



## Freedom Movement in Khurda

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The historians have drawn a line of demarcation between the nationalist movement organized by the English - educated middle class which began with the foundation of Indian National Congress in 1885 and the popular insurrections of the nineteenth century which were sometimes organized by the traditional elites and sometimes by peasants and tribals themselves. In colonial discourse the mobilizations of the latter type are generally treated as disturbances or resistance movements of certain interest groups. For example, the Revolt of 1857 was characterized in colonial parlance as a purely selfish sepoy mutiny and the Khurda Rebellion of 1817 as a rebellion of dispossessed Paikas or militia men of the deposed Raja of Khurda. Among the Indian historians sometimes we find a controversy regarding the characterization of the nineteenth century popular insurrections. For example, while some scholars like S.B. Chaudhury treat the Revolt of 1857 as a war of independence, R.C. Mazumdar holds that "the miseries and blood shed of 1857-58 were not the birth pangs of a freedom movement in India but the dying groans of an obsolete aristocracy and (the) centrifugal feudalism of medieval age". In case of the Khurda Rebellion of 1817 while a section of scholars and intelligentsia consider it as the first war of independence, others call it a resistance

movement. A number of questions may be raised here, while we try to understand the nature of nineteenth century insurrections - What is freedom movement ? When did it begin? Whether the so-called resistance movements were anti-colonial in nature ? Was the Congress movement a freedom movement from the beginning ? While characterizing the Revolt of 1857 as "a primary resistance movement", Eric Stokes, the British historian recognizes its "innate antagonism to alien overlords" and lack of "ideological underpinning". Ranjit Guha, the subaltern historian considers insurgency as the necessary anti-thesis of colonialism. If colonial rule was exploitative and discriminatory in nature, anti-colonialism was bound to be co-eval with colonial rule, and anti-colonial or national movement was a cumulative process. Alternatively we may postulate a phase of hibernation between the popular insurrections and the rise of intelligentsia-based nationalism.

In the early phase of the British rule there were four anti-British or anti-colonial outbreaks in Khurda-the Rebellion of Mukundadeva II, the Raja of Khurda in 1804, Buxi Jagabandhu's Rebellion of 1817, Tapang Rebellion of 1827 and Banpur Rebellion of 1836. Jayi Rajguru, the principal adviser of Raja Mukundadeva II was the kingpin of the anti-British outbreak of 1804. He was most probably opposed to the Khurda



Raja's alliance with the British for assisting the latter in the fight against the Marathas and at his instance the Raja's troops entered the disputed mahals (Lembai, Rahang, Purushottam Chhatar and Chabiskud) which the Marathas had earlier taken away from the Raja of Khurda and the British refused to restore them to the Raja in contravention of their earlier promise and plundered them. (The British also violated their promise by not paying rupees one lakh out of which Rs. 40,000/- was actually paid by them to Jayi Rajguru). The British knew Jayi Rajguru's key role in the rebellion of the Raja, for which they executed the latter and ultimately pardoned the Raja. Buxi Jagabandhu who had opposed Jayi Rajguru's advice for rebellion subsequently rebelled against the British in 1817 in a different context i.e. when he found himself reduced to a pauper being deprived of his Rorang estate because of a bureaucratic conspiracy and he saw the plight of people due to overassessment, rise of salt price, depreciation of Kauri currency and oppression of amlas and darogas. Initially Jagabandhu and Krushnachandra Bhramarabar (the dewan) appear to have sought redressal of grievances through prayer and petition. As there was no favourable response from the authorities he took recourse to open rebellion. The open rebellion was suppressed within a short time. Thereafter Jagabandhu hid himself in the jungles of Khurda, Banpur and Ghumsur and carried on underground resistance with the help of courageous Paikas and Kandhas till 1825. The rebels committed dacoity, arson and murder and opposed revenue collection. Though ultimately Jagabandhu surrendered and was pardoned by the British authorities who granted the former a pension in lieu of the surrender of Buxi title, yet they recognized the genuineness of his cause. A British officer R. Hunter observed: "They (British authorities) had virtually had to admit defeat by

