



Essence of Life, Long After Death

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Twenty six miles away from the township of Nayagarh, on the south western side, a narrow cartable track runs through the forest range of Mahipur, to a village of the Khonds. This village is 'Kusubida' the mother land of Kasti Dakua, the martyr of the Praja Mandal Movement of Nayagarh.

From Mahipur, one has to proceed by the side of the village 'Thuavari', the famous village of the freedom fighters of Nayagarh Praja Mandal. Amidst groves of Sal (*Shorea Robusta*), Mango and Mahula (*Madhuca Indica*), one has to cross villages like Paradhipi, Karadapalli, Ramapalli, Chadakamara and Kenduvani. Then comes the village 'Kusubida', inhabited by the aboriginal Khonds who claim themselves as 'Suddha Kandh' (pure Khond).

A journey to this remote corner is possible in summer, when the torrents get dried up and the thorny branches of the shrubs, shrinks to some extent. The cartable passage created by cutting down clay maunds are somewhat manageable during the dry season to reach the village 'Kusubida' that lies close to the mountain 'Paloba' on which the spirit of nationalism of the Quit India Movement and the movement of Nayagarh Praja Mandal was echoed one day.

Leaders like Narayan Behera (Father of Bhagabat Behera) and Binayak Mishra, who were in charge of the 'Malas' (forest tract) worked day and night along with tribal leaders like Kunia Pradhan, Bhagabat Jani, Laxmidhar Pradhan and Mulee Pradhan, to organize the tribals and create patriots like many a Kasti Dakuas.

Kusubida, a tiny village of some thatched cottages, unseen and unknown, lies far away from the din and bustles of the urban life, still dozing in the lap of nature with all its simplicity and superstition.

On the entrance, to the village, there is an open air platform, on the middle of which, the village diety 'Suradei' is worshipped. Anything and everything is offered first to the mother goddess, be it the 'Juribalu' (country liquor) or vegetables like beans, spine gourd, ber fruit or Tamarind. On festive days like 'Gamha Purnami' (full moon day of the month of Sravana) or 'Jantala' (Community feast observed in the month of Chaitra), they sacrifice goats and fowls to appease their goddess 'Suradei'.

Close to the platform of mother 'Suradei', an altar (12' x 12') is under construction with a conical roof to house the statue of the pride of



the village, the martyr Kasti Dakua, But as the statue has not yet been installed, the altar is presently used as the shade for the village bull. This is the village 'Kusubida' where the people lead such a rudimentary life even in this century. The traditional surnames they bear are Jani, Pradhan, Mallick, Behera and Dakua.

Seventy years back, in August 1942, when the All India Congress, Committee resolved to launch the 'Quit India Movement', the British Govt. banned the All India Congress Committee. Soon after, here at Nayagarh, the Raj Sarkar banned the 'Nayagarh Praja Mandal'. When this order was issued, the leaders of the organization secretly convened a meeting of its workers at Mahulia near Godipada on 15.8.1942. The Darbar Administration could somehow smell about the convention and sent fifty armed forces under the command of Naz. Muhammad to foil the meeting. He was that Naz. Muhammad who had ruthlessly suppressed the 'Kandhameli (agitation of the Kandhas) at Dasapalla in 1914.

The meeting was running in full swing under the presidentship of Udayanath Prusty. On the other side, the police force which was heading towards Mahulia, started piercing bionets on the person of anybody and everybody, they found on the way to Mahulia. Police brought these wounded people who were looking horrible by profuse bleeding to the venue of the meeting to show to the gathering to what extent they could move. The mob got violently irritated to see the inhuman behaviour of the police force. They stood up all at once to avenge the barbarism. It became too difficult to control the mob. The President and other leaders of the Praja Mandal constantly appealed the angry mob to keep quiet. Anyhow the agitated mob got controlled; else so many

Kasti Dakuas would have been mercilessly slain that day. The Police force dishursed the meeting on the point of gun and arrested the top leaders of the movement. What irritated the tribal folk was the arrest and jailing of the tribal leaders like Kunia Pradhan, Bhagabat Jani, Laxmidhar Pradhan and Mulee Peadhan for they knew the tortures and torments inflicted on the leaders of the Praja Mandal in the jails at Nayagarh, the horrors of which were unheard of in the annals of the civilized world. Once the tribal blood is ignited, it emits a flame like that of the fire in a forest which reddens the sky and blackens the soil.

As a sign of protest, the Praja Mandal called for a 'Hartal' (Strike) on 16.8.1942. The Raj Sarkar thought that if 'Odagaon', the centre of the movement, could be controlled, the entire movement would be squeezed. Now three hundred soldiers of the Sikh Regiment assisted by he state police force, marched to Odgaon, at dead of night with state officers like the Dewan and the Asst. Dewan. On the morning of 16.8.1942, when the state officers saw all shops and godowns were closed, they located some shops belonging to the agitators with the help of the local police officers. Those shops were completely looted. The army entered even the private houses and tortured the innocent villagers.

