

Role of Khariar in the Freedom Struggle

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It is a strenuous task to trace the history of freedom struggle in terms of a small principality like Khariar. The tremor of freedom struggle was felt in Khariar region. This paper seeks to highlight the role of this region in the freedom struggle.

Origin of Khariar

Very scanty information is available about the origin of the name of Khariar. Very few records have come to my notice which are placed here after careful scrutiny. Near Badadadhibaban temple, one of the oldest temples of the area, the first living settlement or housing restoration had been made and that settlement might have been called with some name about which nothing substantial is known. In course of time tradition believes this housing settlement was called "Khaliapali".¹

According to G.C. Praharaj², Kaisar-i-Hind (Silver Medal) the following explanation of the word Khalia are found in his compiled work "Purnachandra Odia Bhasa-kosha" (A lexicon of the Oriya language). He stated that, due to the condition of clay and sticky, gravely (soil) cattle suffer from stringhalt. It also means a low marshy land unfit for cultivation, slippery condition of the ground owing to the accumulation of water. A small pool at the foot of a hill where water is left in summer. This locality was named Khaliapali and afterwards it came to be known as Khariar, Khariyalaya and Khadial.

Some interpret "Khadi" meaning chalk and therefore, explain the word "Khadial" means living place for learned people.³

We have also traced the origin of the name Khariar from a report written by Sibanarayan Deo.⁴ He stated that during the reign of Ratan Singh (1818-1842 A.D.) he had shifted his capital from Komna to Khadial. The name Khadial owes its origin to a river of Rajasthan named Khariar which falls into Sambhar lake, Menda, Khadial, Khandel, Rupanagar and Aral rivers fall into Sambhar

lake of Rajasthan. In the Orissa State Gazetteer⁵ this place has been mentioned as Khadial. During the British period Khariar has been mentioned as Khariar, Thereafter, still it is being used in all purpose as "Khariar", which is within 82°/83' longitude and 20°/23' latitude. The shape of the territory is like an English letter "L".⁶

Brief Political History of Khariar

The present Nuapada district (formed after the bifurcation of Kalahandi district on 1st April, 1993) comprises the area of Khariar principality alias state. It was reduced to the status of an estate in 1865 A.D. by the British authority. It had its capital at Komna. Then the state was known as Tonnote state. This state was separated from Patna in 1590 A.D. and its Raja ruled independently. Within 1751-55 A.D. the whole area fell into the hands of the Maratha of Nagpur, but it appears to have been ceded to the British Government by the Treaty of 1803 A.D. with the Maratha.⁷ It can be corroborated by the records of T. Mottle, the first European to visit Sambalpur (1768 A.D.) for trade in diamond clearly reveals the political instability in Sambalpur region due to

struggle between the British and the Maratha for supremacy towards the close of the 18th century." Again in 1806 A.D. Maratha regained their supremacy. Towards the end of 1817 A.D. It was once more reverted to British and it finally in 1826 A.D. ceded to East India Company. It appears from "Aitchison's Collection of Treaties, Engagements and Sanad" that Khariar was finally ceded under Article-5 of the treaty between the East India Company and Raghuji Bhonsale-III, dated 1st December, 1826 A.D. This was further confirmed by a subsequent Treaty dated 26th December 1829 A.D. By article of the Treaty. Chhatisgarh was given back to the Nagpur region. After the death of Raghuji Bhonsale III, the British fully lapsed the dominion status of Nagpur Raja. It is said that this territory was wild, rugged and mountainous covered with dense forest, difficult to access, and of course, thinly populated.⁹

During the period of Prataparudra Singh Deo (1792-1818 A.D.) the capital was at Komna. There was a Pindari raid in this area in 1806 A.D. according to Raipur District Gazetteer.¹⁰ The leader of the Pindari Chittu, was determined to devastate the

Bhonsale territories because the Bhonsale troops had killed the adopted son. In consequence Pindari spread into Chhatisgarh. From a report written by Sibanarayana Deo,¹¹ Pindaris had plundered the Khariar region. It is known that Bhonsale Government had taken Ratan Singh to Nagpur for non-payment of arrear Takoli and kept him there for 14 years. It is known that Majhi Priest and local leaders had collected funds and had gone to Nagpur for payment and finally released Ratan Singh. After that Ratan Singh became Raja in 1818 A.D. and ruled upto 1842 A.D. Raja Ratan Singh died in 1842 A.D. and was succeeded by his son Sunder Singh. He was succeeded by Krushna Chandra Singh Deo.

During his period of reign from 1852 to 1867 A.D. was a crucial period of revolt against the British for he supported the cause of Surendra Sai.

Khariar formed a part of the Chhota Nagpur Division in British record until it was transferred to the jurisdiction of the superintendent of Tributary Mahals, Cuttack, and in 1861 A.D. Khariar state was again transferred as a part of Sambalpur and incorporated in



the Central Province (C.P.) of British India.

