

# PEASANT MOVEMENT IN ORISSA: 1921-39

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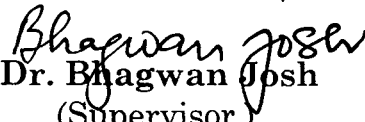
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### CERTIFICATE

This is to Certify that the dissertation entitled **Peasant Movement in Orissa: 1921-39** submitted in partial fulfillment for the M.Phil degree of this university has not been previously submitted for any other university and is my original work.

  
SUSANTA KUMAR BAG

We recommend that the dissertation may be placed before the examiners for evaluation.

  
Dr. Bhagwan Josh  
(Supervisor)

  
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(Chairperson)

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*Lastly, I remain solely responsible for all inadequacies in this dissertation.*

*New Delhi*  
*24<sup>th</sup> July 2000*

*Susanta Kumar Bag*  
SUSANTA KUMAR BAG

DEDICATED IN LOVING MEMORY  
OF MY BELOVED BROTHER  
SANATAN WHO IS NO MORE  
WITH US

## **ABBREVIATIONS**

AICC- All India Congress Committee

BBSR- Bhubaneswar

Com.- Company

EPW- Economic and Political weekly

ICHR- Indian Council of Historical Research

INC- Indian National Congress

Ltd.-Limited

NAI-National Archives of India

OSA- Orissa State Archives

O.H.R.J.- Orissa Historical Research Journal

OSPC- Orissa State Peoples' Conference

PIHC- Proceedings of Indian History Congress

PIHRC- Proceedings of Indian History Record Commission

TNMLM- Teen Muruti. Nehru Memorial Library and Museum.

UPCC- Utkal Pradesh Congress Committee

Vol.- Volume

## **GLOSSARY**

Abwabs- Extra imposts/illegal cesses

Ashram- Training centre for congress workers

Bethi- Free and Forced Labour

Bheti- Presents

Beali Crop- Autumn Crop

Bhogra Land- Land usually best land

Chasas- A Category of peasants in Coastal Orissa

Dukhini- Distressed

Gauntias- Village headman

Garjats- Feudatory States of Orissa

Haliya- Agricultural Labourer

Hulahuli - Ululation

Jagir - Rent free land

Jema – Princes

Jumma- Sum-Total of revenue payable by a Zamindar or a feudatory chief

Khadar- Homespun- coarse cotton clothe

Kulabudha- Grand Old man

Kisties- Fixed date for payment of rent

Mahal- State yielding revenue

Mulia- Agricultural Labourer

Mustagirs- the rent Collector in Kanika Estate

Mahajanas- Village Moneylenders

Magan- Forced requisition of money on ceremonial occasions

Meli- Organized trouble

Pahi ryots- Non-resident cultivators

Raja- Chief of the Feudatory/Princely States

Ryot- A Cultivator

Salami- A present to the Chiefs on some special occasions

Sanad- A grant, a charter, a patent, a diploma, a document conveying to an individual, emoluments, titles, privileges, offices under the seal of the ruling authority

Satyagraha- Protest demonstration in a peaceful manner

Swaraj- Self-rule

Suniya Bheti- New year presents

Sastanga Dandabata/Pranam- Prost rate on the feet

Saradi Crop- Winter crop

Thani ryots- Resident cultivators

Utkal- Oriya

Utkalamani- Jewel of Orissa



Zamindar- Landlord

Zamindar- Land under the possession of the zamindar

## **PREFACE**

The present study i.e., the “Peasant Movement in Orissa: 1921-39” was one of the significant aspects of the freedom struggle in Orissa. The endeavor here is to take the whole province of Orissa from 1921-39 i.e., the British Orissa and the Princely States of Orissa where the peasantry (both tribal and non-tribal) agitated for various legal and illegal “*abwabs*”, during the anti-imperialist mass movement, forming the part of national movement in Orissa. No such serious attempt has been made so far to look at the perceptions and attitude of the peasantry with the changing agrarian conditions of Orissa in the phase of colonialism and how they participated in the different phases of national movement in Orissa. Thus, an approach needs to study the peasants’ participation in Orissa during national movement.

The present study comprised of five chapters including introduction and conclusion. The chapter wise discussions are as follows: -

Looking at the background, the first chapter deals with the establishment of colonial rule and the basic socio-economic transformation that had taken place with the changing agrarian condition of peasantry and its impact on them. With this background,

I look at how did the peasantry of Orissa exploited in all possible ways, including those of legal and illegal cesses, which the peasantry perceived by them something as legal or illegal by which they agitated for. Besides these I also look at the rise of peasant consciousness during the anti-imperialist, national movement.

The second chapter deals with the beset of the Non-Cooperation Movement and its linkage with the peasant movement of Orissa. In the preliminary study I deal with the peasant movement that took place in Kanika and other parts of Orissa.

The third chapter deals with the opening of the Civil Disobedience Movement and the major peasant movement that took place in Bamra, Nilgiri, Sambalpur and other such places of Orissa. In linking up with the Civil Disobedience Movement, Salt was bound to evoke a sharp response, especially from Coastal Orissa, where colonialism by establishing its monopoly over Salt manufacturing industry had struck a deathblow to the traditional source of livelihood of the peasants.

The fourth chapter deals with the ideological changes that took place in Orissa during national movement and the emergence of two prominent peasant organizations such as Prajamandal and Krushak Sangh, which mobilized the peasantry. In the Princely States and Temporarily and Permanently settled areas of British Orissa

respectively. Although these two organizations articulated the grievances of peasants but their activities used to be regulated by the Orissa States Peoples Conference (1931) or by the Congress.

The fifth chapter deals with the peasant movement as the part of national movement and the deeper understanding of the peasant agitation, not simply for the enhanced land revenue rather for the illegal abwabs such as *bethi*, *rasad*, *magan* as exploitation of labour and the illegal cesses on the daily necessities of life as the exploitation of food etc. Besides these, I also discuss the achievement and failure of peasant movement in terms of reduction of rents and concessions by the Landlords and the Rulers of the States, than the failure rooted in the structure which could not be changed completely till India got her independence in 1947.

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## INTRODUCTION

Agriculture was the single largest sector in Orissa and it was the mainstay of Orissan population.<sup>1</sup> Two rice crops such as Saradi (winter crop) and Beali (Autumn crop) were most important crops produced throughout the province of Orissa.<sup>2</sup> The British occupied it in 1803<sup>3</sup>. After establishment of the colonial rule, the British began to streamline their administration. By and large they retained the Mughal pattern by dividing the Coastal region from the rest of Orissa. In the Coastal areas of Cuttack, Puri and Balasore districts initially the British introduced a number of temporary land revenue settlements i.e., they fixed the revenue on an annual or triennial basis.<sup>4</sup> Among the early settlements were those of 1805 and 1837. The systematization of

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<sup>1</sup>. Mishra, K. C. *Land System and Land Reforms*, Himalayan Publishing House, Bombay, 1990, p.1.

<sup>2</sup>. Moahapatra, Monorama, *General Economic Conditions of Orissa (1803-1818)*, *Orissa Historical Research Journal*, Vol., No. 1, 1958, p. 171.

<sup>3</sup>. Toynbee, G. *A Sketch of History of Orissa (1803-1828)*, *Orissa Historical Research Journal*, Vol. IX, April and July, No. 1&2, Calcutta, 1873 (1960 -reprint), pp. 7-8.

<sup>4</sup>. Mohanty, Monaranjan, *Caste, Class and Domination in a Backward State: Orissa*, in Frankel, R. and Rao, M. S. (eds.), *Dominance and State Power in Modern India: Decline of Social Order* Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1990, p.329.

this was finally achieved through the settlement of 1897 and a Revision Settlement of 1927.<sup>5</sup>

The land revenue measure of the colonial government during nineteenth century ruined most of the old landowners i.e., the Oriya proprietors and transformed their land to rich absentee Bengalis and Amalas of the Courts.<sup>6</sup> They resided in Bengal and prospered as absentee landlords by extracting revenue regularly. These absentee landlords were a swarm of vermin who thrived during this period.<sup>7</sup> The landed aristocracy was created thus, had detrimental socio-economic impact on the poor Orissan peasantry and they could not withstand the competition of the Bengali speculators and the Amalas of the Courts. The colonial government was aware of the situation but very little was done to improve this. Thus, the Landlords owned and controlled most of the land and the agrarian property during nineteenth century, which continued till twentieth century.<sup>8</sup>

Besides these, the estates were frequently sold for a mere fraction of their real value and were almost invariably purchased by

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<sup>5</sup>. Malley, O. S. S. L. *Orissa State Gazetteers*, Puri, 1984,(reprint), P. 201.

<sup>6</sup>. Toynbee, G. *Op.cit.*, p.50.

<sup>7</sup>. Panda, Prakash Chandra, *British Administration in Orissa (1912-1936)*, Inter-India Publication, New Delhi, 1984, p. 1.

<sup>8</sup>. Das, Purna Chandra, *Colonialism and Peasantry in Orissa in the 19th Century in Proceedings of Indian History Congress*, Panajim, 1987, p. 588.

Bengalis and Amalas. The new landlords placed their Kith and kins to collect the land revenue, by which they rack-rented the peasants.<sup>9</sup> The revenue also gradually enhanced with the frequent changes of land revenue settlements without considering the paying capacity of the peasants.

The land revenue enhanced during this period by about 3.5 lakhs of rupees, being raised from 413,14,825 in 1804-5 to 16,307,924 in 1818-19. In 1847 it was 16,89,630 in 1870-71, Rs. 17,36,725<sup>10</sup> and in 1897 to 21,02,900.<sup>11</sup> Out of an area of 83,000 square miles, which comprised British Orissa in 1920s, 12,000 square miles was temporarily settled 66,000 square miles was permanently settled and 5,000 square miles was directly administered areas.<sup>12</sup> At the same time without extension of the permanent settlement, imposition of temporary settlements and rigid terms for the payment of revenue *kisties* led to the economic ruin of the peasantry.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>9</sup>. Toynbee, G. *Op.cit.*, p.50.

<sup>10</sup>. *Ibid.* p. 49.

<sup>11</sup>. See Dalziel, W.W. *Final Report on the Revision Settlement of Orissa (1922-1932)*, Patna, 1934.

<sup>12</sup>. Maddox, S.L *Final Report on the Survey and Settlement of the Province of Orissa*, Vol. I and Vol. II, Calcutta, 1900, pp. 201-298 & 392.

<sup>13</sup>. Panda, Prakash Chandra, *Op.cit.*, p.1.



To talk about social stratification and social domination in the temporarily settled areas of Coastal Orissa, the Zamindars came mostly from *Brahmanas*, *Karanas* and *Kayasthas* composed of 27,22 and 28 percent respectively. They privileged a lot whom among other things had special rights over forests and fisheries and could make profits from areas where cultivation was newly introduced.<sup>14</sup>

Below them, there were the sub-proprietary tenure holders who were mostly *Khandayats*. They held hereditary tenures and were not disturbed as long as they paid the rent (which they were supposed to collect) to the Zamindars.<sup>15</sup>

Then there were the holders of *Lakhrāj* grants resumed revenue-free tenures. (*Bazyaftidars*) and *Jagirdars* who held rent-free lands. This category was mainly composed of *Khandayats* and *Karanas* as well as people of different castes who pursued their caste professions.<sup>16</sup>

During this period there were the two peasant-cultivators namely, *thani-ryots* (resident-cultivators) and *pahi-ryots* (non-resident ryots) mainly consisted of *Khandayats* and *Chasa* castes.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>14</sup>. Pati, Biswamoy, *Resisting Domination (Peasants, Tribals and National Movement in Orissa, 1920-1950)*, Manohar Publication, New Delhi, 1993, p.6.

<sup>15</sup>. *Ibid.* p.6.

<sup>16</sup>. *Ibid.* p.6.

<sup>17</sup>. Chaudhury, Pradipta, *Peasants and British Rule in Orissa, Social Scientists*, Vol. 19, No. 859, August and September 1991, p.31.

Next came the under-tenants and at the bottom the daily labourers (*muliya* and *haliya*). The daily labourers were mainly consisted of *untouchables* and *tribal-peasants* who did not have any land to cultivate.<sup>18</sup>

The Southern portion of Orissa i.e., Ganjam and Koraput were administered as a part of Madras Presidency till the amalgamation of Orissa in 1936.<sup>19</sup>

The relationship between the landlords and tenants were strained during the period under review. The landlords collected number of illegal cess known as "*abwabs*" in addition to their usual land revenue. This put serious financial burden on the raiyats.

The village moneylenders besides the landlords exploited the peasants. Although the Orissa Tenancy Act was passed in 1913 and was amended in 1928, but it could not protect the interests of the peasants.<sup>20</sup>

Besides these, the introduction of salt monopoly after the occupation of British increased the pressure on agriculture and it

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<sup>18</sup>. Pati, Biswamoy, *Op.cit.*, p.6.

<sup>19</sup>. Mohanty, Monaranjan, *Op.cit.*, p. 330.

<sup>20</sup>. Kar, A. K, *Aspects of Socio-Economic History of Orissa (1912-47)* in Pradhan, S. (ed.), *Orissa History, Culture and Archaeology*, Mishra, P.K. Felicitation Vol. D.K. Print World, Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi, 1999, pp. 387,389.

created unemployment. Increased pressure on land led to overcrowding and fragmentation of holdings into un-economic sizes. This resulted stagnation of agriculture and pressure on peasantry.<sup>21</sup>

The Coastal Orissa was also frequently ravaged by natural calamities such as draught, famines, floods etc. The most severe famine was 1866 in Orissa, which ruined the backbone of the peasantry. The callous Officers, greedy Mahajanas and selfish Zamindars were partly responsible.<sup>22</sup> During 1919-20, 1925-26, and 1927-28 there were heavy floods caused extensive damage of standing crops. Although repeated demands were made in Bihar and Orissa Legislative Council no such remission of revenue was granted.<sup>23</sup> To improve the agricultural conditions no such significant or elaborate irrigation network was undertaken neither by colonial government nor by the Zamindars during this period, which brought the agricultural condition from bad to worse.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>21</sup>. *Ibid.* p. 388, this point is also taken from De, S. C. *Salt Monopoly in Orissa and its Effects During Early British Rule in the Proceedings of Indian History Record Commission*, Vol.V, No. 29, pp. 19-20.

<sup>22</sup>. Mukherjee, P. *History of Orissa*, Utkal University, 1964, p.396.

<sup>23</sup>. Kar, A. K. *Op.cit.*, p.387.

<sup>24</sup>. Chaudhury, Pradipta, *Op.cit.*, p.37.

Turning to the Tributary States, when British occupied Orissa, there were twenty-nine in numbers.<sup>25</sup> But during twentieth century, it was comprised of twenty-four dependent territories attached to it.<sup>26</sup> For political expediency and economic considerations the colonial Government kept, the Feudatory States, separated from Coastal Orissa.<sup>27</sup> The chiefs of Feudatory States came into the agreement with the colonial government and they agreed to give tribute on fixed basis. In return the colonial government assured liberal kind of treatment to the Rajas.<sup>28</sup> The Rajas generally administered their Estates in accordance with the provision of their 'Sanads,' which defined their status, power and position. In case of failure of administration, the colonial government appointed superintendent for administration.<sup>29</sup>

✓The agrarian conditions of these states were more or less similar in comparison to the Coastal Orissa. Rice was chief crop and was entirely dependent on seasonal rainfall. The peasantry used in all the

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<sup>25</sup>. De, S.C. *Feudatory States of Orissa*, in *Orissa Historical Research Journal*, Vol.VIII, No.2, p.91.

<sup>26</sup>. Ramsay, Cobdden, *Feudatory States of Orissa*, Firma KML, Pvt. Ltd., Calcutta, 1910, (reprint - 1982), p.1.

