



## An Odia Patriot of Freedom Struggle : Niranjana Pattnaik

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The early years of the twentieth century witnessed the emergence of a younger group within the fold of Indian National Congress (INC), who dreamt of “Swaraj”. Some of those visionaries left studies and some other resigned from Government jobs to participate in the movement to free the motherland from the shackles of imperialism. This was the period when Gandhiji appeared after returning from South Africa, in the firmament of India and transformed the freedom struggle from a class to a mass movement. It was also the time for amalgamation of the Odia speaking tracts which remained divided under four divisions such as Bengal, Bihar, Central Province and the Madras Presidency in to one administrative unit. This led to an organized movement for many years for the formation of a new Odia speaking State,” Odisha”. This agitation for amalgamation roused and moulded public opinion and helped much for the growth of political consciousness of the people in the early decades of the twentieth century. In this critical juncture the contribution of an Odia visionary was unique who tried to integrate the Odia movement with that of the greater freedom struggle. ***“Niranjana the Perniel river, the source of water, the flow of which comes from the sky high Himalaya to merge with the blue sea. It is the ocean of power, love and affection to win over the thousand hearts, the pious cold touch smoothened not only the countrymen but also the people of world”.***

Niranjan Pattnaik was born on 24<sup>th</sup> of November, 1896 at a village named Rukhakana near Polosara of the then district Ganjam under Madras Presidency. His father was Damodar Patnaik, who was working as a Nazir in the Munsif Court of Aska Town. His mother was Haramani. Both the parents had the nationalist bent of mind. Niranjan was the eldest son of the family. Damodar had seven children and Niranjan was the eldest one who loved Khadi very much to wear from the childhood, the nationalist insignia. Niranjan completed his elementary education at Aska and later he was admitted in the Aska Board High School to pursue his entrance examination. As a student he was serious, studious and sincere. At that time as Ganjam was under the presidency of Madras, the Entrance (XI) examination was conducted by the Madras University. In the Year 1914, Niranjan Patnaik an Odia boy secured first class first position in whole of the Madras University and became the pride for all of us. He had broken all the past records of the University securing Ninety one percentage of marks. He had passed intermediate examination in Arts from Khallikote College, Berhampur. During his two years of stay at Berhampur, he confronted with number of problems that Odias had been facing then because of the Telugu predominance, in the field of service, in the field of business everywhere. This affected a lot to young Niranjan, a boy of twenty in 1914; the Utkal Union Conference was



organized by the king of Parlakhemundi-Maharaja Krushna Chandra Gajapati who seemed to be the spearhead of the then Odia movement. Many selfless workers came to boost Odia nationalism in the remotest corners of the district. With these feelings, Niranjan graduated from Madras University in 1918 and went to Calcutta to study M.A. and Law in the University of Calcutta. With the helplessness feelings of the Odia in their motherland Odisha, he got endless pain throughout his study period. He had concentrated his mind to do something for the amalgamation and unification of the Odia speaking area. During his stay at Calcutta, he spent his time and brain in collecting the past glory and records of history, geography, art, culture and political map of Odisha and started writing a very factual and evidence able book co-authored by a similar senior activist Chakrapani Pradhan. The title of the book was the “Odia Movement” under the pseudonym “two bachelors of Arts” and published in Dec. 1919 by the Ganjam Odia Samaj, Berhampur. Odisha was then vivisected. In this book a strong plea was made for the amalgamation of the Odia speaking areas under one administrative head and for the creation of a separate Odisha Province. The books introduced Odias nationally and inter-nationally and empower Odias to put forth their demand for a separate state. Even Gandhiji, when he came across this book, did appreciate the argument initiated in favour of the separate entity. The ideas inculcated in the book received all-round support and justification for a separate state. The year, next to the publication of “the Odia movement” was 1920, which was the turning point in the history of freedom struggle of India. Gandhiji hurled himself in to the centre of Indian politics. The Non-Cooperation Movement was started against the British rule. The movement was boy-cott of schools and colleges and the national activists exhorted the student mass to participate in the freedom struggle. During this period, Niranjan was at Calcutta to pursue his higher studies and

came in contact with a number of nationalists. He was greatly influenced by their activities and the dormant seed of patriotism awakened. In this favoured situation he left his studies, returned back to his village with a mind to spread the news of Non- Cooperation. He had taken a rented house at Hillpatna in Berhampur and opened a ‘Swaraj Ashram’ to spread Khadi Andolan as a movement against Britishers. The ‘Swaraj Ashram’ unified the nationalists of the area and the supporters for the cause.

