

Political Movements of Bhagirathi Pattnaik in the context of Gandhian Ideology

Mahendra Kumar Dash

The history of freedom movement in Orissa is the expression of forces that constitutes an integral part of all India struggle. The soil of Sambalpur has produced so many heroes who sacrificed themselves in the service of the motherland against the tyrannical rule of the British Government during the freedom movement in Sambalpur. Sambalpur forms the streams of militant nationalism in the Indian war of Independence where the name of Bhagirathi Pattnaik is written in golden letters.

Bhagirathi Pattnaik as the follower of Gandhi has

worked in the Non-cooperation movement with the Congress members, continued for Peasant congregation during Civil-Disobedience Movement and revolted actively in the Quit India Movement.

EARLY LIFE:

Bhagirathi Pattnaik was born on 9th November, 1884. His father was Jadunath Pattnaik who was an Amin during the Sambalpur land settlement and mother was Kurmari Bani. He spent his early childhood in the peaceful atmosphere of Barpali and took admission at the Zilla School, Sambalpur for higher education. He left school when he was in 9th class due to the accidental death of his father in 1903 at Attabira.¹

Bhagirathi Pattnaik joined as an Oriya Teacher at Simagaon Dhanwantiri near Raipur in 1904. At that time Sambalpur District was under Madhya Pradesh. But he suddenly resigned from the post. Next Bhagirathi Pattnaik joined the Patna King Prithviraj Sing Deo as a Nazir and promoted to the position of Munsif and lastly to the personal secretary of the King. He spent nine years like a deaf, dumb and blind man in the empire of tyranny and suppression. When he started raising voice against

the oppressive king, he was arrested and sent to jail at Bolangir on 9th February 1920.

The Non-Cooperation Movement and Bhagirathi Pattnaik

Gaya Congress:

Bhagirathi Pattnaik being influenced with the spirit of patriotism and nationalism voiced against the tyrannical and unjust rule of the king. Thus he was sent to jail. After his release from Bolangir jail on 07.12.1920, he brought a Charkha and started spinning Khadar. He trained his son Prafulla and wife Jambubati in this regard. At that time Gandhiji had started his non-cooperation movement from 1 August 1920 and Sambalpur took an active part in this movement. The movement was spread out in Sambalpur district under the leadership of Chandra Sekhar Behera. Students left schools, colleges to join the strike. It was on 20th June 1921 a grand meeting was held at Sunaripada of Barpali where Bhagirathi played a great role in enrolling the names of the people in the movement. People were kin to register their names as the members of the congress.²

But due to the Chauri Chaura incident Gandhiji

stopped the movement and took active interest on weaving Khadi, removal of untouchability.

Bhagirathi Pattnaik went village to village for preparing people for the Gaya Congress. The preparatory meeting was held at Balibandha, Sambalpur from 23rd October 1922 to 25th October 1922.

Bhagirathi Pattnaik was selected to the Orissa provincial congress from Sambalpur. Among others Nrusingha Guru, Kunjabehari Meher and Ladabhai Thoria, Mahavir Sing had joined the Gaya Congress.³ They started their journey from Jharsuguda on 21st December 1922. The congress meeting was held from 26th December 1922 to 31st December 1922. After attending the conference they returned to home with a new spirit of Gandhian ideology of prevention of untouchability, spinning charakha and prevention of intoxication etc. Accordingly, Khadi centers were opened in Bargarh, Barpali and Attabira. Bhagirathi was accompanied in this regard by Chintamani Pujari, Laxminarayan Mishra, Achyutananda Purohit and others.

When Gandhiji was arrested on 11.1.1923 after Gaya Congress, Bhagirathi Pattnaik along with his friends observed 'Hartal' in Sambalpur town on 18th January 1923.

In spite of his poor economic family condition Bhagirathi Pattnaik wanted to participate in the Kakinada Congress held on 28.12.1923. He joined Kakinada Congress with the Congress representative ticket no.2447.⁴ Bhagirathi met Muhammad Ali the president of the Kakinada Congress meeting and Motilal Nehru. While returning to Sambalpur Bhagirathi came in close contact with the Berhampur congress committee and reached Puri to join a meeting with Ramdas Babaji and Nrusingha Pattnaik. The meeting was intended to free Gandhiji from Jail. He announced the message of Kakinada Congress at Bhubaneswar, Khordha, Kantilo, Baud, Sonapur, Kumbhari and Barpali.

The 39th Session of the Indian National Congress was held at Belgaon in 1924. Jawaharlal Nehru issued special delegates card for Bhagirathi Pattnaik. Bhagirathi Pattnaik distributed the cyclostyled copies regarding the negligence of the Pradesh Congress

Committee. Gopabandhu observing the situation rushed to Bhagirathi and said : "Bhagirathi Babu. I was really in dark, hence I will lapse the matter let our family dispute confined to our home, what is the need of making a public show of it ?" His affectionate word melted his heart. He withdrew the resolution copies from Nehru and others. Gandhiji visited Sambalpur on 23rd December 1928. He was accompanied by Kasturba Gandhi and Dev Das during his visit. Bhagirathi organized a meeting in the memory of Lala Lajpat Rai who was beaten by an English Officer and ultimately died in November 1928. Protesting against the Britishers Bhagirathi Pattnaik on that day gave a Khaddar Dhoti and a coat to his son Prafulla.

Declaration of Purna Swaraj and Bhagirathi Pattnaik (Salt Campaign)

In the Lahore Session of 1929 "Purna Swaraj" was passed and congress decided to observe the Purna Swaraj Day on 26th January 1930 throughout India. Bhagirathi made all arrangements to celebrate Independence Day at Sambalpur. District Magistrate Bharat Chandra Nayak was present to observe the situation.

