

The Peasant Movements in Odisha 1936-1990

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The Krushak Sabha was established in 1936 at Bagalpur near Gobindpur, Cuttack. On 10th June, 1935 a peasant convention was organized in Cuttack under the leadership of Godavarish Mishra. It was presided over by Mohanlal Goutam. On 26th June, 1936, Dr. Pattavi Sitaramayya presided over a peasant movement in princely states, which was later known as Orissa States Peoples Conference. Sarangadhara Das was the Secretary of this Conference. Nilagiri, Jenapur (Cuttack), Dhenkanal, Talcher were the main centres of peasant movement at that time. The Communist leaders like Pranath Patnaik, Gangadhar Paikray organized a big peasants conference in Chandmani field near Khurda. In Kakatpur near Astaranga a meeting was held under the leadership of Purnananda Swain and Gatikrushna Swain. Bhagabati Panigrahi was the president of this meeting.

A meeting of farmers and peasants was organized in Shergarh, Ganjam under the communist leader Govinda Pradhan. The main demands were :

- (a) Abolition of Mustadari System
- (b) Land to the tillers.

When some Communist leaders got elected to the Assembly they played active roles to fulfill some demands of the farmers like :

- (a) Free distribution of land among agricultural labourers and poor peasants.
- (b) Abolition of landlordism without compensation.
- (c) Agrarian reforms.
- (d) Abolition of Zamindari system and all types of intermediary system.
- (e) 5:3 system will prevail over 3:2 system in share – croppers.
- (f) Free from British imperialism.
- (g) Abolition of money lending.
- (h) Unification of agricultural and industrial unit, land to the tillers, land reforms and land to the landless.¹

Due to the efforts of Communist leaders zamindari system, makaddama, Inamda Sarbarkari, Mustadari and Guntia which were different forms of intermediary system were abolished. In 1943, the Communist leaders like B.C. Panigrahi, Bijaya Chandra Dash, G.C. Pattanaik, Sadhu Charan Mohanty organized a peasant's rally at Shergarh of Ganjam.

Their main demand was to provide land to the landless. To achieve this goal a red army of the youths of Shergarh, Badagad, Sanakhemundi, Dharakat, Badakhemundi was formed, who were given training by INA comrades like Batch Patra and Narasingha Moharana. This youth army captured unused lands in Kiritipur and Shergarh of Ganjam. These lands were distributed among the landless people subsequently.

The Krushaka Sabha of Ganjam district called a meeting of peasants at Cuttack where 5 to 6 thousands of people attended the meeting. The Communist leaders like Govinda Pradhan, Harihara Dash, Surya Narayan Acharya, Nanda Kishor Pradhan, Ramachandra Padhi took the leading role there.

On 24th – 28th August, 1964 CPI, Odisha unit called an agitation against the price hike of necessary commodities. The leaders took part in agitations in Kujunga, Athagarh, Marshaghai Dhanmandal, Jajpur Road, Cuttack, Badabil, Sonapur, Bargarh, Baripada, Khurda, Aska, Berhampur, Dhenkanal, Bolangir. The Communist leaders like Durga Charana Mohanty, Ramkrushna Pati, Lokanath Choudhury, Dushasana Jena, Braja Pattanaik, P.N. Pattanaik, Gatikrushna Swain, Somanath Patra, Rangadhar Biswal, Prana Krushna Padhi, Panchanana Moharana were arrested and they had to remain in jail for quite some time. Leaders had also organized party meetings in several districts during 21-28th May, 1965 for protection of democratic rights of people along with the demand to ensure food for all.

In 1960, the land ceiling was fixed at 75 acres by the Congress government, when it made the Land Reform Act. However due to the effective and influential role of CPI leaders, this was reduced to 20 acres in 1965.

Subsequently the Orissa High Court dismissed the Land Reform Act as a case was filed by a land owner of Bolangir. The Swatantra – Jana Congress Government of 1967 in Odisha did not try to protect it at the level of Supreme Court. So the C.P.I. leaders were forced to resort to protest movements in various parts of the state.

