

## Madho Singh : An Associate of Surendra Sae

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The freedom struggle of India marks a great landmark in the history of mankind. Because it shook the very foundation of the colonial empire of the mighty British. The first hundred-year rule of the British from 1757 to 1857 began to crack from the Sepoy mutiny of 1857 which was considered as the first war of Indian Independence. Because the genesis of the freedom movement of India lies in the great revolt of 1857 and its aftermath. If we look into the vast panorama of the revolt of 1857, we come across stories of the heroic sacrifices of people both from the national and regional level. One such great hero was Veer Surendra Sae who dedicated his whole life for the greater cause of the motherland. Mother and motherland is superior to heaven, was his belief and nationalism was his religion, which inculcated a deep sense of patriotism among the people of the western Orissa who were greatly inspired by his message and heroism. Madhab Singh Bariha, the Zamindar of Ghens who followed the footprints of Veer Surendra Sae, was a great patriot. The heroic sacrifice of Madho Singh and his family was not only sensational but an unforgettable



chapter in the history of India's freedom struggle. Dr. Harekrushna Mahatab has very rightly observed, "the revolt of Madho Singh was far greater than the revolt of Surendra Sae". But neither in the history of Orissa nor in people's mind, he finds a place of that significance. The life of Madho Singh and his sons was a relentless struggle against the British. Though they suffered defeats in the hand of the British, their names will be recounted in the pages of history with glory.<sup>1</sup>

Veer Madhab Singh Bariha is known from British records as Madho Singh. He is mentioned as Madho Singh in all historical documents.<sup>2</sup> His father Arjun Singh Bariha made necessary arrangements to make him proficient in the art of warfare. It is learnt that he became a martyr at the age of 72 in 1858. So, he must have been born in the year 1786. He inherited the value of honesty and integrity from his predecessors. His indomitable courage, love of freedom and his altruistic nature made him a great revolutionary.<sup>3</sup> Seeing his courage and capacity, his father handed over the zamindari of Ghens in his favour, which consisted of twenty small villages. Those were : 1. Ghens,

2. Petupali, 3. Ghumuripali, 4. Jhankarpali, 5. Tileimal, 6. Barpadar, 7. Turimunda, 8. Badmal, 9. Katapali, 10. Kuchipali, 11. Sidhira, 12. Kalagapali, 13. Nuapali, 14. Videshpali, 15. Brahmanipatha, 16. Balipatta, 17. Beherapali, 18. Tumerpali, 19. Bandpali, 20. Charhapali. These were known as Khalsa"<sup>4</sup> Madho Singh had five sons. They were Hati Singh, Kunjal Singh Bairi Singh, Airi Singh (Uday Singh) and Narayan Singh. His second son Kunjal Singh had got five villages as dowry. Those were : Grinjal, Budhamal, Kendumudi, Kendumudi, Rengali and Biripali.

Madho Singh was independent minded, who never desired to remain under the control of the Marathas and the British. He hated them for their exploitation of Indians. He hated the British as 'Bendra'<sup>5</sup> (a low caste) and his feeling towards the British was echoed in those villages, which remained under his zamindari. He was convinced about the strength and shrewdness of the British. Yet he dared to fight against them. The reasons for which Madho Singh raised sword against the British are widely known. Firstly, the attitude of the British towards Veer Surendra Sae wounded the feeling and sentiment of Madho Singh. Because the lawful claim of Surendra Sae for the throne of Sambalpur was set aside by the British. Further Sae killed Duryodhan Singh, the zamindar of Rampur, who was found to be a seditionist. His (Duryodhan's) son Dariar Singh fled away to Hemgiri and saved his life and brought this act of Surendra Sae to the notice of the British. Veer Surendra Sae and his followers were victimized. Life imprisonment was inflicted on them. Madho Singh regarded this act of the British as a great threat to the independence of the region. He became a firebrand revolutionary against the British. Further the British attitude towards Narayan Singh, the Zamindar of Sonakhan influenced the mind of Madho Singh with strong

reaction against the British. Narayan Singh was the son in law of Madho Singh. A great famine occurred in Sonakhan in which people died out of starvation.

Narayan Singh requested Seth Makhanlal of Kharod to provide food grains for the famished people. But Makhanlal was reluctant to provide any help at this time of adversity. It infuriated Narayan Singh. He looted wheat and rice and distributed among his hungry people. For this, Narayan Singh was convicted and sent to jail. This act of British added fuel to the fire. Madho Singh and his whole family took a pledge to drive out the British. Further the policy of increasing revenue collection made the situation volatile. It over-burdened the people. A Govt. report reveals that in the year 1849, when the Gountias and Zamindar of Sambalpur were required to pay Rs.8800/-, it increased to Rs.74,000 in 1854.<sup>6</sup> Such was the trend of revenue collection. Further the British made an announcement that all kings Zamindars and Gountias belonging to Sambalpur area were required to come down to Sambalpur to deposit their revenues. It certainly hunted the vanity of the kings, Zamindars and Gountias. But they could not defy the order. However, the community of Gond and Binjhal deadily opposed to pay the revenue. He decried this measure of the British. He did not want to rob peter to pay Paul. He stopped collecting land revenue from his subjects. He did not care for the demand of the British. Such act of Madho Singh was taken as a blatant disregard to British authority. Commissioner C.F. Cockburn Esq made an announcement for the confiscation of property of those who had declined to pay revenue to the British. The announcement was published in Sambalpur on 25.08.58. A list of defaulters was prepared in which Madho Singh was at the top.<sup>7</sup> Another incident which conflagrated the situation was the dispute over Bhatibahal region. The