Bhagirathi read out the resolution paper passed by the Congress.

Sambalpur played an important role during the Salt Satyagraha movement of 1930. Bhagirathi organized a public meeting at Bargarh with Chaturbhuja and Premsankar to discuss the matter. On 19th March, Laxminarayan, Bhagirathi, Dayananda Chintamani, Sudhansu Sekhar, Nrusingha Guru and Durga Guru were charge sheeted and ordered to appear before the court.

It was during the 2nd phase of the Satyagraha on 8th July, 1932 when Bhagirathi Pattnaik along with his revolutionary workers was arrested. Gandhiji started individual Satyagraha where he pleaded "All those who are able and are willing to offer individual Satyagraha on their own responsibility without expectation of any help from the Congress organizations are expected to do so".⁵

Bhagirathi Pattnaik along with his wife Jambubati Pattnaik and son Prafulla Pattnaik started individual civil-disobedience movement. It was on 22nd September 1933, Bhagirathi Pattnaik along with his family members were arrested while picketing at Bargarh.

After release from jail they began to serve the earth quake destitute. Prafulla worked in the relief camps of Mungher, Saharse, Panchgahia and Bangoan. Bhagirathi Pattnaik met Jawaharlal Nehru who came to supervise the relief work. On 3rd April 1934 they spent a night with Mahatma Gandhi, Bhagbati Devi and Jamunalal Bajaj in one camp.

Gandhi visited Orissa in May 1934 for an intensive study of the problem of untouchables and the method of solution. He reached Jharsuguda on 5th May 1934 at 5 a.m. along with Laxminarayan Sahu, Raj Kumar Bose, Thakkar Bana and some of his associates.⁶ Gandhiji also visited the Harijan Bustee of Sambalpur on the same day. Bhagirathi discussed various problems with Gandhiji and informed him about their success in closing the wine shops at different places.

Government of India Act was passed in 1935. The Congress decided to work within the framework of this new Act because it accorded new status to the provinces. The Act came into force in 1937 and the Congress decided to take part in the election for legislative assemblies at eleven provinces. Bhagirathi took

active part in the election campaign.

Quit India Movement and Bhagirathi Pattnaik

Bhagirathi Pattnaik took active part in the Quit India Movement. The historic "Quit India" resolution was passed on 14th July 1942. It renewed the demand that British Rule in India must end immediately. Bhagirathi organized the peoples at Sambalpur with his son Prafulla. Prafulla Pattnaik also collected funds from Deoghur and Dhunka for the August Revolution. On 17th April 1943 Jambubati Pattnaik died due to heart fail when Bhagirathi and Prafulla were in jail. Ayodhya Prasad Mishra a famous congress leader lit up the pyre.

It was on 10th February 1943, Gandhiji undertook a long fast for 21 days against the atrocities and illegal collection of money by the government. A feeling of high tension spread all over the district. Even illiterate labourers in the interior villages knew the deteriorating condition of Gandhiji's health and expressed keen anxiety regarding the effect of his fast.⁷

Bhagirathi Pattnaik presided over a meeting at Dharmasala, Sambalpur. This

meeting was organized against the anti-people policies of the interim government. He supported the student's movement openly at Sambalpur on 24th November 1945 as a protest against the firing and lathi charge on the students in Calcutta and he organized the students at Bargarh and Barpali. The Independence Day was observed on 26th Jan. 1946 at some centres of the district.⁹

But the Independence Day was celebrated throughout India with great joy and enthusiasm on 15th August 1947. Mr. Garnath Gartia presided over the independence celebration meeting at Barpali.

Conclusion

The contributions of Bhagirathi Pattnaik and his family in the freedom struggle are priceless and immeasurable. His role was not only confined to Sambalpur but also to different parts of India, Bhagirathi Pattnaik as a follower of Gandhiji actively

worked from non-cooperation movement to the Independence of India. Bhagirathi's contribution in the peasant congregations, individual Satyagraha, revolution against the British Government and his stand against untouchability is remarkable and historical. He also raised his voice for equal opportunities to all irrespective of caste, creed etc. He realised that true democracy could not be achieved without education. He emphasized upon the village Panchayats to resolve the disputes of the villagers. Bhagirathi as an ardent follower of Gandhiji entered into the Jagannath temple at Barpali with the untouchables. Bhagirathi took active part in the Bhoodan Movement in 1957. In this movement they got a village 'Panimora' as Gramdan. He identified himself with the communist party of India with Red Flag during the last part of his life. He also participated actively in the communist movement against the price rise, unemployment

and corruption in 1976. This was the last political movement for 92 years old Bhagirathi Pattnaik. It was on 9th July 1980 his great soul vanished with the Supreme Soul leaving his unforgettable deeds, for whom the soil of Sambalpur has been glorified.

References:

1. Diary of Bhagirathi Pattnaik in Archives of S.U.
2. "Seva" Dated 25.06.1921, Cuttack.
3. H.K. Mahatab (ed.) "History of Freedom Movement in Orissa" Cuttack, 1954.
4. "Mukti Pathara Yatri" Oriya, p. 17.
5. D.G. Tendulkar, "Mahatma" Vol.3, New Delhi. 1969, P.209.
6. 'Utkala Sevaka' Dt.10.5.1934, p.83.
7. Deputy Commissioner Office, Confidential File No.4, Sambalpur.
8. Deputy Commissioner Office, Confidential File No.10, Sambalpur, OSA.
9. Deputy Commissioner Office, Confidential File No.8, Sambalpur.

Mahendra Kumar Dash is a Doctoral Scholar, Dept. of Political Science and Pub. Admn., Sambalpur University, Jyoti Vihar, Burla, e-mail : Mahendradash@gmail.com.