The C.P.I. and other leftist leaders protested against the existing Water Policy. The Swatantra Jana Congress did not abolish the policy although it promised so to the people before coming to power.

There was a big protest movement by the farmers in Bolangir – Sambalpur under the guidance of CPI state leaders.

The CPI had taken a lead role to unite and secure the interests of farmers and labourers during Swatantra Jana Congress Government on 22nd October, 1967, the CPI organized a state level Protest Movement in Cuttack, Mahanga, Jagatsinghpur, Khurda, Dhenkanal, Bargarh, Chandbali and Ranapur to rehabilitate flood and cyclone affected people on 1st March, 1968. The CPI had organized an agitation to provide rights on waste land including fallow land as a result of which 700 Communist leaders were arrested in Khurda.² The farmers of Samkhunta Panchayat in Mayurbhanj had protested against Water Tax under the leadership of Communist leaders on 30-31 March, 1968. The 8th State Krushaka Sabha Conference was held at Khurda on 17-18 April, 1968 in which Z.A. Ahmed had addressed the gathering.

In 1968, the farmers of Ranapur, Barpali of Sambalpur and Bolangir district under the Communist leaders agitated against the policy of Government and demanded that the farmers could get canal water after giving application only. On

17th November, 1968, the party organized “Krushaka Sabha” convention at Bhubaneswar.

The party leaders agitated against the anti-people budget of 1967 Swatantra – Jana Congress Government, protest movements in Ganjam, Cuttack, Jagatsinghpur, Salipur, Nischintakoili, Marshaghai, Tangi, Aul, Bhubaneswar, Khurda, Begunia, Nimapara, Ranapur, Bolangir, Bargarh, Balasore, Chandbali were organized by these Communist leaders.

In 1970, under the leadership of Communist Party a peasant agitation was organized to capture the lands of landlords and unused lands. At the end they could be able to take control of 20,800 acres of lands.³ In 1970 with the help of Krushaka Sabha, Trade Union and Kshet Majdoor organization party leaders organized agitations to take control of unused and barren lands. It was successful in Gurudijhatia in Athagr, Mangalpur in Soro Begunia in Puri, Bhanjanagar in Ganjam, Vyas Sarobar in Cuttack. Farmers in large number had participated in this agitational programme. In the second phase the lands of Rajas and zamindars were snatched away at Dhenkanal and Bolangir and the Communist leaders like Ramakrushna Pati, Prasanna Kumar Panda, Ramachandra Mishra, Braja Mohapatra were arrested and were thrown into jail. It was an important phase in the land reform movement in Odisha.⁴ Between 1969 and 1970 there was an agitation in Marshaghai. During the same time, being inspired by Communist leaders, nearly fifteen thousand farmers of Brajaraj Nagar and its nearby areas had demanded for providing land *patta* to them. On 19th to 23rd September, 1973 the eleventh session of “Krushaka Sabha” was held at Manikajoda, Puri, many communist leaders had participated, CPI leaders had made their demands for land, irrigation, more wage to

the farmers, land reform etc. during Nandini’s Congress Government. To protect the interest of share croppers and better land reforms, a convention was organized of the leaders. Subsequently, the Revenue Minister Bankabihari Das of Nandini Government made some modifications on share croppers’ law after the above protest movement in 1976.

In 1977 the party leaders observed 1st September as the farmers day under the leadership of Hrushikesh Pradhan, an active Communist leader. An agitation was staged at Angul to protect the interest of poor farmers at the time of settlement in 1979. At the call of the party leaders, 25 thousand of people protested against Bhatalingam Committee report and demanded better land reform, proper distribution of land and a revision in central law for Kshet Majdoors. In August, 1980 the party leaders organized protest movements in Kendrapara, Naugan, Jagatsinghpur, Ersama, Bolgarh, Kakatpur on the issue of price hike, land to the tiller, exemption of agricultural loan.

