



FREEDOM MOVEMENT IN BALASORE AND ROLE OF CONGRESS

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(Abstract: - Freedom struggle in Orissa coincided with the Oriya movement, a powerful regional movement, spearheaded by Utkal Union Conference. It aimed at the unification of Oriya speaking tracts into one administrative unit. These two distinct movements, at a time hostile to each other and often merging into one, put the Oriya people and their leaders in a dilemma. Consequently Orissa remained aloof from national mainstream for quite a long time. Though Oriya movement became the main theme of the political activities, the Oriya joined the national mainstream especially after the emergence of Gandhi on the national scene in the 1920's. Orissa hereafter played her role in all phases of Gandhian struggle, viz. Non-Cooperation movement, Salt Satyagraha, Quit India Movement and State People's Movement. The coastal district of Orissa became important centres of the political activities and the district of Balasore played admirably a key role.)

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Growth of national consciousness had been swifter in Balasore during the second half of 19th century.¹ Her flourishing ports and maritime trade, her early contact with the Europeans, especially British, her proximity to Calcutta, the capital of British in of Indian Empire, her facility of communication through the coast Canal even before the appearance of the Bengal Nagpur Railways exposed her to the spread of western education and modern press and publication.² Consequently, Balasore emerged as the cradle of Orissan renaissance in the later part of 19th century.³ By 1868 Fakir Mohan Senapati established modern press and brought out two periodicals, Bodho Doyini and Balasore Sambad Bahika.⁴ He also Successfully led the protestant movement against the attempt by some Bengali enthusiasts to replace Oriya as the medium of instruction by Bengali in the schools of Orissa.⁵ He protested against Kantilal Bhattacharya's assertion that a Oriya was not an independent language, rather mere dialect of Bengali. Kantilal was even supported by Rajendralal Mitra.⁶

As a result of the movement, a number of books in Oriya appeared to save Oriya language from extinction. Along with this a number of socio-political organisations, more specifically, the nation of society of Balasore was established by 1878. With the birth of Indian national Congress and coming up of organized movement for freedom, the 'National Society of Balasore' along with 'Utkal Sabha' of cuttack in 1886. The nominated members to attend the second session of the congress held at Calcutta.⁷ Next year, Rev ShomSaha and Harekrishna Das attended the Madras session of National congress. Ramesh Chandra Mandal, Bhagban Chandra Das and Abduss Sobhan represented Balasore in the Allahabad Session of the INC⁸. However, it may be mentioned here that the Congress delegates from Orissa formed a part of the Bengal branch, since the British Orissa to Bengal which mostly constituted the coastal districts was one of the revenue division of the Bengal presidency then. Since the early years of the present century, the congress movement in Orissa received a set-back.⁹ It was because many political, stalwarts including M S Das dissociated themselves from congress in order to intensify the movement for amalgamation of oriya speaking tracts. The most prominent leader of Balasore was Raja B N Dey, and he was the first Orissan leader to present a memorial to the British government for creating a separate province for the Oriyas¹⁰.

However, because of her close proximity to Bengal, Balasore was often influenced by the political turmoil which Bengal experienced since the anti-partition movement. In Balasore Townhall, a public meeting was organized under the presidentship of Abdus Shobhan Khan who urged the people to boycott foreign goods. Fakir Mohan also presided over another meeting. Picketing against foreign goods, demonstration, and bonfire of foreign cloth were also organized. While the terrorist movement was sweeping all over Bengal, Balasore could not escape it. A dramatic incident took place near Balasore town in September 1915. There was a bloody skirmish between a group of terrorists from Bengal led, by Jatin Mukherjee popularly known as Baghajatin and the district police forces. Jatin fought heroically against the police but ultimately surrendered. He was tried in special tribunal and J.N. Ghose, a leading advocate of Balasore defended his case. Baghajatin became a household name in Balasore for his courage and heroism¹¹.