Niranjan Patnaik attended the INC Session at Nagpur in Dec, 1920. Odisha represented through thirty delegates for the meeting under the leadership of Pandit Gopabandhu Das. On the way back, they also attended the Utkal Union Conference held at Chakradharpur on the 1<sup>st</sup> day of Jan, 1921. In the Conference, a momentous decision was taken to accept Non-Cooperation movement of the Congress. Niranjan Pattnaik had taken a vital role to mobilize and to move the movement in side Odisha. The Non-Cooperation Movement got a boost in Odisha due to the visit of Gandhiji, on 23<sup>rd</sup> March, 1921. Gandhiji addressed meetings at Cuttack, Bhadrak, Satyabadi, Puri, Berhampur, etc, within a period of six days of his stay. Niranjan Pattnaik as a leader from Ganjam had the meetings with Gandhiji. During the period, he pleaded at Berhampur that Ganjam District Congress Committee (GDCC) should be constituted as a part of Utkal Pradesh Congress Committee (UPCC) and not as a part of Madras Presidency Congress Committee. The demand and the claim was received whole hearted support of the other veteran Odia Congress leaders like Biswanath Das, Sashibhusan Rath, Dibakar Patnaik, etc but was opposed by the Telugu Congress leaders. Despite the opposition, the Ganjam D.C.C. became a component of the Utkal Pradesh Congress Committee. Niranjan collected rupees ten thousand and presented it to



Gandhiji for the freedom fighting fund of the nation. The Ganjam Odia nationalists took this as a win and a step ahead towards the creation of a separate state. The organizational work of the Ganjam D.C.C. was entrusted with the young Niranjan. Accordingly, the reconstitution of the UPCC also took place on 30<sup>th</sup> Nov, 1921 and Niranjan Pattnaik was also taken as an executive member in the Ganjam D.C.C. from the date.

Niranjan Pattnaik along with Hare Krushna Mahatab, Gopabandhu Das, Bhagirathi Mohapatra, Gopabandhu Choudhury, Neelakantha Das were also elected for the Odisha Pradesh Committee as the representatives to All India Congress Committee (AICC). Niranjan was a staunch Non- Cooperator. He visited different villages and made door to door campaign to spread the messages of Gandhian Non-Cooperation like boycotting of foreign goods, removal of untouchability, spreading the Khadi Andolan, Charkha-Spinning, etc. The Congress men were given training on Khadi Andolan, etc. in the Swaraj Ashrama. In the process of the movement he courted the displeasure on the British Government and was imprisoned and lodged at Kudalar Jail of Tamilnadu. After the release, he took active part in organizing Utkal Sammilani (Utkal Union Conference) at Berhampur in 1923. A memorandum was prepared and submitted to the government on behalf of the Utkal Union Conference for the amalgamation of the Ganjam District with Odisha Division. In 1924, he presented himself in front of the Phillip-Duff inquiry Committee for the unification of the Odia speaking tracts. In the Kanika peasant movement (Kanika Praza Andolana) Niranjan Pattnaik with H.K. Mahatab went to Lucknow and held discussions with the veteran leader of the AICC Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya regarding the atrocities of the British. Mahatma Gandhi stressed on the spread of Khadi Andolan as an important weapon of freedom struggle. Niranjan Pattnaik and Gopabandhu Choudhury were nominated to remain incharge of Ganjam district and of Odisha

State Centre respectively. After the resignation of Gopabandhu Choudhury, Niranjan remained incharge of Odisha State also. In 1924, a meeting of AICC was held at Kakinada, now in Andhra Pradesh, along with the problems of freedom movement, the Telugu-Odia dispute was referred to a Committee headed by Chakrabarty Raj Gopalachari. Niranjan Pattnaik along with Pandit Nilakantha Das were the members to this Committee. After some days Chakrabarty Raj Gopalachari resigned from its Chairmanship leaving the problem as it was.

