

Freedom Movement in Jharsuguda District

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The district of Jharsuguda has a special niche in the history and culture of Orissa since early times. Findings of prehistoric tools, rock shelters of stone age period with earliest rock engravings in India at Vikramkhola and Ulupgarh, ruins of early temples, sculptural art of medieval period etc. provide an idea of the flourishing culture in the area. In early historical period, Jharsuguda area was included in the territory of Dakshina Kosala. With the establishment of Chouhan rule in Western Orissa, Jharsuguda became a part and parcel of the Chouhan kingdom of Sambalpur.

The year 1803 was a turning point in the history of Orissa when the British occupied Cuttack on 14th October, 1803. Subsequently

Sambalpur was occupied by the British in 1817 from the Marathas. In 1827, the Chouhan ruler Maharaja Sai died and Rani Mohan Kumari, widow of the Chouhan ruler was installed on the Gaddi of Sambalpur. During her reign, the Zamindari of Jharsuguda was created in 1829, which was assigned to one Ranjeet Singh, a near relation for maintenance of his family. Ranjeet Singh was a son of Siva Singh, grandson of Haribans Singh and great grandson of Chatra Sai, seventh Chouhan ruler of Sambalpur. Ranjeet Singh and his successor lived with Rajas of Sambalpur and he was in the hope that he might succeed the Gaddi. When the British appointed the widow Rani on the throne of Sambalpur. Ranjeet Singh was disappointed and that's why the Rani sent him to Jharsuguda as Zamindar granting in his favour 13 villages by way of consolation. Subsequently Ranjeet Singh along with his brothers Bhupal Singh and Bhawani Singh opposed the rule of the Rani. Consequent upon the confinement of Ranjeet Singh in the fort of Sambalpur, his son Govind Singh took up the case of rebellion. Govind Singh was supported by Krishna Rai of Khariar, Thakur Ajit Singh of Kodbaga, Chandra Behera of

Bamra, Trilochana Rai of Paharsiriguda, Abdhuti Singh of Bissikella, Medini Bariha of Kharmura, Jagabandhubabu (a discharged amala of the Rani), Biju a discharged Duffadar of Sambalpur, Shickru Mohanty (formerly a Namadar of Barkandazee), Balaram Singh, Balbhadra Singh Deo of Lakhanpur and many Gond leaders. Govind Singh could muster the support of the total people and thus the movement for freedom in Sambalpur began in Jharsuguda as a protest against British highhandedness. Thus before 30 years prior to the first war of Independence of 1857 AD, Govind Singh raised his sword to drive away the British from Sambalpur. The resistance movement of Govind Singh could not be successful due to strong measures of the British. However, credit goes to him for initiating militant nationalism in the area which was later on sustained by Surendra Sai.

The British government successfully dealt with Gobind Singh. Govind Singh was spared and kept in confinement. Ultimately the British realized that so long as Rani remained in power, there would be endless trouble and accordingly in 1839 Narayan Singh, the Zamindar of Barpali was made the Raja of Sambalpur. This

was opposed by Surendra Sai of Ranipur Khinda a village located hardly at a distance of 20 kms from Jharsuguda. Surendra Sai was a descendant of Aniruddha Sai, son of Madhukar Sai, the fourth Chouhan Raja of Sambalpur and had a claim for succession to the throne at Sambalpur in the absence of a direct claimant to the throne as per the traditional rule of succession. With the active support of his uncle Balaram Sing and his six brothers Udanta, Druva, Ujjala, Chabila, Jujjala and Medini, Surendra Sai successfully enlisted the support of the like minded Zamindars and Gauntias and organized a rebellion against the British. The Zamindar of Kolabira a powerful tribal leader supported Surendra wholeheartedly and on his taking up the rebel cause, many others followed. Surendra Sai was successful in organizing a rebellion during 1857-1858, in the area, which became forerunner for the freedom movement in Orissa.

Throughout the National Movement, the people of Jharsuguda took active part by supporting the Indian National Congress. The Nagpur Session of the Congress; held in December 1920 under the presidentship of

Vijayaraghava Charier adopted a resolution in favour of adopting non-violent non-cooperation movement. A good number of delegates from Orissa attended the session. Non-cooperation movement was launched in various parts of the district including, Jharsuguda, Talpatia and several other places. Jharsuguda became an important centre and Nrusingh, was in charge of the centre. To support the movement students of the zilla school, Sambalpur called for a complete Hartal and in response to it, strikes took place at Jharsuguda and Bargada. Trilochan Sah Deo of Ranchi, Laxmi Narayana Mishra, Chandrasekhar Panigrahi and Arun Das took active role in spreading the message of non-cooperation in the rural areas. During this time, Mahavir Sing, a contractor of Jharsuguda became a staunch supporter of the movement and his quarter was converted into Congress office. His quarter became the meeting point of all the Congress leaders and workers.