FREEDOM MOVEMENTS IN BALASORE DURING GANDHIAN ERA

The next phases of freedom movement in Balasore took place in the Gandhian Era. The emergences of Mahatma Gandhi with his programme of non-violence and non-cooperation against the British led to a new awakening throughout India.¹²

In Orissa, the freedom movement began when the Utkal Union Conference merged in the congress in Chakardharpur session, 1920. Utkal provincial congress committee was formed under Gopabandhu Das. His lieutenant, Harekrishna Mahatab of Balasore District. With the help of Mukunda Prasad Das and Nanda Kishore Das, Mahatab could bring all classes of people into the congress fold. Gopabandhu visited Balasore and in a meeting in town hall explained the principles of non-cooperation. It was also decided to form a district congress Committee. Gopabandhu along with Mukund Prasad Das and Nanda Kishore Das addresses large public meeting at Soro and Bhadrak. Gandhi's visit on 24 march, 1921 boosted the moral of the congress. He addressed a large public meeting at Bhadrak and exerted the people to join the Non-cooperation Movement.¹³

In response to Gandhi's call, large number of students withdrew from the government schools in Balasore to join the congress programs. Nilambar Das, Biswanath Hota and H.K. mahatab gave up their studies to lead the freedom movement in Balasore. Surendranath Das, an S.I. of police and Md. Hanif, an S.I. of excise department resigned from their job and joined the congress movement. Banchhanidhi Mohanty gave up his legal studies to take charge of the congress organization of Bhadrak¹⁴.

The District congress committee was formed with Bipin Bihari Das as president and Mahatab as secretary. A congress office named as Swarajyamandir was opened. It started an oriya journal Swarajya Samachar. Congress leaders such as Krushna Prasad Mohapatra, Nilambar Das, karunakar Panigrahi, BiswanathHota, Nandakishore Das, BanchhanidMohanty, Ghanasyam Sahu, Upendra Panda, Subodhch.Dey were sent to Basta, jaleswar, Soro and Bhadrak to supervise congress work. Bhairab Chandra Mohapatra was kept incharge of the congress office. Thus in short time the work of the entire district was organized¹⁵.

Non-cooperation movement spread like a wild throughout the district. The congress volunteers were engaged in picketing before the liquor shops and obstructing the sale and use of foreign cloth, enrolling congress members, collecting TilakSwaraj Fund spreading spinning and boycotting British law courts. Large number of Muslims of Bhadrak participated in the movement as congress supported the Khilafat agitation.¹⁶ In many parts of the district, village panchayats were started to settle the dispute amicably. In srijung area sale or mortgage of land was made through village panchayat under the supervision of Gourmohan Das. The congress took steps to spread the use of khaddar and hand-spinning.Byjune 1921, the district congress committee enrolled 5000 members and collected Rs.3000/- for the Tilak Swaraj Fund. Mahatab along with Bhairab Mohapatra and Abhiram Nanda were arrested for blocking the road to prevent the coming of foreign clothes to the town. While the Non-cooperation was spreading to the rural areas of balasore, its suspension after the Chauri Chaura incident led to disillusion among the people. It became easy for the government to suppress the movement by resorting to repressive measures. The movement faced a set-back till the launching of the civil disobedience Movement.¹⁷

The historic Dandi March of Gandhi in March 1930 to break the Salt law signaled the beginning of another mass movement. In fact, the suggestion to start salt satyagraha in Orissa had been given to Gandhi during his visit to Orissa in1927 by H.K. Mahatab. With the outbreak of the salt satyagrah Utkal Pradesh congress committee, headed by Mahatab met Balasore on 16 march 1930 and decided to launch salt satyagraha In Orissa 15 and selected Inchuri, a place situated on the sea-coast at a distance of 12 miles from Balasore as the place for launching the campaign. Mahatab and Surendranath Das were entrusted with the responsibilities of making necessary preparation at Balasore and Inchuri area. Since Gopabandhu Choudhury was arrested, Acharya Harihar Das took the lead of the campaign and reached Balasore on 12 April 1930. He broke the salt law in the presence of hundreds of people on 13th April. The volunteers collected the salt earth inspite of the opposition of the police. The police resorted to force and arrested Harihar Das and six others. Both men and women in large numbers joined the congress volunteers and began to prepare contraband salt in different places on the sea-coast.¹⁸ Satyagrahas from different parts of Orissa reached,Inchuri coast and participated in the movement. According to official report, Inchuri was next to the Dandi March In the whole of the sub-continent. In Balasore district manufacture of salt was not confined to Inchuri alone. In the Sartha salt bed, Mathura Mohan Behera, Nilambar Das, Karanakar Panigrahi and many others manufactured contraband salt and were arrested. The movement spread to Kasba, Basta and Bhadrak gradually.¹⁹ The most striking feature of the movement was the large scale participation of women and students. Led by Malati Devi and Rama Devi, large number of women came out of their homes. Smt. Jahnabi Devi



