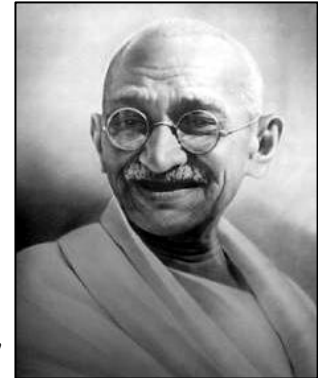




Swell of 'Purna Swaraj' in Odisha and the Importance of 26th January



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To the British people as well as their political leaders the Indian Empire was their most precious possession. It was painful for them to think that the Empire might be lost one day. The rise of Indian nationalism, the growth of the Congress Party, and the mass movement of Mahatma Gandhi finally convinced them that the Empire was not permanent or timeless as their forefathers had believed. In changed conditions they were mentally prepared to give India political rights. The British Labour Party, being more progressive, even thought of radical approach to Indian problems and wanted to help Indian towards responsible government. But they too, could not think of complete independence for India. The farthest extent to which most Englishmen could go in their thought was the Dominion Status for India. When India demanded Swaraj and freedom, some of the British leftists wanted to start discussion on Dominion Status. But to Parliament as a whole even that appeared a remote possibility to most members, India was not fit for Dominion Status.

As early as 1923, the Labour Party leader Ramsay MacDonald had announced in London: "I think, most of us who have liberal minds, must accept as the essential condition of imperial unity, namely, the recognition of Dominion Status for the great national elements of the Empire itself.

We will say to be Indians: "Your country is yours, your Government is yours. And we shall seek your justification not in your continued subjection to us, but in your own capacity for Self-Rule and Self- Government. Ironically enough, the same Ramsay MacDonald changed his principles later on. The Labour Party thought it necessary to go by a national policy towards India to which all other parties should agree.

In India, some of the national leaders felt attracted towards the concept of Dominion Status. When the Simon Commission was touring India, an All-parties Conference was held at Lucknow in August 1928 for a draft constitution for the country. Pandit Motila Nehru headed a committee to prepare the draft which the Conference accepted. It came to be known as the Nehru Report or the Nehru Constitution. This constitution proposed Dominion Status as the immediate goal of India. To silence the critic who felt that social condition in India were unsuitable for self-government, the Nehru Committee declared: "We do not deny that there is much need for social advance. We feel, however, that is an argument for, rather than against the establishment of responsible government, for we believe that without real political power coming into our hands, a real programme of social reconstruction is out of the question. The Nehru



Report rejected the separate electorate and some other dangerous doctrine which the British had introduced. It recommended for provincial autonomy and assured freedom of religion, freedom of conscience and freedom of expression to all Indians. While men like Motilal Nehru felt that India should win Dominion Status, there were others who regarded it as a status of no honour. For them, Purna Swaraj or complete independence should be the only goal for the Indian nation.

The National Congress had talked of Swaraj for years. It now talked of Purna Swaraj. In its Madras Session in 1927 the Congress announced complete independence as its objective. The younger generation of Congressmen led by Jawaharlal Nehru and Subhash Chandra Bose looked at the idea of Dominion Status with disfavor. So too, the Left Wing members of the Congress Party Gandhi announced his decision for complete independence.

While Simon Commission continued its work with the official support, most of the political parties were trying to frame a constitution for India. The committee constituted for the purpose was headed by Pandit Motilal Nehru. An ultimatum was served on the British Government that if the constitution framed by the Nehru Committee was not accepted in its entirety on or before 31 December 1929, the Congress would revive the non-violent non-cooperation campaign with the aim of realizing complete independence. The Indian National Congress met at Lahore on 29th December, 1929. Being a huge gathering of 15,000 people, the youth Congress President Jawaharlal Nehru announced the Congress polity that complete independence was the goal of India. It was to be “complete freedom from British dominion and British imperialism.” “The embrace

of the British Empire,” he declared, “is a dangerous thing. It cannot be the life-giving embrace of affection freely given and returned. And if it is not that, it will be what it had been in the past, the embrace of death.” In that historic session on the 31st December, 1929, Mahatma Gandhi moved his famous resolution on Purna Swaraj, saying: “The Congress declared that the words ‘Swaraj’ in Article 1 of the Congress Constitution shall mean Complete Independence and further declared the entire scheme of the Nehru Committee’s Report to have lapsed and hopes that all Congressmen will henceforth devote their exclusive attention to the attainment of Complete Independence for India.” To the anxious gathering of that great session, Gandhi held out the immediate prospect of a Civil Disobedience Movement. The resolution on Purna Swaraj was passed by the Congress on the last day of the year 1929. The tricolour National Flag, signifying independence, was unfurled by the Congress President Jawaharlal Nehru as the thunderous shouts of ‘Inquilab Zindabad’ or Long Live the Revolution greeted the occasion from countless throats.

As the New year opened, the 26th of January, 1930 was observed as the day of Purna Swaraj or Independence Day all over India. People took the Independence Pledge on that memorable day. The Pledge declared ‘freedom’ as ‘the inalienable right of the Indian people’ and criticized the foreign Government for ruining India “economically, politically, culturally and spiritually.” “We hold it be a crime against man and God.” Said the Pledge, “to submit any longer to a rule that has caused this fourfold disaster to our country. We, therefore, hereby solemnly resolve to carry out the Congress instructions issued from time to time for the purpose of establishing Purna Swaraj.”