<sup>27</sup>. Pradhan, Sadasiba, *Agrarian and Political Movements, State of Orissa: 1931-1949*, Inter-India Publication, New Delhi, 1986, p. 81.

<sup>28</sup>. Mukherjee, P. *Some Records of the Early British Policy towards the Tributary Mahals of Orissa*, *Proceedings of Indian History Congress*, 1959, pp. 332-336.

<sup>29</sup>. Deo, Fanindam, *Studies in Humanities and Social Sciences*, Vol.VI, No.1, 1996, p.26.

states most primitive type of cultivation. Regular survey and settlement was rare in the States. Canals and embankments in any large scale were unknown.<sup>30</sup>

The States of Orissa were not subjected to be ravage of severe famine. The great famine of 1866 did not affect the Tributary States however, in 1897, 1900 and 1908 some of the States were suffered from considerable scarcity.<sup>31</sup>

The system of taxation prevailed on these states defined all canons of finance. Land was heavily taxed without regard to the capacity of the peasants to pay. No scientific principles of land revenue assessment was observed by the rules of these states. Land revenue in British India was considered to be high enough and there was widespread demand for its substantial reduction. But the same rent in the states was higher still.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup>. Ramsay, Cobdden, *Op.cit.*, pp. 72,74,79.

<sup>31</sup>. *Ibid.* p 78.

<sup>32</sup>. *Report of the Inquiry Committee, Orissa State, 1937*, Cuttack 1939, p.8.

The following figures will show the incidence of rent in the state, which was higher, than that of the Orissa Province. Name of the States	Rate of Rents Per Acre Highest Rate		
	Rs.	A.	P.
Tigiria	2	11	5
Keonjhar	3	0	0
Narasinghapur	3	12	5
Gangpur	2	7	0
Dasapalla	3	4	1
Baramba	2	8	3
Mayurbhanj	4	5	7
Pallahara	2	12	0
Nilgiri	5	0	0
Kharswan	4	0	0
Nayagarh	3	4	1
Bonai	1	13	0
Patna	1	8	0
Athagarh	3	8	3
Sareikala	4	0	0
Khandapara	2	5	6
Hindol	2	10	0
Bamra	3	8	3
Athamalik	2	10	0
Dhenkanal	2	11	9
Talcher	3	4	1
Ranpur	4	11	0
	2	10	0(double crop) <sup>33</sup>

<sup>33</sup>. *Ibid.* p.9.

Added to this, there were numerous other illegal cesses or abwabs such as grazing cess, industrial cess, sugarcane cess, tax on landless labourers, fruit cess, merchandise cess, fees for adoption, salami for permitting widows to adopt, income tax, salt tax, kerosene, bidi, tobacco, pan, coconut, coir, meat cesses and many other cesses on articles and daily necessities of life, through monopoly. In some states, special fees for permitting use of plank doors, use of any head dress, use of palanquins, tax on plough and many other tax had been levied.<sup>34</sup>

Besides these illegal cesses, *Bethi* (forced labour), *Ragad* (forced requisition of provisions), *Maganas* (forced requisition of money on in the ceremonial occasions), *Suniya Bheti* (New Years Presents) were illegally practiced.<sup>35</sup>

The systems of state monopoly on the daily necessities of life like salt, kerosene, pan and coconut etc. hard hit the people. The increased prices in these commodities encouraged sale of inferior stuffs and set the diminishing return in motion with the consequent fall in the consumption of the articles concerned.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup>. *Report of the Orissa State Enquiry Committee, 1939*, Cuttack, 1939, p.10.

<sup>35</sup>. *Ibid.* pp.15-17.

<sup>36</sup>. *Ibid.* p. 10.

In a poverty-stricken area, which had not, other sources of income except land, this heavy and iniquitous burden had broken down the backbone of the peasantry.<sup>37</sup>

The relationship, which existed between the rulers of the States and tenants, was one of *Ma-Bap*. The rulers on account of the education they received and the behavior that was expected to them by the paramount power had lost touch with the people. The only training that the rulers got in the twentieth century was how to mix freely with the Europeans and to vie with one another in winning the behavior of the political officers.<sup>38</sup> Thus, the relationship between the Zamidars and the peasantry on the whole was not cordial.

Coming to the social stratification in the States of Orissa at the top there was the colonial Government, followed by the Rajas. In the Princely States at Orissa, *Bhuiyans*, *Kharias*, *Kultha*, *Kolta Chasa* (Haliya) and *Bhiuyans*, *Savaras*, *Gonds*, *Konds* (aboriginal tribal-peasants) were mainly the peasant communities and the *Brahmins* and *Karans* dominated the entire rural agrarian social structure and

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<sup>37</sup>. *Ibid.* p. 10.

<sup>38</sup>. *Ibid.* p.22.



exploited the rural peasant economy.<sup>39</sup>

Next to the Rajas of the Feudatory States, there were the *Gauntias* (village headmen). They were essentially the local tax collectors designated by the Rajas and enjoyed a part of village land called *bhogra*, (land-usually best land) for his own cultivation. The social and political status of the *Gauntias* (*Kulta/Brahmin*) was firmly high in the village. He functioned as a landlord in relations to the ryots and was representative of the State for collection of land revenue. During colonial rule, the *Gauntias* acquired the power to evict defaulting tenants, the right to distribute wasteland and also to mediate in transfer of ryotwari land. The *Gauntias* were traditionally entitled to demand unpaid labour and *bethi* from the *ryots*. At the bottom of the social hierarchy, there were the landless labourers who were mostly from the depressed castes.<sup>40</sup> *Marwari* and *Gujrati* merchants and moneylenders expanded their oppressions, taking advantages of the growing agriculture indebtedness. The post-famine developments increased the number of small landowners. The tenants,

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<sup>39</sup>. Sahu, Bhairabi Prashad, *The Orissan Society: Past Trends and Present Manifestations* in Sharma, K.L. (ed.), Vol. *Caste and Class in India*, Rawat Publication, New Delhi, 1994, pp.118-119. This point is also taken from Randhaw, M. S. (chief editor) *Farmers of India*, Vol. III, Indian Council of Agricultural Research, New Delhi, 1964, pp. 106,109,110, 115.

<sup>40</sup>. Mohanty, Monaranjan, *Op.cit.*, p.332.

landless labourers and artisans became dependent on more well to do landowners in the village for loans.<sup>41</sup>

Thus, while the Zamindars dominated the entire agrarian society in Coastal Orissa, the Rajas and Gauntias dominated the entire agrarian structure in most of the Princely States of Orissa. In the Feudatory States, the Rajas performed the role under the paramount rule of the British, who intervened mainly to quell the peasants' agitation.<sup>42</sup>

In Coastal Orissa the political consciousness was created by the Oriya newspapers, which focused attention on the problems of local interests.<sup>43</sup> The movement for the reorganization of the Oriya language, unification of Oriya speaking tracts in one administrative unit,<sup>44</sup> participation in the sessions of the Indian National Congress, spread of English education,<sup>45</sup> had played important role for the rise of political consciousness in Orissa during nineteenth century.

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<sup>41</sup>. *Ibid.* p.336.

<sup>42</sup>. *Ibid.* p.336.

<sup>43</sup>. Mukherejee, P. *Op. cit.*, p.418.

<sup>44</sup>. Patra, K. M. *Growth of Social Consciousness in Orissa in 19<sup>th</sup> Century, Proceedings of the Indian History Record Commission*, Vol.XL, Madras, 1970. p.148.

<sup>45</sup>. Mukherjee, P. *Op.cit.*, p. 433..

In the same way British judicial system, and modernization measures like education, urbanization, reform in the administration, brought about socio-economic changes on the peasant society of Orissa.<sup>46</sup>

But how did the peasantry united and resisted their exploiters? The common call for solidarity came from drum beat among the *Santals* (tribal-peasants) in Coastal Orissa, blasts from shells and *hulahuli*(ululation) brought them together. Regarding leadership traditionally, the peasantry of Coastal Orissa as well as in the Princely States of Orissa led by headmen or village chiefs. Occasionally, they also accepted the leaders from outside like “saints” and “holy men”. The Rajas, Zamindars, Officials, the Queens/Kings of England and white men considered by them as plunders, exploiters, extractor of labour and were just and were above wrongdoing. Thus, the peasant consciousness of during twentieth in Orissa could be understood of these limitations.<sup>47</sup>

Besides these, the rise of middle class intellectuals during twentieth century broadens the mass base of national movement on

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<sup>46</sup>. Pradhan, Sadasiba, *Op.cit.*, p.217.

<sup>47</sup>. Pati, Biswamoy, *Op.cit.*, p.43.

Orissa. The rise of Gopabandhu Das and some other intellectuals provided the leadership and gained popularity especially in Coastal

Orissa.<sup>48</sup> The Utkal Sabha was set up in 1878, attracted several Oriya intellectuals. It sent four delegates to the Congress Session in 1886 and thereafter delegates from Orissa regularly attended the Congress Sessions.<sup>49</sup>

In 1903, the Utkal Union Conference was set up. This regional forum guided the political activities of the Oriya-speaking people under the aegis of Madhusadan Das and others.<sup>50</sup> Later on under the leadership of Gopabandhu Das, the National Movement in Orissa turned into the mass movement and focused on the agrarian difficulties of the peasantry in 1920s in the colonial Orissa.<sup>51</sup> By 1920 a dominant section of Oriya intellectuals decided to join in the Indian National Congress with its political break from colonialism and feudal world. The intellectuals were turned towards the masses and the

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<sup>48</sup>. Barik, R. K. *Gopabandhu and National Movement in Orissa in Social Scientist*, May 1978, pp.47-48.

<sup>49</sup>. Mishra, P. K. *The Early Phase of Nationalist Movement in Orissa (1885-1905)*, in *Proceedings of Indian History Congress*, Hyderabad, 1978, pp.646-648.

<sup>50</sup>. Barik, P.K. *Op.cit.*, pp.43-47.

<sup>51</sup>. Pati, Biswamoy, *Op.cit.*, p. 48.

complexities of this interaction were to determine the path that the national movement took place in Orissa.<sup>52</sup>

The consciousness among the peasants also grew as a result of the growth of Kisan Movement in the province. The Congress Party took up the cause of the peasants during the election campaign in 1936 and organized "Krushak Sanghs" throughout the province.<sup>53</sup>

In the same process in the Princely States of Orissa, after the Orissa State Peoples Conference in 1931 at Cuttack, the peasant masses were mobilized and the peasant movement became more intense under the guidance of the Prajamandals. But their activities used to be regulated by Utkal Provincial Congress Committee, which came into being in 1921.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>52</sup>. Kar, A. K. *Op.cit.*, p.387.

<sup>53</sup>. Rath, Bijay Chandra, *Prajamandal Movement in Orissa*, in *Orissa Review*, Vol. XLVI, No.1, 1989, p. 119.

<sup>54</sup>. Mishra, Bichitra Nanda, *Peasant and Peasant Resistant in Orissa, 1937-39*: in Karna, M. N.'s (ed.), Vol. *Peasant and Peasant Protest*, Intellectual Publishing House, New Delhi, 1989, p.130.

## **NON-COOPERATION AND PEASANTRY IN ORISSA: 1921-28**

The Utkal Sammilani or the Utkal Union Conference was founded in 1903 under the leadership of veteran patriot Madhusudan Das, the "*Kulabuddha*" to carry the struggle for the formation of Orissa into a separate linguistic province.<sup>1</sup> Till 1920 it dominated the political scene of Orissa, which represented the hopes and aspiration of middle class intellectuals including those of the landed class.<sup>2</sup> The situation however changed with the emergence of Mahatma Gandhi, who was called the "intrepid leader of the masses" by Abdul Barid. Gandhi's coming to active politics in India in 1920 with his message of non-violent Non-Cooperation Movement against colonialism,<sup>3</sup> gave birth a new sense of nationalism in Orissa.

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1. Hunter, W.W., *A History of Orissa*, Vol-II, Calcutta, 1956, p.400.

2. Pati Biswamoy, *Resisting Domination (Peasants, Tribals, and The National Movement in Orissa, 1920-50)*, Manohar Publication, New Delhi, 1983, p.61.

3. Hunter W. W. *Op.cit.*, p.400 and Pandey B.N., *A Centenary History of Indian National Congress*, Vol-II, Vikash Publishing House, New Delhi, 1985 pp.25-26.

Although the Indian National Congress in 1920 had no definite programme and policy for the peasants <sup>1</sup> Gandhi was fully aware of the necessity to enlist the peasant support for the programme of India's struggle for freedom, which was apparent from his following observations in 1916, "our salvation can only be achieved through the farmers neither the lawyer nor the doctors nor the rich landlords are going to achieve it."<sup>2</sup>

The thirty-fifth session of the Indian National Congress was held at Nagpur in December 1920.<sup>3</sup> A good number of delegates including Gopabandhu Das, who believed in Gandhian principle of non-violence, attended this session.<sup>4</sup> In that session a resolution was passed for the constitution of a branch of Indian National congress. Which should be consisted of a branch of Indian National Congress, Pradesh Congress Committee, District Congress Committee etc.<sup>5</sup> So Utkal (Oriya) which

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<sup>1</sup>. *Indian National Congress Report. 1920*, File No.1.

<sup>2</sup>. Kumar, Kapil, *Social Scientist*, Vol-II. No-2, February 1983, p.16.

<sup>3</sup>. Indian National Congress Report, *Op.cit.*, Rell No. 6

<sup>4</sup>. *Ibid.*. Appendix -B, p.118 and Mishra, *Godavarish, Godavarish Granthavali* (Oriya) part-I, (An Autobiographical work of Godavarish Mishra), Students Store, Cuttack, 1960, pp. 110-111.

<sup>5</sup>. *Indian National Congress Report, Op.cit.*, Appendix-F, p.7.

had no separate Provincial Congress Committee till then was now entitled to have and constituted one in 1921.

After the Nagpur session of the Indian National Congress, Gopabandhu "*the Jewel of Orissa*" and other Congress stalwarts went to Chakradharpur where the Utkal Union Conference was to be held on 30th December 1920 under the leadership of Jagabandhu Singh. <sup>6</sup> In that session Gopabandhu Das argued the leaders that "Utkal Union Conference is a part of Indian National Congress and it needs to fight for an independent nationality on the national plane not on the regional plane".<sup>7</sup> In that congress, finally the Utkal Union Conference accepted the Non-Cooperation resolutions and accordingly Utkal Pradesh Congress Committee was constituted. <sup>8</sup>

Gandhi's visit to Orissa on 24th May 1921 and his address on the bank of river Kathojori (Cuttack), Puri, Bhadrak, Berhampur acted as a catalyst. Within ten days of his stay in that area created

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<sup>6</sup>. *Ibid.* p.8, and Mahatab, H. K. and Pattnaik, S. (ed.), *History of Freedom Movement in Orissa*, Vol-III, Manohar Press, Cuttack, 1957, p.55.

<sup>7</sup>. Barik, Radhakanta, *Social Scientist*, Vol.6, No.10, May 1978, p.43.

<sup>8</sup>. *Ibid.* p.43.



unprecedented enthusiasm among the masses of Orissa <sup>9</sup> and the peasant masses did not remain aloof from that.

Here, my attempt is to describe how the peasant masses of Orissa looked upon Gandhi. Why and how did they follow him? What was the involvement of the congress leaders of Orissa such as Gopabandhu Das and others? It is also my attempt to analyze at the regional level the peasant attitudes and response to Gandhi and his programme of Non-Cooperation Movement in different places of Orissa.

Unlike many peasant movements in the ongoing struggle for national freedom<sup>10</sup> the peasant movement in Kanika Estate was most important during Non-Cooperation Movement.

But before discussing the happenings, it would be better to understand the short history of the estate and the physical features of the tract in order to visualize more clearly the conditions under which the trouble arose.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup>. *Orissa Review*, Vol. LV, No.2-3, September and October 1998, p.1.