Khariar Supported the Cause of Surendra Sai

Veer Surendra Sai, the most illustrious Chauhan of Khinda in Sambalpur region with all his strength was striving to oust the Britishers from the Motherland, but by the later part of 1858 A.D. Surendra Sai found Sambalpur region unsafe and made his stronghold in the hills of Khariar. Manikgarh the traditional bastion of the Chauhan in this part of country, provided Surendra Sai greater protection and safe mobility in 1861 A.D. Raja Krushna Chandra Singh Deo and the people of Khariar region did not pay any heed to the frequent warning of the British authority to drive Surendra Sai away from the state. Instead, K.C. Singh Deo helped Surendra Sai with men

and money. He gave him shelter and maintained secrecy of his whereabouts.¹² That had invoked the British authorities and they regarded K.C. Singh Deo, the Raja of Khariar as dangerous.¹³

Raja K.C. Singh Deo did not receive proper treatment from the British. Despite that, when the 32 Regiment of Madras Native Infantry under Captain Swiney passed through Khariar to join the Regiment at Kamptee. He gave them valuable logistic assistance without which Captain Swiney would never have reached his destination safely. Instead the Raja helped the Britishers to capture some of the camp followers of Veer Surendra Sai. At the same time the Raja of Khariar used to help Surendra Sai with men and money inspite of all this hiccup. The Raja of Khariar never got Surendra Sai arrested and saw that no harm was done to him. Because of this fact, he was called a dangerous Chief in British correspondence. He is also regarded as mere Zamindar in the letter of Acting Commissioner R.N. Share of Sambalpur district dated 23rd January 1862 A.D.

Despite the above hurdle, Khariar Raja and the common people supported the

cause of Veer Surendra Sai. The injustice meted out to Surendra Sai was a climax to one of the most gross forms of political chicanery practised by the British (East India Company) for grabbing Indian territories. In the inaccessible area of Sambalpur Surendra Sai waged a sustained war by Guerrilla tactics in order to espouse the cause of the mute tribal peasants who had flocked under his banner without any fear to the British troops.¹⁴ During this journey of heroism and time of urgent necessity Veer Surendra Sai got valuable support and assistance from Khariar which still remains a statement for posterity and has been a historic testimony for all freedom lovers.

Civil Disobedience Movement

Within the formation of the Indian National Congress by A.O. Hume and during the time of Lord Dufferin in 1885, the Indian freedom struggle got new shape and energy. The whole country was agog with over the Civil Disobedience Movement decided upon by the working committee of Congress on the Lahore session in 1929. The Civil Disobedience Movement began on 12th March, 1930. Mahatma Gandhi with 78 male

members left the Sabarmati Ashram on foot and reached the sea at Dandi on 5th April 1930. As scheduled Gandhiji broke the Salt law on 6th April 1930, this had great significance all over India.¹⁵

During this period, as already observed Khariar state was incorporated in Raipur district of Central Province. The first Civil Disobedience Movement of 1930, led the Forest Satyagraha in Raipur district. We get this information from Raipur District Gazetteer¹⁶ which narrated thus : "The forest Satyagraha started in the district led the arrest of large number of persons on 29th April 1929. Waman Rao Lakhe asked the audience to break laws and destroy the Government on 18th May 1929. He suggested social boycott of bureaucracy. Consequently he was convicted on 25th June 1930 and had to undergo one year simple imprisonment. On the same day car of the Police Superintendent was stoned and two policemen were assaulted by the people.

Raipur District Gazetteer further elaborated that sporadic violence continued unabated in the former Khariar Zamindari. An attack was made on 30th

September on the police party which had gone there to make arrest. The policemen were able to extricate themselves with difficulty after resorting to firing. Two persons were wounded and other sporadic violence occurred at Chaulshara, Patparpali, Khateru and Konnadabri villages.

The above narration of the Gazetteer shows that, police force were deployed in many parts of the district. The Khariar Zamindari was famous for its teak forest and was part of the same district. As freedom struggle was all India in nature, the activities of the forest Satyagraha of Raipur must have spread to the interior villages or forest areas of Khariar.

Saliha Agitation

Saliha, a village is situated at a distance of eight Kms towards north-east direction from Nuapada surrounded by rocky mountains. It appears to have been located within dense forest. It seems to be an ancient settlement, because two pieces of sculpture arts are found on the bank of the tank. One is a rectangular Sakti measuring 2 ft. 2 inches by 1ft. 6 inches. Sakti worship in ancient and early Medieval periods was popular.

J.P. Singh Deo,¹⁹ a freelance archaeological researcher visited the site on 16th April, 1996 and wrote it in his article "Saliha and Its Aftereffect." He makes the following observation.

"Once two stone temples stood there. One was of Shiva linga and other was of rectangular Sakti deity. The second sculpture of a Saliha shows a yogi fasten with a belt (Yoga patta) practising high austerity in sitting position. There is every possibility that once two small temples Shiva and Sakti stood there. At present Konabhaira deity is worshipped as presiding deity by the villagers of Saliha was once a site of Shiva-Sakti worship."