When the National Congress under the presidentship of Jawaharlal Nehru passed the resolution on complete independence at Lahore on the last day of 1929, he saw in it a direct threat to the empire. The Viceroy Lord Irwin came to believe that the resolution would result in a secession movement and revolutionary violence. The Secretary of State advised him: "Try and avoid action which will force you to deal with masses, but rather pick responsible leaders and deal with them whoever and whatever they are. Keep up moral authority of Government and rally round it those who respect law and order and whose political instincts will defend India from revolutionary movement while pursuing evolutionary politics." The attention of the people and of the Government centered on Gandhi from the beginning of the new year. He saw himself in search of his step to begin the movement. When Rabindra Nath Tagore met him at the Sabarmati Ashram on 28th January, Gandhi told him: "I am furiously thinking and I do not yet see any light coming out of the surrounding darkness." Arising out of Gandhi's serious thought, the nation was first asked to take the Independence Day Pledge on 26th January 1930 in the following words:

"We hold it to a crime against man and God to submit any longer to a rule that has caused this fourfold disaster (economic, political, cultural and spiritual) to our country. We recognize, however, that the most effective way of gaining our freedom is not through violence. We will, therefore, prepare ourselves by withdrawing, so far as we can, all revolutionary association from the British Government, and will prepare for civil disobedience including non-payment of taxes. We, therefore, hereby solemnly resolve to carry out the Congress instruction issued from time to time for the purpose of establishing Purna Swaraj."

The nation took the solemn pledge. This proved to the Government that dark clouds were gathering on the horizon. In February, the Congress Working Committee met at Sabaramati and gave full authority to Gandhi to direct the nature of the Civil Disobedience campaign and direct its course. The Mahatma in his deep insight suddenly thought of a novel way to defy the Government and break its law. It was the Salt Satyagraha.

With the new political stir in the country, the people of Odisha were also prepared to plunge into the movement. On 26 January 1930 mass meetings were organized in different parts of the province to celebrate the Independence Day. In a large gathering at Cuttack, Gopabandhu Choudhury read the declaration and after listening silently, the people gave their assent to it by raising hands. A procession was also taken out in the town. At Balasore, Harekrushna Mahatab and Nanda Kishore Das took prominent part in organizing the function. At Bhubaneswar the national flag was hoisted at the top of the Temple of Lingaraj. Some leading Congressmen like Acharya Harihara Das, Lingaraj Mishra, Krupasindhu Hota and Bholanath Sahu were arrested at Puri on the occasion. Besides, in many places the function was organized by the Congress and the people were aroused to the call of the nation. (The Samaj, 29 January 1930) In the meanwhile, the four Congress Councilors from Odisha, Godavaris Mishra, Lingaraj Misra, Nanda Kishore Das and Naraya Birabar Samanta, resigned from their seats in the Bihar and Odisha Legislative Council. Biswanath Das of Ganjam resigned his seat from the Madras Council. Nilakanth Das also gave up his seat in the Central Legislative Assembly. However, Nilakanth Das and Godavaris Misra once again contested the election and returned to their respective seats in the legislatures. The disobedience of the Congress mandate by them



was very much resented and Gopabandhu Choudhury appealed to the electorate not to vote for them. Godavaris tried to justify his stand on the ground that the people in the country were not fully prepared for Purna Swaraj. He issued a statement on 10 February 1930 and observed that the people's battle must also be fought in the legislative chambers. For the people of Odisha, it was a heaven-sent opportunity to hoist the national flag in Odisha.

The national Independence Act, 1947 was remarkable in many respects. It put an end to the centuries of British Rule in India. The grant of Independence to India was one of the greatest events of history. In the words of Lord Samuel, "It was an event unique in history- a treaty of peace without war". The Labour Government of England was happy as the Act marked a fulfillment of the British Mission. All Indian leaders welcomed the Act with great glee and delight. On that memorable day of August 15, 1947, devout prayers were offered from the heart of every patriotic leader. No doubt, the Act was an event of great constitutional significance. The horrors, sufferings and miseries ended and an era of freedom and prosperity ushered in. Then the Constitutional Assembly made for the framing of the Constitution of India. Jawaharlal Nehru observes, "A Constitutional Assembly does not mean a body of people, or a gathering of able lawyers, who are intent on drawing up a Constitution. It means a nation on the move, throwing away the spell of its past political and social structure, and fashioning for itself a new Government of its making. It means the masses of the country in action through their elected representatives". Thus a Constituent Assembly means a convention or an assembly set up by the people of a country for the purpose of framing a Constitution.

The British Government and the Indian National Congress decided to continue the work of the Constituent Assembly. Finally, the Constituent Assembly met on the 9th December, 1946 with 233 participating members out of which 202 belonged to the Congress Party. Sachidananda Sinha, the oldest member of the Congress Party, presided over the first meeting of the Constituent Assembly. On the 11th December, 1946, Dr. Rajendra Prasad was unanimously elected as the President of the Constituent Assembly which lasted from the 9th December to 23rd December, 1946. It had its final session from the 14th November to 26th November, 1946. Finally, on the 26th November, 1946 the new Constitution of India was signed by all the representatives of the Constituent Assembly deciding that it should come into effect from the 26th January, 1950. Because the 26th January was the day of Purna Swaraj or the day of first Independence in India. This day was declared as Republic Day only to remember the 26th January. On that day the first national flag was hoisted for the first time in India. The Constituent Assembly, as stated, took two years, eleven months and seventeen days to frame the Constitution. Dr. Rajendra Prasad in his final address to the Assembly said, "I desire to congratulate the Assembly on accomplishing the task of such tremendous magnitude. It has undoubtedly taken us three years to complete this work, but if we consider the work that has been accomplished and the number of days that we have spent in framing this Constitution, we have no reason to be perturbed for the time spent.

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