



## August Kranti and Jatiya Sarkars in Orissa

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After the failure of the Cripps Mission a popular sentiment for a determined assault upon British imperialism ran extremely high. The hopes of understanding and co-operation between the British and Congress disappeared. Gandhi now began to inaugurate his systematic campaign for "orderly British withdrawal" from India. The campaign started late in April, 1942. In his views, "whatever the consequences .... to India her real safety and Britain's too lie in an orderly and timely withdrawal from India". The phrase 'Quit India' in a spirit of 'Do or Die' came into vogue. The Summer of 1942 found Gandhi in a strange and unique militant mood in the reflection of which he wrote in the Harijan on 10th May, 1942 - "The presence of the British in India is an invitation to Japan to invade India. Their withdrawal removes that bait". A fortnight later he again wrote, "Leave India in God's hands or in modern parlance to anarchy. Then all parties will fight one another like dogs or will, when real responsibility faces them, come to a reasonable agreement." He repeatedly urged the British "This orderly disciplined anarchy should go and if as a result there is complete lawlessness I would risk it".<sup>1</sup>

The famous 'Quit India' resolution was passed by Bombay Session of the All India Congress Committee on the 8th of August 1942

followed by a call for 'mass struggle on non-violent lines on the widest possible scale.' From 9th August onwards what Linlithgon privately described on 31st August as "by far the most serious rebellion since that of 1857 and the extent of which we have so far concealed from the world of military security."<sup>2</sup>

The rout of British hegemony in South East Asia by the victory of an Asian power totally shattered the white prestige. It again revealed the gross racialism of the rulers of India. The Europeans in Malaya, Singapore and Burma ordered all forms of transport of their escape flight. At the same time they left the Indian immigrants there to make their own way by trekking in atrocious conditions through the dense forests and dangerous mountain range. Eastern U.P. Northern and Western Bihar regions were traditionally the main catchment areas for Indian migrant labour to South East Asia and other parts of the world. Coincidentally the 1942 rebellion attained maximum popular intensity in these regions with its influence spreading over to the neighbouring states and adjoining areas.

The arrest of the Congress leaders triggered off a massive popular upsurge throughout India. In all the metropolitan cities, provincial capitals and district towns it sprung up. Unlike the civil disobedience movement,

this rebellion was mostly confined to students, peasants and the lower-middle class population. August Kranti became a formidable phase of National movement for the mass upsurge of peasantry and common people. For the space a few weeks or months or years, the British rule ceased to exist. Intensity was manifested in the establishment of Parallel governments or Jatiya Sarkars and the British government seemed to be in real danger of being overthrown.

This paper aims at these Jatiya Sarkars with a specific study of Orissa vis-a-vis India. At Bhagalpur in Bihar and Balia in Uttar Pradesh, the peasant discontentment manifested in the parallel governments. The wrong economic policy and relief scares served the basis of Jatiya Sarkar in Midnapore. In case of Satara, it was the Maratha lineage and Satara heritage that were the key factors. But in case of Orissa there were reflections both in Garhjat and Mughalbandi areas. Even in the absence of proper leadership and able guidance, the mass national upsurge ran high. In case of Garhjats the oppression by the rulers and elite Prajamandal leaders set the high national ideals to be echoed in popular hearts. In the Coastal British belt commoners embarked upon the process of political experimentation with future dreams. Even though they failed, these Sarkars of 42 days bear the testimony of Oriya Nationalism which still stand unrecognised. In the remote state corners also the inhabitants of the province do not pay any heed to this glorious trend. The objective of this paper is to highlight this feature of Orissan Freedom struggle in the Indian context. It deals with the study of Bhagalpur in Bihar Balia in U.P., Satara in Maharastra, Midnapore in Bengal with specific reference to Basudevpur in Balasore , Talcher and Dhenkanal in Orissa. These storm centres, as a matter of fact,

reflected the real mass rebellion at the grass root level.

### **Bhagalpur**

The idea of August Kranti flew fast over the Bhojpuri speaking tract of Bihar. Both in intensity and extent Bhagalpur since 1930's had served as an important base of Kisan Sabha. The people declared the establishment of a National Government or Jatiya Sarkar in North Bhagalpur.

Under the guidance of indomitable revolutionary Siaram Singh (the pivot of Bhagalpur people's movement) a parallel government sprang up at Sultanpur and this government appointed its own Daroga. In the constituent element of Bhagalpur such as Madhipur, all government offices came under people's possession who virtually ran them for few days. A police Sub-inspector fired indiscriminately on a gathering of 12,000 through the barred windows of a specially constructed quarter of iron frame with asbestos roof. Immediately as a counter attack, the Assistant Sub-inspector and three others were overpowered and burnt alive. At Karabara, five British and one Anglo-Indian soldiers who had fired on a meeting were disarmed and finally killed.<sup>3</sup> The leader of the insurgency Jaglal Choudhury was later sentenced to ten years rigorous imprisonment on the charge that he had urged the crowd to tie up a Sub-inspector in a sack and throw him into the river. According to official version of course he had made plans to resist troops with spears, lighted torches and boiling oils. In Manjhi, Daravli, Parsa, Siswan, Baikunthapur, Ekama, Dighwara, Raghunathpur and Garkha the British Machinery was almost paralysed. An efficient administrative system was set up by the people in the areas. Swatantra Mandal was the highest body which worked through village

Panchayats. Above it were thana Panchayats. There were four main departments under Swatantra Mandal - Department of Dislocators, Publicity Department, Village Defence Department and Volunteers Department or Sevak Dal.