In 1981 a joint meeting of party and Krushaka Sabha was held and 16 point memorandum was given to the State Government. Subsequently, Rajeswar Rao of All India Communist Party visited the flood affected area of Odisha. Odisha state unit party organized demonstrations for the miserable condition of flood affected people in Cuttack, Puri, Ganjam, Boud and Phulbani. On 2nd September, 1984 at Bhadrak the party leaders organized a great protest rally on 15 point demand on jute, rice price, irrigation, and wages of the working class.

On April, 1986, the golden jubilee of “Krushak Sabha” was observed. In this year also party leaders protested against the house demolition campaign of the municipality in

Jharsuguda and Adivasi eviction from land in Mohana of Ganjam. The party had demanded for the distribution of 5 thousand acres of unused land in Ganjam district.

On 1st September, 1987, which was observed as “Krushaka Sabha Day” party leaders organized protest movements in all regions of the state and their main demands were: - Land to the landless people, more wages to the Kshet Majdoors, housing land to the homeless.

On 11th May, 1988 both CPI and CPI (M) jointly made a 14 point demand which included land reform, exempt from loan, supply of commodities in low price, controlling of flood and famine.⁵ In 1989 at Kushapali of Paralakhemundi, 1500 farmers of 47 villages with Red Flag marched to capture the ceiling surplus land. Then followed the state level Krushak Convention at Puri on 27th August, 1989, which was attended by Krishna Rao. In another move CPI’s Cuttack unit leaders resisted against the Government’s (Police and Revenue Department) attempts to snatch away 45 acres of seacoast cultivated land from the farmers. On 14th March, 1990-1991 the party leaders gladly accepted the Biju Patnaik’s Janata Government’s decision of minimum wage hike to rupees twenty five.

CPI (M) Leadership

The Communist Party of India (M) made a great contribution in the field of Peasant Movement. They were very much concerned with the future of peasant demand and radical changes in the agrarian sector. The Communist formed “All Odisha Kissan Sabha affiliated to AIKS demanding land to the tiller, abolition of “Bethi” etc. When in the Garjat areas “Praja Andolan” was at its peak in 1936, the peasant movement got momentum in “Moghalbandi” regions. A

peasant meeting was held at Cuttack under the chairmanship of Mohanlal Goutam. Godabarish Mishra was presiding over the meeting. Young Communists, who were the members of Krushaka Sabha gave a revolutionary touch to the peasant movement in Odisha. They organized many Krushak Sabhas in undivided Puri, Cuttack and Balasore. The Communist Party (M) of Odisha formed its peasant wing “Odisha Krushak Sabha” in 1968 after its split in 1964. The founding President of Odisha Krushak Sabha was Banamali Das.

Sri Banamali Das who was a leading Communist leader played a very significant role in mobilizing the peasants of Nilagiri of Balasore district. The peasant movement took a violent turn there like that of in Telengana Movement in Andhra Pradesh. The peasants captured some lands of Nilagiri Raja. An annual meeting of Gobindapur Krushak Sabha was held at Khantapada on 24th – 25th May, 1973. CPI (M) Cuttack district Secretary Ajay Rout presided over the meeting. Sri Bansidhar Das invited all the peasants, Kshet Majdoor to be united under the Red flag to get their demands fulfilled. Chief Speaker of the meeting was Sri Shivaji Pattnaik and he criticized the Congress Government for its indifferent attitude to solve the problems of peasants. Land to the landless was the primary demand of Krushak Sabha.

A meeting was held on 5-6 July, 1973 at Bhubaneswar under the Chairmanship of Khagendranath Jena. R.C. Panda Secretary of Odisha Krushaka Sabha pointed out about that the role of Krushaka Sabha on the issues like land reforms, price hike, unemployment etc. He said that the peasant should be organized to put their demands on food for work, wage enhancement, irrigation etc. Annual conference of Nilagiri Chasi

Mulia Samiti was organized on 19-20 July, 1974. Govind Singh, Kailash Panda. Apariti Nayak, organized the meeting. Iswar Das pointed out the miseries of peasants and called for the generation of class consciousness among the peasants and majdoors. Odisha Krushak Sabha participated in the mass movements and made demands like food for work, hike of agricultural loan, repeal of black ordinance etc. They did it in Balasore, Puri, Kanasha, Brahmagiri, Niali and Khantapada.