In the year 1925, Niranjan married to Kishoremani, the daughter of Dasrathi Mohanty, an age old Zamindar of Kumbharapada near Nimapara of Puri district. Kishoremani was also having a nationalistic outlook and shared the activities with her husband hand to hand. Later on she became a woman leader and worked for the freedom of India. After the suspension of the Non-Cooperation Movement, Gandhiji announced a number of programmes for the promotion of Khadi, etc. Niranjan took active interest in the Khadi Movement in whole of the district especially at Kodala, Kabisurya Nagar, Kukudakhandi, Nuapada, etc. Gandhiji established All India Charakha Sangha and Niranjan was appointed as the chief organizer for Odisha in 1925. To popularize Khadi and the messages of Gandhiji, Niranjan published a Litho-Typed daily newspaper named 'Gandhi Samachar' from Berhampur on 1<sup>st</sup> Nov., 1927 and the Samachara continued publication till 3<sup>rd</sup> Jan, 1928. Mahatma Gandhi came to Odisha in 1927 and along with Niranjan Pattnaik he visited different places of Odisha to take stock of the Khadi situation. Looking at the 'Gandhi Samachar' the daily, it is said that the weekly Asha of Sashibhusan Rath was made to publish daily in the name of 'Dainik Asha' from 1<sup>st</sup> April, 1928. The AICC met at Calcutta in Dec, 1928. Niranjan Pattnaik as a top ranking Congress leader of Odisha pleaded to take a resolution in the session on the unification of the Odia speaking tracts and



on the formation of a separate state along with Rajkrishna Bose and Neelakantha Das. The president of AICC was Motilal Nehru who disallowed the proposal. As a result of dissatisfaction all Odia delegates left the session in a huff and expressed their discontentment and resentment against the Congress leadership by marching on the streets of Calcutta. Later Motilal regretted and then Odia delegates rejoined the Session. In 1930, AICC resolved to start civil disobedience movement by violating the obnoxious Salt law. Odisha responded to the call very seriously. Niranjana as the president of DCC spearheaded the "Salt Satyagraha" in the area. He along with his wife Kishoremani Devi, Rama Devi, Sarala Devi, Malati Choudhury, Narayan Patra, Jaggannath Mishra and other Congress workers marched from village to village garnering the support of the civilians for the Satyagraha. Being inspired by Gandhiji's Dandi March, Niranjana led a group of more than hundred Satyagrahis from Berhampur and nearby areas on 30<sup>th</sup> April and reached the village on 5<sup>th</sup> May to break the salt laws. Satyagrahis along with Niranjana were arrested on the spot and sent to Vellore Jail. There was an unprecedented mass participation in the movement and the people displayed exemplary courage and tenacity in braving the official machinery of terror and repression. Niranjana was sentenced for two years of imprisonment but due to the Gandhi-Irwin agreement he was released in April 1931. After the release from prison, he attended the AICC meeting at Karachi in 1931 where along with others he pleaded fervently on the creation of a separate Odisha province in the Second Round Table Conference; Gandhiji expressed his consent for the purpose. To monitor the issue an action-committee was set up by the UPCC under the chairmanship of Nilakantha Das in which Niranjana was a member. Because of the efforts made by the committee O' Donnell Committee was constituted in Sept, 1931 to demarcate the boundaries of the proposed Odisha province.