In 1921 it was decided by Indian National Congress that all efforts would be made to raise funds for Tilak Swaraj fund and to prepare Charkha for augmenting the non-cooperation movement. The

target was in order to achieve Swaraj to collect one crore of rupees for the fund and one crore of enrolment of the Congress. In this aspect, Anantaram Behera was in charge of Jharsuguda and Ambika Madhav Prasad Patnaik, Mahavir Sing and Janaki Das Agarwal for Laikera. It was with the efforts of Mahavir Sing in several panchayats, use of Charkhas was popularized. Bhagirathi Pattanaik also took active part in the opening of a Khadarboard with its headquarters at Jharsuguda. Further, at the initiation of Chintamani Pujari, Panchapara and Bhalupatra in Laikera Police Station became two important khadi centers. Mohan Sing of Belpahar showed a great zeal to popularize the non-cooperation in his locality. Congress members were recruited from different parts of Sambalpur and out of a total of 4,800 some 2000 were recruited only from Jharsuguda area.

On 17 December, 1921, the crown prince of England was supposed to visit India and the All India congress committee made no stone unturned to have a complete hartal on the eve of his visit. Mahavir Sing was arrested on 14th December at Jharsuguda.

In Panchapara also, the people organized by Chintamani Pujari supported the cause. On 20th January 1922, Gopabandhu Das arrived in Jharsuguda. Ambica Madhab Patnaik secretary, District Congress Committee of Sambalpur, Anantaram Behera, a teacher of National school and many others received him at the railway station. He visited Panchapara and was satisfied to see the activities there undertaken by the Congress leaders. Though Gopabandhu was served with a notice of 144, the moment he reached Jharsuguda, a conference was organized on 21st January under the presidentship of Mohan Birtia, where the message of Gopabandhu Das was read out.

The Khadi and Charkha movement attracted many members of the depressed classes into the fold. Many Gandas (Harijan) enrolled themselves as congress members. They were moved by the spirit of the Khadi. A Ganda named Kastaram Tanti took part actively in organizing the Khadi and Charkha in rural areas. He was well supported by Sukharam Tanti, Kaidram Tanti and others.

Social movements did not lag behind in Jharsuguda

area. Gandhiji's clarion call for prohibition and removal of untouchability had its effect in the area. Meetings were organized for the upliftment of the untouchables at Panchpara, Turekela, Panpali and several other places. On 13th April 1922, a Harijan (Ganda) of Kulabira Zamindari was organized at Panpali. The people were appealed to give up liquor. The meeting resolved to prohibition of drum beating for untouchables and forbate to take beef etc. In 1923 one Mina Goura was outcaste by his caste men as he had touched the Gandas and had used pan supari (betel) from his hands. A meeting was convened on 18th October, 1923 at his native village Panchapara, where about 200 Gandas were assembled. The Gandas asked the better class Hindus to follow the example of Mina Goura and remove untouchability. The non cooperators like Laxminarayan Mishra and Bhagirathi Pattnaik attended the meeting and raised their voice against untouchability. The anti untouchability movement gained ground in a big way. Subsequently a Harijan home came at the village Panchapara at the initiative of Laxminarayan Mishra. In 1935 even a sum of Rs.728.00 was sanctioned by the Provincial Harijan Sangha for utilization to

improve the social and educational sphere. A Harijan temple was constructed at Pandupathar in Jharsuguda police station. Both Laxminarayan Mishra and Bodhram Dube attended the opening ceremony. The National Flag was hoisted with national song. Both the leaders addressed the people and impressed them to take spinning with right earnest. When Amritlala Thakur, Acharya Harihar Das and Laxminarayan Sahu visited Harijan localities of Sambalpur and Jharsuguda in 1936 they were satisfied with the work undertaken in the area.

The Lahore session of Congress in December, 1929 adopted the creed of Purna Swaraj. The Congress decided to observe 26 January, 1930 as the Purna Swaraj Day all over India. The day was observed with all enthusiasm in the district. With the beginning of the salt campaign in March 12, 1930, the Civil Disobedience Movement was started. Four batches of Satyagrahis were sent by the Satyagraha committee of Sambalpur to defy the British laws and to prepare counter band salt at different places of the coastal districts of Orissa, Mahavir Sing and others toured a number of villages and

collected a group of volunteers for the movement. The people of Jharsuguda accorded warm ovation to those Satyagrahis on reaching Jharsuguda, from where they proceeded by train. With the arrest of important leaders, the civil disobedience movement could not get much momentum. However from August 1932, the programme was revived in a big way. Kastaram Ganda worked vigorously along with other political workers under Mahavir Sing. Leaflets were distributed in the market of Talpatia, near Jharsuguda. These leaflets were published from the Revolution Bulletin Press, Cuttack and it incited the public to boycott foreign goods, British clothes and held out a threat to picket the shops of those who were dealing in British goods. Kastaram and Mahavir Sing were arrested and persecuted.

