

Quit India Movement in Odisha with Special Reference to Balasore District

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Abstract :

In the Saga of Indian's Freedom movement, Quit India movement forms a landmark. In this historic movement, Odisha in general and Balasore in particular played an illustrious role. Exhibiting unprecedented chivalry, heroism, sacrifice and patriotism in a violent form and hereby created a sensational chapter of flesh and blood. The August revolution took an alarming shape in the places of the district Balasore like Bhandari Pokhari, Dhamnagar, Basudevapur, Iram and Turigadia and converted to a blast furnace and presented thus and heart to plunge in to the ocean of 'Do or Die movement' of Gandhijee¹.

The people of Balasore a coastal district in colonial Odisha played significant role in the struggle for freedom. The people of the district participated in all phases of Gandhian struggle with tremendous enthusiasm and by their suffering and sacrifice wrote a glorious chapter in the history of our freedom struggle.

It has been pointed out very often that national level works on Indian Freedom movement have not given due recognition to the sacrifices and courage of the people of Odisha. In fact, politically fragmented Odisha, steeped in poverty and ignorance failed to draw nation's attention. It is the responsibility of the researchers, historians of Odisha to project the freedom movement in Odisha in right perspective and to present a comprehensive history of the struggle. Unfortunately it has not been done as yet, though vast amount of historical literature is available at present².

The failure of the Cripps Mission and the fear of Japanese aggression led the congress to

adopt the famous 'Quit India' resolution in the AICC at Bombay on 8 August 1942. The congress took the final decision of launching a country wide non-violent movement under the leadership of Gandhi. The British authorities acted swiftly and arrested members of the working committee including Gandhi. H.K. Mahtab, the prominent congress leader from Odisha was arrested at Bombay, but S.N Diwedy and Malati Devi returned to Odisha secretly. Congress was declared an illegal organization.

In Odisha, all prominent Congress leaders were arrested. Left leaderless, the people of Odisha, suffering from war time restrictions reacted strongly³. The movement spread rapidly from Balasore in the North to Koraput in the South. Mob violence was witnessed in the districts of Cuttack, Puri and Balasore⁴.

In Balasore District, the people responded to Gandhi's call 'Do or Die' with tremendous enthusiasm. Their reaction found expression in the destruction of Government

properties including telegraph and telephone wires, attack on police stations, post offices and establishment of parallel Government⁵. The Government struck hard and police action and firing followed.

In Balasore Town, Motiganj Post Office was burnt, which was barely 200 yards away from the police station. Anti-British pamphlets were circulated, the public meeting were organized. Banchhanidhi Giri, Amulya Das, Maguni Mahapatra, Golak Das, Pitambar Pani actively participated in the movement⁶. In Barabati area, Gour Chandra Das operated a secret organization whose members were engaged in circulating anti-British pamphlets to the interior areas. In fact, two Anti-British bulletins 'Congress Varta' and 'Satya Sambad' were edited by Sri S.N. Dwivedy who directed the August movement in Odisha as a underground leader. Gour Chandra Das was instrumental in circulating these bulletins in Balasore District, which inspired people almost to a state of open rebellion. The patriotic songs composed by Banchhanidhi Mohanty acted as a catalyst⁷.

Under the leadership of Muralidhar Panda 500 people set fire to the police station at Bhandari Pokhari and injured two police constables. Dhushuri was declared an independent area and a plan was chalked out to occupy Bhadrak Katchery. The police resorted to firing at Lunia on 22 September 1942 which resulted in the killing of nine persons⁸. The police also opened fire at Khaira and Tudigadia. However the most tragic incident took place on 28 September at Iram in the Basudevpur Police station where the police party opened fire on the villagers and killed 29 persons on the spot and some 55 people were injured.

In Iram area, the most significant development was the formation of a parallel

Government. An area known as "Banchhanidhi Chakia" was declared an independent area⁹. The local Zamidar became hostile to the movement and requested the district authorities to station a police force at Iram. The people hearing the news of the arrival of the police assembled at Melan Ground apprehending danger. The luggage of the police force was snatched away by the Satyagrahis. The D.S.P. then ordered the March of the police force to Melan Ground and instructed to open fire. Some 29 people died on the spot and many were injured. The police arrested the leader of the movement Aniruddha Mohanty and Kamala Prasad Kar¹⁰.