The head of each of the Department was known as *Adliyaksha* whose orders were carried out by the Sevak Dals under him.

The two revolutionary groups Siaram Dal and Parasuram Dal were active in Bihar. With a band of 150 young followers Siaram Singh, founder of Siaram Dal carried on guerilla activities in Bhagalpur and adjoining districts to paralyse the government. A Region of terror by police and military raj were let loose. Loot, arson and assaults were unrestrained for a number of days. Even women were stripped of their ornaments. From a Congress source the estimated number of tribal killing in Bhagalpur was 447.<sup>4</sup>

#### **Ballia :**

The movement took a very serious turn in U.P. especially in the eastern District of Ballia. To quote the official report "in these areas the trouble soon spread from the big towns to the outlying areas, thousands of rioters gave them up to an orgy of destruction of government property, while districts were isolated for days on end, a large part of the East India and practically the whole of B & N.W. Railway systems were put out of action."<sup>5</sup>

The government report also refers to a typical type of mass attacks on government buildings at a Tahasil in Ballia district which was one of the citadels of national government. The Mob led by a local Congress Man (Chitu Pande) according to government version had installed himself as Swaraj Tahasildar broke

down the wall, destroyed official records, broke the treasury and looted Rs.15,000/-. In the connecting part of Bairia, a huge procession of over 20,000/- marched to the Kotwali and demanded its surrender. Eight police stations were set ablaze by the rowdy mob who were in total control of the district by 19th August.<sup>6</sup>

Each and every organisation in Ballia was destroyed and the roiters took possession of treasury, armoury and everything else. One person took charge of the office as one administrator and another assumed the office of another officer and they attempted to carry on the administration in their own way.<sup>7</sup>

The arrested leaders were made free and National Government was established under Chitu Pandey. The people were asked to return the looted public property. To quote Nehru "In Ballia the British rule ceased to exist. The whole structure of the British government collapsed from top to bottom though not for long".<sup>8</sup> The military arrived on the scene within three days and a wave of repression flooded in.

#### **Midnapore**

The best account of a rebel 'National Government' is found from Tamluk sub-division of Midnapore district in Bengal. In comparison with Ballia and Bhagalpur flare-up it was less violent but better organised and more sustained. The inhabitants of the region started slogans of resistance to British policy and stopped grain exports from the region. Well-planned attacks were made on the police stations of Tamluk, Mahishadal, Sutahat and Naudigrah. On 16th October, 1942 a terrible cyclone destroyed half of the crops, 70,000 herds.

In Satara, the people threw up the foreign yoke and set up a parallel government known

as 'Satara Prati Sarkar'. Nana Patil was at the head of this government which ran its course for a number of months Patels of about so villages tendered their resignations.<sup>10</sup> As per the plan of Anna Master of army created was known as 'Tufan Sen' with the task of maintaining peace and discipline. Nathlal was the founding father of the village Raj and co-ordinated the works of Prati Sarkar.

The Satara movement was closely related to the peasant based Non-Brahmin Bahujan Samaj tradition which was strong in this region. The parallel government developed bit late from mid 1943 and maintained its existence as late as 1945-46. It managed to run people's courts (Nyayadan Mandals). Apart from carrying guerilla war it took constructive works on Gandhian lints. Mortgaged land was returned to poor peasants and exploitation of women by village big wigs were severely tackled. It reminds us the peasant mobilisation in French Revolution of 1789 which had directed itself against the so called aristocratic plot and brigands.

### **Basudevpur**

August Kranti in the province of Orissa was sporadic by nature and could not be a sustained one for the arrest of almost all top-ranking leaders. The congress organised plunder of salt depots, disruption of communication. Swaraj Panchayats were held to stock food. The most spectacular was the formation of a parallel government on 17th December, 1942 in Eran-Basudevpur. It was handed as Swadhina Banchhanidhi chakla (in the name of native Oriya Nationalist poet Banchhanidhi Mohanty) comprising 6 Panchayats and 24 villages within a radius of 19 sq. miles.<sup>11</sup>

For the smooth functioning of the government a five member apex committee was

formed with Gouranga Chandra Mohanty as its Prime Minister and Ramala Prasad Kar as its Director-cum-Commander-in-chief. Anirudha Mohanty, Pravakar Tripathy and Shyam Sundar Panigrahi were the three members. The house of Arjuna Biswal was made the office with Congress flag hoisted everyday and lowered after sunset. They too had their own jails for offenders. Bhagi Singh and his son Ram Singh of Eram were detained in their jail for defiance of Congress activities. The government had three departments : Intelligence Department, Food Department, Army Department with two wings, i.e.

