



Prajamandal Movement in Nayagarh

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Much before the formation of Prajamandal, the people of Nayagarh were seething with discontent. They were neglected by their ruler. Their socio-economic condition was most pitiable. From the thirties of the 20th Century, injustice, corruption, extortion and maladministration reigned supreme in Nayagarh. Most of the time Krushna Chandra Singh, Raja of Nayagarh, lived in foreign countries. The state affairs were entrusted to the Dewans. They were mostly recruited from outside the state.¹

Early in 1938 situation suddenly began to deteriorate in Nayagarh. The state officials were very much oppressive. More than half of the state income went to the pockets of these officials. Illegal taxes on road, opium, betel, *ganja* etc. were imposed on the people. No native people were given appointment even in low salaried employments of the state Durbar.² On the other hand, the Raja recruited more and more officers from outside. There were two Dewans in Nayagarh, but there was no co-ordination between them. In such a state of affair, it was doubtful as to who, in fact, ruled the state. Whether K. C. Neogy or the Court Inspector, or the elder dewan or the

younger one, or the Lala Saheb who was in charge of the state endowments.³ People did not get water to drink and bathe in summer. Through much difficulty they fetched a little water from distant places. In the rainy season the rivers overflowed and inundated their paddy fields and houses. People did not even get straw to thatch their houses. They had to live in open air under the scorching sun.⁴ In order to be relieved from such miseries, when people went to appeal to the Raja of Nayagarh, the state officials did not allow them to do so.

The imposition of monopoly on betel and *tamakhu* by the Raja made the condition of people most devastating. Against it, the people started 'betel agitation' in Nayagarh. Due to the imposition, people had to purchase it on high rate. Therefore, they boycotted to consume betels. About 500 agitators appealed to the Political Agent, stating the fact that this newly introduced betel monopoly was due to extra expenses incurred in the frequent tours of the Raja to Puri and Calcutta.⁵ The Dewan ordered the Police to arrest and assault those who persuaded the people not to purchase betels. As a result, Narayan Nanda



and Bharat Sahoo from Odagaon, Biswanath Mishra from Itamati and Ganapati Ram, Banchhanidhi Panda and Akrura Maharana were dragged to Itamati Police Station, where they were severely beaten by the Police.

Lingaraj Behera of Saranakula was beaten by the police so mercilessly that it created a terror in the minds of the people. The fault of the person was that he was reading a newspaper named '*Krushak*'.⁶ Another example of cruelty was the assault on Bhika Mallik, a village *choukidar* by a police Sub-Inspector, because the Choukidar had not informed the higher authority about a political meeting held at Bolagarh.⁷

There was no rain in the months of June, July and August 1938 and as a result the people did not cultivate their lands. So there was no food for them. Persons owning acres of land had to go for *coolie work* on the streets.⁸ At such an hour of crisis the Prajamandal was formed in Nayagarh following the foot-step of Nilgiri. Guided by the Congress, the Nayagarh Prajamandal first started *Swadeshi* movement in the state.⁹ People used *charakha* and wore hand spun *Khadar*. This movement continued for months together. The Raja tried his best to win over them but failed.

A meeting of the Prajamandal was held on December 27, 1938. The state authorities arrested two important leaders from the meeting. Thereupon the Prajamandal offered *Satyagraha* on 30th December. The ruler then approached the *Satyagrahis* and promised to issue a proclamation redressing their grievances. But the people were not convinced and hence continued their

movement.¹⁰ A large number of people assembled before the palace of the Raja and demanded the release of their leaders. The Raja out of fear, released the Prajamandal workers on January 9, 1939.¹¹

With the outbreak of the World War-II in September 1939, the Prajamandal movement stood quite for some period in Nayagarh. After the War period tension was mounting high in the state due to failure of the Raja to meet the demands of Prajamandal. In order to suppress the movement, the Raja arrested the leaders like Sridhar Das, Banchhanidhi Senapati, Laxman Moharana, Sukru Behera, Udayanath Prusti and Bidyadhar Mantri on July 19, 1942.¹² Such an action of the Raja, aggravated the situation in Nayagarh and the people again started *Satyagraha* in the state. They declared every region in the state as independence entity and attacked the Government office and Police Station. About 400 weavers assembled at Bolgarh on September 28, 1942 demanding the release of Khadi centre of Dighi which had been in the possession of the police.¹³

The Police arrested the leaders of the movement but in view of the gravity of the situation, the British Government issued orders to release the spinning centre for the use of the 'All India Spinners Association'. Nevertheless, the agitation continued. Prajamandal supporters from outside states joined in the Nayagarh movement in October 1942.¹⁴ The people were determined to secure their demands through peaceful *Satyagraha*. But the Raja adopted repressive measures. Consequently, there was a clash between the armed police and the peaceful procession of



the people on October 10, 1942. Police had to open fire in order to disperse the mob. One person named Kasti Dukha was shot dead and a number of persons were wounded.¹⁵ Thereafter began the reign of terror in Nayagarh.¹⁶ Oppression started inside the jail. Kanduri Parida and his son Budhi Parida were beaten to death inside the jail.¹⁷ Democratic movement continued, in spite of such inhuman oppression in Nayagarh state.

References :

1. *Deshkatha*, 22 February 1938.
2. *Ibid*, 21 March 1938.
3. *Ibid*, 29 March 1938.
4. *Ibid*, 24 April 1938.
5. *Ibid*, 31 May 1938.
6. *Ibid*, 1 August 1938.
7. *Ibid*, 7 August 1938.
8. *Ibid*, 21 August 1938.
9. S.C. Dey (Ed.) *Diary of Political Events in Orissa*, P.-18.
10. *Ibid*, PP.- 22 - 23.
11. *Orissa Records*, W.W.C.C., Acc No.-34, P.- 35. S.N. Pattanaik, *Odisare Swadhinata Andolana*, PP. 147 - 148.
12. *Utkal Prasanga*, August 1972, P.-42, S.N. Pattanaik, *Odisare Swadhinata Andolana*, P.-179.
13. *Orissa Records*, W.W.C.C., Acc No.- 30, P.-98.
14. *Ibid*, P.-114.
15. *Utkal Prasanga*, August 1972, P.-78.
16. *Orissa Records*, W.W.C.C., Vol- Cuttack-Puri, Diary, P.- VIII.
17. S.N. Pattanaik, *Odisare Swadhinata Andolana*, *op. cit.*, P.-179.

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