<sup>10</sup>. Chandra Bipan (ed.), *India's Struggle For Independence*, Penguin Book, New Delhi, 1997, p.1.

<sup>11</sup>. Home Political Department File, Acc/ No. 3628, 1922, (Kanika debate by Mr. Macpherson in the Bihar and Orissa Legislative Proceedings on 25<sup>th</sup> August 1922, (Henceforth it became the Proceedings), p. 2.

The Estate Kanika, with an area of 440 square miles was situated along the seacoast the Bay of Bengal. It was divided into four main fiscal divisions. Panchamukha area (under Balasore revenue role), Chhamukha, Kerara, Kaladwip (under Cuttack revenue role).<sup>12</sup>

In 1803 the first Commissioner confirmed the Peshkush at 84,840 of cowries, equivalent to Rs. 20,408 to the Imperial Government. But in 1805 the Raja of Kanika found malpractices and the estate was held under the Khas Management.<sup>13</sup> Since then, there were frequent settlements of the Kanika Estate during the period of Court of Wards Management It was partly a result of the reclamation of the jungle and the rent rose from about Rs. 50,000 in 1884 AD to Rs. 1,36,000 in 1894 AD<sup>14</sup> But interestingly the rental collected by the estate rose from Rs. 105,338 in 1880-81 to 138,893 in 1893-94. Till 1893-94 the rents used to be collected through the village *Mustagirs*.

The *Mustagirs* got a commission of ten percent on total amount collected by them. Besides they also held some privileged tenures. But

12. L. S. S. O'Malley, *Gazetteers of India, Bihar and Orissa District Gazetteer*, 1933, pp. 246-47.

13. *Ibid.* pp.246-47.

14. Maddox, S. L., *Final Survey Settlement Report, in the Province of Orissa*, Vol., p.418.

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this system was abandoned in 1894. <sup>15</sup> Because the *Mustagirs* i.e., the natural leaders of the peasants organized "*Melis*" (organized troubles) at every revision of settlement instead of helping the proprietors. After that the *Mustagirs* were swept away since the Khas Management was introduced.<sup>16</sup>

But as we are dealing with the period 1921-22, it is necessary to understand the changes that took place between 1893-94 and 1921-22. Of course, the *Mustagirs* in addition to the commissions on collection, enjoyed some other commissions and privileges which made them well to do. Their permanent class interest naturally allied more with the Raja than with the peasants. But it cannot be denied that, important role was played by the "*Mustagirs*" in the peasant movement of Kanika in the year 1921-22. As reflected by some ex-*Mustagirs* like Dinabandhu Khandaitrai played a prominent role during this period of time.<sup>17</sup>

Also certain changes took place over population during these periods. In 1893-94 the minimum density of population was two

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<sup>15</sup>. Macpherson Proceedings, *Op.cit.*, p.5.

<sup>16</sup>. S. S. Hossein, *Completion Report of Survey Settlement for Kanika Wards Estate* (District Cuttack, 1889-94), Calcutta, 1895, pp. 1,65,66 and 71, ("*Melis*" were no-tax campaign).

<sup>17</sup>. Pati, Biswamoy, *Social Scientist*, Vol.II, No.7, July 1983, pp.26-27. <sup>17</sup>

hundred per square mile and maximum density of population was four hundred-forty per square miles. In 1921 it was 250 and 900 respectively. The area in and around Rajkanika was the highest population density in the two districts of Cuttack and Balasore.<sup>18</sup> Although we do not have concrete information about it, but it can be safely assumed that the pressure on the land was much heavier in the Cuttack side of the Kanika Estate.<sup>19</sup>

As has been said earlier, the rental of the estate rose between 1880-81 and 1893-94 by which a council was formed in 1922 under Rai Bahadur Brajendra Nath Rai, to enquiry into the "*Dukhini Kanika*" (Distressed Kanika) grievances. Accordingly, in February 1922. The Collector held a local enquiry into the grievances of the peasants and in course of enquiry he found that the record of rights made in the period 1889 to 1894, when the Kanika Estate was under Court of Wards had been connectedly maintained but that there has been changes on the following three respects.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup>. W.C., Lacey, *Census of India, 1931, Bihar and Orissa*, Patna, 1933, p.1.

<sup>19</sup>. *Ibid. Report of W.C., Lacey, Census of India, 1921, Patna 1923, Vol-VII, Bihar and Orissa, Report of P.C. Tallents, Census of India, 1911, Calcutta, 1913, Vol.V, Bengal, Bihar, Orissa and Sikkim, Report of L.S.S.O'Malley.*

<sup>20</sup>. Macpherson Proceedings, *Op.cit.*, p.6.

1. The rental of the Cuttack portion of the estate was enhanced generally by two annas with per rupee about 6 years ago (1916)
2. The Court of Wards raised the forest cess, which was originally levied at the rate of four anna per holding per annum, to eight annas three pies during the management. But it was commuted in October 1910 to a cess at six pies in the rupees.
3. Pasturage dues on buffaloes eight annas per head were being levied.

So far as the facts had been ascertained the enhancement was protected by the provision to the section 84 of the Orissa Tenancy Act 1913 as it had been collected for three years. The right of forest cess was questioned in the Court in 1912-13 and was decided in favor of the Raja Rajendra Narayan Bhanja Deo, the present proprietor.<sup>21</sup>

Raja Rajendra Narayan Bhanja Deo, who came in the age of 1902 made petition in 1912 to the Colonial Government for his hereditary proprietorship and was ascertained according to the Regulation of XII of 1805. <sup>22</sup> By which he got wide opportunity for further enhancement of land revenue, when Orissa Tenancy Act was

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<sup>21</sup>. *Home Political Dept. File*, No.121, 1922, pp. 4-5, (OSA), BBSR.

<sup>22</sup>. *Home Political Dept. File*, No. 71/3, 1912 (OSA), BBSR.

passed in 1913.<sup>23</sup>

As an influential member of Bengal Legislative Council and afterwards Bihar and Orissa Legislative Council, he was successful in molding several provisions of the Orissa Tenancy Act of 1913 AD to the interest of his own. Besides, Section 16 of the Act, while empowered the landlord to coerce the peasants to increase the mutation and transfer of the land fees, Sections 136 and 137 were most draconian to the extent that it empowered him to increase the rental on a so-called "compromise" basis of his own sweet will.<sup>24</sup>

Besides, the land revenue and other means of revenue provided in the Orissa Tenancy Act of 1913, it struck to the fancy of Raja Rajendra Narayan Bhanja Deo and his cohorts to try extracting other cess not provided in the law. It was that fanciful idea that gave birth to sixty-four kinds of "Abwabs", i.e., illegal cesses known as "*Chausathi-Kara*", peculiar and satirical for outsiders to hear, but bone breaking to the poor peasants.<sup>25</sup>

A few of the illegal cesses to squeeze the peasant were as follows:

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<sup>23</sup>. Samuel, J. A., *The Bihar and Orissa Code*, Vol.III, (Bihar and Orissa Act of 1913-1933), Patna 1936, p.56

<sup>24</sup>. Das, Prafulla, *Op.cit.*, pp.12-13.

<sup>25</sup>. *Ibid.* p.14.

*Banakara* (forest cess), *Macha Kara* (fish cess), *Gochar Kara* (grazingcess), *Chama Kara* (hide cess), *Hada Kara* (bone cess), *Anda Kara* (egg cess), *Para Kara* (feather cess), *Singha Kara* (horn cess), *Hata Kara* (creeper cess), *Hentala Kara* (mangrovetrunk cess), *Pincha Kara* (mangrove leave cess), *Khala Kara* (harvesting place cess), *Angar Kara* (coal cess) *Fala Kara* (fruit cess), *Namkata Kara* (mutation cess), *Namalekha Kara* (mutation cess), *Bhulsansodhan Kara* (mutation cess), *Nanjog Kara* (mutation correction cess), *Namyog Ghata Kara* (ferries cess), *Nata Kara* (Dance cess) *Bata Kara* (road cess), *Bhandha Kara* (embankment cess), *Polo Kara* (bridge cess), *Kesha Kara* (hair cess) and *Madhusajya Kara* (honeymoon cess).<sup>26</sup>

Being systematic in his manner Rajendra Narayan Bhanjo Deo, was really a very polished and sophisticated tyrant. So he did not enhance or impose those awabs or cesses half-hazardly. To impose it throughout his estate in a systematic way and within a specified period he appointed an officer named Indramani Mohanty to act as the head

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<sup>26</sup>. *Home Political Dept. File, Acc/No-124, 1922.* This is the pamphlet of Ananda Chandra Jena, "*Dukhini Kanika*" (*Distressed Kanika*), which describes the illegal cesses imposed on Kanika and Interview with Prafulla Das (Age-74), on 12.7.1999, *Sebasahi, Rajkanika, Kendrapara*, This part is also taken from his book, *Kanikare Praja Andolonaro Itihasa (Sahid Basu-Bisuni)*, (Oriya), Cuttack, 1987, pp. 121-122.

of the settlement operation known as Superintendent of Kanika Estate.<sup>27</sup>

For the peasants of Kanika such an private settlement operation were considered as "*Nightmare*" and the peasants were feeling helpless desperate and groaning under the iron heel of the oppressive Raja.<sup>28</sup>

What emerges is a clear picture of pressure on the peasants of the estate. They were forced to sell the bulk of their harvest (paddy crops) leaving very little for them to live on to pay the cesses. This was then sold to the dealers outside the estate at two or three times of the cost prices. The estate was in a position to do this since according to the existing system the peasants could not sell their produce in the market themselves.

At the same time, they were forced to work for constructing embankment, roads, digging ponds (Chandnapukhari), bridges by *Bethi* system (without remuneration) and were forced to pay eight annas per acre whenever or wherever any such construction was undertaken in the estate.

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<sup>27</sup>. Das, Prafulla, *Op.cit.*, p.13.

<sup>28</sup>. *Ibid.* pp. 13-14.



They paid grazing cess, eight annas per buffalo, forest cess, pond cess, health cess, education cess and other such cesses but this cess were for nothing.

Then to speak about the practice of giving loans, the estate gave the peasants money in advance and took away their paddy. The money remained unreleased due to the burden of so many cesses and was called loan. The interest of the loan was 6.35% or 12.5% per annum. The estate adopted strict means at the time of repayment of the loan.<sup>29</sup>

What happened afterwards? Being sorry for the distress, the estate in a hurry carried on business of paddy. It was twenty-two "gaunies" of paddy to get the ten *gaunies* of rice. It worked "on the principle of trade" and opened godowns at several places. The manner, in which the rice was sold, was highly profitable and time was no loss at all. It was impossible to ascertain the profits incurred by the estate in such a bad time.<sup>30</sup>

Again to say, the peasants of Kanika never allowed to take loans from other village creditors or moneylenders. The estate granted them loans at 12.5% interest at the rate of Rs 10 per acre. When they failed

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<sup>29</sup>. *Home Political Dept. File*, pp. 9-12.

<sup>30</sup>. *Home Political Dept. File, Op.cit.*, pp. 19.

to repay the loan, their lands were taken away by the estate forcibly and if they refused to give up their estate and were severely beaten up.<sup>31</sup>

The things became so worse because the estate was hard hit on account of first scarcity of rains and then floods successively for two years *i.e.*, 1919-22. <sup>32</sup> No steps had been taken to relieve the peasants of the mishaps. Owing to the loss of crops rather the prices of paddy and rice had gone high. The rents of the estate were not commuted. The proprietor of the estate Raja Rajendra Narayan Bhanja Deo, turned a deaf ear to the grievances of the peasant for the exemption of the land revenues.<sup>33</sup> Although the colonial authority distributed rice and "*takavi loans*" after the floods but Rajendra Narayan Bhanja Deo, prevented to do so on the ground that he would do it by himself. Three rice distribution centers were opened in the estate when the District Magistrate visited the place. No sooner did he left the place the relief work was stopped by "beat of drums"<sup>34</sup> and the food grains were sold to the peasants in higher prices. Ananda Chandra Jena in his "*Dukhini*

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<sup>31</sup>. *Ibid.* pp. 19-20.

<sup>32</sup>. Kar, Purusottam, *Indian National Congress and Orissa*, Cuttack, p. 114.

<sup>33</sup>. *Home Political Dept. File, Op.cit.*, pp. 19-20.

<sup>34</sup>. *Ibid.* pp. 8-9.

*Kanika*" (Distressed Kanika) booklet had remarked that "the estate oppressed the peasants in various ways, the oppression committed by the estate cannot be described by words".<sup>35</sup>

It was with this historical background the Non-Cooperation Movement started in Orissa and it became an eye opener to the peasants of Kanika. In July 1921 the Raja of Kanika made a speech and openly condemned the Non-Cooperation Movement and congratulated his peasants in having remained <sup>36</sup> uninfluenced by the propaganda of non-cooperators. It was true to the Gandhi's perceptions to the Zamindars that Zamindars would prove the chief stumbling block to the Non-Cooperation program and they could be brought to sense if the peasants could be persuaded not to pay rents".<sup>37</sup>

When the Raja of Kanika opposed the Non-Cooperation programme, complaints appeared against him in Oriya newspapers such as Samaj, Utkal Dipika and Seba. The non-cooperators

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<sup>35</sup>. *Ibid.* pp. 19-20.

<sup>36</sup>. Macpherson Proceedings, *Op. cit.*, p.8 and Confidential Report, 10th July 1922. (OSA) BBSR.

<sup>37</sup>. *Home Political Dept.* (Deposit) file No - 75, January, 1922, NAI, New Delhi p.8

considered the condemnation of Non-Cooperation by the Raja as a challenge.<sup>38</sup>

Ram Das Babaji an up-country youth from Uttar Pradesh who was associated with the congress work in Orissa arrived at Kanika from Aul a neighboring estate made most exciting speech in Kanika High School. In the garb of a *Sadhu*, he commanded tremendous influence on the peasants.<sup>39</sup>

Ram Das Babaji, had a sharp tongue and said, "the sinful oppressive government which has been ruling over India for two hundred years have ruined us. Do not trust this '*Satanic Government*'. The Raja of Kanika is a creature of this '*Satanic Government*' and he has been oppressing and opposing Non-Cooperation Movement in various ways; do not be deceived by this satanic government. They are 'swindlers'.<sup>40</sup> Although people were asked not to talk to the non-cooperators by the Raja but that order hardly produced any impact on them.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>38</sup>. Macpherson Proceedings, *Op. cit.*, p.8.

<sup>39</sup>. Das, Prafulla, *Non-Cooperation Movement in Kanika*, *Op. cit.*, p.24.

<sup>40</sup>. Das Prafulla, (1987) *Kanika Praja Andalanaro Itihasa, Sahid Basu-Bisuni* (Oriya) Kalyani Press, Cuttack, 1987, pp. 168-169.

<sup>41</sup>. Kumar, Kapil (ed.), *Congress and the Classes. (Nationalism, Workers and Peasants)*. Manohar Publication, New Delhi, 1988, p.127.

Thus, Rama Das Babaji, who created political consciousness among the peasants of Kanika by having public meeting in disguise of a "Sadhu" seems to have close similarity between him and <sup>42</sup> Baba Rama Chandra, who operated in Oudh area during this period by carrying a copy of Tulsi Das's Ramayan in his back from which he would often recite verses to rural audience. <sup>43</sup>

Ram Das Bhabaji was arrested at Rajkanika under Section 108 of Indian Penal Code but by then he could become successful in rousing the peasants of Kanika from her stupor. It was also during this period Ananda Chandra Jena, the rebel poet of "*Dukhini Kanika*" booklet was dismissed from his service from Kendrapara Local Board. Chakradhara Behera, the stormy-petrel of Kanika had resigned from his service of the estate a few days before Rama Das Babaji visit to Kanika in protest against Governments conferment upon the Raja, the power of confiscating land on allegation of arrears of rent. All that happened in such lightening speed that the peasants of Kanika were spellbound their spirit of defiance stiffened.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>42</sup>. *Ibid.* p.127.

