

## Early Phase of Freedom Movement in Orissa

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In 1568 A.D. Orissa lost her Independence after the defeat and death of Mukundadeva, the last Hindu king of Orissa. The feudal organization that had prevailed in Orissa broke down at last and the peasant militia was crippled. The Muslims then ruled this land till 1751 A.D. when the administrative responsibility of Orissa was shifted to the control of the Marathas of Nagpur. At last, during the Governor-Generalship of Lord Wellesley, the long cherished desire of the British to occupy Orissa was fulfilled in October, 1803 A.D. as a part of the treaty after the second Anglo-Martha war.

The people of Orissa, both non-tribals and tribals woke up from their slumber from the 16<sup>th</sup> century till the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and began to raise their voice

in the forms of resistance, protest and rebellion against the authorities, only when a foreign trading company began to rule through exploitation and opposed them socio-psychologically. In the true sense of the term, the raising of voices was to be treated as freedom struggle of the people, which was a part of the national struggle.

From the recorded history of Orissa's freedom struggle it is known that people of different categories in Orissa participated actively as well as passively in different phases of the freedom struggle. The 18<sup>th</sup> century saw the first phase of Rising against the alien powers of northern and southern Orissa. In northern Orissa, the Raja of Mayurbhanja was a powerful ruler. He resisted the authority of the English company strongly. In southern Orissa, the district of Ganjam came under the formal possession of the English in 1765 by a farman of the Mughal emperor. The Raja of Ghumusar gave first resistance to the European authorities. In 1767-68, Raja Narayan Dev of Paralakhemundi rebelled against the British. But insurrectionary activities continued in Ghumusar and Paralakhemundi till the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century when they

were completely suppressed by the British.

The freedom struggle in Orissa began immediately after the British occupation of it in 1803 mainly in the form of armed resistance to the newly established political system. This movement mostly between 1803-1895 was regional in character occasioned by the reactions of the people against the imposition of foreign rule on them causing them extreme hard-ship in different spheres.

The first Rising in early 19<sup>th</sup> century was seen in Paralakhemundi. As the supporters of the Raja broke into rebellion, the British authorities had to yield to the people's will of being ruled by their own Raja. In the Ghumusar rebellion of 1801, Raja Srikara Bhanja was dethroned and the local battalion called Sibundies were disbanded in 1803 after considerable disturbances since they all revolted against the British. In the second phase of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, in Ghumusar, the Kandhas and Savaras of the zamindari rose up against the British under the leadership of Dora Bisoi. The chief aim of the revolt was for restoration of native rule of Ghumusar. Dora Bisoi carried on this resistance movement till

he was imprisoned by the British in 1837 A.D. Thereafter he was sent away to Ooty near Madras where he died as a state prisoner sometime after, leaving behind a glorious legacy of brave and resolute struggle against the British.

In 1804, the Rajas of Khurda, Kujanga and Kanika rose against the British authority. The Prime mover of this rising was the minor Raja of Khurda, Mukundadeva II. But the real leader was Jae (Jayakrushna) Rajaguru, the dewan and guardian of the Raja of Khurda and the chief architect of this anti-British design. The rising was ruthlessly suppressed and an exemplary punishment was given to Jayee Rajaguru. He was hanged to death in 1805 and became the first martyr of Orissa during British regime who had inflexible devotion to the cause of the motherland. With his fall, the last ray of hope for the freedom of Khurda from the British control was extinguished and the historic fort of Khurda also lost its importance, and came to be recognized as the last independent and important fort of Orissa. The idea of revenge got printed in the minds of the people of Khurda which afterwards culminated in the open revolt by the people in 1817, the first of its kind in Orissa against the British.

The first 'spark of rising' at Khurda on 29<sup>th</sup> March, 1817 was popularly known as the Paik Rebellion as only the Paiks or a kind of militia under the local rulers rose as a body against the British authority. It was led by Buxi Jagabandhu Bidyadhar Bhramarbar Ray Mahapatra or Buxi Jagabandhu, the commander of the troops of the Raja of Khurda. His chief associate was Krushna Chandra Bhramarbar Ray. They were assisted by the kandhs, savaras, panas and other tribal people of Banpur, Nayagarh, Boudh and Daspalla and were encouraged by some zamindars and supported by a few Garjat chiefs. The rising manifested general feelings of discontent and disaffection among the people of Orissa. The genuine personal grievances of Buxi Jagabandhu provided the spark to the explosive situation and served as the immediate cause of the rebellion of 1817. He, thus, carved the vengeance at the first opportunity. The rising was suppressed but the insurrectionary activities of the insurgents in other areas continued on certain terms and conditions. He died at Cuttack on 24<sup>th</sup> January, 1829. His failure, however, does not tarnish his image as a leader of

the people. In 1827, Madhab Samantray, the Dalabehera of Tapangagarh, rebelled against the British with the active support of the people. At last he was imprisoned but subsequently released as the authorities apprehended disturbances again in Khurda. The spirit of insurrection spread to the neighboring areas like Banpur, Daspalla and Nayagarh. The Kandhs of Banpur along with the Panas launched their struggle under the leadership of Krutibas Patsani and others.