offering him (Jagabandhu) pardon. Though Jagabandhu surrendered himself he was really the victor in the fight between him and the British."<sup>1</sup> In 1827 the people of Tapang garh refused to pay rent and rebelled under the leadership of Samanta Madhab Chandra Routroy (the Paik leader or Dalabehera). Eight years after this rebellion Madhusudan Bipra, an eye witness wrote a Kavya, entitled *Firinghi Kali Bharat* which gives an account of the conflicts of the Khurda people with the British and particularly the rebellion at Tapang. In 1836 the Paikas and Kandhas of Banpur who had been all along seething with discontent rose in a serious outburst. The kingpins of this rebellion were Sharan Singh (Surrin Singh) and Kruttibas Patsani both of whom were transported overseas for life. There was a Kandha leader, named Lochan Bisoyi in the Banpur Rebellion of 1836.

The basic factor behind the discontent that fuelled rebellion in Khurda in 1817 and afterwards was economic. Overassessment, dispossession of many original proprietors, who failed to pay revenue, resumption of rent free tenures enjoyed by Dalabeheras, Dalais and Paikas, rise of salt price under monopoly system and depreciation and abolition of Kauri currency were the causes of popular discontent before the Rebellion of 1817. The support of the discontented tribals (i.e. Kandhas spread over three geographically contiguous regions i.e. Khurda, Banpur and Ghumsur and hill chiefs were of great help to Buxi Jagabandhu in organizing and carrying on rebellious activities. Tribal discontent against colonial rule later on found manifestation in violation of forest laws during nationalist movement in Gandhian era. A contemporary British officer, named W. Ker characterized the Rebellion of 1817 as a freedom movement in the following words :



"Jagabandhu has given a lead in organizing a movement, no matter in how haphazard manner for ousting the newly established English from Orissa; he expected that other people who (were) also hit hard by the mal-administration under the English and the Orissa chiefs who had been deprived of all their freedom would follow up the lead to make a common cause with him for the purpose of liberating their motherland from foreign yoke."<sup>2</sup>

Whether freedom movement or resistance movement, the Rebellion of 1817 become a source of inspiration for the nationalist leaders and intellectuals of Khurda such as Godavarish Mishra of Satyavadi School, poet Godavarish Mahapatra, the composer of the stirring poem *Utha Kankala* (Oh Skeletons, Arise) and leftist politicians and intellectuals like Pranath Patnaik, Sachi Routroy and Gangadhar Paikaray. Godavarish Mishra wrote on it a historical novel, entitled *Athara Shaha Satara* (Eighteen hundred and seventeen). At the time of Dasahara, in 1937, with the help of his associates, like Gokul Mohan Raichudamani and Purnachandra Mahanty, Pranath Patnaik organized a rally of the descendants of erstwhile Paikas with traditional dress and weapons at Gurjang. The organization of this rally by Patnaik may be viewed as a political gimmick. But the enthusiastic response of the people showed how the Rebellion of 1817 had struck their chords. As Gokul Mohan Ray Chudamani observes :

"After the Paik Rebellion British imperialists virtually buried the once powerful Paik race of Khurda. Pranath Patnaik infused new life into the skeleton-like Paikas by giving a call in the spirit of late Godavarish Mahapatra's *Utha Kankala* (Oh Skeletons ! Arise) invocation. In 1936, in the first general election he was elected to the Legislative Assembly as a Congress candidate.

