

The Heros of Kanika Peasants' Movement Basu - Bisuni

Dillip Kumar Behura

The Britishers invaded Orissa in 1803 and the revolt against them started from October, 1804. Under the leadership of Saheed Jayee Rajguru, the Paikas of Khurda rose in revolt with a view to overthrowing the British rule. With the help of some opportunist local Oriyas, the British administrator succeeded in capturing Jayee Rajguru and put him into death. In this way Jayee Rajguru became the first martyr of Orissa during the British regime.

The brutal death of Jayee Rajguru never terrorized the revolutionaries. The revolution for freedom continued and its flame spread throughout the State. The Britishers introduced 'Feudalism' in India. They created thousands of land lords (Zamindars) in this country to carry out their administration smoothly. The Zamindars were called as kings and their Zamindari called princely states. Kanika was one of them near Kendrapara in Orissa. Sir

Rajendra Narayan Bhanjdeo was the king of Kanika. Contradicting to his character, in one hand, the king himself was a patron of Oriya movement, on the other hand to get more revenue he imposed 64 types of taxes on common man. Though the king thought himself as a pure Oriya, still he liked to imitate the English Culture. The costly living style of the king also cost dearly to the common man. Without giving any respite the taxes were collected forcefully in the presence of police force.

Besides this, in 1922 first settlement of land was started in Kanika. As the manager of Kanika, Indramani Mohanty began this settlement work, so it bore the name 'Indramani Settlement.' On behalf of the British Government, the settlement work progressed in Orissa and Bihar. However, the settlement work created a revolutionary attitude among the peasants.

Before the commencement of Kanika Peasants' Movement in early 1921, the Utkal Provincial Congress Committee was constituted with Pandit Gopabandhu Das as its founder President. Non-cooperation movement started with Gandhiji's first visit to Orissa. Gandhi arrived at Cutack on 23rd March, 1921 and addressed public meetings at Cuttack, Bhadrak,

Satyabadi, Puri and Berhampur within a period of six days.

Several youngmen left their studies, government service and other jobs and professions. Most prominent among them were Harekrishna Mahatab, Nityananda Kanungo, Nabakrushna Choudhury, Nanda Kishore Das and Raj Krushna Bose. Gopabandhu Das, Bhagirathi Mohapatra and Jagabandhu Singh left their legal practice. Gopabandhu Choudhury resigned from his job of Deputy Collector. Pandit Nilakantha Das resigned from Calcutta University and took charge of a National School at Sambalpur. Pandit Lingaraj Mishra and Surendranath Das resigned from Govt. service. Soon after Gandhiji's departure from Orissa, students of Sambalpur Zilla school staged the first students' strike under the leadership of Laxminarayan Mishra.

These developments in non-cooperation movement added fuel to Kanika Peasants' Movement. Congress leader Gopabandhu Das rose his voice against the tyranny of Kanika Raja. He urged the people not to pay tax, that led Kanika uprising. The government arrested Gopabandhu Das and sent him to jail. The peasants got united and revolted against the Kanika Raja Rajendra Narayan Bhanjdeo.

Madhusudan Pattanaik was the leader of that movement. The British army rushed into Kanika to help the King. As the situation came under control the king again with the help of police force forced the people to pay tax.

People refused to pay tax. The leaders of the peasant movement also advised the peasants not to pay tax. The servants of Zamindar and police forces tried to collect the taxes. Those refused or unable to pay tax, police force beat them mercilessly. Besides this, the king oppressed the peasants brutally. There were some honest and lenient Tax Collectors. They also refused collect the tax. One of them was Dinabandhu Khandayat Ray. He tried his level best to solve the problems of the peasants. He also appealed before the Collector in this matter.

The Government accused Mr. Dinabandhu Khandayat Ray blaming him as the mastermind behind the peasants' movement. So he was deprived from his rights. He had lost all of his farming land. The Government ordered him to leave the State. Another farmer Aswini Palei also lost his property due to Government's order. This unfortunate incidents did not discourage the peasants. The speech of Babaji Ram Das in the meetings of Aul and Kanika inspired the people

not to pay tax. The peasants formed 'Praja Sabha' in each village. The main village of 'Praja Sabha' was 'Ayatan'. Madhusudan Pattanaik was the leader. Chakradhar Behera activated the Kanika Praja movement with more enthusiasm. At last the king made a ban on the 'Praja Sabha'. He ordered that "no one can arrange a meeting in the periphery of his State." But the peasants were very bold and in a revolutionary mood. They all got united. One of the leaders of this movement was Dinabandhu Khandayat Ray. He was native of village 'Bartanee'. Bisuni Madhual was a peasant of the same village. Bisuni acted like a messenger and informed the peasants regarding the movement. He was also a very healthy young man, having mastery over martial art. So he was very popular among the leaders. Basudev Sethi of Tentulikoli village was also an able youngman. He was also master in handling Lathi and Batuli. Anand Chandra Jena wrote a book titled, "Dukhini Kanika" which was distributed among the people. The book had reflected the sorrows and oppression story of peasants of Kanika. Anand Jena was a teacher in Meghapur Village. Basu used to go to that village for his traditional service. He also discussed with teacher Anand Jena regarding the

oppression over the people by the ruler. The king of Kanika immediately issued a ban order on the book written by Anand Jena. He also ordered Mr. Jena to leave his State. The oppression over peasants increased day by day. One day police force with officials came to Patrapur village. They declared to auction a house of someone. The people opposed it. The Police tried to arrest some people but other people forcefully released them. The situation was grim. In the next day more police forces were deployed to control the situation.

It was 3rd April, 1922. That was a black day for Indian freedom movement. Under the leadership of Basu Sethi and Bisuni Madhual about 2000 peasants gathered with a firm resolve to resist the army of local Zamindar from entering the village and collecting the taxes, but they had to pay a heavy price for it. Basu Sethi and Bisuni Madhual were shot dead by the British Police on the spot. Thus, the history of revolt of peasants of Kanika against British rulers and the despot king of Kanika had a magic power to inspire the common man in the later phase of the freedom struggle of India.

Dillip Kumar Behura lives at Qr.No.9/1, F Type, Unit-9 Flat, Bhoinagar, Bhubaneswar-22.