



Salt Satyagraha in Orissa

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In ancient times several Independent regional kingdoms, Viz, Kalinga, Utkala, Odra, Kosala, Tosali and Kangoda flourished in the region now known as Orissa. The word Orissa (Promenade as Odisa) is derived from the word Odra or Odra Desa. In the 12th century A.D., the kingdoms of Kalinga, Utkala, Odra and Kosala were politically united to present Orissa. Considerable cultural unity had prevailed over the area extending from the river Ganges in the north to the river Godavari in the South and from the Bay of Bengal in the East to the Amarkantak hill in the west. The political union of the Oriya-speaking people facilitated a long period of the unprecedented cultural unity. Modern Orissa extends from 17°27' N to 22° 34' N and from 81° 29' E to 87°29' E longitude on the eastern coast of India . It is bounded by West Bengal on the North-East, Bihar on the North, Madhya Pradesh on the West, Andhra Pradesh on the South and Bay of Bengal in the East. The area of the Orissa State is 155, 842 square kilometers.

Freedom Struggle in Orissa began as far back as the 3rd Century BC, when the Mauryan ruler Asoka invaded Kalinga in 261 BC. The Kalingan army faced the invader with grim determination and laid down their lives in thousands to save the freedom of their motherland. Since then Orissa has been subjected

to many invasions and the freedom struggle continued sporadically in different periods.

Orissa, as it is today, does not include all the Oriya speaking areas within its boundary. Portions of it remain in Bengal, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh and Andhra Pradesh. There was no political organizations in Orissa prior to the year 1882 A.D. A meeting of the citizens of Cuttack was held in the premises of the Cuttack Printing Company on 30th June 1882. It was attended by people of different professions, prominent among them were Beharilal Pandit, Hariballabh Bose, Madhusudan Das, Haji Abdul Rahaman Musa etc. A resolution was moved in the meeting thanking the Governor General for the Local self Govt. Resolution. The second meeting also arranged in the same premise on 16th August, 1882 under the presidentship of Chaudhuri Kasinath Das. Mr. Madhusudan Das proposed establishment of a permanent political situation for Orissa under the name of 'Utkal Sabha' to deal with all political matters relating to Orissa. This proposal was accepted and Chaudhuri Kashinath Das was elected as the first president of Utkal Sabha, Haji Muhammed Rahaman Musa as the Vice-President and Gauri Sankar Ray as Secretary. This organization gradually became strong and progressive 'Utkal Samilini' was born of it in 1903. It devoted itself to the problem of



amalgamation of all Oriya speaking regions under one administration. The period from 1912 to 1947 forms an important chapter of modern Orissa. In 1912 Orissa Division was separated from Bengal and tagged with Bihar to form a separate province much to the disappointment of the people of Orissa. This period also witnessed two distinct movements one for the amalgamation of Oriya speaking areas scattered over two other neighbouring provinces, namely Madras and Central Provinces into one single administrative unit and another for attainment of national independence.

In 1920s a new wave of nationalism swept across the whole of India, after the emergence of Gandhi as the leader of the Indian National Congress. Under the leadership of Pandit Gopabandhu Das, the Oriya people joined the national mainstream. The Utkal Pradesh Congress Committee was formed under his leadership in 1921. He preached the message of the Non Co-operative movement in Orissa. Gandhiji's visit to Orissa in 1920 gave tremendous fillip to the Congress movement in Orissa. The Utkal Provincial Congress Committee took up the Non-Cooperation programme successfully.

The historic Civil Disobedience Movement was promulgated by Gandhiji in the historic Lahore Session of the Indian National Congress. Breaking of Salt Law was taken up as the first phase of the Civil Disobedience Movement. The Salt Satyagraha Movement was launched in Orissa under the able leadership of H.K. Mahatab, the President of Utkal Pradesh Congress Committee in 1930. In Orissa the only subsidiary industry to agriculture had been salt industry due to its vast coastline. With the advent of East India Company, the manufacture of salt was banned in India. In 1860 there had been a

revolt in the coastal districts of Orissa against imposition of salt tax. Gopabandhu Choudhury was elected as the dictator of the Civil Disobedience Movement in Orissa. The people of coastal Orissa were financially hard hit due to the operation of the Salt Law. So he thought that some steps should be taken for the redressal of their financial sufferings.