During the period, Niranjana experienced the worst ever financial crisis. After the death of his father, the whole burden of maintaining the large family came to Niranjana. After a lapse of ten years of time span Niranjana again went to prosecute his study. After getting the Law degree, he obtained the license for practicing Law from Madras High Court and started his profession as an advocate at Aska in 1934. Within no time, he got the distinction in the profession and the financial crisis was over up to some extent. During the period, a special session of the Utkal Samilani was organized at Berhampur in 1934. Niranjana also worked in the Sammilani for the formation of his Motherland, the Odisha province. Lastly, it was decided by the British Charter in the round table at London and a committee was set to demarcate the boundaries. The committee camped at Cuttack and at Berhampur in 1934. 'The Odia movement' book written by him and another helped a lot in submitting memorandums, petitions, and to submit the factual evidences at Governors, Badlats, etc. It is felt that the king of Parlakhemundi and Khallikote pleaded the facts at the Round Table Conferences which were based on the Odia Movement Book. Niranjana was felicitated for writing such a book which paved the way for formation of a separate Odisha province on a linguistic basis in the Utkal Sammilani's Cuttack Session. The Odisha Pradesh was formed on 1<sup>st</sup> April, 1936 the happiness crossed the boundaries for all Odias and for all the makers of New Odisha who was dreaming for the same since centuries. Niranjana was extremely happy to see the creation of his dreamed separate province 'Odisha' and felt the victory but at the same time he was still worried about the freedom of India. The first general election for Odisha Division was held in 1937. Niranjana took active role in mobilizing the support to Congress Party but he himself did not enter in to the direct process of the election rather preferred to work as an organizer. As the leader of the national party, Maharaja Krishna Chandra



Gajapati was invited by the Governor to form the ministry on 1<sup>st</sup> April, 1937.

During the Quit-India-Movement, Niranjan Pattnaik mobilized the movement in Aska, Rasalkonda, Boirani, Kodala, Jagannatha Prasad and many other places of Ganjam and Odisha. The activists disrupted the telephonic, transport and communication services and even set dynamites to explore Rushikulya dam. They looted Government treasury at Aska. Niranjan was extending the legal and financial help to the freedom fighters. British Government Police alleged the direct involvement of Niranjan Pattnaik in the so called disturbances but not able to arrest and prove his involvement. On 1<sup>st</sup> April, 1936, the inauguration ceremony of the Odisha Province was commenced with a Darbar held in the Revenshaw College hall at Cuttack. Sir Courtney Terrel, the Chief Justice of Patna, administered the oath to Sir John Austin Hubback as the first Governor of Odisha. Following message to the people of Odisha, was then, issued from London as the greetings to the people of New Odisha Province. "16 Codogan Gardens, London S.W.I. on the inauguration of the new province of Odisha I am glad to have opportunity of sending a message of greeting and congratulation to the 'Odia' people and to wish them all prosperity and success in future.

Niranjan Pattnaik was a sincere advocate and also a serious freedom fighter. He was an activist in the Quit India Movement of 1942. He was instrumental in spreading the Charkha movement across the length and breadth of Odisha. He was also a frontline leader in Gandhiji's civil disobedience movement and Salt Satyagraha in Odisha for which he was put behind the bars. He has worked in various capacities in the Congress organization and also in the provincial committees. He was a good organizer,

and knew the trick to get the things done successfully by others also. On 14<sup>th</sup> Aug, 1943, Niranjan went to Rasulkonda (Bhanjanagar) court with some cases of the activist, returned towards evening to his residence at Petroja Peta of Aska and felt uneasy. The next day he was suffering from diarrhoea. To our misfortune, exactly four years before India's Independence, the body of Niranjan Pattnaik, the hero of separate Odisha Province and a sincere freedom fighter collapsed. The illustrious patriot breathed his last on 15<sup>th</sup> Aug, 1943. He died at the age of only forty-seven leaving his family, four tiny daughters and two sons. Kishoremani left his husband at the age of thirty-six, her eldest daughter was only of fourteen, Jayanti the next one at nine, the first son at 7 years, the third daughter Abanti was only of five years and the youngest son Bijayketan was at four years and last one the daughter Reeta was 2 years of age. The plight came not only to the family members of Niranjan but to the people of Odisha.

The glorious activities performed by this illustrious personality blessed the members of his family and so, they were established in a decent way. Jayanti Pattnaik, the second daughter is now a senior politician of the country and Janaki Ballava Pattnaik the son-in-law is the Governor of Asam State and so on. In 1980, as an attribute to Niranjan Pattnaik, the Government of Odisha established a Govt. Women's College in the name of Niranjan and the civilians of Aska renamed the Petroja Street where Niranjan was residing as an honour to this magnetic personality as Niranjan.

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