



Tribal Participation in Freedom Struggle of Rayagada District and Role of Biswanath Pattnaik

Raghu Nath Rath

Every creature had a past life according to Hindu Philosophy. The deeds of past life is called destiny and he has to reap it in the present life. According to the deeds of previous life the God sent the creatures to discharge certain duties. Some of them are remembered for long time. In this paper about such a person who became an Angel of the tribals, who was destined to serve hill people will be discussed.

He was late Biswanath Pattnaik, who was born on 11.11.1961 at village Kumarada. His father Upendra Pattnaik died when Biswanath was a child. Hence his elder brother Ghanashyam looked after him. He read up to fifth class in his village and then studied at Ichha Puram of Andhra Pradesh up to eight class. He returned to his village in 1933 and posted as a teacher with a monthly salary of rupees seven.¹

He was horn to serve the nation. How can he continue in teaching profession ? In the meantime he heard about Puri Seva Samiti of Acharya Harihar Das. He proceeded to Puri, joined as a volunteer in Puri Seva Samiti and served to Choura Patients.² This became the turning point of his life.

In 1934 Biswanath with his friend went to Kumbhamela at Allahabad to become a saint.

But due to some reason he returned home. His elder brother Tarini Charan was a freedom fighter, who participated in the salt movement in 1930 and was punished. So Biswanath was aware about the activities of Congress. He thought to be a member of Congress and in the year 1934 became a member by paying four Annas (25 paise). Then he used to practice spinning and wear Khadi cloths.

The veteran Congress leader Gopabandhu Choudhury established an Ashram to impart training on Gandhian ideology to produce constructive workers at village Bari and named it Sevaghara, which had functioned from 6th April 1935.³ Biswanath applied for training in May 1937, but failed. It was decided in the third annual conference of Gandhi Seva Sangh at Hubuli of Karnatak that the fourth annual conference will be held in Odisha in 1938.

The fourth annual conference of Gandhi Seva Sangh was held at Delang of Puri district in Odisha from 25th to 31st March 1938 and Biswanath could manage to participate in the conference as a volunteer. He was engaged as gate keeper at the cottage of Mahatma Gandhi and discharged his duties most satisfactorily, which drew the attention of Gopa Babu. He told him to join in Sevaghara at Bari for training.⁴



Biswanath entered in Sevaghara for training as constructive worker in 1938 and completed it in March 1939. Then for some times he served there as office assistant. At the beginning of 1941 Gopa Babu directed him to go to Gunupur for extension of cotton cultivation and Khadi work. With a letter from Gopa Babu he reached at Gunupur and handed over it to Prahalad Panigrahi, the Manager of Khadi Bhandar.

Prahalad Babu convinced Bairu Gamango, the chief of village Kujendri to give shelter to Biswanath for Khadi work. Bairu agreed and in the evening of last Sunday of January 1941 took Biswanath with him to Kujendri and gave shelter on his Veranda.⁵ At that time it was thought that to give shelter to a Congressman means to protest against British Government and Raja of Jayapur. But Bairu Gamango fearlessly accepted Biswanath.

From the very next morning Biswanath started his work in his own style without taking help of anybody. He started to clean pigdungs from the streets of the village. Sauras observed the work of Biswanath and gradually came to him. Biswanath talked to them. He persuaded them to cultivate cotton and to spin thread. He told them about the benefit of cleanliness, tried to educate them. He taught the tribals prayer, flag songs and told about Mahatma Gandhi, independent movement also. He told them that if our country will be independent, Bethi (torture by the Raja) and British government will be abolished. Sauras of Kujendri gradually belived him. They cultivated cotton and spinned thread by spinning wheel. Biswanath purchased all the thread. Gradually economic condition of tribals grew up. Tribals thought that all the things taught by this man is for our well being and accepted him as their kin member. By the inspiration of Biswanath about

three thousand spinning wheels were working at that time and, his name was changed to Ajna. He was known in that name in Odisha till his last breathe, which name was conferred to him by Sauras of Kujendri area.

While going to Wardha, Gopa Babu and Rama Devi came to Kujendri for one day. Rama Devi saw Sandi the daughter of Bairu Gamango there and observed her devotional work. She told Biswanath that if she will agree, then she could get training at Bari. Biswanath discussed about the will of Rama Devi with Bairu and Sandi and as per their consent he took Sandi to Bari. After six months training Sandi returned to Kujendri and became the leader of tribal women. Saura women came to front in all constructive works and participated in freedom movement also.

A Congress flag was hoisted in every morning and descanted in the evening. Throughout the day the flag was flying on the flag post situated in front of the Radha-Krishna temple of Kujendri. This fact came to the notice of British administration. One day in the month of July 1942 the District Magistrate of Koraput, Mr. Wilcuck with police and forest employees with guns, Landlords came to Kujendri on horse. The D.M. witnessed flying of the Congress flag and ordered to get down it.

At this time about twenty young ladies under the leadership of Sandi rushed and danced fearlessly in a circle around the flag post. Again about another thirty women came and made a second circle and danced wildly. The Collector observed the situation and thought not to take any drastic action in order to avoid unpleasant situation. He ordered his party to go back.⁶

The Congress party did not support the British government during the Second World War 1939-1942. In March 1942 Prime Minister of



England Mr. Churchill sent Sir Stafford Creeps with a message that if India will support in war and if Japan will be defeated, then England will give Local Self Government to India. Congress Party bluntly denied to the proposal and in the All India Congress Committee Meeting held from 29th April to 2nd May 1942 at Allahabad, it was demanded that the British should quit India. The Quit India proposal was passed by A.I.C.C on 14th July 1942 at Wardha and it decided the date of the next meeting on 7th August at Bombay.