<sup>43</sup>. Maittal, S. K. and Kumar, Kapil, *Social Scientist*, No.71, 1978, this is also cited by Chandra, Bipan (ed.), *Op. cit.*, p.198.

<sup>44</sup>. Das, Prafulla, *Non-Cooperation Movement in Kanika*, *Op.cit.*, p.24.

After the arrest of Rama Das Babaji, the Utkal Provincial Congress Committee identified with the peasants and organized them. The anti-imperialist attitude of the students of Kanika High School reflected when the student of Kanika left the school and attempted to break it down and to establish a National School instead.<sup>45</sup>

A "*Swaraj Ashram*" was set up at Chandbali-Kantapara road and *Swaraj Jagyan* was held. A tricolor flag was hoisted on a tree, which came to be called as *Gandhibata*. Bhagirathi Mahapatra, the Secretary of the Utkal Pradesh Congress Committee and Jadumani Mangaraj,<sup>46</sup> Mrs. Sarala Devi (wife of Mr. Mohapatra) and Dr. Atal Bihari Acharya, traveled all over the Chhamukha area of Kanika and attracted huge crowd. The burden of the speech was that "*Swaraj*" would come into being within a year and the peasants would not be required to pay their rent. <sup>47</sup> Chakradhara Behera, a young peasant leader of the estate moved around asking people not to serve false witnesses against Rama Das Babaji.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>45</sup>. Das, Prafulla, *Op.cit.*, p. 169.

<sup>46</sup>. Pati, Biswamoy, *Social Scientist, Op. cit.*, p.28.

<sup>47</sup>. Das, Prafulla, *Non-Cooperation Movement in Kanika Op.cit.*, p.25.

<sup>48</sup>. Mallick, Murlidhar, *Biplabi Chakradhara*, (Oriya), Cuttack, 1973, pp.12-13.

Ananda Chandra Jena, Jairam Rai, Upendra Subudhi Rai joined in the movement. Other activists included Upendra Subudhi Rai, a "Patadar" of the Raja but had resigned to participate in the "meli". Bisuni Madual (a cultivator) and Basu Sethi (a washerman by profession) also joined in the movement. The congress workers worked actively among the peasants and formed several villages Sabhas in different places to protest against the land laws. A large number of peasants were enrolled as four-anna membership of Congress and directly linked with the Congress organizations.<sup>49</sup>

In such a situation in April-March 1922, the peasants entered into the most militant phase of their struggle in Balasore and Cuttack areas of Kanika Estate. As a result, the peasants who embraced over hundred villages and contained as many as four thousand members formed a "Mel". A regular Council with office-bearers was established at a village called Meghapur to co-ordinate their activities.<sup>50</sup>

The Estate did not agree to accept rent unless paid at the higher rate proposed which the peasants too did not agree to pay. Many of them therefore deposited their rent at the existing rate into Kendrapara Government Sub-Treasure under the provision of the Tenancy Act of

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<sup>49</sup>. Pati, Biswamoy, *Resisting Domination, Op.cit.*, pp. 64-65.

<sup>50</sup>. Macpherson, *Proceedings, Op. cit.*, pp. 11-12.

1913.<sup>51</sup> But those who inclined to pay taxes were "boycotted" and "intimidated". Funds were collected failing to seek redress from the Raja a petition was submitted to the collector signed by as many as five thousands people. In February and March, the Collector and the Commissioner conducted enquiries but the lots of the peasants did not improve in any way.<sup>52</sup>

It was most important that in a meeting, which was held at Khurda, Gopabandhu Das, had called upon the people not to stop the payment of rents and jungle taxes. The Indian National Congress called off the Non-Cooperation Movement on 10th February 1922. But the militant peasants of Kanika continued their struggle.<sup>53</sup>

At that time when Dr. Harekrushna Mahatab and other congress workers wanted to hold a meeting at Moto in the way to Chandbali. The Tahasildar served a notice on the Utkal Pradesh Congress Committee, by which the meeting was banned. Similarly, all meetings were banned

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<sup>51</sup>. Mahatab, H. K. and Pattanaik S.(ed.), *History of Freedom Movement of Orissa*, Vol.III, Manhor Publication, Cuttack, 1957, p.67.

<sup>52</sup>. Pati, Biswamoy, "*Social Scientist*", *Op.cit.*, p.29.

<sup>53</sup>. Pati, Biswamoy, *Resisting Domination*, *Op. cit.*, pp. 64-65.



in Kanika. But nevertheless meetings were held secretly to keep the movement alive.<sup>54</sup>

Raja Rajendra Narayan Bhanjo Deo, made a proposal to secure the support of the colonial administrators to suppress the movement once for all. In April 1922, a violent crowd at a village called Patarpur assaulted a peon accompanied by two others, who had been to serve notice on certain judgment debaters the and the colonial government came into fray. <sup>55</sup>

When Gopabandhu Das, saw the peon blood strained he took him to the '*Swaraj Ashram*' at Kantapara where first aid was applied. He was offered a "*Khadar Cloth*" to change the torn and blood strained uniform because nothing was available in the Ashram. That peon however deposed on trial against Gopabandhu Das, that it was the latter who had so severely assaulted him and forced him to put on the '*Khadar Cloth*'. Gopabanhu and Bhagirathi Mohapatra, the two congress leading were convicted and sentenced to two years Rigorous Imprisonment.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>54</sup>. Das, Prafulla, *Kanika Praja Andolanaro Itihasa (Oriya)*, *Op.cit.*, Appendix-3, this is the letter of Dr. Harekrushna Mahatab to Prafulla Das, the author of this book which describe the ban on Congress activity in Kanika, Dated 9.7.84, p.271.

<sup>55</sup>. Macpherson Proceedings, *Op.cit.*, p. 12.

<sup>56</sup>. Macpherson Proceedings, *Op.cit.*, pp.12-13.

A case was started under Section of Indian Penal Code 147 on 10th April 1922, by which the Inspector of Police proceeded to arrest the accused. He was surrounded and cut off from his men by a crowd of two thousand persons by force. On hearing a large gathering of the peasants the Superintendent of Police Rai Bahadur Srikrishna Mahapatra, immediately left for Kanika. On his arrival he found a somewhat alarming situation. The superintendent took with him a force of twenty-fifth armed police and proceeded to break-up and disperse the various crowds moving in the vicinity. The colonial police force camped between Jorele and Meghapur on 23 April 1922. Consequently, three people were killed and as many as 144 others were injured.<sup>57</sup> Among those who died were Basu Sethi and Bisuni Madual, the two peasant leaders of the Gandhian movement in Orissa.<sup>58</sup>

### **THE TRAGIC WITHDRAWAL OF THE CONGRESS AND COLLAPSE OF THE MOVEMENT.**

But a tragic turn of the events on the national movement turned upside down. Gandhi withdrew the "*Satyagraha*" on 12th February 1922. So the die was cast for the Government and certainly for the

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<sup>57</sup>. Macpherson Proceedings, *Op. cit.*, pp.12-13

<sup>58</sup>. Das, Prafulla, *Non-Cooperation Movement in Kanika, Op.cit.*, p.1.

Raja. Within no time the congress office was closed at Rajkanika and Ayatan. Congress workers who came from outside ran away as a most "disciplined soldiers" of the day. They did not even get time to make over the office house to their owners.<sup>59</sup>

Since the Raja Rajendra Narayan Bhanjo Deo, got identified with the colonial government, carried out large scale repression with the help of colonial police forces upon the peasants.<sup>60</sup> The forces sent from Cuttack to suppress the movement looted the houses of the peasants and raped their womenfolk.<sup>61</sup> The men were mercilessly beaten up. The women who were pregnant delivered prematurely due to the oppression made on them.<sup>62</sup>

The peasant activists of the "Meli" were arrested, tried in the Raja's house and forced to admit that they were the culprits of the disturbance. About one hundred-fifty of them were tied to one another

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<sup>59</sup>. *Ibid.* p.29.

<sup>60</sup>. Das, Prafulla, *Kanika Praja Andalanaro Itihasa (Oriya), Appendix-3, letter of Dr. H.K. Mahatab to P. Das. Op.cit.*, p.271.

<sup>61</sup>. Mishra, K. C., *Land System and Land Reforms*, Himalayan Publishing House, Bombay, 1990, p.122.

<sup>62</sup>. *Confidential Report, File No.129, 1922*, (OSA) BBSR, this is the booklet of Ananda Chandra Jena, *Dukhini Kanika*, (Distressed Kanika) which depicted the picture of oppression made on them during this period of time.

and made to walk up and down from Cuttack side of the estate to the Balasore side *i.e.*, between Chandbali and Bhadrak.<sup>63</sup>

Alongwith suppressive measures to terrorize the peasants the Raja implemented Rs. 10,000/- fine on them. The colonial government gave him the power of collecting rents by the "*Certificate Procedure*". By which the peasants who did not pay the taxes were forced to evacuate the estate. <sup>64</sup> Punyanda Rautray and Dinabandhu Khandayatray, the two most important peasant leader properties were confiscated and were driven out from the estate.<sup>65</sup> These repressive measures brought about a tragic collapse of the movement.

Besides these, some of the important cultivators, who were behind the movement like Sadananda Samantrai and Raghunath Samantrai, changed the side instead of supporting the "*Meli*"<sup>66</sup>. The "*Dukhini Kanika*" booklet of Ananda Chandra Jena, which was banned at that time vividly, describes the decline of the peasant movement. Ananda Chandra remarked thus: -

"Kanika Devi is our mother (Goddess of Kanika).

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<sup>63</sup>. Mahatab, H. K. and Pattanaik S. (eds.), *Op.cit.*, p.68.

<sup>64</sup>. Kumar, Kapil (ed.), *Congress and the Classes*, *Op. cit.*, p.130.

<sup>65</sup>. Das, Prafulla, *Kanika Praja Andalanaro Itihasa*, *Op.cit.*, p.271.

<sup>66</sup>. *Ibid.* p.271.

Her husband (Lord) is our father;

We will never forsake our father and we will always lie prostrate before him.

We will not mind the insults, which he may inflict upon us. We should again prostrate at his feet and fight for having our grievances redressed".

A typical feature was an appeal to the Lord of India for help. As Anand Chandra Jena wrote,

"To get out of this trouble,

Let remember to the Lord of India"

This appeal to the "Lord of India" for help repeated fourteen times in the booklet.<sup>67</sup> Simultaneously, rumors were floated in Kanika that Gandhi's army on its way from Ranchi to assist them against the Raja and the Colonial police force. It was clearly evident that an attempt was made to keep the struggle alive and to inspire militancy.<sup>68</sup>

However, the hostile posture of the Utkal Pradesh Congress Committee at this juncture seems to be quite striking. A day before the firing, it was announced that its aim was to build up good relationship between the landlord and the peasants. Since the Kanika events there

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<sup>67</sup>. *Confidential Report File No. 124, 1922, Op. cit.*, p.6.

<sup>68</sup>. Macpherson Proceedings, *Op.cit.*, pp.14-15.

have been several prosecutions both against the rioters and against the persons pulling the strings in the background. Therefore, the Raja and the colonial government further tightened the security in July and August 1922 by sending additional forces to Kanika. It was decided that, one fourth of the costs would be paid by the Raja himself and three fourth by the peasants.<sup>69</sup>

By this time the "Meli" had been crushed. However, all this was happening in the Cuttack area of the Kanika Zamindari but in Panchamukha, i.e., in the Balasore side of the Zamindari everything was practically calm and quiet which was mainly due to the intelligent and conscientious handling of the situation by Mr. Hudson, the then Superintendent of Police of Balasore.<sup>70</sup> Besides, there was lack of organisational support.

The most striking example of the Utkal Pradesh Congress Committee's attempt to keep the Non-Cooperation Movement within bounds was provided by its actions in Bhadrak area. The peasants of this area stopped payment of rents during this phase. Interestingly, through the mediation of Banchanidhi Mohanty, a congress worker the landlords did not institute rent suits against the peasants, but filed

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<sup>69</sup>. Pati, Biswamoy, *Resisting Domination, Op.cit.*, p.67.

<sup>70</sup>. Mahatab, H. K. and Pattanaik S. (eds.), 1957, *Op.cit.*, p.68.

lists of the dues of the peasants at the congress office. Further through the help of village panchayat the Utkal Pradesh Congress Committee assumed the charge of rent collection after the Bardoli Satyagraha, retreat.<sup>71</sup>

During the Non-Cooperation Movement the peasants of Puri also well responded and started "no-rent campaign". On 16th October 1921, there was a meeting at Khandagiri, was well attended by the peasants. It was organized to explain the elements of non-cooperation by Gopabandhu himself. In that area "Sabarkars" and (a type of peasants and were intermediary between the Government and the peasants) violated the forest laws and started "no-rent campaign" when their right were denied.<sup>72</sup>

In Sambalpur areas such as Baragarh, Jharsugura, Talpatia, Rampella and several other places the peasants showed their enthusiasm and actively participated in the Non-Cooperation Movement. In two camp settlements operations were to face passive resistance but the matter did not take a serious turn. <sup>73</sup>

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<sup>71</sup>. Pati, Biswamoy, *Social Scientist, Op.cit.*, p.31.

<sup>72</sup>. *Ibid.*, pp.31-32.

<sup>73</sup>. Senapati, Nilamani, *Orissa District Gazetteer*, Sambalpur, 1971, p.79.

When Mahatma Gandhi visited Berhampur, where he delivered a speech stirring up the national spirit in the minds of the people of Ganjam. Besides Gopabandhu Das, late V. V. Giri (ex-President of India) who hailed from the district and his family members actively worked for the Congress organization and mobilized the masses.<sup>74</sup>

In all Orissan States where the peasants had no full right over their land and where land was taxed heavily besides other awabs such as: - hospital cess, forest cess road cess, sugar case cess, income tax, bidi, tobacco, pan, coconut, coir, plough tax, salami (for permitting widow to adopt) bethi and rasad, showed their much enthusiasm during the Non-Cooperation Movement and implemented the "no-tax campaign" against the rulers.<sup>75</sup>

A public meeting was organized in Keonjhar in May 1921 to rally against the *bethi* and *rasad*. Accordingly, on 17 May 1921, a hartal was organized. Estate authorities enforced Section 144 of Indian Penal Code and courted arrests of the peasant mobs.<sup>76</sup>

Similarly, in Dhenkanal at the end of the nineteenth-century the Manager of the state contemplated the enhancement of rent under a

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<sup>74</sup>. Senapati, Nilamani, *Orissa District Gazetteer*, Ganjam, 1971, p.110.

<sup>75</sup>. Behuria N.C. *Orissa District Gazetteer*, Cuttack, 1996, pp. 113-115.

<sup>76</sup>. Pati, Biswamoy, *Social Scientist*, *Op.cit.*, p.32-33.



new settlement. One thousand people came and protested. In consequence of which the idea was abandoned. But again in 1922 the management wanted to revise land rent. Forest rules were also revised and enforced just then. Against both these there were much resentment and agitation. Some redress was effected but four of the leaders were charged with conspiracy and were sentenced to imprisonment for three years. This gave a setback to the movement. But in this area the exploited people rose independently and Utkal Pradesh Congress Committee was virtually remained out of it. <sup>77</sup>

Thus, it was quite evident from the Viceroy's telegram to London on February 1922 that the peasants in some parts of Orissa have been affected.<sup>78</sup>

After the suspension of the Non-Cooperation Movement as in the rest of the country the congressmen in Orissa divided into two groups i.e., the Pro-changers and No-changers. The Pro-changers wanted to enter the legislature under the Government of India Act 1919 and the No-changers wanted to work out the Gandhian constructive programme while boycotting the legislature. The following Pro-changer

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<sup>77</sup>. Das, M. N., (ed.), *Sidelight on History and Culture of Orissa*, Vidyapuri Cuttack, 1977, pp. 284-285.

