



Rani Suryamani Patamahadei : A Revolutionary Queen in Puri Gajapati Dynasty

Prof. Jagannath Mohanty

Having read my article entitled "Rani Suryamani Patamahadei - an Extraordinary Lady in Puri Temple Administration" published in the Orissa Review (Rathayatra Issue), 2005, Revd Lawrence M. Ober, S.J.2926, Carroll Avenue Cleveland, Ohio, 44113, USA on 17 March 2007, wrote to me for getting some information relating to the details of the Rani. But inspite of my contacting repeatedly some knowledgeable persons on this subject both over phone and in writing throughout the year I could not collect adequate data, I however, responded to him with some information on 03.12.2007.

In order to convince me about his sincerity of purpose he introduced to me and sent a genealogical chart with details that he was able to collect starting from the king Ramachandra Deva-II (1722-1736) ending with the king Mukund Deva (1877-1926). He is a foreign researcher in History of India and read with keen interest about the kings and queens of Puri. I, for meeting his queries, went through relevant literature. I feel that among all the Gajapati kings and queens of Puri, Rani Suryamani Patamahadei stands unrivalled and outstanding in managing the Puri Temple administration and handling the affairs of the state under an alien rule with their possessive attitude. Her training and education for ascending a royal throne was excellent. She

was very efficient in archery, horse-riding, handling swords and acquired other useful skills.

She married Raja Birakishore Deva of Puri Gajapati dynasty who expired in 1859. They had an adopted son of four years only. He was the first child of Zamindar of Bada Khemundi. By a Will Rani Suryamani was made the guardian of all properties and was head of the temple administration. She also obtained a certificate from the Civil Court appointing her the guardian of the minor and his estates under the Act XI of 1858. At that time the condition of temple management was unsatisfactory. There was indiscipline in the temple at first. However, she managed to control the temple administration soon. The son attended adulthood and became Raja Dibyasingh Deva. The Raja was found indifferent, wayward and misguided, as a result of which temple administration was disturbed and the Raja chargesheeted and then convicted of killing a Sadhu. On this ground he was deposed and deported to one of the Andaman Islands.

By deposition of the Raja Dibyasingh Deva, a very anomalous situation arose. As under Act X of 1840 the superintendence of the temple remained with the Raja, but he was then deported. The British government wanted to extract huge funds from the Raja as Superintendent of the temple. Again, Government of India wanted to



pass an Act for vesting management of the temple with a manager appointed by Government. There was strong protest from the public and from Rani Suryamani on the issue. Mr. Madhusudan Das, a great Oriya Advocate was requested by the Rani herself to institute a suit protesting against the Government action. The arguments of Mr. Das was so strong that government proposed a compromise formula. Rani was in charge of the Temple administration. She was also authorized to appoint a manager with full power to control the Sevayats. Rani could dismiss any manager, if his performance would be unsatisfactory. She then had to appoint another as soon as possible.

At this critical juncture the startling qualities of Rani Suryamani enabled her to fight for the right and also in the interest of the Oriya people and Puri temple. Subsequently she was at the helm of the temple and state affairs for long 33 years from 1860 to 1897, excepting a disturbing period from 1875 to 1878 ruled by Raja Dibyasingh Deva. During this long period she could bring peace, order and prosperity to the people and Temple. Eulogising the important role played by Rani Suryamani an eminent historian Prabhat Mukherjee commented -

"Rani Suryamani was undoubtedly a women of keen intelligence and strong personality. Though a Purdah lady, she revived the prestige of the Puri Raj family, x x x She became widow at an early age x x x x she was expected to live sixty years in recluse. But destiny ordained otherwise. She became the custodian of the Jagannath Temple and of the Puri Raj estates from 1860 to 1897 except for the brief period 1875 to 1878 when Dibyasingh Deva took charge".

The Rani made a great success with the stewardship of advocate Mr. Madhusudan Das. Rani Suryamani improved the administration of the temple and there was no complaint from any side. Besides her education and training, she learnt

from experience. Due to the strong efforts of Madhu Babu, the government's infringement of the Temple superintendent power was checked and government's malafide intention to reduce the autonomy of the Rani by setting a committee to supervise the Temple administration was thwarted. Although a Christian, Madhu Babu fought tooth and nail and with British Government foiled the government's conspiracy and safeguarded the prestige and autonomous status of Sri Mandir and of Rani Suryamani. After Raja Mukund Deva came of age, she relinquished her responsibility as the ruler of estates and superintendent of the temple. Her place in the history of Puri Gajapati Dynasty is unrivalled and she deserves to be remembered for ever. This memorable lady was born in the Sonepur (Suvarnapur) royal family in 1818 and breathed her last on November 24, 1926. Her marriage was held in 1830 with Raja Birakishore Deva of Puri. She actually lived a very pious and useful long life.

References :

Mishra, K.C., *The Cult of Jagannath*, Orissa Sahitya Academy, Bhubaneswar.

Mukherjee, Prabhat, *History of Jagannath Temple in the 19th Century*, 1977, Calcutta.

Mohanty, Jagannath, "Rani Suryamani Patamahadei, An Extraordinary lady in Puri Temple Administration" *Orissa Review (Rath Yatra Issue)*, 2005. Government of Orissa, Bhubaneswar.

Pattnaik, Surasingh, "Parama Biplabini Rani Suryamani Patamahadei O Satabdira Surya Madhusudan Das" *Anupam Bharat*, November, 2007, Bhubaneswar.

Tripathy, Mahimohan, *A Brief Look at Sri Jagannath Temple*, SGN Publications, Sri Jagannath Temple, Puri, 1997.

Prof. Jagannath Mohanty lives at Plot No.2935, Gouri Nagar, Bhubaneswar-2.