



## Untold Stories of 1<sup>st</sup> Responsible Govt. of Mayurbhanj

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The victory of the Prajamandal was a victory of the people in their struggle against feudal social order and outdated pattern of monarchical Government.

Mayurbhanj was the first princely state in India to have a popular Government, soon after the independence was achieved, and the understanding with which such a great task was peacefully accomplished appears to be no man achievement for the people of Mayurbhanj. The institution of popular Government in Mayurbhanj on 10 December 1947 was an unique experiment which offered the Prajamandal leaders an opportunity to translate their ideals into practice. Since transfer of power took place on 10 December 1947, that day was declared as a public holiday in the State. It was given due publicity and the Government of India was informed.

After almost a decade of political tension and acrimony normalcy was restored in Mayurbhanj, Maharaja's proclamation dated 9 Dec-1947 had instituted a Council of Ministers. Sri Sarat Chandra Das, Bidyadhar Mohapatra and Maheswar Nayak were chosen by Maharaja to constitute a three member cabinet with Sarat Chandra Das as the premier. The Ministers were allotted the following portfolios :

- 1) Sarat Chandra Das - Premier, Home, Finance, Audit, Planning and Reconstruction.
- 2) B. Mohapatra - Revenue, Law, Health & Local Government.

- 3) M. Nayak - Development, Education, Supply, Transport, Public Works, Commerce and Labour.

The popular ministry functioned with different committees like Budget Committee, Steering Committee and Constituent Committee. To commemorate the establishment of the Representative Government with sovereign power, 15 December was celebrated as the Self-Governing Day and on this occasion Minister M. Nayak took the salute from the police Parade at Baripada. The council of Ministers introduced the budget in the Assembly on 13 december 1947, which was accepted with minor changes. The popular Ministry remembering the Paik Uprising in February 1947 first introduced an agrarian legislation which abolished the system of Paik Jagir. More than 300 Paik families gained proprietorship of the land in their possession without any liability to render military service. Next most important and revolutionary step was another significant legislation dated 20 March 1948, which abolished the abnoxious and much hated sardait system with effect from 1<sup>st</sup> June 1948. The work of Silaghati reservoir was completed and two sons of Maharaja Pratap Chandra Bhanjdeo worked as ordinary labourers in the construction work, and this was a historic achievement of Mayurbhanj Prajamandal. Then the new Government abolished feudal levies like Paika Pancha.

The long felt desideratum was lack of educational institution in Mayurbhanj. There was



no college in the state to provide facilities of higher education. A college to promote higher education in the State was established at Baripada. In the third session Sonaram Soren brought a proposal to maintain the independence and sovereignty of the State of Mayurbhanj, so that it would remain distinguished among the Indian states. The proposal was passed. Gour Mohan Mohapatra proposed to set up a drafting committee to draft the administrative laws in a revised form. The Budget for 1948-49 was passed in this session. True to its ideology the new government introduced prohibition throughout the State. Grain-golas were opened with a view of keeping a buffer-stock of paddy to be used in times of scarcity as well as to give loans to needy farmers. Even distribution of clothes among the tribals during their festivals like Makar and was started by the new government.

But in the long run the popular Government could not live upto the expectation of the people. It failed because of the differences of opinion among the Ministers on policy-making which divided the Ministry. Even this differences led to the formation of a rival-Congress organization called Mayurbhanj District Congress. The existence of two paralleled rival Congress organizations created undesirable confusion in the political circle. The officials became more powerful and corrupt owing to the incapability of the ministers. Serious allegations of corruption and embezzlement were brought against premier Sri Das regarding the misappropriation of the funds from Gandhi Smarak Nidhi. This made the Maharaja hostile towards the Ministry. He was extremely unhappy while in Calcutta, he received the documents from Sardar Patel exposing the corruption and misrule in the state. To prove his innocence Sri Das along with other Ministers went to Delhi and met Home Minister. V.P. Menon informed them that further continuance of Mayurbhanj as a separate state was out of question and the Home Minister insisted upon

merger with Orissa province was the only logical solution of the problem.

On the other hand, the tribals of the State agitated under the leadership of Sonaram Soren, condemning the idea of the merger of the State with the province of Orissa. Sonaram Soren took keen initiatives to form a separate state for the tribals, and thereby to give a tribal identity to Mayurbhanj. Towards September, Maharaja observed that the administration had become chaotic. Everywhere there was a feeling of suspicion and resentment. The situation became violent when the tribals started advocating for the merger of Mayurbhanj with the province of Bihar and not with Orissa. In order to save the situation getting worst, along with Sarat Chandra Das, Maharaja went to New Delhi on 16<sup>th</sup> October 1948 and signed the Instrument of Merger. That brought an end to the short tenure of the popular Government in Mayurbhanj and the State administration was taken over on behalf of the Government of India by D.V. Raje, ICS as the Chief Commissioner with effect from 9 November 1948.

Thus the integration of the Feudatory States with the province, apart from removing several administrative anomalies resulted in the creation of a homogeneous political unit in Orissa. Not only uniformity in administration was possible for people living in the erstwhile princely states, but also the advantages of rule of law were made available to them.

### **References :**

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