<sup>78</sup>. Dutt R.P., *India Today*, Calcutta, 1970, p.350.

congressmen were elected from Orissa and to the Bihar and Orissa Legislative Council and to the Central Legislative Assembly. Godavarish Mishra, Jagabandhu Singh, Radharanjan Das were elected to the Bihar and Orissa Legislative Council and Nilakantha Das was elected to the Central Legislative Assembly.<sup>79</sup>

On 28th and 29th June 1929 first All Orissa Provincial Congress Conference was held at Cuttack under the leadership of Acharya Prafulla Chandra Ray, the Chemist of Bengal. The conference resolved to workout the constructive programme of the congress. Ghanashyam Das and Bhagirathi Mohapatra attended the conference immediately after being released from Jail.

After release from Jail Gopabandhu Das, fully devoted himself to the constructive programme of the Congress. He laid particular stress on promotion of *Khadar*. In 1925 and 1926 he set up spinning centers in Puri. Similarly, Harekrushna Mahatab after release from jail started constructive programme of the Congress in Balasore district.

In December 1927 Gandhi visited Orissa for the third time. He visited various khadar production centres. He advised the people to give up fear, promote khadar movement, and remove untouchability

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<sup>79</sup>. Pradhan, A.C., *Orissa Review*, Vol. XLVI, No-1, August. 1989, p.94.

and not to be slaves to intoxicant. <sup>80</sup> Gopabandhu Das, arranged to observe the All India Bardoli Day on 12th June 1928. But when the day was celebrated at Puri, he could not attend it due to high fever. He died of that fever on 17th June and his death came as a great blow to the national aspirations of Orissa. <sup>81</sup>

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<sup>80</sup>. *Ibid.* p. 94.

<sup>81</sup>. Senapati, Nilamani & Kuanr, Durga Charan, *Orissa District Gazetteer*, Puri, 1977, p.108.

## **CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE AND PEASANT**

### **MOBILIZATION: 1928-34**

Following the suspension of the Non-cooperation Movement, till the revival of another *Satyagrah* in 1930 in which the increased salt tax became the relaying cry, Gandhi's major energies, time and concerns were directed towards the socio-economic upliftment of the villagers and different constructive programmes.<sup>1</sup> But the year 1928 was of great importance for the peasants all over the country. Because in Bardoli Taluq, during this period due to the enhancement of arbitrary land revenue led to the agitation of the peasants and the interest in it was nation wide. Every Zamindar and Kisan was affected by it, and the Satyagraha under the leadership of Vallababhai Patel, ended in the victory the peasantry.<sup>2</sup>

In Orissa, particularly in coastal belt, there were the series of floods from 1926 to 1928 by which it led to the rise of price of rice, steadily upward movement on the whole.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, there were two major peasant movements that took place in Baramba and Nilgiri in

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<sup>1</sup>. Samal Bidyut Kumar, *Orissa Review*, Vol.xlvi.No.1, 1984, pp. 97- 98.

<sup>2</sup>. *Report of Indian National Congress 1928*, p.178.

<sup>3</sup>. Dalziel W. W. *Final Report on the Revision Settlement of Orissa (1922-32)*, Patna, 1934, pp.5-13.

1928. In fact, these were the symptoms of the existing discontent among the people.<sup>4</sup>

In 1928, in Bamra the Meefer Settlement was carried out, by which it increased the land rent to an intolerable extent. The leaders like Hara Pradhan, Bhagirathi Pradhan, Jagannath, Daitari Hota and Bhagaban Patel mobilized the peasants. As many as four hundred people marched to Sambalpur and placed their grievances before the colonial Political Agent. The “no-rent campaign” was organized in which many of *Gaontias* (village headmen) took active part. Six *Gaontias* were deprived of the *Gaonti* rights, and some leaders lost their jobs. Section 144 was served on Dayananda Satpathy and five co-workers, several others seen in *Khadar* were arrested. By this time the movement was suppressed.<sup>5</sup>

In 1928, in Nilgiri an adjoining area of Balasore, in connection with celebration of the marriage ceremony of the *Jema* (princess) of the Raja of Nilgiri besides various *abwabs* a new kind of tax was imposed upon the peasants. There had already been discontent among the peasants due to their already having been highly assessed

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<sup>4</sup>. Pati Biswamoy. *Social Scientists*, Vol. II, No.7, July 1983. pp. 33-34.

<sup>5</sup>. Samal J.K. (ed.), *A Comprehensive History and Culture of Orissa*, Vol.II, Kaveri Book, New Delhi, 1997, p.361.

on various pretexts and also due to forced labour on occasions like hunting and etc.<sup>6</sup>

Besides these illegal abwabs, the daily hearing of the progress of the national movement in the adjoining district of Balasore largely influenced the peasants to agitate. So they did not agree to the assessment of further *abwabs* and rose against it. They approached Hare Krishna Mahtab at Balasore for instruction. They asked the peasants to give them in writing about all the oppressions committed against them. This was made into a pamphlet named "*Oppression in Nilgiri*" and was widely circulated in different places of Orissa.<sup>7</sup>

The effect was that, a wave of oppression was let loose. Hare Krishna Mahtab, advised the tenants to leave the state and come away. Accordingly, tenants in thousands came away to Balasore. Meanwhile, Hare-Krishna Mahtab had wired to C.F. Andrews, in this connection and he came down to Balasore and looked into the situation himself. In his book, "*India and Simon Commission*", C.F. Andrews writes regarding the conduct of these Nilgiri peasants in this light- "that shortly after the departure of Mahatma Gandhi (1927) from Orissa for his Madras session of the Indian National Congress,

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<sup>6</sup>. Mahatab, H. K. *History of Freedom Movement in Orissa*, Vol. II, 1960, Cuttack, p. 376.

<sup>7</sup>. *Ibid.* p. 376.

about a thousand residents of a neighbouring Garjat State of Orissa went away to Balasore with stories of relentless cruelty and oppression perpetuated on them. Their allegation was that, Raja was squandering away everything in luxury that there was no accounts maintained of the rents realized, that people suffering had exceeded all limits and many of them had left the state in search of justice. They waited at Balasore for months together with endless patience. They were firm that they would not return home unless and until their suffering were redressed. At Balasore, some Congress Swaraj workers came down to help these tenants by saving them from starvation".<sup>8</sup>

It was on Andrews's intervention that a settlement could be arrived at. The Raja agreed to pay proper remuneration for services obtained from the peasants, then suspended the agitation and returned to their home.<sup>9</sup>

All these factors would be seen leading to a striking response to the Civil Disobedience Movement in Balasore. When Mahatma Gandhi, gave his call for the Civil Disobedience movement on the basis of salt issue in April 1930, it created an unprecedented popular

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<sup>8</sup>. Mahatab, H.K. (ed.), *History of Freedom Movement in Orissa*, Vol.iii, Cuttack, 1957, P. 99.

<sup>9</sup>. *Ibid.* p. 100

patriotism, particularly from coastal Orissa.<sup>10</sup> Gandhiji issued a public statement confessing his breach of the salt law urging Indians everywhere it was convenient. It was a formal declaration of war against the iniquitous laws of the mightiest empire in the world. Across the sub-continent countless peasants looked to Mahatma's advice and broke the law to obtain the daily salt they required. Louis Fischer saw in Gandhi's Dandi March imagination, dignity and sense of showmanship of a great artist. "It appealed", observed Fischer, "to the illiterate peasant and it appealed to a sophisticated critic and sometime fierce opponent of Gandhi like Subhash Bose who compared the Salt March to Napoleon's March to Paris on his return to Elba".<sup>11</sup>

The monopoly of salt industry was a terrible blow on the economic life of the peasants, which they practically obtained just at the door and practically at on seacoasts. The coastal districts of Orissa were reduced to a state of an object property, as the salt manufacture was the only subsidiary cottage industry of the agriculturalist that could hardly make their ends meet from agriculture alone. It was through the export of salt to other provinces

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<sup>10</sup>. Behuria, Krushna Charan, *Gazetteers of India, Orissa State Gazetteers*, Vol.1, Cuttack, 1990 p. 228.

<sup>11</sup>. Samal, Bidyut Kumar, *Orissa Review, Op.cit.*, p.101.



that the Oriya agriculturalist used to supplement his scanty resources all through the centuries. Naturally, therefore, the Salt Satyagraha appealed highly to the sentiments of the peasants of coastal Orissa, who threw themselves heart and soul into the movement.<sup>12</sup>

However, there were the cases of violation of Salt Law in coastal Orissa, before the Civil Disobedience Movement was started as the table seen below.

**Case of Violations of Salt Laws in Coastal Orissa**

Year	Cuttack	Balasore	Puri
1927-28	83	150	46
1928-29	40	55	46
1929-30	30	31	23
1930-31	6	87	27 <sup>13</sup>

On 16<sup>th</sup> March 1930 the Utkal Provincial Congress Committee, met at Balasore and decided to break the Salt Laws. Hare Krushna Mahatab and Surendra Nath Das, made arrangements for Salt Satyagraha at Inchudi<sup>14</sup> in Balasore seacoast only second to Gandhi's

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<sup>12</sup>. Mahatab, H.K. *History of Orissa, Op.cit.*, p. 35.

<sup>13</sup>. Pati, Biswamoy, *Social Scientist Op. cit.* p.35

<sup>14</sup>. Behera, K. S. *Souvenir*, 1994, p. 10

Satyagraha in Gujrat in its impact and importance.<sup>15</sup> On 6<sup>th</sup> April 1930, the day on which Gandhi broke the Salt Law at Dandi, the first of Satyagraha led by Gopabandhu Chaudhary and Acharya Harihara Das began their Journey from Cuttack to Inchudi.<sup>16</sup> In Sambalpur a Satyagraha Committee was formed under the chairmanship of Ghanashyam Panigrahi and with Dayananda Sathpathy and Harihara Behera as Secretaries. They sent four batches of Satyagrahi to defy the Salt Law and to prepare contraband salt at different places of coastal Orissa including Inchudi.<sup>17</sup> Large number of volunteers came from Baripada, Puri and other such places to break the Salt Law.<sup>18</sup>

At other places, such as Kujang in Cuttack district, Kuhudi, Singheswar and Latra in Puri district, and Huma in Ganjam District, (at that time Ganjam was in Madras Presidency) the Salt Satyagrahi in thousands broke the Salt Law,<sup>19</sup> very soon the Civil Disobedience Movement started the peasants of Balasore responded

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<sup>15</sup>. Senapati, Nilamani, *Orissa District Gazetteers*, Sambalpur, 1971, p. 80.

<sup>16</sup>. Mishra, C.R. in Madhu Pati (ed.), *West Orissa A Study in Ethos* (silver jubilee commemorative volume) Sambalpur University, 1992, p.225.

<sup>17</sup>. Pati, Biswamoy in Kumar Kapil (ed.), *Congress and the Classes*, Manohar Publication, New Delhi, 1988, p.135.

<sup>18</sup>. Behuria, Krushna Charan, *Orissa State Gazetteers*, *op. cit.*, p. 108.

<sup>19</sup>. Pati, Biswamoy, *Social Scientist*, *Op.cit.* p.35

enthusiastically. On the one hand the people of different villages in Balasore i.e., at Iram, Sartha, Padmapur, Basta, Kasaba, Srijang, Inchudi, Atilabad, Bhadrak and so on, actively sympathized with the congress-led violation of the salt laws. On the other hand we come across the attack on the propertied classes and no-rent campaign. Thus, the villagers who sympathized the Congress workers and broke the salt laws as well as those who refused to pay the *chaukidari* tax. The villagers of Balasore used to supply food to the congress workers, who came from Madras and Bihar. The movement took a dramatic turn in May 1930, when about six hundred villagers from the surrounding villages of Inchudi carried nine manuds of contraband salt to Balasore and sold it. The colonial police remained a silent spectator.<sup>20</sup>

The peasants in on Srijang, stopped to pay *chaukidari*-tax, which led to the violent attack on the peasants by the colonial force. Around seven hundred villagers attacked the colonial police when they proceeded to collect the *chaukidari*-tax. In order to put down the response of the peasants, collective fine was imposed upon them. On 2<sup>nd</sup> July 1930, the Sub-Deputy Magistrate with forty-four constables went over to Khersai to carry out the attachment of property. The

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<sup>20</sup>. Pati, Biswamoy, *Resisting Domination (Peasants, Tribals and the National movement in Orissa 1920-50)*, Manohar Publication, New Delhi, 1993, p. 72

next day half a mile from the yard conch-shells began to blow and the villagers followed the police party. The crowd grew larger every moment. When the police party marched Khersai the crowd had swollen to near two thousand people. Who were shouting at and threatening the police party. As the crowd grew more excited and came within a range of twenty yards, which had the effect of dispersing the crowd permitting the police to proceed towards the police station.<sup>21</sup>

Thus, began a veritable reign of terror in the area by armed forces under the very nose of the District Magistrate and Superintendent of Police. There were indiscriminate brutal assault, loot, plunder, rape, torture and confiscation of property. Over and above, the villagers were loaded with “*punitive tax*” as the government kept extra police at Srijang. Most of the notable persons of the area including Gaur Mohan Das and Bidyadhar Rath, were arrested and they lost their property. The horrible atrocities of police on thousand of peasants faded the movement. <sup>22</sup> Laxami Narayan Sahu (the member of the Servants of Indian Society) Bhubawanada Das, Bhagabat Prasad Mohapatra, Surendra Pattanaik, Rama Devi, Malati Devi and many others visited the affected areas and condemned the

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<sup>21</sup>. Samal, Bidyut Kumar, *Orissa Review*, Vol. XLVI, No.1, *Op.cit.*, p.107.

<sup>22</sup>. *Ibid.* p.107.

severe oppression of the Government. For publishing the police atrocities at Srijang, in his daily "Asha", Shasi Bhusan Rath was arrested and Gopal Narayan De at Balasore was prosecuted for his pamphlet entitled "Lawlessness in Balasore". After the Srijang repression the campaign for the non-payment of Chaukidari tax was not pursued elsewhere in Orissa.<sup>23</sup>

The tribal peasants of Koraput, known as *projas* i.e., a category of peasants were freedom loving and did not like the idea of subjugation. Their sporadic attempts were against the British Raj and local chiefs. In 1929 they enrolled as primary congress membership to make the Civil Disobedience Movement, more popular.<sup>24</sup> In 1930, under the leadership of Radha Krishna Biswas Ray, volunteers were recruited to launch the Salt Satyagrah and the local leaders were convicted and sentenced to various terms of imprisonment.<sup>25</sup>

In Kalyansinghpur area, the *kondhs* i.e., the hill ryots started "no-rent campaign" against the Maharaja of Jaypore and stopped *kists*. Narasingha Sahu of Jaypore organized the hill ryots and

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<sup>23</sup>. Pati, Biswamoy, *Social Scientist, Op.cit.*, p.37.

<sup>24</sup>. Senapati, Nilmani, *Orissa District Gazetteers*, Koraput, 1966, p. 74, and Randhawa M.S. (ed.), *Farmers of India*, Vol. III, Indian Council of Agricultural Research Publication, New Delhi, 1964, p, 38.

