

Kamal Singh Dau - the Martyr

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History is silent about the sacrifice made by the two freedom fighters of Western Orissa namely Balabhadra Singh Dau and Kamal Singh Dau. They were born in Lakhanpur, a tiny fort on the foot-hills of the Barapahar during the bloody struggle to make India free from the British colonial rule.

Historically speaking, Surendra Sai was one of the most famous rebel leaders of India during British regime. One of his close confident Kamal Singh Dau was the son of Balabhadra Singh, the Zamindar of Lakhanpur in Bargarh District. He organized and led the Gond and Binjhal clans to lodge Guerrilla/Gorilla warfare with the British. His father Balabhadra Singh was a die-hard opponent of the British colonial rule. He was the most prominent among the rebels who protested against the suppression of the tribal people and the anti-peasant policies during the British Raj. He joined Surendra Sai in his struggle against the British when Sai was denied the throne of Sambalpur in the year 1827. Thus, the seeds of rebellion germinated and a popular uprising sprouted against foreign rule. Kamal Singh Dau further precipitated this. He organised the tribal people under the active guidance of his father and Surendra Sai. He formed a dreadful and formidable gorilla force, positioned them at strategic points at Debrigarh and Barapahar in the terrains of Barapahar and Gandmaru hill near Alekhpur village. He armed them with traditional arms and armaments and fought many battles

against the British. Although some portions of these *ghats* have been demolished, the major parts remain unscratched.

The Goutias of forty-two Praganas coming under Lakhanpur Zamindari were also the bitter opponents of British rule. They were occasionally providing financial assistance as well as logistic support to Balabhadra Singh and his soldiers. It was during that time the Britishers dethroned Mohan Kumari and Narayana Singh of Barpali Zamindari clan was made the Raja of Sambalpur ignoring the claim of Surendra Sai. Thus, the British rulers indirectly controlled Sambalpur and partially succeeded in suppressing the uprising against them. Resultantly, Surendra Sai organized the Zamindars of Bodasambar, Ghens, Lakhanpur, Sonapur, Bamanda and Rairakhol against the British and sphereheaded the armed rebellion.

The revolt, which Surendra Sai and Kamal Singh started in the year 1827 with the help of Gond and Binjhal clans, became more focused, sharp, and violent. With Kamal Singh, joining the rebellion Balabhadra Singh had his first encounter with the British on 8 January 1831. Subedar Gurudayal Tiwari and Jamadar Gangadhar Mishra of Ramgarh battalion led the British force. Under Jamadar Wilso more than a hundred fighters attacked the British camp, burnt it to ashes, and returned to Debrigarh. Subsequently in 1837, Balabhadra Singh became a victim of treachery and his hideout was disclosed to the king of

Sambalpur by Pahadu Gond a hench-man of the Rampur Zamindar and was attacked. He fell to the combined force of Narayan Singh and the Zamindars of Rampur and Barpali and was killed in Debrigarh while fighting. However, Surendra Sai though severely wounded, escaped. The three sons of the slain king, Kamal Singh, Khageswar Singh and Neelambar Singh swore in the name of their father for revenge and joined the Ghens Zamindar Madho Singh and his sons Hati Singh and Kunjal Singh.

The combined force of Kamal Singh and Kunjal Singh attacked the British in 1864. Kunjal Singh was captured and thereafter Kamal Singh alone continued the struggle and repeatedly attacked the British camps. The Gond leaders Bandyai Rai and Mahapatra Rai then assisted him. It is believed that the British Commissioner V. S. Kokborn requisitioned an army contingent from the Madras presidency to crush the rebellion and capture Kamal Singh. Some fighters of Madho Singh and Kamal Singh were stationed at Singhora Ghat to stop the entry of the British force to Sambalpur. The British army captured Singhora Ghat in 1858 and subsequently took control of the Zamindari of Lakhanpur, Kharsal, Kolabira and Loisingha. Another rebel leader Madhu Gountia was captured and convicted for attacking the British and killing a British doctor at Jujumura of Rairakhol. Chhabila Sai, the fifth brother of Surendra Sai and many other rebel leaders were killed.

The British administration merged Sambalpur with Madhya Pradesh ignoring huge protest by the common people. The violent protest was ruthlessly suppressed and the people were subject to barbarous cruelty. Surendra Sai's ancestral village Khinda was burnt and people were killed indiscriminately. The rebels could not organize themselves, starved, and got demoralized. This forced Dhruba and Balabhadra

Sai, the two brothers of Surendra Sai and Khageswar Singh Dau to surrender. Kamal Singh was cornered, dejected and tired. A treacherous man of Bardol village while resting under a tree killed him. The Britishers were earlier declared a reward of rupees two thousand for his head. The place where he was killed is known as Mudkati in memory of this incident. It is written in some journals that the Britishers hanged his head-less body on a tree at Lakhanpur to create a sense of terror among the people. However, the famous historian Dr Naveen Kumar Sahu had a different version regarding the death of Kamal Singh. In his book published by the Department of Culture, Government of Orissa, it is mentioned that the capture of Kamal Singh was the handiwork of a treacherous king of Sarangarh for the reward money. Dr Sahu wrote that after his capture, Kamal Singh was sent to Asurgarh prison where he breathed his last like Surendra Sai.

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