These tortures along with the news of torments to the arrested members at jail so much irritated the leaders and workers of Nayagarh Praja Mandal that they met at a dense forest 'Madhua Khali' near Bahadajholla on 8th Oct. 1942. Then and there in that meeting, it was decided to form five war groups to march from different routes, all at a time, to occupy the govt. offices at Nayagarh to avenge the damage done to the workers of Nayagarh Praja Mandal in



terms of 'Betra Sajja' (caning twenty times), 'Mandu Sajja' (salt less cooked of boiled rice given as launch), 'Mesala Sajja' (any sort of Punishment as decided by the Darbar Administration), putting of human urine in the mouths of the leaders and looting the houses of workers. The morning of 10th Oct. 1942 was scheduled as the time of the march to Nayagarh.

The first group was to start from Barakola via Nuagaon. Thousands and thousands of workers were moving with full vigour headed by Purna Chandra Mallick and Anand Chandra Swain. Most of the workers of this first group were tribals. But they were completely unarmed. Nobody was holding even a 'lathi' or any sort of their traditional weapons like a bow, arrow or spear. The procession was advancing peacefully.

As an anticipatory measure from the side of the Raj Sarkar, four constables under one Assistant Sub-Inspector were waiting on the Barakola Dak Bungalow (Inspection bungalow) with their guns. But they got scared to confront the crowd. They all surrendered. The victors set fire the bungalow, put the guns of the police in the fire and advanced with inspired zeal.

At the Nuagaon Police Station, Six constables under the command of one Sub-Inspector were waiting well equipped to confront the agitators. When the agitators tried to thrust into the Police Station, there was sudden firing.

No warning was given, no scope to retreat, the guns were not even pointed to their legs, it was not only sudden but a random firing.

Kasti Dakua, a Youngman in his thirties, the brave tribal of Kusubida, was at the front. Hundreds were injured; one bullet pierced the

abdomen of Kasti Dakua. Blood was sprinkling from the wound to redden the air. The dying man was crying for water. He was offered some water but that was mixed with ash. Giving water mixed with ash to a dying man was not only to ridicule the dying who was speedily losing his senses but to the crowd who were injured and bleeding but not losing their senses. What could be more a naked picture of the barbarism of the administrative system of the then Garhjats ?

The cry for water of the dying became silent. The blood that sprinkled reddening the air now oozed slowly to blacken the soil, lying on which the Youngman breathed his last.

The sound of the guns injuring hundreds was enough to disburse the crowd. But Khati Sahoo, another worker of the Praja Mandal, who was very much present there at the time of the firing, was found no more. Neither his body, nor his person could be traced after that incident. The disappearance of Khati Sahoo is still shrouded in mystery.

After the death of Kasti Dakua, there was mass arrest and jailing of the leaders and workers which continued for months together. Due to shortage of accommodation, monasteries like 'Ghodasala math' and even the court rooms were utilized as jails. The tortures behind the bars were such inhuman, some leaders like Kanduri Parida, Buddhi Parida and Daya Behera breathed their last. These shocks shattered the spirit of the movement though temporarily.

On 21st Aug 1943, the Raj Sarkar convened a special 'Darbar' to reward the loyal police officers who suppressed the agitation. The Sub-Inspector of Police who was that day the commanding authority of Nuagaon Police Station,



was conferred with the title of 'Birabara'. The constable, who fired the unfortunate bullet that killed Kasti Dakua was conferred with 'Dhapad Singh'.

Three and half years later, Nayagarh Praja Mandal regained its lost vigour. On 25th May, 1946, the third historic conference of Nayagarh Praja Mandal was held at Godipada with leaders like Malati Choudhury, Surendra Nath Dwivedy, Banamali Pattanaik, Viswanath Pandit, Banchanidhi Das and many others. On 26th May, in the presence of fifty thousand delegates and leaders, the tragic demise of Kasti Dakua was condoled.

On 10th Oct, 1946, four years after the martyrdom of Kasti Dakua, Nayagarh Praja Mandal observed its first 'Sahid Divas' (martyr day), more than ten thousand volunteers with Sri Sarangadhara Das, paid homage to the departed soul at Nuagaon, exactly on the spot, the martyr breathed his last. The soil that was blackened that

day, became colourful with flowers from ten thousand folded hands. The air which got reddened that day by the martyr's blood attained an emotional sanctity by the silent prayer of ten thousand souls.

History never remembers those assassins, never recollects the honours they earned, it only commemorates that rustic youth, who is held an all time hero commanding a handful of flowers for his selfless sacrifice. The victors however lived long to die with their death, but the victim died young to live, long after his death, that death which reminds us the famous Hellenic epitaph, where a martyr requests the sojourners passing by the side of his grave, to convey the message to his countrymen that he is dying here for the cause of his fellowmen.

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