<sup>25</sup>. Senapati, Nilamani, *Orissa District Gazetteers*, Koraput & *Ibid.*, p, 74.

started protest movement in Bissemucuttack Taluk. But to suppress the movement, the Deputy Tahasildar served a notice and prohibited meeting and speeches. When the sub-inspector attempted to serve this order Narasingha Sahu hoisted a Congress flag and said that, he took orders only from his government, presumably meaning Mahatma Gandhi. Attempts were made to isolate Narasingha Sahu from the inhabitant of this tribal tract.<sup>26</sup>

During this time Subudhi Patra of Luhagudi, organized Kondhs i.e., hill ryots and garbed with Gangadhar Patra's *in am lands* that happened to be dominant *Muttahadar*.<sup>27</sup> In 1931 in May or June, Hari Das a *Paiko* in the Pavitrapur Agency of Vizagapatam district organized hill men tribes and started protest movement. Domburu Naiok, Jaisingh Naiko, Balaram Sobudhi, Kadraka Chachri Bhimji and other leading men from the village Garidi supported him. These leaders were arrested and released only in 1936.<sup>28</sup>

The reverberations of the Civil Disobedience movement, unlike British Orissa, witnessed in the Princely States of Orissa as well.<sup>29</sup> In

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<sup>26</sup>. Pati, Biswamoy, *Social Scientist*, *Op. cit.*, p, 38 I.

<sup>27</sup>. *Home Political Dept. File*, No. 36/VI/1930, NAI, New Delhi.

<sup>28</sup>. *Home Political Dept. File*, No. 44/55/1936, NAI, New Delhi.

<sup>29</sup>. Rath, Bijay, Chandra, *Orissa Review*, Vol. XLVI, No-1, 1989, p.119.

Talcher once again for the third time, peasants during 1930-32 agitated against *bethi* and other miscellaneous cesses. Dhobei Chhual Singh and Brundaban Pradhan, took the lead and put forth charter of demands and grievance before the Political Agent, Mr. Bruton, but it yielded nothing substantial, Dhobei Chual Singh, Brundaban Pradhan and Anadi Sahu, were imprisoned for a year. Further they ordered to furnish bonds of good behaviour for having agitated against the administration. Punitive police were posted in their village on the suspicion that the villagers were holding secret meeting. The arrest, imprisonment and humiliation of their popular leaders, besides the repressive measures demoralized the movement. Besides these acts, the *Chasas* (peasants) of Talcher, who formed an association called "*Sobhagya Samiti*" in 1925, the ruler of the state banned the association. Those who were in the service of the state and yet took part in the Association were suspended forth with. The funds of the association amounting one thousand rupees were confiscated.<sup>30</sup>

In 1930 in Boud under a new settlement land rents were increased arbitrarily by one hundred to four hundred percent in the different parts of the state. About two thousand people went to the

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<sup>30</sup>. Pradhan, Sadasiba, *Agrarian and Political Movements: in the States of Orissa: 1931 - 1949*, Inter-India Publication, New Delhi, 1986, pp. 86-87.

Raja to lay before him their grievances redressed. But the officials prevented any access to the Raja. Subsequently, twenty- seven Kondhs i.e., the hill ryots went to Sambalpur to get some relief from the Political Agent. On their return to the state, they were mercilessly beaten, fined and imprisoned. Such was the relationship between the government and the governed; that the subjects were not allowed to see the Ruler and submission of the charter grievances was considered to be a rebellious act. There were absolutely no cordial relationship between the ruler and ruled.<sup>31</sup>

Although all these peasant movements in different parts of the states were nipped in the bud by means of repressive measures, they were not altogether without any results. The experience gained in these repressed and ill-organized agitations, though obtained at a heavy price was of far-reaching consequence. It became clear to the people of the Garjats, that the oppressive rulers could preserve their authority only by the support of the paramount power and they failed because they neither had a common plan of action against the authorities nor had competent leadership. They also learnt that since the agitations were confined within the four walls of their respective states, it was easy for the Rulers to put down the agitations. However, a year passed on the growth of a slow but steady political

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<sup>31</sup>. *Ibid.* p. 87



awakening was observed, when the people resolved to organize themselves properly and took up to the congress leaders for organization and leadership.<sup>32</sup>

The Civil Disobedience Movement on which thousands of Indians courted arrest, faced lathis, bullets, lost their property during 1930, proved in many ways surprisingly successful. But by the end of 1930, due to mass arrest of congress leaders, adverse affects on agricultural depression on peasants and various repressive measure of the Government, the movement began to lose its spontaneity and potency of radicalism and showed, instead, signs of exhaustion. Despite the pressure of Tej Bahadur Sapru, V.S. Srinivas Sastri and M.R. Jayaker for a settlement, Gandhiji was not favourable towards this proposal right upto 11<sup>th</sup> February 1931. Yet a sudden retreat began from 14<sup>th</sup> February and finally on 5<sup>th</sup> March 1931 was announced the historic Gandhi Irwin pact.<sup>33</sup>

Accordingly, the Civil Disobedience Movement was withdrawn and the Congress representatives took part in the Second Round Table Conference. However, this unprecedented country-wide movement achieved one significant gain i.e., the people of costal Orissa were allowed to manufacture salt for their domestic use but

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<sup>32</sup>. *Ibid.* p. 87.

<sup>33</sup>. Samal, Bidyut Kumar, *Orissa Review*, Vol. XLVI, No.1, August 1989, p. 108

not for sale on commercial basis out-side their villages. As a result the rural economic discontent in the coastal districts of Orissa was minimized and the people in general, were happy to see that their old privilege had been restored. The 45<sup>th</sup> session of the Indian National Congress was held in Karachi in March 1931, Gopabandhu Chaudhry and Nilakantha Das who attended the session proposed to host the 46<sup>th</sup> annual session of the Indian National Congress at Puri and was accepted. Gandhiji, promised the congressmen from Orissa at Karachi to support the demand for creation of separate province on the Second Round Table Conference. To host the next session of the Congress at Puri, a Reception Committee was formed with Nilakantha Das, Gopabandhu Chaudhary, Jagannath Mishra and Harekrishna Mahatab as Chairman, General Secretary, Treasurer and Sena Nayaka (chief volunteer crops) respectively. Popular enthusiasm was again stirred by brisk political activities. <sup>34</sup>

Unfortunately, Orissa Congress became faction ridden, one group constituted of Nilakantha Das, Sasibhusan Rath and Lingaraj Panigrahi which was named as Council Group, whereas Hare krushna Mahatab, Gopabandhu Chaudhry and Pranakrushna Padhihari, were of Gandhi Group. Besides this, the Government encouraged Amunsabha, to carry on anti-congress propaganda.

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<sup>34</sup>. *Ibid.* p. 109

Peoples Welfare Associations were established in every part of the province with the initiation of the Government to counteract congress activities. The Government officials, Zamindars and other wealthy tenants who were the members of this association acted on the whole as a restraining force.<sup>35</sup> When Utkal Pradesh Congress Committee set up Krushak Sangh throughout Orissa on September 1931, the official complained that Congress village work was worsening Zamindar-tenants relations in districts like Puri.<sup>36</sup>

Gandhi attended the Second Round Table Conference held in London in September 1931. This left Gandhiji and the working committee no option but to make token revival of Civil Disobedience Movement. In response to the call of Gandhiji and the Congress Working Committee of the Civil Disobedience Movement resumed vigorously in Orissa. The congress workers carried on the programme of boycott and salt campaign with redoubled zeal. Sardar Surendra Nath Das, guided the movement from Paharasidinga near Balasore for a long time. He used to circulate inflammatory leaflets such as "Ranaveri" to keep alive popular enthusiasm and radicalism. Nilambar Das also worked secretly in North Balasore to mobilize

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<sup>35</sup>. *Ibid.* p. 110

<sup>36</sup>. Sarkar, Sumit, *Modern India*, 1885-1947. Macmillan Publication, Madras, 1985, p.317.

peasant response for popular upscerge. In Athagarh, during this time Congress activists like Binod Kanungo, Radhanath Rath, Surendra Pattanaik, Bhramarbar Routrary, were busy in publishing revolutionary bulletins and sending them secretly to Cuttuck for circulation. Due to dedicated leadership of Nrusingha Guru, Mahabir Sing, Fakir Behera and Bhagirathi Pattnaik the movement in Sambalpur, Jharsugada, Baragarh and Burapati continued for a long time.<sup>37</sup>

Armed with the unlawful ordinance, the Government directed its energy to seize the places associated with Congress activities in Orissa. Sterner means of repression this time far exceeded those taken by Irwin in 1930. The repressive measures to crush the movement included “blocking of villages, billeting, fines, curfew, special tribunals, firing, mass intimidation, ill-treatment in lock-ups, confiscation of lands, cattle, utensils and personal belongings, ill-treatment of women (savage, beating, rape, abuse and insults) and children censorship of the press, searches without warrants, destruction of property, unprecedented police surveillances, parole orders, imprisonment after summary trial, beating of pickets and volunteers etc. All these measures were undertaken by the British authorities to crush the movement.

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<sup>37</sup>. Samal, Bidyut Kumarr, *Orissa Review, Op.cit.*, p.111.

To strike terror was the only remedy left in British hands and the Government was successful on attacking the leaders, resources and organization of the Congress. Therefore in the face of overwhelming repression the second Civil Disobedience Movement could not evoke as much massive popular support as 1930 movement, The Zamindars who turned loyalist to the colonial Government and the congress's keeping away from agrarian radicalism thus losing peasant response.<sup>38</sup> The effort of Hare krushna Mahatab to start "no-tax campaign" through Krushak Sangh could not be materialized. Gradually, the Civil Disobedience Movement was pushed onto the background. On 8<sup>th</sup> May 1933, Gandhiji, announced suspension of the movement for six weeks and afterwards decided to abstain from it. Thus the movement collapsed before officially called off by the congress in May 1934.

The Civil Disobedience Movement in Orissa did mark great advance in every respect over the Non-Cooperation Movement. The fundamental issue like "salt" was of great economic significance for the people of Orissa. The peasantry provided great strength to the movement. One of the significant features of the movement was that, there was no terrorist action nor-radicalism among the peasantry in

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<sup>38</sup>. *Ibid.* pp. 111-112.

sharp contrast to other provinces.<sup>39</sup> In May 1934, Mahatma Gandhi made another visit to Orissa for Harijan work for social reconstruction. Under his command Gopabandhu Chaudhury the great champion of Gandhian movement in Orissa worked untiringly for the social reconstruction of Orissan society.<sup>40</sup>

After the end of the Civil Disobedience Movement there emerged the socialist trend in Indian National Movement. The rising peasant movement increasingly moved towards the left. The congress socialists and communists after 1935 became active members of the congress. Jawaharlal Nehru started propagating socialism. The congress was increasingly radicalized. This radicalization found expression in Karachi Resolution in 1934 and Nehru's presidential address in Lucknow Congress in early 1936. During this period several nationalist leaders turned to Marxism and the Congress Socialist Party was able to acquire strong or even dominant influence in Orissa.<sup>41</sup> In February 1933, Utkal Samyabadi Karmi Sangh (Utkal Congress Socialist Workers League) was set up at Cuttack and it

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<sup>39</sup>. *Ibid.* p. 112.

<sup>40</sup>. Nayak, Birendra Kumar, *Gandhian Perspectives*, Vol.X, No. 12, 1997, pp.71-72.

<sup>41</sup>. Chandra, Bipan, *Social Scientist*, Vol. 14, No. 879, August-September, 1986, p.19.

became a forum of discussion within Utkal Pradesh Congress Committee. This marked the beginning of Socialist Organization in Orissa. The members of this group were Nabakrishna Chaudhary, Malati Chaudhury, Gaur Chandra Ghosh, Dibakar Pattanaik, Gatikrishna Swain and Gaurishankar Samal.

They published a weekly journal (newspaper) named *Sarathi* on behalf of the Utkal Congress Socialist Workers League. In 1935 Congress Socialist Party launched another monthly journal named *Adhunika* and a cultural organization called *Nabayuga Sahitya Sansad*. The literary initiative in forms of *Adhunika* was dominated by a fair amount of discussion on Marxist ideology and the journal heavily leaned towards Soviet Union for a distinct communist orientation. Finally, Utkal Congress Socialist Workers League was affiliated to All India Congress Socialist Party and worked as provincial unit of it in Orissa from September 1934. This shows that the platform attempted to build up socialist hegemony over the existing congress movement.<sup>42</sup>

Describing the nature of political activities carried on by these societies, Dwivedy, the prominent socialist of the period remarked

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<sup>42</sup>. Nanda, Chandi Prasad, *Orissa Review*, Vol. XLVI, No. 1, 1989, pp. 145 – 146.

“we decided to go from village to village holding meetings, getting peasants signature on a printed appeal to the Government asking for remission. As this was an appeal to the Government they might not create any obstacle. The Zamindars might not also oppose our move, as they would also be benefited by a corresponding rebate in revenue. Secondly, we would easily enter the villages and organize the peasants by setting up *Krushak Sangh*”. In the Zamindari areas the peasants had no rights over trees in their fields or over the fish in the pond near their house. So the Zamindars and moneylenders found it easy to extract *illegal cesses* from the peasants. So in such circumstances, it was unrealistic to conceive of organizing the peasantry on the basis of class struggle. For this hour, the programme was to work in such a fashion as to make peasants fearless and consequently sought the need to be inside congress and preferred to work with non-socialists in the peasant conference. During this period, consistent ideological campaigns through public meetings were organized against oppressive, exploitative and arbitrary rule. Kisan processions became the major pre-occupation of Congress Socialist Party.<sup>43</sup> Besides these Congress Socialist Party in Orissa since its inception followed more positive attitude towards the Garjat states. With the active cooperation of the Congress Socialist

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<sup>43</sup>. *Ibid.* p.146.



Party, the Orissa State Peoples' Conference (Garjat Praja Sammilani) was founded in Cuttack in 20<sup>th</sup> June 1931, under the leadership of Bhubanananda Das.

It kindled a new hope among the people of the states to present their demands in an organized way. But the organization failed to achieve much success as attempts were made to suppress the organization.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>44</sup>. Pradhan, Sadasiba, *Agrarian Political Movements, Op.cit.*, p.90, and Behera K. S. in *Souvenirs*, 1999, p.11.

## **PEASANT ORGANIZATIONS AND PEASANT**

### **MOBILIZATION: 1936-39**

With the withdrawal of Civil Disobedience Movement in Orissa out of disillusionment, there emerged the socialist trend as well as the realization among the youthful socialists of the need to have a fighting front for the peasants. The stage was thus prepared for the birth of Krushak Sangh in 1935.<sup>1</sup>

As early as the end of 1933 and the beginning of 1934 attempt of organizing peasants at district levels had been made. Harekrushna Mahatab was organizing the peasants at Balasore to secure remission of rents towards the end of 1933. On 6th February 1934, a peasant meeting was held and it was attended by more than two thousand peasants at Bhadrak (Balasore). Harekrushna Mahatab and Lingaraj Mishra, stressed the necessity of forming peasant organizations to compel the authorities to reduce rents. In the meeting, the peasants were fed free.<sup>2</sup> Throughout 1933 the officials apprehended that the followers of Jawaharlal Nehru in Orissa were developing the possibility of peasant movement. They were also afraid of the fact that taking advantage of natural calamities like floods, the leaders might persuade

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<sup>1</sup>. Pati, Biswamoy, *Social Scientist*, Vol.20, No.5&6, May & June 1992, p.64.