Nowhere in India were so many people killed in police firing during the Quit India movement¹¹. The Government was bitterly criticized for this inhuman incident and was ultimately forced to institute an enquiry into the matter. The incident at Eram created widespread hatred among the people against the British Government¹². The movement in Balasore District was participated not only by Congress, but also by Congress socialists, communists, Forward Bloc, Kisan Sabha, Students Federation, Youth organization and common men. It turned out to be truly a mass movement surpassing all other movements in dimension and intensity, and open rebellion with unbelievable enthusiasm of the people¹³. This was admitted by the viceroy Linlithgow in his telegram to Churchill, the PM of England on 31st August 1942, "I am engaged here in meeting by for the most serious rebellion since that of 1857, the gravity and extent of which we have so far concealed from the world for reasons of Military Security."

It was a people's revolt, popular initiative asserting itself in the course of nationalist struggle. People acted 'on their own' independent of elite leadership.

Ranjit Guha of Subaltern school calls it 'politics of people' which existed parallel to the domain of 'elite' politics, in which the principal actors were not the dominant groups of indigenous society or the colonial authorities, but the 'subaltern' classes or groups constituting the masses.

The participation of large number of women in Balasore District was the striking feature of the movement. Nowhere in Odisha, such a large number of women came out of veil to participate in the movement. The movement produced the first woman martyr of Odisha, Pari Bewa who died in police firing at Eram. The movement witnessed a lot of violent activities. Followed by brutal police action, firing and arrests. Highest number being 42, including women at Balasore in comparison to other districts in police action.

The high percentage of literacy was responsible for the growth of political awareness among the people who actively participated in the movement. North Balasore was relatively calm as it was reeling under severe cyclone in 1942 and exodus of people from the neighboring Midnapore District as a result of the disastrous Bengal Famine.

South Balasore where the movement took a violent turn was under the spell of great nationalist poets like Banchhanidhi, Laxmikant and prominent Congress leaders like Mahtab, Nandakishore and Nilamani. With the fall of Rangoon and withdrawal of British troops, apprehension of Japanese invasion loomed large in Balasore especially in Chandipur region. The pre-cautionary measures of the Government hit the people of the coastal district very hard. Congress exploited the war-time situation and made the movement more widespread and mass based. Though the movement was crushed by the

end of 1942 it demonstrated the strength of the common man and their hatred of alien rule.

References :

1. Balasore acquired the status of a district 1827, the erstwhile district was divided and Bhadrak became a separate district.
2. H.K. Mahtab, Sadhanara Pathe (Odia), Cuttack, 1972, p. 238.
3. S.N Dwivedi. Mo jibana Sangram (Odia), Cuttack, 1984, p.130-131.
4. S. Patnaik, Odishare Swadhinata Andolane itihash, (Odia), Cuttack, 1972, p. 173.
5. M.N. Das (ed), Sidelight on the History and Culture of Orissa, Cuttack, 1977, p. 174.
6. This fact was revealed by Sri Pitambar Pani, a freedom fighter who died recently.
7. The Samaja dated 12.10.1942.
8. The persons died as a result of police action at Lunia are (1) Gopinath Jena, (2) Gouri Jena, (3) Shankar Jena, (4) Agani, (5) Nidhi Mahalik, (6) Shyam Mahalik, (7) Naba Nayak, (8) Chintamani Das.
9. This was revealed by Sri Girish Chandra Padhi, a freedom fighter who was injured in the police action at Eram on 28th September 1942.
10. History of Freedom Movement in Orissa, Vol. IV, p. 97.
11. Cultural Heritage of Orissa, Vol-1, Balasore, p.99.
12. N. Mansergh, Transfer of power, Vol-2, London, 1971, p. 835-855.
13. R.Guha, (ed) Subaltern studies, Vol-1, New Delhi, 1982, p.4.

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