Immediately thereafter he organized a youth rally at Khurda. His main objective was that Paikas will proudly march in the streets of Khurda with sword and shield; they will regain their lost glory. In fact the great Paika procession of that day roused new life, inspiration and hope like elixir."<sup>3</sup>

Khurda became a part of the Puri district in 1829, and from the late nineteenth century onwards socio-political consciousness grew in Khurda as a result of growth of modern education and influence of nationalist movement in Puri district spearheaded by the Satyavadi School. Khurda was one of the eight places where a vernacular school was established in 1844 according to the scheme of the Governor General Lord Hardinge. Subsequently schools were established in other places such as Tangi, Banapur, Begunia, Bhubaneswar and Janla in 1858-59. The Khurda vernacular school has been subsequently elevated to the status of Middle English school (in 1867) and High English school (1896). The Khurda High English School was named as BJB High School in memory of Buxi Jagabandhu after independence. According to a report in Utkal Dipika, as early as 1882, some educated people of Khurda such as Fakir Charan Ray (the teacher of Orada school), Shyam Sundar Raj Dalbehera (his student) and Antaryami Patnaik (Sub-Inspector of Schools) were planning to spread female education in Khurda.<sup>4</sup> In course of time the alumni of Khurda High English School became instrumental in rousing the socio-political consciousness of the people.

In pre-Gandhian era the Swadeshi movement of Bengal had some stimulating effect on the weavers and cane goods producers of Banpur.<sup>5</sup> With the beginning of Non-cooperation movement attempts were made by the Congress leaders of Puri like Gopabandhu Das and Jagabandhu Singh to mobilise people of Khurda,



hailing from different sections such as Sarbarakars, village revenue officers, ryots and primary school teachers. Gopabandhu and Jagabandhu addressed meetings at Khandagiri (8 October 1920) and Jatani (16 October 1920). In his addresses in Khurda villages Gopabandhu focused on public resentment against forest laws, chaukidari tax and union board tax.<sup>6</sup> The students of Khurda H.E. School played an active role in the Non-Cooperation movement. On 21 January 1921 they arranged a meeting to boycott the school and attended the meeting at Satyabadi, Sakhigopal.<sup>7</sup> About eleven students of Khurda H.E. School participated in the Non-cooperation movement.<sup>8</sup> Due to the active involvement of the students of this school in the movement the authorities felt the necessity of curbing their activities. Consequently the students had to seek the permission of police even to go in procession for the immersion of the image of Goddess Saraswati.<sup>9</sup> Narsingh Charan Chow Patnaik was the main leader of Non-cooperation movement in Khurda. There were other Non-cooperators, such as Digamber Srichandan, Krupasindhu Hota, Daitari Mishra, Gopi Singh, Hari Mallik and Sadananda Tripathy.<sup>10</sup> Associated with the Non-cooperation movement there was a movement of tribals and poor peasants of Khurda to violate forest laws, which was supported by the student activists.<sup>11</sup> On 10 February 1922 in a gathering of two thousand people at Khurda, Gopabandhu gave a call to stop payment of rent and jungle tax.<sup>12</sup>

The authorities adopted stern repressive measures being alarmed at the growth of agitational activities. Gopabandhu Das was detained as an undertrial prisoner in Khurda from 28 October to 29 November 1921 for publishing a news item, entitled "Serious if True" in his mouthpiece Samaj, criticizing the alleged molestation of a woman in market place by two

constables in the Begunia P.S.. Though he did not defend himself, finally he was acquitted.<sup>13</sup> Meetings were prohibited. In March 1922 the police resorted to incendiary activities in Khurda and Begunia. In defiance of the police ban, in January 1922, at Tribeni mela held in Banamalipur the Congress volunteers sold Khadi goods, carried on picketing and shouted the slogan 'Mahatma Gandhi ki Jay'.<sup>14</sup> In spite of prohibitory orders and other obstructions like deployment of constables, chowkidars and scavengers on all roads leading to the venue of meeting for preventing people, sprinkling of wine by scavengers on gentle men and hanging of drums in their necks for the purpose of insulting, Gopabandhu Das addressed a public meeting at Khurda in February 1922.<sup>15</sup>