Zamindar of Bijepur was very clever. He immediately rushed to Sambalpur to justify his claim over Bhatibahal. The British supported his claim to amalgamate the region with his estate. It infuriated Madho Singh and his son. They made violent protest against the act of the British. So, all those events convinced him that a war against the British was inevitable.

Madho Singh was a man of farsightedness, courage and resourcefulness. He gave his head and heart to make an organization of the soldiers. He instilled the youths of 'Khalsa' in the spirit of nationalism. The gospel of nationalism spread to the nook and corner of the 'Khalsa'. A field situated between Budharaja Gudi and Banyan tree of Ghens was chosen for the training of the art of warfare. The youth belonging to the Kondh, Binjhal, Gond, Chauhan and other communities participated in the training. All expenses towards the training was borne by Madho Singh. The training programme was carried out from the full moon day of the month of Pousa till the last tuesday of Chaitra. The last tuesday of Chaitra, when the training was over, was followed with feasting and merrymaking. A sense of unity and self-respect was fostered among the people. The voice of Madho Singh reverberated throughout the length and the breadth of Ghens. The people of Ghens rose in revolt against the foreign domination, and it was the inspiring leadership and guidance of Madho Singh, which made this movement widespread and prominent. He made Ghens the breeding ground of nationalism.

On 30th July 1857, the Sepoys rose in Hazaribagh. They broke open the jail and liberated the prisoners including Surendra Sae and Udanta Sae. After that, Surendra Sae alongwith his brothers and son arrived at Sambalpur.<sup>8</sup> The commissioner of Chotnagpur intimated about the incident to the commissioner of Sambalpur.

Immediately R.T. Leigh, the Asst. Commissioner of Sambalpur sent a 'Parwana' to all the kings and Zamindars to disassociate themselves from Surendra Sae. Madho Singh learnt about the arrival of Surendra Sae when the 'Parwana' was sent to him on 14.8.1857.<sup>9</sup> He was overjoyed and made up his mind to revolt. For him, every movement was vibrant; every day was an adventure. But the British kept him under supervision and sent him a letter on 20.8.1857 and warned him to keep himself disassociated from Surendra Sae and his brothers.<sup>10</sup> But the situation took a different turn when a spy of the Zamindar of Bijepur informed the British authority about the activities of Madho Singh. R.T. Leigh, the Asst. Commissioner of Sambalpur took preventive measure when he learnt that Madho Singh and his sons had already organized the Zamindars of Gond and Binjhal communities and were breeding revolutionary spirit in Rajbodasambar, KeSaepali, Patkulunda, Bheden, Padampur and Sonakhan etc. and championed the cause of Surendra Sae.<sup>11</sup> Madho Singh worshiped the presiding deity 'Pataneswari' of Ghens and took a pledge not to touch food till 120 heads would be sacrificed before 204 goddesses. Thus he started his campaign. The fire of revolt sparked in Sambalpur and soon spread like a wildfire throughout the nook and corner of western Orissa. The Gountias, Arakhit of Karondala, Markand Beriha of Kharmunda, Sri Krishna Behera of Bamanda, Pitambar Singh of Patakulunda, Zamindar Dian Sardar of Kharsel, Manohar Singh of Kuseikela, Chandan Gartia of Loisingha, Janardan Singh of Pahad Sirgida, Ananta Singh of Mudomahal, Anjari Singh of Kodabaga, Dhansingh of Machida, Kamal Singh, Nilambar Singh and Khageswar Singh of Lakanpur, Gond Zamindar Kama Gartia of Kolabira, Balabandhu Rao of Chandrapur Padampur, Rama Chandra Gauntia of Patrapali