Braja Kishor Padhi²⁰ while dealing with freedom struggle in Khariar Principality states, "The year 1930 A.D. is a landmark in the history of Khariar. The tyrannical rule of Garhjat feudatory state evoked a strong feeling of resentment against the ruler and aroused their sympathy for oppressed masses of the States. The imposition of taxes on the tenants of the states by the Raja of Khariar created resentment against him. The people Khariar state united and organised a meeting at

Salihagarh village in 1930 and protested the taxation taken by the Government. This incident is popularly known as "Saliha Agitation." It was mid of Summer, the people of many villages like Chuhuri, Kodmeri, Nuadehi, Thelkobra, Saliha, Katyanpar, Bairbhadi, Karemeli, Murhela. Patparpali, Dumerdihi, Nilji and Sinapali, etc. and many more villages gathered and denounced against the imposition of wood tax and pandri tax."²¹ In the same way in Kalahandi the peasants revolted against Durbar rule mainly because of the Kulta immigrants from other districts especially Sambalpur who received the patronage of the ruler to improve agriculture in his territories which deprived the indigenous tribal of their traditional rights and privileges. This peasant discontent surfaced in 1878 A.D.²² and in the same Kalahandi Kondh rebellion also took place. They had nursed a deep grievances against the Kulta Cultivators.

The above resentment of common people against the ruler in real terms was directed towards the British because the British forced and imposed the ruler to collect wood and Pandri taxes from the common men. So, everywhere there was some sort of rebellion, one of such was Saliha agitation.

A meeting was organised at Saliha. More than seven hundred people assembled. Their ambition was one. A resolution was passed in the meeting not to give taxes and to revolt against imposition of taxes. One Pratap Singh (Komdat) Supervisor of Nawapara investigated secretly and informed the same to Raja Artatran Deo immediately. He disliked to expose himself. So, he dealt it diplomatically and believed that matter can be settled peacefully and reported the matter to police to control the campaign. To suppress any untoward incident police rushed to Saliha while meeting was in progress. Police gheraoed the campaigners all of a sudden and warned the people to stop the meeting. The people dis-obeyed the order and chanted slogan against the Government. So, to control the agitation police charged lathi. In return people manhandled the police force and burnt the lathis. Some policemen were wounded. Without finding any other alternative the police were compelled to fire at the crowd. They arrested forty to fifty members in the meeting. So in the whole area, there was anarchy and the situation was beyond control. Leaders like, Keju Das Baba of Chahari, Ramlal Deongan of Parakoda,

Ramu of Saliguda, Gouda Rai of Saliha and many more people of Panaguda and Chanabeda villages were arrested and were taken to prison. Some died and many more were wounded on the spot.²⁴

All the above narration of B.K. Padhi is mostly from oral archives and therefore most of the statements may find in excess of the real happening and exaggeration. There was no death during Saliha firing and Keju Das Baba and Kartik Sabar suffered injuries in their leg on 30th September 1930. And It is also found clear from the Raipur District Gazetteer that, only one person was reportedly wounded.

In the further course, with the consent of Raja Artatran Deo, Khariar estate was amalgamated with Orissa province on 1st April, 1936 and remained in Sambalpur district. The people at Khariar like other parts of the new province had regularly received the clarion call of the Congress and many of them actively participated in the cause of freedom struggle.

Non Co-operation Movement & Indian Independence

Mahatma Gandhi launched the Quit India

Movement on 8th August 1942 for which a resolution of All India Congress Committee was passed on 7th August 1942. Gandhi asked the British to leave India for good. Gandhiji was arrested. The news of his arrest was followed by non-violent demonstration in the shape of meetings, hartals and procession throughout the country. Despite the warning from the Superintendent of Police of Sambalpur for unlawful gathering, a number of meetings were held at Bargarh, Jharsuguda, Barpali, Khariar and in Sambalpur in defiance of the notice or warning.²⁵

The Quit India Movement in Khariar was intense and there was widespread protest against the British Raj. Many Congress activists were arrested. Every attempt was made from the people to lodge their protest against the British Raj and early release of Gandhiji. There was widespread unrest in Khariar, Nilji, Sinapali and many more remote villages and people in large numbers courted arrest. With all the above nationalist temper the Quit India Movement in Khariar was only sporadic in its success.

At last, toil and blood of the people of India became materialised with the coming of

Lord Mounbatten as the new Viceroy. He worked out compromise plan for the transfer of power, more suitable to the British hidden agenda of dividing the Nation. At that time there were many Muslims of Khariar including late Mohammed Hussain (Ustadji) who led a protest march from Khariar Masjid (Mosque) to the police station and submitted a memorandum to the police in charge against the partition formula of Lord Mountbatten. The pride and joy in the achievement of freedom on 15th August, 1947, was diluted by the pain and sadness of partition and the consequences of partition. Freedom was only the first step with faith and hope. India began to march forward to meet the challenges of freedom.

The above narration shows the martial, heroic and independent character of the people of Khariar with a seat of culture, knowledge and wisdom from remote past.

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