The second all-Orissa provincial conference was held at Bolgarh on 14-15 November 1925. When this place was chosen as the venue of the conference in supersession of the claim of Puri there was some resentment at the latter place. This conference was presided over by Bhagirathi Mahapatra, the first secretary of Utkal Pradesh Congress Committee. On 13 November, along with Gopabandhu Chaudhury, Birakishor Das and Rajakrushna Bose, Bhagirathi Mahapatra arrived at Khurda Road railway station by passenger train. They were garlanded by volunteers and carried in motor lorry to Bolgarh. On the way, at places like Khurda and Begunia the people greeted these leaders by raising the slogan 'Mahatma Gandhi ki Jay'. The Bolgarh Conference passed a resolution moved by Gopabandhu Dash and Godavarish Mishra and seconded by Narsingh Charan Chow Patnaik and Raghunath Mahapatra, expressing resentment over the restrictions imposed by the Government on securing the required timber and fuel from the forest in Khurda.<sup>16</sup>



During the Civil Disobedience movement the student leaders of Khurda such as Nrusingh Charan Samanta Singhar, Laxmidhar Patnaik, Shyam Sundar Senapati and Balaram Patra played active roles. With the financial help of the zamindar of Janla some school students decided to proceed to the nearby sea coast for manufacturing contraband salt.<sup>17</sup> A Congress flag was fixed on the roof of the Khurda H.E. School building by some students on 15 April 1930. On 16 April some students organized hartal in the school and Khurda town.<sup>18</sup> Nrusingh Charan Samanta Singhar was very active in organising Civil Disobedience movement in Puri and Khurda. He was externed from the Puri town while trying to organize a hartal in the town. In Khurda, Samanta Singhar, Shyama Sundar Senapati and Balaram Patra were moving from village to village asking the students to boycott the schools and the villagers to defy government officials and violate laws. Samanta Singhar and Senapati were arrested on the charge of intimidating the village Chowkidars and tearing foreign cloth.<sup>19</sup> After the second session of Round Table Conference, when Civil Disobedience movement was resumed, Pranath Patnaik and eleven others were arrested for picketing before the foreign cloth shops in Jatni. They were tried and jailed.<sup>20</sup>

As in case of Non-cooperation movement, during Civil Disobedience movement the tribals and poor peasants of Khurda carried on agitation to secure right for using both the protected and reserve forests. To check the violation of forest laws, under the Indian Forest Act the Paikas were empowered to arrest the offenders and the Sub-Divisional Officer of Khurda was vested with powers to grant rewards to those who detected the forest law violators.<sup>21</sup>

The withdrawal of Civil Disobedience movement was followed by socialist and peasant

movement, Gandhian constructive work and state people's movement or Prajamandal Andolan. Each of these movements had more or less some impact on Khurda.

Before the formation of all India Congress Socialist Party, Utkal Congress Socialist Worker's League had been organized with Sarathi as its mouthpiece. The following were the members of its executive - Nabakrushna Chaudhury (general secretary), Malati Chaudhury (treasurer), Surendra Nath Dwivedi, Dibakar Patnaik, Gauri Shankar Samanta, Nrupendra Narayan Sen, Goura Chandra Das, Pranath Patnaik and Gatikrushna Swain.<sup>22</sup> Pranath Patnaik who had studied in Kashi Vidyapitha during the period 1932-34, got Shastri degree, and had been indoctrinated in Marxist ideology by the Principal of the Vidyapitha, Acharya Narendra Deva. He presided over the first session of Orissa Congress Socialist party, held in the residence of Nabakrushna Chaudhury at Cuttack in 1934.<sup>23</sup> In October 1934, in a meeting held at Bombay, All-India Congress Socialist Party was organized with delegates from thirteen states. On 10 June 1935 a peasant conference was held in the Cuttack Town Hall under the chairmanship of Godavarish Mishra. On 10 August 1935 the socialists of Orissa formed a Kishan Sangha with Harekrushna Mahtab as the president. In April 1936 the annual sessions of Indian National Congress and all India Kishan Sabha were held at Lucknow. S N Dwivedi and Nabakrushna Chaudhury attended the subject committee of the all-India Kishan Sabha held in Lucknow under the presidentship of Swami Sahajananda of Bihar. From Orissa the following were elected as the members of the working committee of All-India Kishan Sabha-Harekrushna Mahtab, Nabakrushna Chaudhury, Malati Chaudhury, Dibakar Patnaik and Gatikrushna Swain.<sup>24</sup>