A. Death squad B. Peace Squad

A letter from B.O. to C.O. dt. 29th Sept. 1942 reported the formation of Swaraj Panchayats in 12 villages and 250 soldiers of Marana Sena (Death-squad) had been enrolled." Attempts were made to destroy rural police stations.

As a counter balance 29 persons were killed in mass attack on Eram - Basudevpur police station on 28th September. Cases of extortion of Paddy under threat from the rich were there. The official inquiry report on Eram-Basudevpur firing stated that rumours had spread "Swaraj would be attained within a week... that under a Swaraj government no taxes would be paid and the paddy of the rich will be available to the poor."

### **Talcher :**

Kranti had its flame in the princely state of Talcher. It had already witnessed struggle against forced labour (Bethi) forest laws and autocratic rule in September 1938. The immediate cause of the popular upsurge was a rumour that Pabitra Mohan Pradhan, President of Talcher state Prajamandal had been murdered.<sup>13</sup> For all practical purposes the

ruler's administration had collapsed from 31st August 1942.<sup>14</sup>

The Jatiya Sarkar was called as 'Chasi-Maulia' or 'Mazdoor Raj'. It was to be set up on the basis of adult franchise in each village, block, circle, pargana and sub-division. The Central Government was accordingly constituted on the same line. Some government servants voluntarily resigned, burnt their European Dress and uniforms, set fire to the official records and swore allegiance to the New Raj. People had their Raj almost in the whole of Talcher except Talcher town where the ruler and his entourage were under British protection.

A National Militia was formed by the rebels. They were well equipped with crude implements and made an organised march in Talcher principality. They requested the ruler to relinquish British authority and to hand over the government of Kisan Mazdoor Raj - the ruler might act as the constitutional head.<sup>15</sup>

The counter move started with the machine - gunning the mob from the air. The firing of the British troops below resulted in may casualties. Thus Talcher was one of the five places in India where in 1942 the masses were machine-gunned from air because of the intensity of the movement.<sup>16</sup>

### **Gurpal :**

Jatiya Sarkar bloomed with its multifarious petals in the Gurpal area of Balasore district in September 1942.<sup>17</sup> The residents of the locality being influenced by Tamralipta Jatiya Sarkar in the East and Swadhina Banchhanidhi Chakla in the west resolved to have their own National Government. A strong determined public in the open meetings vowed to paralyse the Government machinery. Payment of taxes were

stopped. Government servants were socially boycotted. Rural police force was compelled to resign. Post offices, police station and the government offices were demolished. In a parallel judicial system the criminal cases were settled by local Panchayat courts rather than by government institutions.<sup>18</sup>

### **Madhi (Kamakshya Nagar)**

The Quit India movement in the state of Dhenkanal bore a violent look on 26th August, 1942. Baishnab Charan Patnaik led a group of 19 persons at Madhi and created a serious problems of law and order for the authorities.<sup>19</sup> Burning of Madhi Police Station and its capture were the most sensational events. The guerilla squad of 19 members including Musa Mallick, Ananda Charan Swain, Baidhar Sahu and others looted the armoury, captured all armaments, burnt the police station and quarters of all police personnel, Tahasil and forest offices. Then they proceeded to Malapur and looted the grannery of the Raja. After the success of the operation the rebels established an independent government at Madhi.

The headquarter of the state being 22 miles away from Madhi was having no easy communication in rainy season. The river Brahmani in between was in spate. So nothing could be done immediately. State administration became thoroughly demoralised. The political Agent also asked the neighbouring state of Keonjhar Pallahara, Talcher, Hindol and Tigiria to co-operate with Dhenkanal in capturing the so called miscreants.<sup>20</sup>

For a short spell confusion engulfed the state. It was Baishnab Charan Patnaik who mooted the idea and mobilised the people into action. Gandhian call of 'Do or Die' and the torrent of repression unleashed by the government engendered in him the spirit. State

administration vanished for few days and parallel government worked at his initiative.

The mass participation during this period of August Kranti surpassed all the previous records. Rightly Nehru remarks in Discovery of India -

"The sudden unorganised demonstrations and outbreaks on the part of the people culminating in violent conflicts and destruction of powerful armed forces were a measure of the intensity of their feelings."

These intense attitudes manifested in the establishment of Jatiya Sarkars in different parts of the country. While volumes have been brought to lime light about these Jatiya Sarkars or parallel governments of outside states in Orissa still more facts are to be explored for their gallant contributions to August Kranti. Orissa was no less. It stands in equal rank with that of Satara, Ballia, Tauluk or Bhagalpur. Both in Garhjat and Mughalbandi areas of Orissa Jatiya Sarkars made their benign presence to be felt. These unrecognised heroes and martyrs and their unsung activities still remind the modern generations to fix them at their proper places in the annals of August Kranti.

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