Eleventh State conference of the party was held at Tangi on 1-2 March, 1975. Shivaji Pattanaik hosted the Red flag of Krushak Sabha and Banamali Das President of Odisha Krushak Sabha read out its annual report. Shantimaya Ghosh of West Bengal Krushak Sabha addressed the meeting and urged to fight for the end of exploitation and miseries of the peasants. He even suggested to make every village a unit of Krushak Sabha until the farmers owned the land they tilled, there would be no development of our country and of the peasants also.

A meeting of Odisha Krushak Sabha was also held on 21st June, 1976 at Bhubaneswar. It was presided over by Banamali Das and the following demands were made :-

- (a) To ensure to the farmers the right to form association and wage agitation.
- (b) To include the leaders of the Farmers' Association in the land reformed committee.
- (c) To open control shops in villages and
- (d) To provide loans to the marginal farmers immediately.⁶

Odisha Krushaka Sabha organized its 12th State Conference at Balasore Town Hall on 19-20 June, 1978. President of Krushak Sabha,

Banamali Das hoisted the red flag and a Steering Committee was formed comprising Shivaji Pattnaik, Himanshu Nandi, Ramesh Chandra Panda, Khitis Biswal and Jagannath Mishra. Resolutions were made on issues of land reform, irrigation, exploitation of Adivasis and Harijans, bonded labour, Centre-State relation, flood and famine.⁷

A new committee was formed with the following office bearers.

- (a) Banamali Das – President of Committee.
- (b) Shivaji Pattanaik and R.C. Panda – Vice President of Committee.
- (c) Khitis Biswal – General Secretary of Committee.
- (d) Jagannath Mishra, Bansidhar Das and Himanshu Nandi as Secretaries.

On 26th July, 1980 Ganjam District Krushak Sabha called for unity among all the farmers to revolt against the problems faced by them. Dandapani Mohanty presided over the meeting. Decision was taken to launch a demonstration against the Government on the following issues.

- (a) Price rise of the essential commodities,
- (b) The hiking of prices of fertilizers, seeds and other input and instruments of agricultural production.

Shivaji Pattanaik, Vice-President, Orissa Krushak Sabha had presided over a meeting on 21-22th April, 1981 at Berhampur, which was organized by Brahmagiri Krishna Prasad Block Committee.

The main demands of the leaders were⁸ :-

- (a) Old age pension for peasants and agricultural workers.

- (b) Work for agricultural workers (Guaranteed employment)
- (c) Introduction of crop insurance.
- (d) Subsidised food for peasants.
- (e) Supply of electricity to the peasants.

On 6th September, 1981, Orissa Krushak Sabha decided to start a civil disobedience movement against the Government on 24-25th September 1981. The demands were :-

- (i) Irrigation facilities to the farmers.
- (ii) Declaration of procurement price of paddy and rice.
- (iii) Supply of essential commodities at regulated price through sale counters opened in every Gram Panchayat.
- (iv) Procurement centre be opened in every Gram Panchayat.
- (v) Supply of Rice @ Rs. 1.75 per kg to the poor.

A Krushak Convention was organized on 12th June, 1983 at Bhubaneswar jointly by Utkal Krushak Sabha, Orissa Krushak Sabha, Kissan Sammilani and Kissan Janata. The leaders participated in a rally and supported a call for "Orissa Bandh". Krushak leaders demanded that the State Government should stop collecting agricultural loans as the peasants had suffered loss due to the failure of crops following natural calamities like flood, drought and cyclone.

Krushak Sabha of Sambalpur district was held on 8th June, 1984 at Charbati, Rairakhole sub-division. The following demands were made:-

- (a) To provide irrigation facility through canals.

- (b) To provide people the right to collect forest products.
- (c) Minimum Rs. 200/- per quintal of Kendu leaves.
- (d) Burning of forests be stopped.

On 9th – 10th May, 1985, Orissa State Krushak Sangha Council was held at Bhubaneswar under the Chairmanship of Ramesh Chandra Panda.