After the Lucknow sessions of Indian National Congress and all-India Kishan Sabha peasant meetings were held in different places and the socialist leaders like Nabakrushna Chaudhury, Pranath Patnaik, Gangadhar Mishra, Gatikrushna Swain, Gokul Mohan Rai Chudamani, Mohan Das, Bhagabati Charan Panigrahi and others tried to unite the peasants under socialist banner. In a meeting held at Puri on 10 May 1936 a committee was formed, consisting of Nabakrushna Chaudhury, Harekrushna Mahatab, Godavarish Mishra, Jagabandhu Singh and Gorachand Patnaik to look into peasants' grievances and consult public opinion regarding the amendment of Orissa Tenancy Act.<sup>25</sup> A meeting of the working committee of Utkal Provincial Kishan Sabha was held at Puri on 14 August 1936. A sub-committee was formed, consisting of H.K. Mahtab, N.K. Chaudhury, Rajakrushna Bose, Lingaraj Mishra and Malati Chaudhury to inquire into the grievances of peasants and submit a report to Provincial Congress Committee.<sup>26</sup> On 20 August 1936 the working committee of the Puri district Kishan Sangha passed a resolution authorizing Pranath Patnaik and Gajendra Mishra to carry on investigation into the condition of peasants and submit their findings to a high level three-men committee (consisting of Gorachand Patnaik, N.K. Chaudhury and H.K. Mahtab) who would move the Government for reduction of rent.<sup>27</sup> On 1 September 1936 all India Kishan Day was observed in different places of Orissa and resolutions were passed, demanding reduction of rent, amendment of tenancy laws and relief of the peasants' indebtedness.<sup>28</sup> In September 1936 Pranath Patnaik organised a huge meeting of the peasants in Chandmari field of Khurda which was chaired by Nabakrushna Chaudhury and attended by Jadumani Mangaraj, Rajakrushna Bose, Mohan Das and Pyari Shankar Roy,<sup>29</sup> and

a sub-divisional peasants' committee, consisting of 50 members was formed at Khurda.<sup>30</sup>

On 2 November 1936 a peasants' conference was held in Bhubaneswar with Rajakrushna Bose on chair. This conference passed resolutions, demanding reduction of land revenue, free primary education, abolition of indirect taxation, reduction of rate of interest by money-lenders and amendment of tenancy Act. This conference supported the minimum political and economic demands of peasants as formulated in the Lucknow session of all India Kishan Sabha and the candidature of Pranath Patnaik for election to Orissa Legislative Assembly.<sup>31</sup> The visit of Jawaharlal Nehru, the Congress President from 10 to 12 November 1936 before the Assembly election and his appeal to the peasants roused great enthusiasm. Nehru addressed public meetings in Bhubaneswar, Puri, Sakhigopal, Pipili, Nimapada, Delanga, Jatani and Khurda. On 15 November 1936 Utkal Provincial Kishan Conference was held at Puri under the presidentship of Swami Sahajananda. It was attended by a large number of peasants from all parts of Orissa.<sup>32</sup>