<sup>2</sup>. Nanda, Chandi Prasad, *Orissa Review*, Vol. XLVI, No. 1, 1989, p. 148.

the ryots to join in a “no-rent campaign”.<sup>3</sup> The apprehension of the possibility of a peasant movement in Balasore due to the activities of Mahatab also remained strong on the official mind in the beginning of 1934. In 1935 there was marked by a lull in political activities in Orissa. However, the Congress Socialist Party undertook to organize Kisan Sanghs in Cuttack, Puri and Balasore districts. Their activities revived and attained renewed vigor in 1936. Congress workers also devoted themselves to peasant agitation and advocated the programme of village reconstruction to remove the grievances of peasants and to relieve their distress.<sup>4</sup>

The new province of Orissa as first linguistic state of India came into existence in 1st April 1936.<sup>5</sup> The election campaign of the Congress officially started on 13<sup>th</sup> September 1936. The Congress election Campaign in Orissa got immense moral boost by arrival of Jawaharlal Nehru on 10<sup>th</sup> November 1936. He addressed meetings in a number of places like Salepur, Chandol, Kendrapara, Jagatsinghpur, Cuttack, Puri and Berhampur. Everywhere he was enthusiastically received and large number of people especially peasants from the rural

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<sup>3</sup>. Mahatab H.K., *History of Freedom Movement in Orissa*, Vol. V, Cuttack, 1957, pp. 22-25.

<sup>4</sup>. Nanda, Chandi Prasad, *Op.cit.*, p. 148.

<sup>5</sup>. Behera, K. S. *Souvenir*, 1994, p.11.

villages overcrowded his meetings. Pandit Nehru pointed out that “Swaraj” was nothing unless all kinds of exploitation ended. He also added that “Swaraj” meant "Swaraj" of the masses not of the classes. In that connection he vehemently criticized the policy of the Zamindars and personally he was in favour of its abolition.<sup>6</sup>

In Cuttack Townhall, Pandit Nehru addressed a gathering of ten thousand peasants.<sup>7</sup> At Puri Pandit Nehru, said that by casting votes for Zamindars and rich men, that would only invite miseries upon the poor peasants and the countrymen at large. In the meeting at Berhampur, Panditji pointed out that, only when British imperialism is vanished from India, socialism could be established in order to remove the miseries of the people. Thus, Nehru in his mass meetings in Orissa outlined the Congress programmes before the people.

It should be mentioned here that a powerful section of the Congress Party in Orissa belonged to the so-called socialist-group. They championed the cause of the peasants<sup>8</sup> and established Krushak Sanghs(Peasants Association) in 1935 under the presidentship of

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<sup>6</sup>. Patra, K. M. *Orissa State Legislature and Freedom struggle (1912-1947)*, People Publishing House, New Delhi, 1979.

<sup>7</sup>. Nanda, Chandi Prasad, *Op.cit.*, p. 148.

<sup>8</sup>. Patra, K. M. *Op.cit.*, p.96,

Mahatab.<sup>9</sup> Finally the Utkal Provincial Krushak Sangh was formed with Pandit Pranakrushna Padihary as President, Smt. Malati Choudhury and Surendra Nath Dwivedy as Secretaries.<sup>10</sup> It prepared an election manifesto, which the Utkal Provincial Congress Committee was bound to accept for the 1937 elections and the kisan support to Congress was ensured.<sup>11</sup>

In 1936, a peasant's conference was held at Bagalpur under the chairmanship of Mahatab and it was resolved besides many other suggestions that the peasant should not pay "*Salami*" to the Zamindars. During 1936 a good number of Kisan meetings particularly in the districts of Cuttack and Balasore were held and the Kisans were exhorted to resist the unjust exactions by the Zamindars. The peasants were mobilized by observing Srijang Day on 13<sup>th</sup> July 1936 at Cuttack and celebrating All India Kisan Day on September 1936 in various places of Orissa.<sup>12</sup> Around fifteen thousand Kisans marched through Cuttack city, shouting slogans of "Down with Imperialism", "Abolition of landlordism" etc.

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<sup>9</sup>. Samal, J. K. (ed.), *A Comprehensive History and Culture of Orissa*, Vol.II, Kaveri Book, New Delhi, 1997, p. 340.

<sup>10</sup>. *Ibid.* p. 340.

<sup>11</sup>. Rasul, M. A. *A History of All India Kisan Sabha*, National Book Agency, Pvt. Ltd., Calcutta, 1974, p. 26.

<sup>12</sup>. Samal, J. K. (ed.), *Op.cit.*, p. 340.

The second session of the Utkal Provincial Kisan Conference was held in November 1937 under the presidentship of Swami Sahajananda Saraswati. Some Congress leaders like Nilakantha Das, however carried on anti-Kisan Sabha campaign.<sup>13</sup> Provision was made to establish Kisan organizations at different levels. By which (1) Pradeshika Krushk Sangh (state levels), (2) Zilla, Krushk Sangh (district level), (3) Thana Krushak Sangh (Thana level), (4) Grama Krushak Sangh (village level) were set up so that the peasant masses could actively participate.<sup>14</sup>

Consequently, the membership of Utkal Provincial Krushak Sangh rose to twenty thousand in Cuttack, Puri and Balasore and thirty thousand-membership rose in the Princely States of Orissa.<sup>15</sup>

The Congress Election Manifesto issued by Provincial Congress Committee, pointed out various issues of all-India nature. It also added a number of issues, specially designed for Orissa. The following demands were included (1) abolition of Permanent Settlement affecting Kanika, Paralakhemundi and number of small landlords in Ganjam and Cuttack and the very important Zamindari of Joypure (2)

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<sup>13</sup>. Rasul. M. A. *Op.cit.*, p.26.

<sup>14</sup>. Mishra, Bichitra Nanda, in M. A. Karnal (ed.), Vol. *Peasant and Peasant Protests*, Intellectual Publishing House, New Delhi, 1989, p. 131.

<sup>15</sup>. Pati, Biswamoy, *Social Scientist*, Vol. 27, No. 7&8, July August 1999, p.80.

remission of arrears of rents and land revenue (3) reduction of all rents and water rents by half percent (4) graduation of all rents on the line of income tax (families with an income of less than Rs. 250 a year being excused altogether) (5) amendment of Tenancy Act in various respects to the detriment of landlords (6) forest lands to be thrown open to neighbouring villages (7) securing a living wage of labourers (8) death-duty on property over Rs. 20,000 and succession duty as well (9) free primary education (10) religious endowment to be diverted to upkeep of schools and dispensaries.<sup>16</sup>

The first Congress Ministry was formed in July 1937<sup>17</sup> headed by Biswanath Das.<sup>18</sup> The Faizpur session of the Indian National Congress was held under the presidentship of Jawaharlal Nehru on 27<sup>th</sup> December 1936. Arguing in favour of the peasantry Nehru was absolutely clear that the Zamindari system was most detrimental to the interest of peasants:

“Land is considered to be the property of the Zamindars. The Zamindar does not work on his land but enjoys its fruits sitting at home. He gives his land to the peasants on rent and is always taken

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<sup>16</sup>. Chopra, P.N. (ed.), *Towards Freedom, (1937-47)*, Vol.1, New Delhi, 1986, pp. 113-114.

<sup>17</sup>. Senapati, Nilamani, *Orissa District Gazetteers*, Sambalpur, 1971, p.81.

<sup>18</sup>. Behera, K. S. *Op.cit.*, p.11.

out by extracting as much rent as he possibly can. It is my belief that the land should belong to the person who tills it and not to the Zamindars or Talukdar. We should also try to have "Swaraj" in our country not to the capitalist but of the poor and the peasants... The present day Zamindars and Talukdars in fact a burden on the country".<sup>19</sup>

In other words Nehru was not merely engrossed in the problems of reduction of rent and legislation against eviction of tenants from their land but he was also convinced that the socio-economic system which was based on a feudal structure had no right to exist. Ideologically therefore, he was determined to sweep off the landlords as a class.<sup>20</sup> The Congress activities of Orissa made the peasants conscious about their rights and potentialities. On the occasion of celebration of All India Peasants Day on 1st September 1937 about ten thousand peasants met the Prime Minister of Orissa and presented their demands. During this time, the peasant agitation in Kanika Estate became vigorous due to the organizing skill and leadership of Chakradhar Behera. The Raja of Puri, Khalikote, Kanika and some other Zamindars did not appreciate the Congress Party and the

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<sup>19</sup>. Pandey, B. N. (ed.), *A Centenary History of Indian National Congress (1919-1935)*, Vol.II, Vikash Publishiung House, Pvt. Ltd., 1985, pp. 483-484.

<sup>20</sup>. *Ibid.* p.484.



government. On the other hand Socialist leader like Surendranath Dwivedy, upheld the cause of peasants through his journal *Krushak*. The Congress activities inspired the peasants for “no-tax campaign”. The year 1938 witnessed peasant unrest in vigorous proportion in many parts of Orissa against the non-payment of unauthorized taxes to the Zamindards, abolition of forced labour, which were their important demands.<sup>21</sup>

In 1937 the Congress Socialist Party in Orissa chalked out an agrarian programme for the Ministry if it at all the Congress accepted the office.<sup>22</sup> It included the following demands (1) fifty percent reduction of rent and revenue (2) abolition of landlordism with compensation (3) stoppage of payment of illegal taxes such as “*Salami*” to the Zamindars (4) amendment of Tenancy laws i.e., the Madras Estate Land (Orissa Amendment) Bill 1937 and the Orissa Tenancy (Amendment) Bill 1937.

The Madras Estate Land (Orissa Amendment) Bill 1937 was applicable to the area which was joined in Orissa in 1936 from the Madras Presidency especially Ganjam. The rent collected in this area was very high since it was calculated on the basis of half of the gross produce of the land. This was much higher than the adjoining areas

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<sup>21</sup>. Samal, J.K (ed.), *Op.cit.*, p.340.

<sup>22</sup>. Mahatab, H. K. *Op.cit.*, p.28.

of the province. Consequently, the Bill aimed at rationalizing the rent structure by reducing it to the rent prevailing in the nearest Raitwari areas in the province with similar conditions. It was referred to the Select Committee. Before it was brought back to the House the Provincial Congress Committee made an abortive attempt for a compromise with the landlords of South Orissa by offering some concessions.<sup>23</sup> The Bill became highly controversial and the opposition protested against it vehemently that the passage of the Bill was delayed as long as 5<sup>th</sup> February 1938. The Raja of Khalikote termed it as “ a revolutionary measure unknown in the history of the legislation in India”. Mandhata Gorachand Patnaik called it “a hasty piece of legislation”. The Bill was referred to a Select Committee, which discussed almost every clause and every section of the Bill.<sup>24</sup> Steps were also taken for a compromise between the Congress and the opposition for a postponement of the discussion on the Bill. But that also failed, as Zamindars of South Orissa headed by the Raja of Khalikote and Mandhata Gorachand Patnaik, did not agree to reduce the rent. The Bill thus, again was brought before House on 26<sup>th</sup> January 1938 and was passed on 5<sup>th</sup> February 1938. In spite of repeated appeals by the Congress to give his assent, the Governor

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<sup>23</sup>. Patra, K. M. *Op.cit.*, pp. 118-119.

<sup>24</sup>. *Indian Annual Register, 1938*, Vol.1, p.261. NAI, New Delhi.

General kept silent for three years and vetoed the Bill in February 1941, stating that there had no general investigation prior to the promotion of the Bill and that no negotiations conducted between the representatives of both the interests.<sup>25</sup> Thus, the first Tenancy Legislation by the Congress Ministry with an aim of ameliorating the condition of peasants of South Orissa ended in failure. The Krushak Sangh wanted the Ministry to resign in case the Bill was not passed by June 1938 and lead the peasants in a civil disobedience movement. However, the “un-preparedness” of the Congress to force a ministerial crisis on this issue and shift to a pro-landlord position prevented such a development.<sup>26</sup>

The Orissa Tenancy Act, which was passed by the Bihar and Orissa Legislative Council in 1913, had not been amended to suit the changed situation of the tenants of Orissa. Nityananda Kanungo, the Revenue Minister, therefore, introduced the Orissa Tenancy (Amendment) Bill in 1937 in the assembly on 25<sup>th</sup> September 1937. This Bill aimed at the abolition of mutation fees reduction at the rate of interest on arrear rents, tenants right to cut trees on their holdings and abolition of imposition, apart from the lawfully payable rent.<sup>27</sup> The landed sections responded to it with serious panic. The Premier

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<sup>25</sup>. *Indian Annual Register, 1941*, Vol.1, p.37.

<sup>26</sup>. Pati, Biswamoy, *Social Scientist*, Vol.20, No.5-6, May-June, 1992, p.64.

<sup>27</sup>. Patnaik, Brajendra Nath, *Orissa Review*, Vol.XLVI, No.1, 1989, p.161.

harped by the pressure of the peasant movement while pointing out that unless these small things were done the landlords would scrap as a class. Outside the legislature the landlords got together and expressed their anger at the Bill and prayed to the government not to pass it. They also pledged to fight the evil of socialism.

By this time the Bill was passed but a retreat was already visible. Thus the Congress Ministry agreed to an amendment which stated that if the right of the landlords over trees were recorded in the settlement or had been established in Civil Courts then the peasants had to pay a compensation to the landlords to secure this right. The Congress also backed out from its position regarding the mutation fees by agreeing to abolish it in degrees. Besides, as pointed out by the Krushak Sangh the Bill had nothing to offer regarding the rights of thousands of non-occupancy tenants.<sup>28</sup> After a prolonged debate on the Bill, it was finally passed on 3<sup>rd</sup> May 1938 with a little modification. The final Act provided for (1) absolute right on occupancy-tenants over trees, flowers, fruits and other products and to fell utilize on dispose of timber of any tree or their lands except when the rights of landlords had been recorded in the settlements or

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<sup>28</sup>. Pati, Biswamoy, *Op.cit.*, p.74.

had been established in Civil Courts in which the tenants were to apply to the Collector for their rights on trees and pay reasonable compensation to the landlords (2) free transfer of land without fee (3) compulsory registration of documents (4) reduction of rate of interest on arrear rent from 12½ percent to 6 percent and (5) regular trial of landlords guilty of illegal levies with fine upto Rs. 500/- or simple imprisonment not exceeding six months.<sup>29</sup>

The Congress Ministry introduced the Orissa Moneylenders Bill on 25<sup>th</sup> July 1938. It laid down the provision that the moneylenders had to register in order to carry out their practices. It sought to prevent moneylenders from realizing interests to more than the amount that had been advanced, with a right to open up old accounts from 1<sup>st</sup> April 1936 for the purpose of calculations. The Bill introduced the principle of simple interest rate not exceeding nine percent in case of a secured loan and twelve percent in case of an unsecured loan. Finally, it provided for some penalty for illegal extortions like cancellation of registration of certificates given to them. It may be noted here that the Krushak Sangh had demanded six percent interest on secured loans and nine percent interest for

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<sup>29</sup>. Patra, K. M. *Op.cit.*, pp.127-128.

unsecured loans. The Governor gave his assent on this Bill on 30<sup>th</sup> June 1939.<sup>30</sup>

The Congress Ministry further introduced the Orissa Cooperative Land Mortgage Bank Bill on 24<sup>th</sup> January 1938. The Bill provided for loans to the Raiyats at a low rate interest from the Mortgage Bank for development of land and other agricultural purposes. As it was feared that in some cases the agriculturalists misused the loan Latifur Rehman, suggested that loans should be granted only after scrutiny of the applications and steps should be taken to ensure their proper utilization. This amendment was accepted after discussion for only two days the Bill was passed in the Assembly.<sup>31</sup>

Besides these, the Congress Ministry also took steps to provide relief to small peasants proprietors holding not more than six acres of irrigated land or twelve acres of land and who were cultivating the land themselves or through the farm servants. The Orissa Small Land Holders Relief Act, aimed at the prevention of eviction of small holders and sale of their movable property. According to this Act, the proceedings in Civil Courts for the sale of land of small holders for the recovery of any debt under a decree would be stayed on the

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<sup>30</sup>. Pati, Biswamoy, *Op.cit.*, p.74.

