Role of H.K. Mahatab in the Integration of Princely States

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Hare Krushna Mahatab is a great freedom fighter and an eminent statesman. He is remembered forever for his tremendous contribution towards the freedom struggle. He occupies a high position, not only in the history of Orissa, but also in the history of India. As a great patriot, he sacrificed his life for the sake of motherland. He fought bravely against the might of British imperialism. His role in the time of great uprising was significant. As the founder of modern Orissa, Hare Krushna Mahatab occupied a permanent place in the annals of History. As a true freedom fighter, and the lover of motherland Hare Krushna Mahatab played a significant role during the national struggle. He strongly voiced against the misrule, corruption, tyranny and exploitation of Britishers.

Hare Krushna Mahatab actively participated in All National Movement of the feudatory states of Orissa. He heartily supported the exploited people and also encouraged them to continue their rebel against the feudatory chiefs unitedly and achieve the goal. The Praja Mandal movement started in the Gadjats of Orissa. The kings suppressed the popular movement by the way of police force. At that time, there were 26 Gadjat states in Orissa. The people of these states were exploited by native rulers in many ways. The people of the states were bound to pay the illegal tax like Rasad, Magan, Bethi, and Beggars etc. The common people had no fundamental right to speak anything about the misrule of native kings.

When Harekrushna Mahatab became the new congress premier in the Orissa Province took some steps to solve the problems of the native states. He seriously thought about the complete merger and integration of the princely states with the province of Orissa. Firstly, Harekrushna Mahatab met the members of the Cabinet Mission on 6th April 1946. He presented a memorandum before the cabinet mission and strongly demanded for integration of native states with the province. The cabinet mission did not give any interest to the demands of Mahatab. Mahatab wrote letters to all feudatory chiefs on 10th May 1946 and again on 29th June 1946 in order to know their opinion regarding integration of states and to convince them about benefits of mutual co-operation. Mahatab also requested all the
ruling chiefs for integration of states with Orissa Province for the interest of both. The rulers of Garjat states did not show any respect to the request of Mahatab. They did not want to join with the province. Mahatab also gave a proposal for discussion with the rulers on the question of co-operation between the province and states. Mahatab’s proposal was turned down by the British authorities as well as feudatory chiefs.

In July 1946, the rulers of all native states met in a conference held at Alipore. They decided to form a federal union of Chhatisgarh and Orissa States. The British Resident of the Eastern State Agency who was present in the conference and encouraged the rulers for the formation of federal union. A special committee was formed for the purpose. These political activities discouraged Mahatab for some time but he never lost his faith. On 16th October 1946 Mahatab met the rulers at Sambalpur in a conference. In this conference Mahatab emphasised the necessity of one administration for both states and province. But the rulers did not agree to Mahatab’s proposal. Mahatab did not give up the hope. He approached the Nawab of Bhopal, the chairman of the chamber of princes to solve the problem of the feudal chiefs. This attempt of Mahatab also failed without result.

In the mean time the Praja Mandal leaders of Orissa and Chhatisgarh states prepared a Plan to fight against the rulers more effectively. The rulers of Orissa and Chhatisgarh planned to form a union to counteract the activities of Praja Mandal agitators. The first session of the Orissa and C.P. Regional Council of All India State's people's conference was held at Cuttack on 1st March 1947. The conference passed the resolution that the rulers of Eastern State Agency not to go ahead with their plan of union. The Regional Council constituted a working committee under the chairmanship of Sarangadhar Das to direct the Praja Mandal Movement in different states. Meanwhile the rulers of Chhatisgarh and Orissa met at Puri. The rulers prepared their course of action at Puri to create problems for the merger of princely states in Orissa Province. After some days, 39 States of Orissa and Chhatisgarh formed Eastern State Union on 1st August 1947. They also adopted a constitution and maintained a police force for suppressing the agitation of the Praja Mandal. The tenants of Orissa and Chhatisgarh Regional Council met at Cuttack on 10th August 1947. A resolution passed in this council for integration of native states with the Orissa Province. Meanwhile, after long struggle India achieved the independence. Before leaving India, Britishers gave full freedom to all native states throughout India either to join Government of India or remain independent. All the rulers of princely states of Orissa in this critical political situation met at Bhawanipatna to consider the question of introducing responsible Government in State. Some feudatory chiefs supported the idea of introduction of responsible Government. In this meeting, the rulers decided to strengthen their joint police force. With the dawn of independence the situation so rapidly changed.

After India got independence, Mahatab played a notable role for unification of princely states with the province of Orissa. After independence, political unrest started in the princely states. In Bolangir-patna, princely state people's organisation named "Krushak Party" held a conference. More than 10,000 people who participated in this conference did not accept the proposal of a responsible government by Maharaja and also refused to recognise the Eastern States Union. H.K. Mahatab took a courageous step by taking charge of the Nilgiri state on 14th November 1947 with the permission
of the Home Minister of the Government of India. The ruler of Nilagiri created violence and lawless situation by encouraging tribals against Praja Mandal workers. After taking over the charge of administration of Nilagiri, a meeting of the State Ministry was held on 20th November 1947. In this high level meeting, it was decided not to recognise the Eastern States Union of Orissa and Chhatisgarh State. It was finally decided to meet the rulers in a conference in Orissa as soon as possible. Accordingly, Sardar Patel, V. K. Menon and the Ministry reached at Cuttack on 13th December 1947. In this period, H.K. Mahatab played a very crucial role. The historic conference started in Rajbhawan at Cuttack in the morning of 14th December 1947. Sardar Patel first met the rulers of 'B' and 'C' class states. Twelve rulers of that category were present. Same day in the afternoon Sardar Patel met "A" category states. Patel advised the princely states' rulers to accede to the merger of their states in Orissa Province. After some pressure and persuasion, the rulers agreed to accept the plan of merger and signed in the documents on 15th December 1947. The merger of princely states became effective from 1st January 1948. Due to some problem the State Mayurbhanja merged on 1st January 1949. It was a dramatic climax to the history of the Garjats who enjoyed separate identities throughout the British rule. Unfortunately, the state of Seraikala and Kharsuan were handed over to Bihar on 18th May 1948. The emergence of a greater Orissa was possible for the lifelong struggle of H.K. Mahatab.

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