(Rampur), Gountia Ioknath of Rampela, Adhagara and Kumbharbandh, Gountia Mrutyunjaya Panigrahi of Bargaon, Govind Singh of Sonakhan, Zamindar Lal Sae of Tanat, Jai Singh of Laida, Ganesh Upadhyaya of Singhabaga and many others gave a plunge into the fire of the revolt.<sup>12</sup> It was 7th October 1859 when all prominent revolutionaries gathered in the Barahampura temple and took a pledge to fight against the British. Also they promised to enthrone Surendra Sae. Later, thousands of rebels proceeded towards Junahjilla and captured it without bloodshed. It alarmed and perturbed the British. The ruler of Sambalpur finding no way out of this situation resorted to diplomacy. R.T. Leigh entrusted Chakodi Mahapatra with the responsibilities to settle for peace. It was only a pretension.<sup>13</sup> R.T. Leigh promised Surendra Sae the *Gaddi* of Sambalpur. Leigh told him that it had been intimated to the higher authority which was of course a piece of lie. Then he appealed the revolutionaries to remain calm till the reply is arrived from the authority. Surendra Sae could not sense the shrewd move and he innocently believed in the British. On the other hand T.R. Leigh wrote to the higher authority to send soldiers. Also he organized an athletic meet in Sambalpur to divert the attention of the rebels. In the meantime, more and more soldiers poured into Sambalpur and when they moved, the revolutionaries became suspicious. One day the British soldiers made a surprise attack on the revolutionaries when they were taking bath in the Mahanadi. They fled away in utter panic. Their weapons were captured. However they could manage to escape. They again gathered on the hill of Budharaja. When R.T. Leigh came to know about the gathering of 1500 revolutionaries on the hill of Budharaja he made a planned attack with a large number of soldiers. The revolutionaries offered a stubborn resistance

after which the British soldiers got scared and fled away. The revolutionaries scored a tremendous victory, which gave a boost to their courage and aspirations for the future course of action.

The revolutionaries took the responsibility of guarding the Singodaghat and the Nishaghat. The Singoda Ghat, which was very much impregnable, was guarded by Madho Singh and his son Hati Singh, Kunjal Singh, Bairi Singh and Airi Singh. It completely hampered the movement of the British to Sambalpur. They faced a lot of inconveniences as their approach to Sambalpur was very much linked with these two passes. The British had no way out other than rescuing these (passes). The revolutionaries resorted to a guerilla warfare. The British soldiers received a great setback. They, therefore, gave up the idea of attacking through Sambalpur and planned to proceed through Nagpur.

So on 8.12.1857, Capt. E.G. Wood left Nagpur and reached Singoda Ghat after 19 days of strenuous journey. There was a contest between Madho Singh and Capt. Wood. Many English Soldiers were laid to the dust and the captain escaped and saved his life. On 29.12.1857 he reached Sambalpur. The news spread terror in the camp of the British soldiers and they dared not to bring the Singoda and Nishaghat to their control. On 30.12.1857 Capt. Dyer reached Sambalpur with British soldiers. He attacked the nearby Ghats of Sambalpur. He made a constant search of Udanta Sae. Both Capt. Wood and R.T. Leigh unitedly attacked the rebels and followed Udaya Singh and proceeded upto Kudopali where Chhabila Sae was shot dead. The death of Chhabila Sae shocked Surendra Sae. The incident made Madho Singh aggrieved. After that Madho Singh guarded the Singoda Ghat with great deal of care and seriousness.

The Govt. dispatched Shakespeare to recover the Singoda Ghat. He made two attempts. He failed in his first attempt<sup>14</sup> and during his next attempt, he had to encounter Hati Singh. Hati Singh was severely injured but he managed to escape. Hati Singh, Kamal Singh, Govind Singh and Salegram Beriha again captured Singoda. The situation made Madho Singh more aggressive. He proceeded to Ghana Ghati to collect weapons. But the British made sustained efforts to recover the Singoda Ghat. Capt. Wood Bridge and Capt. Wood were again sent for this purpose. They secretly learnt about the stay of Madho Singh in Paharsirgirah. The British had spread a rumor of the death of Hati Singh in his encounter with Shakespeare at Singoda Ghat. The British thought that it was the appropriate time to capture Madho Singh. They blocked the Paharsirgirah Ghat. But the attempts of Shakespeare ended in smoke when he was captured and beheaded by Madho Singh. His headless body was hanged on a tree. It was the incident of 12.02.1858. The incident terrified the men in the British camp in Sambalpur. The British did not dare to send soldiers any more to Paharsirgirah. However on 14.12.1858 Capt. Ensing Warlo proceeded to Singoda Ghat. He saw a ferocious scene on the top of the hill. Headless and naked corpses were seen hanging in the trees. Naked and headless body of captain Wood Bridge was also found among those of others. Warlo carried the body of Bridge with a horse and came back to Sambalpur.

The wrath of the British on Madho Singh knew no bounds. Major foster proceeded to Ghens with a huge army. There was deep silence in Ghens. No one was found. Everybody hid himself either in distant villages or in deep forest. That again infuriated the British soldiers. They burnt the entire village. This act of the British soldiers was intolerable for the people. There was again a face-to-face fight.

At this hour, Madho Singh had already grown old and fatigued. His constant and relentless struggle with the British exerted an adverse effect on his health. He spent many agonizing days and sleepless nights in the jungle. He wanted rest and while going to Matia Bhatt, he was captured by the British. It was December 1858. Madho Singh was hanged to death.<sup>16</sup> The death of Madho Singh weakened the rebels. Even Surendra Sae was deeply shocked. Madho Singh passed away but his memory is still cherished in the heart of the people. The heroic deeds of Madho Singh gave inspiration to the future.

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