Under Chakra Bisoi, the tribal freedom struggle got a new lease of life and continued at least for two decades from 1837 to 1856. His rebellion was also spread into various parts of Orissa with spontaneous patriotic feelings and fervour. The long years of his resistance to the British Government in the hilly areas is a landmark in the history of heroic struggle by an individual against the mighty British power. He remained as one of those rare men who had left behind him a romantic tale of inextinguishable patriotism and extra-ordinary bravery in the annals of history.

The Great Rising of 1857 triggered off at Meerut on 10<sup>th</sup> May, 1857 and it spread

to other states including Orissa. Sambalpur in Orissa was the most troublesome and dangerous place which came under the British suzerainty after the death of the Bhonsale Raja of Nagpur during the Third Maratha War. The great patriot and rebel hero of Orissa who actively participated in the Great Rising of 1857 was Surendra Sai, the rebel hero of Sambalpur, who revolted against the British rule for seven long years, while in India it collapsed in 1858.

In Sambalpur, Surendra Sai rose against the British during and after 1857. Rightly, Surendra Sai roused the sentiments of his beloved tribal followers who ungrudgingly helped him. Many Zamindars and common people of Sambalpur supported him in 1857 against the rigorous administrative measures of the Britishraj in Orissa. Surendra Sai was directly involved in this agitation. The rising, however, came to an end with the arrest of his followers on 23<sup>rd</sup> January, 1864. Finally, he died in the prison of Asirgarh near Nagpur on 28<sup>th</sup> February, 1864. "If a patriot is a man who plots and fights for the independence, wrongfully, destroyed, of his native Country, then most certainly Surendra Sai was a great patriot." In this connection

the Secretary to the Chief-Commissioner of the Central Provinces reported, "The Sambalpur district was perhaps the very last district in India in which embers of disturbances of 1857 were finally stamped out."

In August 1857, Rama Krushna Samant Singhar, the ex-Zamindar of Balia in Jajpur area, was reported to have organized the Khandaits under his banner to rise against the British as the Company's rule was about to cease. The insurgent leaders were arrested on the charge of evil designs and seditious conduct but afterwards released after the declaration of amnesty by the British Government.

Chakhi Khuntia alias Chandan Hajuri, a 'Sepoy Panda' of Puri by profession, took active part in anti-British activities being the guru and family priest of the great leader of the Rising of 1857, Rani Laxmibai of Jhansi and as such, he was probably in some northern military cantonment when the Great Rising of 1857 broke out. He was arrested on suspicion in Bihar but as there was no proof of his involvement in the revolt, he was released by the authorities at Gaya. The rumour of his death in north India during the period of the mutiny was false and it became

very clear from his letter written from Gaya to his brother at Puri. However, in course of time, in local tradition he was depicted as a great fighter.

The second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century witnessed a few armed resistances of the people against the British. Within a decade after the mutiny, there occurred two noteworthy incidents like the 'Naanka Fituri' of Khurda and the 'Keonjhar Meli' which were the direct effects of the great famine of 1866 in Orissa.

In May 1866, the people of Khurda under the leadership of Narayan Harichandan rose against the British as they were hard-hit by the great famine of 1866. Since the situation became grave, the Government deployed Police force to suppress it. By 1867 the situation came under control and the rebelling leaders fled to the neighbouring garjats to take shelter.

In Keonjhar the tribals like the Bhuyans, Juangs and the Kolhas having been oppressed socio-economically and deprived of their political and traditional rights, started a long-term struggle against their feudal chief as well as the British overlord in 1867 and 1868. The leader of the adivasis was Ratna Naik. Since the

situation was aggravated and took a serious turn, the British authorities requisitioned troops from Bengal, Chhotnagpur and the tributary mahals of Orissa to suppress the rising. At last in 1868, Ratna Naik and his six associates were sacrificed for the cause. Though the first phase of the rising ended abruptly because of inhuman acts of suppression and even hanging to death, the struggle showed a path to the future generation who revived the movement two decades after.

The second phase of the struggle in Keonjhar in 1890 under the leadership of Dharanidhar Naik, a Bhuyan by birth, lasted for 5 years. The rising aimed at abolishing Bethi and other oppressive systems of exaction. The Bhuyans, the Juangs, and the Kolhas of Keonjhar, Mayurbhanja and Pallahara joined the struggle. Interestingly, some of the non-tribals particularly some school

teachers supported Dharanidhar Naik in this rising. It was, in fact, a unique event in the history of the freedom struggle in Orissa. Raja Dhanurjaya Bhanja of Keonjhar fled to Cuttack to seek the help of the Commissioner. Police force were sent to suppress the rising. Dharanidhar was captured and was imprisoned for seven years. Later on, he was released and led the life of a saint and began to preach his philosophy.

In the last decade of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and particularly between 1893 and 1895, the last act of resistance movement by the Kandhs was seen at Nayagarh, Ranapur, Khandapara and Dasapalla demanding a change in the administration and of the ruler, who was a tyrant and corrupt. Their rising gradually became violent and uncontrollable. However, it was suppressed

with firmness by the British authorities. Thus the tribals in Orissa showed the way to the posterity how to fight against the aliens. In true sense of the term, the tribals were the harbingers of that great mission in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Thus ended the resistance movement in Orissa which happened to be a landmark in the history of the freedom struggle in Orissa. The movement was mostly regional in character and hence cannot be called as National Freedom Struggle. But as it affected different parts of Orissa against the establishment of British rule, it can be taken to be the beginning of the end of the British administration in Orissa in future.

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