The members of Utkal Pradesh Congress Committee decided on 'Inchudi' to be the right venue of salt satyagraha.² On 6th April 1930, Gopabandhu Chaudhury and Acharya Harihar Das led the first batch of 21 volunteers from Swaraj Ashram, Cuttack to Inchudi on foot. On 9th April Gopabandhu Choudhury was arrested at Chandol. Now the batch was piloted by Acharya Harihar Das. The Satyagraha reached Balasore on 12 April. On the way to Inchudi they were showered with flowers and greeted with conch sound by women.³ On 13th April Acharya Harihar with his followers picked up some Salt earth and broke the salt law. He was arrested and Satyagrahis from other places of Orissa in five phases also broke the Salt Law at Inchudi. They were Lauha Stambha Bahini of Puri, Ganjam Bahini of Ganjam, Sambalpur Bahini of Sambalpur and Orissa Gujrati Bahini.⁴ Police lathi charged the Satyagrahis at Sundari Chhak, Jamkunda in north Balasore which became another centre of Salt Satyagraha. On 20 April 1930, villagers of Sartha broke the salt law under the leadership of Karunakar Panigrahi, Biswanath Das, Nilambar Das, Mathuri Behera and Bhagabat Sahoo. People broke Salt Law at Rasulpur Sri Jang, Bardhan Pur, Bhimpur, Tundra, Kuanrpur, Ratai, Parikhi, Kheranga, Gudi, Rajabala, Salgaon, Mandari, Eram, Chudamani, Bideipur, Boita, Brahmapur, Panchapur, Atalabad. Thus 22 places of Balasore District became the centres of Salt Satyagrah.⁵



As per the decision of the Utkal Pradesh Congress Committee Narayan Birabara Samanta took the leadership of Salt Satyagraha at Kujung. He was greatly supported by Ramadevi, Malati Devi, Sarat Ch. Das, Narayan Patra, Natu Mohanty, Maheswar Pradhan and Raghunath Satpathy. Besides Kujung many other places in the district of Cuttack also successfully conducted Salt Satyagraha.

Nilakantha Das, Jagannath Rath and Govind Das toured Satyabadi, Astarang, Chhabiskud and Marichpur to mobilize people for Salt Satyagraha. A meeting was organized at Praharajpur where Balabhadra Mohapatra, Narayan Mishra and Ramaranjan Mohanty appealed the people to manufacture salt. Regular salt campaign began on 22nd May 1930 in different places such as Astarang, Latra, Singheswari, Khandasahi, Mandakini Khudi and Olangar police arrested Purusottom Jagannath Rath, Basu Sahu, and Divyasingha Mohanty for carrying contraband Salt. Nilakantha Das was arrested on 30th May 1930 at Sakhigopal.

In the district of Ganjam both Oriya and Telegu Satyagrahis formed their own groups under the leadership of Niranjana Patnaik, Biswanath Das and Ramlingam Pantulu and Master Sanaya respectively. On 7th May, 1930, Satyagrahis broke the salt law at Ganjam. Swadeshi Salt was produced at Huma. Apart from Niranjana Patnaik, Biswanath Das, Sarala Devi, Sashi Bhusan Rath, Dibakar Patnaik and Narsingha Sahu took active part in the Salt Satyagraha of Ganjam district. Under the leadership of Radha Krushna Biswasray volunteers from Koraput district also joined the campaign.

Despite the flood of arrests and police repressions, the movement gathered more and more momentum. For the first time, ladies

participation in a movement was very large. Everyday large number of people poured into the coastal villages to join the Satyagraha showing complete disregard to police reprisal and willingly courted arrest for manufacturing salt and carrying to market for sale.⁶ One of the striking features of this movement in Orissa was the participation of women. Srimati Malati Devi, Rama Devi and Annapurna Devi came forward to mobilize women. Another feature of this movement was the participation of a large number of students. The children volunteers or "Monkey Brigade" also played a vital role in the movement.⁷ The movement was suspended after the Gandhi-Irwin Pact of 1931. At the Karachi Session of the Indian National Congress, Orissa was given the credit of being second in India in conducting Salt Satyagraha.⁸

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