Tribal Revolt of 1949 in Mayurbhanj

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When India got independence on the 15th Aug 1947, the British paramountcy in respect of Indian States lapsed and the state of Mayurbhanj became an independent unit with effect from that date. Soon after the transfer of power from the British hands, 'A Mayurbhanj State Legislative Assembly" was constituted with Sri Sarat Chandra Das as Prime Minister of the state. Sri Das was a leader of the Praja Mandal Party which later on came to be known as Mayurbhanj State Congress.

Sardar Patel summoned the Rulers of Orissa Feudatory states to meet him at Cuttack on 14th Dec 1947. But the Maharaja transferred full powers to his ministry on 9th Dec and took that ground on the conference (14th Dec), remained excluded from the merger negotiations. Had

Mayurbhanj joined with the other states on the 14th Dec 1947 to merge with Orissa, the course of subsequent agitation might have been different.In 1948, started the formation of different groups, some claiming amalgamation with Orissa and some wanting to keep the state independent. By September Maharaja saw that the administration had become chaotic and the ministry divided in this issue. Sri Satat Chandra.Das went to Delhi with Maharaja Pratap Chandra Bhanjdeo on the 16th Oct 1948 and the Maharaja signed there the instrument of the merger. Hence the state of Mayurbhanj merged with Orissa. The formal handing and taking over of the state by the Govt. of India took place in Nov. 1948 when Dr D.V. Rege, I.C.S was appointed as the Chief Commissioner of Mayurbhanj.

The administration of the central government in Mayurbhanj lasted only for a short duration or less than 2 months during which the chief commissioner studied closely and carefully the situation before finalizing his recommendation about the future of the state. After he submitted the report to the State Ministry V.P. Menon visited Baripada on 16th Dec 1948 to announce before the assembly

the momentous decision of the Govt. of India. In a written address to the Maharaja and the Representative of the People, Menon explained the overwhelming desire of all sections of the people except the adivasis to join Orissa as the integral part of Orissa Province and the alike decision of the state ministry.

Actually opposing the merger with Orissa the tribals under the leadership of Sunaram Majhi engineered a tribal movement in favour of merger of Mayurbhanj with Bihar. Formerly Sunaram's demand was in favour of an independent Mayurbhanj opposing merger with Orissa. While the negotiation of Congress leader of Orissa proved unavailing, Sunaram felt convinced that if Mayurbhanj would cease to remain a separate entity, than its merger with Bihar would serve the cause of the tribal population better. Sunaram's arguments touched the tribals in every nook and corner of the state making their agitation more popular and vigorous. Brushing aside the arguments of the Adivasis as highly unreasonable Menon would critically state:-

"The real leader is not the man who can address large public meetings but the man who can do something for the betterment of his fellowmen. Tasted by that standard the Adivasi leaders have failed in their duties".

In order to ally all possible fear from the minds of Adivasis, the Menon reassuringly said, "The Govt. of India and the Orissa Govt. will see that the lot of the Adivasis is improved and every fair chance is given to him."He announced that Mayurbhanj would merge with Orissa on 2nd Jan 1949. But the tribals of Mayurbhanj at once started opposing the decision of Government of India. "Adivasi Mahasava", a volunteer tribal organization started in 1946 became very popular among the tribals of Chhotanagar area under the able leadership of Jaipal Singh. Jaipal wanted to create for himself a stable political base. With this intention he started working for the upliftment of Adivasis of Bihar, Orissa, Madhya Pradesh and Bengal. Taking advantage of the situation in Mayurbahnj his two supporters Sunaram Sore and Ram Chandra Majhi enrolled about 15000 members both man and woman mostly from Bamanghaty and Panchpir sub-divisions adjacent to Bihar. In this context Jaipal Singh came foward, joined hands with Sunaram and Ramchandra and started mobilizing the tribals of Mayurbhanj in favour of merger with Bihar.

In the meantime on 18th May 1948 the states of Saraikela and Kharswan merged with the Singhbhum district of Bihar. The leader of Bihar Krishnaballabh Sahay played a vital role in the transfer of the administration of Saraikela and Kharswan to the government of Bihar. Actually it was the result of a armed rebellion of the Tribals and the backstage political intrigues by tribal leaders of Bihar. This victory of the rebels and their leaders worked liked a heavy tonic for the Adivasis of Mayurbhanj, who resolved to follow similar course of action to breakaway from Orissa. When V.P.Menon announced the final decision of Govt. of India the tribal leaders like L.Bhawan and Jaipal Singh, the brain behind Saraikela uprising started instigating the innocent tribals of Mayurbhanj. Under the leadership of Sonaram Soren and Ram Chandra declared Majhi, they Bamanghaty sub-division as independent unit with headquarters at Rairangpur. Armed Adivasis equiped with bows, arrows, axe and spear divided into several groups,

either cut off or blocked deployment of troops in different places. They guarded the road leading to Rairangpur. Even students of a school were engaged by their teacher Singray Majhi to collect advance information about any troop movement. They considered the non-tribals as Dikus who lived at the mercy of the Adivasis in utter panic in Bamanghaty and Panchpir area. Thousands of armed Adivasis started holding meetings in different places, even they came down to Baripada town and started demonstration at Police parade ground with the slogan" We shall merge with Bihar not with Orissa".

It was an unprecedented spectacle at Baripada town generating panic and spreading lawlessness. V.S.Mathews, the Collector of Mayurbhanj with the help of armed military forces started drastic action against the rebels. He ordered firing at Kuldiha, Gunduria, Gitilata, Rairangpur and several other places, where the tribals were assembled in groups to hold meetings. Due to the use of stenguns and rifles, there was heavy loss of life on the sides of the rebels. Govt. imposed punitive taxes on tribals and showed no linency in realizing the punitive tax. The tribals leaving their home and hearths fled to jungles. Govt. initiated judicial proceedings against the rebels and arrested rebels and their leaders. Since Mayurbhanj was recently merged with Orissa and Govt. of India had commited to take care of the Adivasis, Mahatab visited Rairangpur, met the tribal leaders and expressed his sincere concern about the welfare of tribals. Criminal's proceedings were withdrawn from those arrested leaders. After normalcy was restored, Adivasi Congress was set up to channelize the political minded tribalsof Mayurbhanj.Hence forth there was no obstacle for merger of Mayurbhanj and the state constituted one of the districts of Orissa from 2nd January 1949.

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Hon'ble Chief Minister Shri Naveen Patnaik inaugurating the renovated lounge and reception and improved facilities in Orissa Niwas, New Delhi on 14.7.2010.