After the formation of Congress ministry the peasants became more assertive in their demands. In Puri district the tenants declined to pay rent and ex-communicated the Zamindars.<sup>33</sup> On 1 March 1937 a branch of the Socialist Party was opened at Khurda with Gokul Mohan Raichudamani as Secretary.<sup>34</sup> The nature of peasant unrest in undivided Puri district in 1937 and 1938 can be understood from the following official weekly report of 8 May 1938: "There is no doubt that several prominent leaders of outwardly divergent political persuasions are pooling their energies with a view to create disaffection among the peasantry. During the week under report in Puri district alone there have been



no less than eighteen political meetings. Babu Harekrushna Mahtab, now a member of the All-India Congress Working Committee has been on a prolonged tour of propaganda in the interiors of the district (he himself addressing nine meetings), accompanied by prominent adherents to the socialist creed. Undisguised reference to a future mass no-tax campaign in conjunction with a possible general strike on railways and in key industries with a view to crippling the administration and ultimately to drive the British out of India clearly show the persistent preaching of Communist leaders elsewhere is now resulting in similar rhetoric in Orissa. Every effort, it seems is to be made to intensify this propaganda during the present non-agricultural season, when the peasantry are for the most part not actively occupied."<sup>35</sup>

From 25 to 31 March 1938 the fourth annual session of Gandhi Seva Sangha was held at Beraboi near Delang. It was attended by Mahatma Gandhi and other national leaders such as Vallabhbhai Patel, Rajendra Prasad, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, J B Kripalini, P Sitaramayya and Prafulla Chandra Ghosh. On this occasion the dispute between rival Congress groups was settled. Consequently H K Mahtab voluntarily resigned from the presidentship of UPCC and Gopabandhu Chaudhury was elected as the president and empowered to choose his own executive committee. This meeting of Gandhi Seva Sangh drew a large number of people from different parts of the Puri district and Orissa. Daily public meetings were held. About 30000 people travelled by train to attend the meeting and exhibition.<sup>36</sup> Khurda H.E. School remained closed on 25 March 1938, and under the guidance of six teachers the students went to Beraboi to attend the conference on that day.<sup>37</sup> At that time the Congress Socialists wanted to have a camp at the venue of Gandhi Seva Sangha meeting. Not

being allowed to do so, they established their camp in the house of a Communist, named Durgacharan Mahanty, 1½ miles away from the venue and carried on their socialistic propaganda by meetings and distribution of leaflets.

By 1938 the Congress Socialists developed interest in states people's movement. So far as Khurda was concerned, its socialist leaders and leftist intellectuals like Pranath Patnaik, Gangadhar Paikaray, Gokul Mohan Raichudamani, and Sachi Routray criticized the allegedly oppressive policy of the Dhenkanal Durbar towards the movement of the people. After Bhuban-Nilakanthapur firing incident, in a public meeting held at Puri on 22 October 1938 Mohan Das M.L.A., Pranath Patnaik, MLA Godavarish Mishra MLA, Gatikrushna Swain and Bhubaneswar Mishra criticized the repressive policy of the Dhenkanal Durbar.<sup>38</sup> Godavarish Mishra subsequently changed his stand for which in a public meeting organized at Siko, Begunia P.S. on 5 December 1938 a resolution was passed by Gangadhar Paikray, demanding the former's resignation from the Assembly and Congress party.<sup>39</sup> When Dhenkanal Satyagraha was organized by Congress Socialists from outside, from Khurda, Gokul Mohan Rai Chudamani joined it. The Prajamandal movement of Ranpur had a direct bearing on Khurda because of the geographical contiguity. After the Bazalgette murder on 5 January 1939, fearing police reprisal a large number of people of Ranpur state took shelter in the villages of Khurda from Banpur to Bolgarh.<sup>40</sup> In some villages of Khurda meetings were held condemning the murder. For example, in a public meeting, held in Barapari village under the chairmanship of a Sarbarakar, named Benudhar Patnaik on 18 January 1939, a resolution was passed condemning the murder and holding Congress workers from outside responsible for it.<sup>41</sup> On the other hand, the



Socialists, led by Pranath Patnaik formed a defence committee under the chairmanship of a lawyer, named Lokanath Mishra to help those who were tried as the accused in the Bazalgette murder case. Dinabandhu Sahu, Gadadhar Jena and Shatrughna Mohanty acted as defence lawyers.<sup>42</sup>