and Suryamani Devi of Balasore actively participated in the movement. At Balasore, Rabindra Mohan Das, Gajendranath Sahu, Gour Chandra Das, Nityananda Mohapatra left their studies to participate in the movement. The movement also witnessed the formation of Vanara Sena 'Monkey Brigade' consisting of young boys and girls pursuing vigorously the Gandhian programme of picketing, pasting posters and hoisting national flags. The movement experienced the beginning of the campaign of non-payment of Chaukidari tax under the leadership of Goura Mohan Das who organized the people of thirteen villages adjacent to Inchuri.

QUIT INDIA MOVEMENT

The next stage of freedom struggle in Balasore was the Quit India Movement in 1942. The adoption of 'Quit India' resolution in the all India congress committee at Bombay on 8th August 1942 was followed by the arrest of congress working committee members like Harekrishna Mahatab and sent to jail with the prominent leaders of the congress. Left leaderless, the people all over India started the Quit India Movement with the slogan, 'do or die'.

The movement turned violent in the district of Balasore. People attacked police stations, post offices and resorted to mob-violence. There was also demonstration, strike and hartal. In Balasore town, post office was burnt, which was barely 200 yards away from the police station. Maliram Saha, a local Marwari businessman inspired the people in this direction.²⁰ Anti-British pamphlets were circulated and public meetings were organized. Banchhanidhi Giri, Amulya Das, Maguni Mohapatra, Golak Das, Pitambar Pani, etc. actively helped the movement spread over. In Barabati area, Gour Chandra Das operated a secret organization whose members were engaged in circulating anti-British pamphlets to the interior areas.

Muralidhar Panda, a man of tremendous courage organized the people in Dhamnagar area. Under his leadership and 500 people set fire to the police station at Bhandari Pokhari near Bhadrak. Dhushuri was declared an independent area. The police tried to arrest Muralidhar and people projected him. The police resorted to firing at Lumia on 22 September 1942 and killed nine persons. At Eram the people formed a parallel government over an area which they called Bannchanidhi Chakla and declared its independence²¹. The local Zamindar became hostile to the movement and requested the district authorities to station a police force at Eram. The people hearing the news, assembled in large numbers at Melan Ground apprehending danger. The luggage of the police force were snatched away by the satyagrahis. The D.S.P. ordered the police to open fire and consequently about 29 people died on the spot and 55 were injured. The police arrested the leader of the movement, Anirudh Mohanty and Kamala Prasad Kar. No in India were so many people killed in a single police action during the 'Quit India Movement'.

A review of the various movements as narrated above establishes the significant role the district of Balasore played in different phases of Gandhian Struggle.

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4. Ibid, p. 122.
5. B. N. Dey was a domiciled Bengali zamindar of Balasore.
6. Utkaldeepika dated 16.09.1901.
7. Mahatab, History of freedom Movement in Orissa, vol.iii, p24
8. The samaj dated 29.01.1921.
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11. H.K. Mahatab, Sadhanar Pathe, cuttack, 1977, pp.43-44
12. Ibid, pp.48-49
13. The Samaj dated 16.07.1921.
14. Mahatab, Sadhanara Pathe, p.115
15. Home-pol. FINI5110121 (NAI).
16. The samaj dated 19.03.1930.
17. The samaj dated 22.04.1930.
18. The fact was narrated by sir Pitambar Pani, living freedom fighter whose father and mother actively participated in the salt movement.



19. Interview with PitambarPani.
20. The persons who died as a result of police action in Lunia are: (1) Gopinath Jena, (2) Gouri Jena, (3) Shakarjena, (4) AganiMahalik, (5) NandiniMahalik, (6) ShyamMahalik, (7) NabaNayak, (8) Kalanidhi, (9) Chintamani Das.
21. Revealed by sir Girish Chandra Padhi, a freedom fighter who was injured in the police action at Eram on 28 september 1942.