The civil disobedience movement was withdrawn in May 1934. Gandhi commenced his Harijan tour in Orissa in May, 1934. Gandhiji along with Laxminarayan Sahu and Rajkrushna Bose reached Jharsuguda at first and travelling through Sambalpur, Angul reached Puri. Gandhiji was well received by the people at Jharsuguda and emphasized the need to remove untouchability

from the society. An amount of Rs.405/- was collected for the welfare of the Harijans. No doubt, the coming of Gandhiji was a great boost to the Congress leaders and workers of Jharsuguda area for sustaining the movement against the British.

For popularizing the Congress work, the leaders of the Congress arranged a Peasant Conference at Jharsuguda. A meeting was convened on 5th May 1937 under the presidentship of B.M. Joshi for preparation of the coming conferences. A reception committee was formed for the purpose with Bodhram Doube as the chairman. The district Political conference and peasant conference were held at Jharsuguda on 9th and 10th May 1937. The conferences were attended by congress stalwarts like Rabisankar Sukla of Raipur, Biswanath Das of Ganjam, Harekrishna Mahtab of Cuttack, Abdul Rauf of Raipur and others. These conferences in fact went a long way to boost moral of the Congress workers. Harekrishana Mahatab and Biswanath Das the first Chief Minister of Orissa visited Jharsuguda on 20th and 24th October 1937 respectively and addressed the public. Bodhram

Dubey also visited Jharsuguda in June 1938 and urged the people to get rid of their mind of provincialism and to keep in view the goal of complete independence. During this period, Laxminarayan Mishra could propagate successfully the Congress creed among the masses of the area, for which he received recognition and appreciation of the provincial congress leaders of Orissa. It was at his initiatives in March 1938 an Exhibition of Charkha was held at the village Talpatia and resolutions were passed to remove untouchability between different classes of the Harijans, to open a cotton Depot at Talpatia, to move the Government to include the Harijans amongst the panchas etc. On 17th May 1939 under the leadership of Sradhakar Supkar, a Political conference was held in the village of Telenpali under Jharsuguda police station. The Congress leaders remind the people to present a united front against the oppression of the Government.

The district did not lag behind in the Quit India Movement. On 14 July 1942, the Congress Working Committee passed the quit India resolution, which was endorsed by the All India Congress Committee which met

in Bombay on 7th August 1942. On August 8, 1942, the police arrested Gandhi, Azad and all other eminent leaders of the Congress. Hartals were organized in protest against the arrest of congress leaders in Bombay. Shri Bihariram Tanti and Sukhdev Prasad of Jharsuguda were arrested for having joined the movement of 1942. Pandit Laxminarayan Mishra who had been to Bombay to attend the meeting of All India Congress Committee was arrested on his way back to Sambalpur. However, the movements in the area was sporadic. Sri Durga Prasad Guru, a Congress leader actively participated in fighting the cause of the orient paper mills at Jharsuguda. The Quit India day was observed on 9th August at Sambalpur and Jharsuguda. On August 18, 1942 students of Jharsuguda observed a hartal. No much activity is reported during 1943-46. On June 1947, a political conference was held at

Jharsuguda under the presidentship of Nandakishore Das who happened to be the president of Utkal Provincial Congress Committee. This meeting was attended by stalwarts like Biswanath Das and Malati Choudhury where the leaders exhorted the people to fight unitedly for complete independence of India. Fakir Satpathy organized a labour movement under the Congress Flag and convened a meeting of labours on 8 July, 1947 in the Mazdoor Sangh office of the Congress and pledged to fight for the amelioration of their grievances.

With the passing of India Independence Bill there was a great enthusiasm in the district. In the freedom movement not only the male leaders but also a number of females contributed to the cause and in this aspect the name of Tulasi Devi, Umarani Guha, Sabitaben Joshi and many other are noteworthy.

It is often argued that India's freedom struggle was basically a middle class movement, and confined to urban centers and elite group, But at a glance at the developments in the district amply reflects that the national movement became a movement of the people. The illiterate, the poorest, the lowest and lowly living in remote villages came forward in a big way to oppose the British rule to make India free. It is heartening to see that the peasants, workers, the tribal and the common people of the area actively participated in the movement for which the movement could be a successful one.

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