By 1939 the Communists were singled out as a separate group within the Congress Socialist Party, and it was found that a section of Congress Socialists owed allegiance to Subhas Chandra Bose. As early as 1935 Guru Charan Patnaik had become a secret member of the banned Communist Party.<sup>43</sup> In 1936 Pranath Patnaik, Gurucharan Patnaik and Bhagabati Charan Panigrahi formed a secret Communist Party. According to S N Dwivedi, in a meeting held at Cuttack under the chairmanship of Ramakrushna Pati a decision was taken to form Communist Party in Orissa, and in 1940 Communists were expelled from Congress.<sup>44</sup> Under these circumstances in 1939 Nabakrushna Chaudhury dissolved the Congress Socialist Party and Krushak Sabha in Orissa. In fact the Communists had been trying to indoctrinate the peasants in their ideology while remaining within the Congress Socialist party. As pointed out by Ashish Mahapatra, while remaining a member of Congress Party and a legislator, Pranath was openly implementing the mass programme of the Communist Party and in large areas of Khurda, Jatani, Chandaka, Bolgarh and Begunia the flag of Communist Party was flying along with those of Congress and Krushak Sabha.<sup>45</sup> In Khurda peasant movement was led by the Communists. Pranath Patnaik and his fellow Communists like Gokul Mohan Rai Chudamani, Parashuram Padatikaray, Gangadhar Mishra, Laxman Patnaik, Raghunath Patnaik, Gangadhar Paikray, Sadhu Charan Mahanti, Baikunthanath Subuddhi, Niranjan Jagaddeba, Upendra Nath Das, Damodar Mishra, Purna

Chandra Mahanti and others carried on movement in Khurda for abolition of Sarbarakari system, repeal of khas mahal law, amendment of forest law and tenancy act. Songs of the leftist poets - Ananta Patnaik and Sachi Routray which were published in the form of a booklet, called *Raktashikha* (flame of blood), and distributed by Gokul Mohan Rai Chudamani were being sung by the Communists in the villages of Khurda.<sup>46</sup> The Communist-led peasant movement not only aimed at the redressal of peasants' agrarian grievances but also overthrow of imperialism and capture of power by the peasants. In the Patia peasants' conference held on 10 November 1937 under the chairmanship of Bhagabati Charan Panigrahi, the Secretary of Orissa Socialist Party and attended by 5000 people, where the Communists like Sachi Routroy, Ananta Patnaik, Bijay Chandra Das, Pranath Patnaik and Gauranga Charan Das were present, Panigrahi said. "If the peasants in India would unite, they would one day rule the country. Congress was fighting for Swaraj but this would be of no avail if after the British left India, control remained in the hands of the capitalists such as the Rajahs of Kanika and Parlakimedi". Criticizing the Congress ministry Sachi Routroy said: "When the British government authorized Congress to take over the government, the zamindars and capitalists in the Congress were tempted and have now become ministers. Ananta Patnaik held that Congress was controlled by the capitalists and zamindars where men like Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru were a few honourable exceptions.<sup>47</sup> The activities of the Communists were disliked not only by the zamindars and sarbarakars but also by a large section of Congressmen. In a Kishan Sabha meeting of the Chandaka thana held in the village Mendhasal on 24 February 1939 held under the chairmanship of Sadhu Charan Mahanti, the chairman pointed out that the meeting was



attended by a small number of people because of the fact that policemen and Sarbarakars had given an impression to the people that the meeting would be raided by the Gurkha military.<sup>48</sup>

