

Formation of Modern Odisha and Contribution of British King-Emperor

Dr. Janmejaya Choudhury

With the national spirit growing rapidly, the Congress as well as other parties felt disappointed with the working of the Government of India Act of 1919. Within a few years of its working it proved itself rather unworkable. The country was more conscious than ever before. Demands for self-government were coming from most quarters. The British Government therefore felt the necessity of a fresh assessment of the Indian demands. Accordingly, in November 1927, the Viceroy announced that a Parliamentary Commission of 7 members, headed by Sir John Simon, would visit India shortly. The Indian Statutory Commission was constituted by seven British members of the parliament including Sir John Simon, the Chairman. The primary purpose of the Government of India Act, 1919 was to determine the future course of constitutional development. It was declared that a Commission of all white men could not be a proper body to enquire if India was fit for Swaraj or self-government. That no Indian was taken into that Commission proved that the British Cabinet had no confidence in Indian. Moreover, a Commission consisting of all Englishmen was bound to voice only the views of the Government. The Congress, therefore, decided to boycott the Simon Commission.

A great national unrest soon overtook the country. When the Simon Commission landed in Bombay in February 1928, it was received with black-flag demonstration and *hartal*. Protest meetings were held all over the country simultaneously and wherever the Simon Commission went, it faced hostile processions with the slogan: "Simon go back". Police resorted to lathi-charge and repression. But, everywhere, the people demonstrated their hostility towards the Commission. At the behest of the Indian National Congress, the members of the Congress Party in Odisha boycotted the Simon Commission. But not so the moderate members of the erstwhile Utkal Union Conference who saw in the Commission a golden opportunity to get their demands fulfilled. Brajasunder Das, Rajendra Narayan Bhanjadeo, Laxmidhar Mohanty, Brajananda Das and Bhikari Charan Pattanaik felt that Simon Commission alone was vested with the constitutional power to give a separate province to the Odia-speaking people. Therefore, notwithstanding criticism from the Congress members they welcomed the Commission at Patna Railway Station, drawing the attention of Simon to the just demand of Odisha. This gesture of the Odia-leaders impressed Simon profoundly, and a sub-Committee under C. R. Attle was appointed to investigate the problems of the Odia-

speaking people and recommended measures to redress their grievances.

The Sub-Committee consisted of major C. R. Attle as the Chairman, Dr. Suhrawardy of the Central Legislature, Rajendra Narayan Bhanjadeo and Laxmidhar Mohanty of the Bihar and Odisha Legislative Council as members. They recommended the creation of a separate Odisha Province which includes the Odisha Division, Angul, Khariar and the Agency of either Singhbhum area or the Vizagpatanam agency tract. The Sub-Committee felt that the Feudatory State should be associated with proposed province. The above report of the Sub-Committee made Simon's job easier. He suggested necessity of setting up a Boundary Commission with a neutral Chairman to demarcate the boundary of the proposed Odisha Province. Two problems still loomed large as impediments against the creation of the Odisha province. The shape and size of the proposed province remained uncertain. Secondly, the problem of financial liability appeared quite formidable. Rajendra Naraya Bhanj Deo, who was then the Financial Member in the Government of Bihar and Odisha played a significant role in reducing the formidability of the financial question. Brajasunder Das, his associate and a leading disciple of Madhusudan Das assured the Simon Commission to meet the challenge of deficit likely to be faced by the New Province.

The British Government convened a Round Table Conference in November 1930 to discuss with the Indian leaders the issue of constitutional reforms. On behalf of the Odia-speaking people Sri Krishna Chandra Gajapati, the Raja of the Paralakhemundi went to attend the conference in London. He made an impressive speech and presented a memorandum in favour of creating the separate Odisha Province. He appealed to the Government to reward the Odia-

speaking people for their ungrudging loyalty and protect their ancient glorious culture through a district political set-up. To overcome the financial hurdle, he assured the British Government that the rich mineral and forest wealth of Odisha would be properly exploited. Taking a favourable attitude to the long outstanding problem of the Odias, the Government appointed Sir Samuel O'Donell, as the Chairman of the Boundary Commission to demarcate the boundaries of the proposed Odisha Province. Other two members of the Commission were H. M. Mehta (member, Council of States from Bombay) and Tarun Ram Phookun, (member, Central Legislative Assembly from Assam). The Raja of Paralakhemundi, co-opted members to represent the Odia, Bihari and Telugu interests respectively. B. C. Mukherjee I.C.S. functioned as Secretary of the Commission and represented the Bengali interests. These co-opted members were authorized to take part in the proceedings but had no authority to sign the final report.

Apropos to the terms of reference, the Boundary Commissions were to report: (1) what should be the boundary line, (2) what would be the administrative, financial and other consequences of such a province and (3) what would be the administrative, financial and other consequences in the adjoining territories of British India. The appointment of the Commission evoked great public interest and enthusiasm in Odisha. It provoked resentment in Midnapore and Naybasan areas of Bengal as these were likely to be affected by the formation of the new province. The Odia leaders made a concerted move to represent their case united before the Commission. They forgot their political and other differences to constitute several committees to raise funds, mobilize public opinion, organize meetings and propaganda in areas like Midnapore, Singhbhum, Phuljhar, Vizagpatam, etc.

The student community also came forward to join hands with elderly leaders and moved from village to town, door to door, in generating unprecedented awakening for the Odia cause. There were occasions when senior Odia officers like Nilamoni Senapati gave vent to their feelings publicly advocating serious work for the proposed province. Other Odia leaders, like Lingaraj Panigrahi, Harihar Mishra, Chandra Sekhar Behera, Bodharam Dubey, Ram Naraya Mishra, Bichitrananda Das, Bhubanananda Das, Achyutananda Purohit, Laxminaraya Sahu, Niranjana Patanaik also rendered commendable service in numerous ways.