All India Krushak Sabha General Secretary, Shantimoy Ghosh addressed the Council and the state leaders criticized the Government for its anti-peasant policies. He demanded that the peasants should be provided rice at the rate of Rs. 2/- per kg and work throughout the year. The golden jubilee celebration of All India Kissan Sabha was held in 1986, where the members urged for a radical peasant movement in Odisha.

On 10th September, 1987 a large number of peasants participated in a civil disobedience movement in front of Vidhan Sabha under the Joint leadership of Orissa Krushak Sabha and Orissa Kshet Majdoor Union at Bhubaneswar. Jagannath Mishra, Khitish Biswal, Tapasi Praharaj, Nabakishore Mohanty were at the forefront of the movement. Satyagrahis like Jagannath Mishra in Paralakhemundi, Jaganath Reddy in Chikiti, Prasanna Panigrahi in Aska, Kalu Panda and Basudev Gouda in Soroda, Bimal Rana in Bhanjanagar, Bijaya Baliar Singh in Khurda, Purna Samantroy in Ranpur demonstrated vehemently as a result of which some were arrested and others were lathicharged by the police.⁹

Odisha Krushak Sabha, Orissa Kshet – Majdoor Union, Utkal Krushak Sabha and All

India Kshet Majdoor Union jointly participated in state-wide civil disobedience movement between 5th September and 9th September 1988 as per the call given by central leftist organizations. Shivaji Pattanaik, Jagannath Mishra, Iswar Das, Khitis Biswas, Janardan Pati, Sachikanta Pani and Bansidhar Das were spearheading the movement.¹⁰

All India Kissan Sabha was held at Khaman, Telengana, Andhra Pradesh in 1989, which was the epicentre of peasant. As a response to a call given by the All India Kissan Sabha, the Orissa unit organized a meeting in Orissa on 25th May, 1989 for occupation of lands. They raised their voice against the Congress Governments for its anti-peasant and labour laws.

This movement was organized effectively in Balasore by Iswar Das and Himanshu Nandi, in Baripada by Bhaskar Mohapatraa, Gangadhar Marandi, Khagendra Nath Jena, in Lahunipada by Rabi Nayak, Lambodar Nayak, Surendra Muduli, Birasingh Munda and in Kalahandi by K.C. Dwivedi.

On 6th and 7th April, 1990 Odisha Krushak Sabha State Executive Committee organized a meeting at Bhubaneswar. They demanded compensation for the heavy rain and cyclone affected people and supply of free seeds for cultivation by the department of Agriculture.¹¹

A huge rally was organized on 29th June at Bhubaneswar by a Joint endeavour of both Odisha Krushak Sabha and Odisha Kshet Majdoor Union. Sunnet Chopra, Joint Secretary, All India Agricultural Union workers participating in the rally told in his address for job guarantee to the labourers throughout the year, emphasized on food for work and demanded for minimum wages

of 25 rupees, which the present government must fulfill. All welcomed the Government's decision to enhance the minimum wage to Rs. 25/-.

Jagannath Mishra, General Secretary, Odisha Krushak Sabha criticized the Janata Government as it failed to control the price hike of daily commodities. Kshet Majdoor Union President Bansidhar Das and General Secretary Khitish Biswal informed about their support to the Government on certain specific programmes and they expected government should fulfill the above demands as soon as possible.

Unions of small peasants and Agricultural Labourers

It is an ironical feature of Odisha politics that though peasants constitute a very large number of the state population, they have mostly been neglected by political parties. Only the CPI has always paid some attention to the problems of peasants.¹² The worst offender in this respect has been the Congress Party. For some years, the PSP organised some peasant organizations. During 1980's in a few areas, especially of South Odisha, the Naxalites and the CPI(M) were active in organizing peasants to promote their interests. However, on the whole, the political parties have paid more attention and devoted more energy to the industrial workers than to small land owners and landless labourers. No wonder the small peasants and agricultural workers of Odisha whose lot is much worse than that of industrial workers are politically more apathetic and passive than the latter.¹³

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