As the international situation was heading towards a global war, the Communist-led Kisan Sabhas were passing resolutions not to help Britain in the coming war. But to take advantage of the weakness of Britain, in the Patia Peasants Conference of 10 November 1937 it was resolved that India should not take part in any imperialistic war in future.<sup>49</sup> Similar resolution was passed in the Kisan Sabha meeting of Chandaka thana, held on 24 February 1939<sup>50</sup>, and that of Chhanagiri Hat held on 29 August 1939<sup>51</sup> on the eve of Second World War. The Chhanagiri Hat meeting urged the Congress Working Committee to withdraw disciplinary action against Subhas Chandra Bose in order to open the door for unity between leftists and rightists. After the outbreak of Second World War, for delivering anti-war speech Pranath Patnaik, Gokul Mohan Rai Chudamani, Sadhu Charan Mahanti and Purna Chandra Mahanti were arrested and sentenced to rigorous imprisonment after trial in the Court of Sub-Divisional Magistrate of Khurda.<sup>52</sup> According to police report in April 1940 in Bolgarh a socialist named Fakir Charan Mahanty was dissuading people from contributing to war fund and inducing them to break forest laws.<sup>53</sup> In December 1940, to a large crowd in Khurda Pranath Patnaik read out Gandhi's message and was arrested as an individual Satyagrahi.<sup>54</sup> It is held by Manmohan Mishra that though Pranath did not believe in the efficacy of Individual Civil Disobedience movement he was instructed by the Communist high command that as an active member of the Congress Party he should obey Mahatma Gandhi's call for individual civil disobedience.<sup>55</sup> On 9 August 1942 the office of Communist Party was inaugurated at Cuttack.

Bhagabati Charan Panigrahi became its first secretary. Pranath Patnaik publicly joined the Communist Party on this occasion. At that time because of alliance between Britain and Soviet Russia against Nazi Germany, Communist Party no longer opposed war. But Pranath Patnaik was arrested and sent to Berhampur jail on return from the inauguration ceremony at Cuttack.<sup>56</sup> He was released in 1945.

During the war, on 8 May 1941, the Communists organized all Utkal Provincial Peasants' Conference at Khurda. The conference urged the peasants to remain alert about exploitation by capitalists and imperialists and cooperate with all anti-imperialist activities.<sup>57</sup> After independence the Communists of Khurda, led by Pranath Patnaik started the Tebhaga movement with a view to giving two - third of produce to share croppers.

During Quit India movement the Government declared under Section 30 of the Police Act that no procession or meeting would be organized in Puri, Khurda and Jatani without prior permission from the local authorities. In spite of official prohibition, on 16 and 31 August 1942 the students of Puri, Nimapara, Khurda, Olasingh and Banapur H.E Schools went on strike.<sup>58</sup> In Bhubaneswar and Delang telegraph wires were cut.<sup>59</sup>

On 14 August 1947 before 12 p.m. a large number of people gathered in the Chandmari field of Khurda to celebrate the independence of India. Cannons were fired twenty-one times, which were followed by other fire works. Next day in the morning a large procession went through the town of Khurda, and at 4 p.m. a public meeting was held in the midst of torrential rains.<sup>60</sup>

Resistance to British rule in Khurda in the early phase has left behind its legacy in two forms; one is a glorification of the chivalrous military



tradition of the Paikas; even today when the society has undergone so much change, if a Paika rally is organized, the descendants of old Paikas would come forward to join it; another legacy is a controversy between the adorers of Jayi Rajguru and those of Buxi Jagabandhu as to who was the true rebel or greater rebel than the other. Since Jayi Rajguru was hanged by the British, he is regarded by many as the first martyr of the freedom struggle in Orissa. On the other hand Buxi Jagabandhu who is regarded by his adorers as the organizer of the first freedom struggle in India and is admired for carrying on prolonged underground resistance is criticized by his detractors for his ultimate compromise with the British authorities (He surrendered to the British in 1825 and died a pensioner in 1829). Violation of forest law i.e. assertion of right by the people to use forest was an important local issue in the freedom movement of Khurda during the nationalist era. Peasant movement, led and organized by Communists from 1930's onwards upto the Tebhaga movement was a significant aspect of freedom movement in Khurda, which accounts for the predominant role of Communist politicians like Pranath Patnaik and Gangadhar Paikaray in the post-independence electoral politics in this area.

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