The Commission recorded evidence of 410 witnesses and visited Jamsedpur, Chaibasa, Sambalpur, Raipur, Midnapore, Gopalpur, Waltair, Kakinada and Cuttack. In determining the boundaries they examined several factors; economic interest and the administrative convenience. They also examined the 1913 census statistics in detail and came to the conclusion that the proposed Odisha Province should include Odisha Division, Angul, Padampur and Khariar (of the Central Provinces), the greater part of the Ganjam district and Vizagpatanam agency Tracts. The new province would have an area of 33,000 Sq. miles with a population of 8,277,000. Paralakhemundi posed a knotty problem, the Raja and the population statistics pulling in opposite directions. As an Odia king Krishna Chandra Gajapati wanted his estate to be merged with Odisha. But the census figures of 1931 showed that the Telegus formed a majority in the estate. Sir Samuel O'Donnell, therefore, suggested that Paralakhemundi should not be integrated with the new province. Mehta and Phookun differing from the views of the Chairman recommended the transfer of Paralakhemundi to Odisha. When the contents of the Boundary Commissions report were revealed to the public

in the form of a white paper on 18 March 1933 there was a sharp public reaction in Odisha. They felt greatly injured at the non-inclusion of Midnapore, Singhbhum, Phuljhar and Paralakhemundi and Jeypore. It was apprehended that the proposed province would be truncated Odisha which would not be self-sufficient economically. A section of Odia leaders wanted to reject the offer. They humiliated at the Commission's suggestion that as a measure of economy the new province should neither have a High Court nor a University. A protest meeting was held at Cuttack on 25th March 1933. The Raja of Jeypore was unhappy over the decision of the Government to leave his estate with Madras. In Jeypore and Paralakhemundi large public meetings were held protecting against the white paper proposals.

The Rajas of Paralakhemundi and Khallikote, Lingaraj Panigrahi, Bhubanananda Das and Shyamsundar Gantayat proceeded to London to persuade the Home Government to reconsider the boundary issue. They met Sir Samuel Hoare, the Secretary of State for India and forcefully argued their case. The Joint Committee of the Parliament also allowed them to present their case. The Joint Select Committee under the Chairmanship of Lord Linlithgow after a careful examination of the case recommended to the Government that the new province of Odisha would be formed with areas like the Odisha Division, Angul, Padampur and Khariar, Odia-majority area of the Ganjam district, Berhampur town, Jeypore estate, about 30% of Paralakhemundi estate including Paralakhemundi town and the Maliahas of Paralakhemundi and Jalantra. The total area of the new province of Odisha was now raised from 21,545 to 32,695 Sq miles. Thus, Joint Parliamentary Committee gave the final shape to the new province which emerged as one of the eleven units of British India

by the Act of 1935. The Committee emphatically stated that the question of financial deficit must be made good by federal subvention. Thus all hurdles for the creation of a separate Odisha province were allowed.

It was the desire of the Government of India to provide Odisha with a trained and experienced administrator, who would organize the basic framework of the Provincial administration, constitute essential departments specifying the duties and responsibilities of various officers. Lord Sifton, the Governor of Bihar and Odisha, suggested that the governor of the proposed province be appointed promptly as Special Officer for the above purpose. In addition the Government of India appointed an Administrative Committee under the Chairmanship of Sir John Hubback to inquire into the Administrative problems incidental to the creation of Odisha as a separate province. Hubback's appointment as Governor of the province was also shortly announced. The Odisha Administrative Committee, also called the Hubback Committee had eight members viz., Madhusudan Das, Laxmidhar Mahanti, B.N.Das, Dhira Narendra, N.R.Naidu, W.O.Newsam, Nilamoni Senapati, Lokanath Mishra and Gour Chandra Deb with V.Ramaswamy as the Secretary. It had to consider and recommend measures on numerous issues; the location of the headquarters and the district, territorial changes and their headquarters, and whether the new province should have its High Court and University; etc. The report of the Administrative Committee was published on 20 December 1933 recommending Cuttack to be the provincial headquarters and Puri as Summer Capital. There should be a High Court, but no university. The Committee made some territorial arrangements for areas transferred from Madras and the Central Provinces. A new district for Koraput and two

new subdivisions at Nawapara and Gunpur were created with their respective boundaries demarcated. Angul was split up into two divisions to be administered by the Collectors of Ganjam and Cuttack respectively. After a period of brisk activities to transfer necessary man power, records and documents and make budgetary provisions for the new province every thing was set for the happy augury. The Order-in-Council regarding the formation of the Province of Odisha was released both in England and in India on 21st January 1936. The British Parliament's Constitution of the Odisha Order, 1936 got the approval of the King on 3 March 1936 which was entitled as "The Government of India (Constitution of Odisha) Order, 1936." The members from Odisha attended the Legislative Council of Bihar and Odisha for the last time on 28 March 1936 and they were given a touching farewell by the members of Bihar. It was announced that the new province would come into being on 1 April 1936 with Sir John Austin Hubback as the first Governor. Sir Hubback was administered the oath of office by Sir Courtney Terel the Chief Justice of Bihar and Odisha High Court at a gala inaugural function organized at the Ravenshaw College Heritage Hall at Cuttack. The King Emperor and the Viceroy's messages of goodwill were read out to the people. Odisha became a new province. The long cherished dream of the Odia-speaking people at last became a reality. The new Province of Odisha was inaugurated on 1 April 1936 with Sir John Austin Hubback as its first Governor. Thus began the last phase of her history under the British regime.

Dr. Janmejaya Choudhury, Lecturer in History, Sri Jagannath College, Kaipadar, Khurda.