All the Presidents of Pradesh, District and Zonal Congress Committee were asked to attend the scheduled meeting on the scheduled date. Accordingly Radha Krushna Biswasray, who was the President of Odisha Pradesh and Koraput District Congress Committee attended A.I.C.C meeting at Bombay on 7th August 1942.

On 8th August night Mahatma Gandhi while addressing to the Congress workers told that, I want independence today and just now or in this night. I am giving one formula to all that "Do or Die". On that night all the great leaders including Mahatma Gandhi were arrested. Radha Krushna Biswasray wrote some letters indicating the direction of that night and returned to Odisha on 9th August by train. He was arrested at Saluru on 11th August while returning by bus to Koraput from Bijayanagar.

Biswanath received the letter written by Radha Krushna Biswasray on 12th August. The title of the letter was 'Do or Die'. Biswanath prepared hundreds of copies of that letter using carbon paper and distributed it in many villages. Tribals came to him and discussed for further action. A particular date was fixed for rally from Kujendri to Gunupur.

On the appointed day about two hundred male and fifty female Sauras of Kujendri and some

tribals of nearby villages gathered near the flag post at Kujendri and started rally shouting the slogan "British Government, Quit India." Biswanath was leading the males and Sandi for female. Most of the participants were holding Congress flag in their hands shouting the slogan. The mob left Kujendri and travelled through Lachhapa, Gulumunda, Kaithpadar, Panosguda and Bikrampur. Many persons from each village joined in the rally. When the rally reached Gunupur there were about 1500 members. The entire mob travelled all the streets of Gunupur town and police took them to police station, detained for about three hours and allowed them to go back at about sunset.

On the next morning with some other persons Biswanath travelled to Khilpadar, Dambasara etc. and announced the message of Gandhi and Independence. When he returned to Kujendri after 4/5 days, Gunupur police came to Kujendri and arrested Biswanath, Bairu Gamango, Nilakantha Gamango and another thirty five male and twenty one female members of Kujendri and took them to Gunupur Sub-jail. On trial before Sub-agent, Rayagada Biswanath and others were found guilty. Those who were ordered for six months imprisonment including Biswanath were transferred to Koraput jail from Aug. 1942 to 15.02.1943. Biswanath was imprisoned at Koraput jail as a second class prisoner. Today also we can find 27 names of freedom fighters inscribed on the Martyr Pillar at Kujendri.⁹

After release from Koraput jail Biswanath returned to Kujendri. He thought for another movement. He prepared pamphlet, where he mentioned to recover the lands illegally grabbed by landlords and business community of other caste and distributed it among the tribals. According to the advice of Biswanath, Padaka



Nilambar Dora and some others forcibly brought some paddy bags from the house of the landlord Ram Ch. Sahu of Gulunda without any resistance. Ram Ch. Sahu lodged F.I.R. near the police. Police arrested P.Nilambar Dora and others. They were ordered for one and half year imprisonment and taken to Koraput Jail. Police searched the cottage of Biswanath and found the pamphlet written for Quit India Movement and another pamphlet prepared against Landlords. Biswanath was arrested and on trial before the Sub-Agent, Rayagada he was found guilty. He was ordered for one year imprisonment as a third class prisoner. He was taken to Koraput Jail and was released from Jail on 16th August 1945¹⁰ and engaged himself in constructive works.

On 15.08.1947 India got Independence. Biswanath opted to be a constructive worker as before instead of a political leader. Before commencement of Bhoodan Movement Biswanath lunched Bhusatyagraha from his own thought process, which shook the Government of Odisha and the then Chief Minister Nabakrushna Choudhury posted the great novelist of Odisha Gopinath Mohanty to solve land problems of tribals. In 1953 Bhoodan Movement of Vinoba stepped to Odisha and Biswanath took major role in undivided Koraput district. So Vinoba designated him as Bhumidan Sardar”

Biswanath, in 1966-67 shifted his workplace to Kandhamal district and chose Baliguda for the purpose. He started one NGO named Banabasi Seva Samiti in 1972 with Sri Utsaba Chandra Jena as its founding Secretary. The main objectives of the NGO were the all-round development of tribal and downtrodden. The seed planted by him has now become a big

tree and the institution is now known as a leading NGO of Odisha as well as in the country.

This life long bachelor, Gandhian leader spent his life for uplifting of tribals and downtrodden. For his life time achievements Berhampur University of Odisha conferred on him LLD degree in 2008. He was also awarded many prizes of State level and national level and International Jamanalal Bajaj award for his social work in 2008. This great soul, who was called Gandhi of Koraput passed away on 29.03.2010 at his workplace at Baliguda which was a great loss for tribals as well as for Odisha.

References :

1. Mahapatra, Abhaya - Nil - Jangal Bitharaku Rastha (Odia) - P-12
2. Mishra, Subash Ch. - 2002 - Ajna (Odia) - PP 3-4
3. Ibid -P-14
4. Ibid -P.21
5. Ibid -PP-35-36
6. Mahapatra Abhaya -2008 -Sandi Sabar - PP-13-18
7. Mishra Subash Ch. - Op.cit - - PP. 74-76
8. Ibid - PP - 78-82
9. Samdrusti - Vol.6, Issue- 9 - P. 39
10. Mishra Subash Ch. - Op.cit - PP- 90-96

Raghu Nath Rath, Research Scholar, Panaspadi, Baliguda, Kandhamal.