing of essential commodities, Ensure fair distribution of food grains among the poor, Strengthen the Public Distribution System (PDS), Protect the interests of peasants and consumers. Being a Gandhian leader, he believed in simplicity, honesty, and social justice. His policies reflected concern for the common people, especially the poor, workers, and refugees who were suffering most during the post-Partition crisis.⁹

Later, he left the Congress party and joined the Krishak Mazdoor Praja Party. He even contested and won elections on behalf of this party in the first general election of independent India in 1951-52, from the Diamond Harbour constituency as a candidate of the KMPP. He was considered a key leader of the KMPP in the West Bengal Assembly, contributing to a strong opposition against the ruling Congress party. Following the 1952 elections, the KMPP merged with other parties, but Bhandari remained a significant figure in West Bengal politics, particularly for his work in social service and rural development. Gradually, inspired by the ideals of Acharya Vinoba Bhave, he left all political parties and his membership in the Legislative Assembly and dedicated himself to the Bhoodan movement. Until the last day of his life, he served as the editor of the 'Sarvodaya' magazine.¹⁰

Charu Chandra Bhandari is remembered not only as a freedom fighter and political leader, but also as a writer and thinker closely associated with Gandhian ideology. He wrote articles, essays, and pamphlets focusing on Gandhian philosophy, especially non-violence, truth, simplicity, and moral politics. His writings often dealt with rural reconstruction, cooperative movements, food policy, and social justice, reflecting his practical experience in public life. As a Gandhian, his work emphasized self-reliance (Swadeshi), village-based economy, and ethical governance. Many of his writings appeared in journals, periodicals, and movement-related publications, rather than as widely commercial books. They helped spread Gandhian ideas in Bengal among workers, peasants, and political activists. His work bridged theory and practice, linking moral philosophy with administration and public policy. Today, his writings are valuable for understanding early post-independence socio-economic thought in West Bengal. He wrote many books notable among those are *Bhūdānājajña ki ō kēna* (ভূদানযজ্ঞ কি ও কেন) – (*What and Why of the Land Donation Movement*) (1955), *Āmādera jātiya śikṣā* (আমাদের জাতীয় শিক্ষা) – (*Our National Education*) (1962), *Kōra-āna sāra* (কোর-আন সার) – (*Essence of the Qur'an*), *Āsāmēra aśānti prasaṅgē* (আসামের অশান্তি প্রসঙ্গে) – (*On the Assam Disturbances*) (1961), *Thoughts on Assam Disturbances – (English version / analysis of the Assam unrest)* (1961).

After the death of the Gandhian leader and freedom fighter Charuchandra Bhandari (who passed away on 24 June 1985), a Memorial Committee was formed in Diamond Harbour (in South 24 Parganas, West Bengal) to preserve and honour his memory. The Charuchandra Bhandari Memorial Committee works to remember and honour his contributions as a freedom fighter, social reformer, and the first Food Minister of West Bengal after independence. One of the Committee's main aims has been to protect and renovate places associated with his life, such as the Khadi Mandir he established in Diamond Harbour, which has faced neglect and is in need of restoration. Local voices associated with the Committee have raised the demand for repairing this heritage site. In honour of Charuchandra Bhandari, the municipality in Diamond Harbour renamed a local road "Charuchandra Bhandari Sarani". A bust statue of him has also been installed at a major intersection to keep his memory alive in public space.¹¹ Though not widely covered in mainstream media, local groups around Diamond Harbour continue to invoke the Committee's name when calling for conservation of his legacy and remembrance of his contributions to society and politics.

Charu Chandra Bhandari's life reflects the journey of many Indian leaders who embraced Gandhian ideals and worked tirelessly for the freedom of the nation and the upliftment of society. As a lawyer, activist, reformer, and politician, his contributions are an important chapter in the history of Bengal's participation in India's struggle for independence and social transformation.

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