<sup>31</sup>. Patnaik, Brajendra Narayan, *Op.cit.*, p.161.

application of the small holder unless the court for reasons to be recorded in writing would decide that, this would cause substantial loss to the decree holders.<sup>32</sup>

Malati Devi, the member of the Congress Socialist Party was elected to the All India Central Kisan Committee in March 1939. The All India Kisan Conference deputed Jaya Prakash Narayan and Sahajandra Swaraswati to visit Cuttak and hold an enquiry to review the activities of the Utkal Provincial Kisan Sangh. In their report they held that, though the Kisan Sabha had carried on its work till the middle of 1938, its work had remarkably slowed down due to a kind of most “deplorable political factionalism”, that confronted the Ministry and to the “pre-occupation of the Kisan leaders with State People’s activities”. The report pointed out that in Puri there were eighteen Kisan Sabhas functioning in a total twenty-three thanas. This pointed to an ever-expanding base of Kisan Organization. As per the suggestion of the report to strengthen the Kisan Sabha activities, Prana Nath Patnaik was elected as the Secretary of the Utkal Provincial Kisan Sabha. The agrarian discontent manifested throughout Orissa. Being a flood-prone province, the demand for remission of rents and taxes was a long-standing one. As early as 1933 the official report noted that ‘petitioners for the remission of

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<sup>32</sup>. *Ibid.* p.162

rent and canal cess are pouring in not only flood affected tracts, but in Balasore where there had been no flood...Mahatab was attempting to organize peasants with the object of securing reduction of taxes and in the event of failure to start a "no-rent campaign".<sup>33</sup>

In general peasants conferences were held in Cuttack, Puri, Balasore, Sambalpur, Ganjam where resolutions advocating pro-peasant laws and abolition of *bethi* and *rasad* were passed. Besides resolutions of demanding remission of revenue, compulsory education for children and facilities for the Harijans were the other notable aspect of small demands.<sup>34</sup>

The State Peoples movement remained a major issue for the leadership in Orissa during late 1930s and it provided a great deal of radical thrust for the national movement. The mass movement that developed in the Orissan States was primarily due to terribly backward political and social condition prevalent in the states. The mass nature of movement was obtained due to the fact that ninety five percent of Orissa states population was peasantry whether higher castes or Harijans. They used to suffer equal disabilities<sup>35</sup>. With these unhappy conditions the first Orissa State Peoples Conference was organized in 1931 at Cuttack with the active co-operation of the All

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<sup>33</sup>. Nanda, Chandi Prasad, *Op.cit.*, p.150.

<sup>34</sup>. *Ibid.* p.150

<sup>35</sup>. *Ibid.* p.150.



Indian States Peoples' Conference. In this conference an appeal was made to the rulers for the abolition of the obnoxious *bethi* and *begar* system from the states. When the election of Orissa Legislative Assembly took place, Congress and Krushak Sangh workers organized a number of mass meetings in Orissa. Although, the Congress was sympathetic towards the Orissa State Peoples movement but it did not allow itself to be actively involved in their movement.<sup>36</sup>

To revitalize the State Peoples movement, Sarangadhar Das of Dhenkanal State attempted to organize the peasants during this period. The second session of the Orissa State Peoples Conference was held at Cuttack in June 1937. Dr. Pattabhai Sitaramaya, the President of the All India States Peoples Conference (AISPC) presided over it. Only about hundred people consisted of peasants from eight states out of twenty-four attended. Many people failed to attend the conference because of the preventive measures taken by the States administration. Many resolutions were passed to rejuvenate the conditions of the peasants. The most important among them were (i) the right of occupancy on their holdings (ii) the fundamental right of

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<sup>36</sup>. Rath, Brajendra Nath, *Orissa, Review*, Vol. XLVI, No.1, 1989, p.119.

citizenship (iii) a strong plea was made for the abolition of the evil practice of extracting *rasad, magan, bethi* and *bheti*.<sup>37</sup>

The Working Committee of the Conference consisted of President, Secretary, Treasurer and eight other members elected by the conference. The following were elected to the working committee.

**President** : Dr. Pattabhi Sitaramayya

**Secretary** : Sarangadhar Das (Dhenkanal)

**Treasurer** : Dr. Biswanath Das (Nayagarh)

**Members** : Lalmohan Pati (Maurbhanj)

Balukeswar Acharya (Hindol)

Radhanath Rath (Athagarh)

Harmohan Patnaik (Dhenkanal)

Govinda Chandra Mishra (Dasapalla)

Madhusudan Mohanty (Athagarh)

Madhusudan Patnaik (Tigiria)

Gangadhar Mishra (Ranpur)

The permanent office of the Working Committee was set up at Cuttak. The secretary remained in entire charge of the conference and was responsible to the working committee. The conference had also resolved to affiliate itself to the All India States People

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<sup>37</sup>. *Ibid.* p.119.

Conference.<sup>38</sup>

### **STATES ENQUIRY COMMITTEE**

After the constitutional changes in the provinces and the inauguration of Provincial Autonomy and the advent of Congress Ministry brought about a great psychological change in the outlook of these oppressed people of the Orissan States. In such a time the Orissa States People Enquiry Committee with Harekrushna Mahatab as President Balavantarai Mehta and Lalmohan Patnaik as members moved to hear the people and the peasantry came forward in hundred to lay their grievances before them. Many of the rulers tried to prevent such evidence being forthcoming. Just at this time, the rulers of Nilgiri created a serious situation in his estate by imposing of heavy fines on the peasants for the "offence" of interdinning on a social occasion.<sup>39</sup>

Renewed repression started in various states particularly in Nilgiri, Dhenkanal and Talcher, which later became matters of History of Freedom Movement. Peaceful civil resistance also started in

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<sup>38</sup>. *Ibid.* pp.119-120.

<sup>39</sup>. Das, M. N. (ed.), *Op. cit.*, pp.285-286.

states like Athagarh, Tigiria, Baramba and Narasinghpur under the guidance of the respective Prajamandal leaders. The rulers of these states more or less followed the repressive policy of their fellow rulers of Dhenkanal and Talcher and they had also their share of firing and lathi charges on innocent and peaceful crowds, following the declaration of the Prajamandals in their estates as unlawful and going back upon their departments and assurance given before in response to the agitation and demand of the Prajamandals. There was great agitation in almost all the Orissan states on account of the widespread activities of the Prajamandals.<sup>40</sup>

Though the leaders professed non-violent means of agitation because of the strained relationship, tension mounted and it took a serious turn towards the last part of 1938 and in the beginning of 1939. The Police Administration Report mentions "...agitation in the Orissan States had been working towards climax and this was related in the first week of January when Major Bazelette, the Political Agent was put to death by a large mob in the capital of Ranpur state in 1939". The agitation of Ranpur state took violent turn during the later part of December and especially from 2<sup>nd</sup> January 1939, following the declaration of the Ranpur Prajamandal as unlawful

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<sup>40</sup>. Behuria, N.C. *Orissa District Gazetteers*, Cuttack, 1996, p.117.

organization and the arrest of the leaders. As the agitation took violent turn it claimed the life of two tenants.<sup>41</sup>

The murder of Political Agent, Major Bazelette in Ranpur State caused mixed reaction among the leaders. They came to the conclusion that, it was the necessary outcome of the oppressive rule of the state and a fitting response of the people to the injustice suffered by them. On the other hand the important leaders started questioning themselves, that how the Congress policy of non-violence could be maintained if the party's platform allowed to be used by violent and responsible elements in politics, whose ideas were based on revolution rather than evolution. F.G. Bailey remarked, "The movement seems to have lost sight of its non-violent intentions and became a form of guerilla warfare".<sup>42</sup>

Along with this incident in the other states also where the agitation was becoming stronger for the redress of popular grievances. The arrest of Prajamandal leader Banamali Das, increased the trouble and it led to the renewed activity on the part of the Prajamandal to which the State authorities related by employing forcible measures on the agitators".<sup>43</sup> On 11<sup>th</sup> August 1938 the state police restored to firing for the first time on a procession of the

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<sup>41</sup>. Mishra, Bichitra Nanda, *Op.cit.*, p.142.

<sup>42</sup>. *Ibid.* p.143.

<sup>43</sup>. *Ibid.* p.442.

Prajamandal workers. Large number of agitators were injured and courted arrest. Besides these, they were physically tortured and heavily fined. When the situation deteriorated a settlement was arrived at through the mediation of the Political Agent Bezeglette, District Magistrate of Balasore and H.K. Mahatab, the member of All India Congress Committee by which the evil practices of *bethi* and *magan* were abolished. But the agreement proved to be short lived and the state administration could not tolerate the persistent demand of the Prajamandal to introduce several reforms. The Ruler declared the Prajamandal illegal on 5<sup>th</sup> February 1939.<sup>44</sup>

In Dhenkanal around this time similar incident occurred to the demands of abolition of obnoxious *bethi* and *magana*, enactment of tenancy law as per clauses of Orissa Tenancy Act. The other demands included amendment of forest laws, abolition of an import and export restrictions, abolition of monopoly system in pan (betel-leaf), protection of crops from the ravage of wild animals etc. Under the auspices of the Cuttack District Krushak Sangh a rally was organized to celebrate the All Indian Kisan Day on 1<sup>st</sup> September 1938. On the second day under the presidentship of Sarangdhar Das, the Secretary of the Orissa State People Conference, Prajamandal Conference was held with huge gathering. The state to disperse the

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<sup>44</sup>. Rath, Bichitra Nanda, *Op.cit.*, p.121.

crowd took offense and arrested the prominent leaders of Prajamandal. There was vast demonstration of thousands of people consisted of peasants to protest against the unwarranted arrest of the Prajamandal leaders and to secure the release of the arrested leaders.<sup>45</sup> Fine was imposed to disperse the crowd. This incident was followed by a series of meetings. Four peasants were reported to have been missing and several others injured due to the incident.<sup>46</sup>

In Talcher on 6<sup>th</sup> September 1938 under the presidentship of Pabitra Mohan Pradhan, Prajamandal was constituted. In this Prajamandal gathering a character of demand was passed containing some of seventeen items. Some of them were very general in nature like the abolition of *rasad*, *magan*, *bethi* and *bheti* and the monopoly system, the enhancement of tenancy laws, rationalization of the rent system and the amendment of forest laws to cope with the local situation, abolition of fees for the social functions like marriage, remarriage, widow-remarriage, atonement for the death of a cow etc. The ruler received the charter of demand on 11<sup>th</sup> September 1938 but the ruler of the state banned the Prajamandal and arrested the leaders.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>45</sup>. *Ibid.* p.122.

<sup>46</sup>. Mishra, Bichatra Nanda, *Op.cit.*, p.142.

<sup>47</sup>. Rath, Bijay Chandra, *Op.cit.*, p, 142.

The movement also started in Nayagarh during this period. The peasants had no property right over their land and the rate of rent was higher in comparison to the district of Ganjam and Puri. The forest rules were very strict and the privileges enjoyed by the peasants were drastically curtailed. Punishment for violating forest law was very heavy. Realization of fees for offering worship in the temples of “Raghunath” and “Ladubaba” was special feature in the state of Nayagarh. There were a number of occasions in the past where the peasants expressed their resentment against the operation and misrule in the state resulting in inhuman police atrocities. The state experienced the worst possible draught in 1938 because of the scarcity of rainfall and the production was alarmingly low. There was acute food shortage in the state and the plight of the common people was miserable.<sup>48</sup>

In December 1938 Prajamandal movement started in the state of Nayagarh. Meeting and procession were banned and large number of persons were put into the prison and subjected to torture. At one stage the state administration was compelled to release some political prisoners. Besides this in Khandapara and Athagarh state the similar type of movement took place around this time. <sup>49</sup>

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<sup>48</sup>. *Ibid.* p.130.

<sup>49</sup>. *Ibid.* p.130.



The prominent Congress leaders of Orissa and some notable Indian leaders tried to intervene in the State Peoples agitation in order to bring about a settlement between the rulers and the ruled. Babu Rajendra Prasad, the former President of Independent India, Rev. C.F. Andrews, Miss Agatha Harrison (Secretary of Indian Conciliation Group, London), Dr. H.K. Mahatab and Professor N.G. Ranga – the prominent Kisan leaders and few others played important roles in bringing about such settlement.<sup>50</sup> The situation however changed when the Congress Ministry resigned from Orissa. The Political Department tightened its grip over the States. All the Prajamandals organized throughout the Princely States of Orissa were banned and the leaders were put into jail.<sup>51</sup>

The consequences of the peasant movement during this period i.e., 1936-39 were a mixture of achievement and failure. A series of legislative steps were taken by the Congress Ministry under the pressure of Krushak Sangh and Prajamandal to ameliorate the condition of the peasants of Orissa. Few legislations were introduced for the provision of credit through Co-operative Land Mortgage Banks, for preventing the eviction of small landholder from their land and the attachment and sale of their moveable property. The Orissa

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<sup>50</sup>. Behuria, N. C. *Op.cit.*, p.127.

<sup>51</sup>. *Ibid.* pp. 111-112.

Act-III of 1938 was important legislative measure taken in this direction.<sup>52</sup> Besides this Orissa Tenancy Law of 1913 was amended to confer better rights on the cultivators. Two significant amendments were made by it, were the conferment of full rights of occupancy tenants on the tree standing on the land and also permission to transfer their land without payment of fees to the landlords. Necessary provisions to carry out the mutation of landlord's papers were made. The right to sublet or mortgage the occupancy right was also stipulated as a necessary concomitant to these facilities. These legislative measures were indication of the success achieved by the agitation. In fact, both the Prajamandal and Krushak Sangh have gained enormously through the movement.<sup>53</sup>

Although it was not a fact that the imperial power had denied the existence of genuine grievances in the states, but was rather hesitant to press the Zamindars and the rulers for taking drastic remedial measures. Invariably, everywhere the colonial power intervened to curb the popular movement when, it could not be contained by the Zamindars and the Rulers. The net result was concession granted in the economic sphere. The British colonialism was condemned everywhere as the root trouble in the states and the

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<sup>52</sup>. Mishra, Bichatra Nanda, *Op.cit.*, p.144.

<sup>53</sup>. *Ibid.* pp, 144-145.

whole peasant movement was considered a part of the national movement.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>54</sup>. *Ibid.* P.145.

## CONCLUSION

The "Peasant Movement in Orissa: 1921-39" was one of the most important aspects of the National Movement in Orissa. The peasants were the subordinate, oppressed and exploited segments agitating against various agrarian limitations. Their agitation converged with the anti-imperialist struggle for freedom. The peasant movement during the period of study was explicitly and implicitly anti-landlord, anti-ruler and anti-imperialist in character. The peasantry of Orissa did not simply agitate against the enhanced land revenue, but for the various illegal cesses or *abwabs*, which levied on them by the superordinate classes such as the landlords, princely state rulers and the colonial state.

Another most important aspect of the peasant movement during this period was that the various illegal cesses or *abwabs* such as *bethi*, *rasad*, *magans* were a kind of exploitation of labour and the illegal cesses such as the daily necessities of life which has been explained in various chapters could be understood as a kind of exploitation of food, corvee etc. The tribal-peasants during this period liquidated the forest laws, which enabled them to re-assert their lost right over their forestlands.

Regarding the leadership during 1920s they agitated under the banner of Utkal Provincial Congress Committee for redressal of their grievances and in few cases they also got leadership from the holy men or saints. During 1930s with the transformation of nationalist ideology and the emergence of socialist trend within the Congress Party of Orissa, the peasant movement became more vigorous. The concept of “Swaraj” and “national independence” was associated with them as the end of exploitation and oppressive taxes.

The emergence of Utkal Krushak Sangh in 1935 in the state level, district level, thana level and village levels played important role to mobilize the peasantry, although their activities used to be regulated by the Congress. In the Princely States, the Prajamandals played most important role to mobilize the peasantry for multifarious agrarian issues. The Utkal Krushak Singh in Coastal Orissa and the Prajamandal in the Princely States of Orissa broaden the mass base of the peasant movement by demanding security of tenure, debt relief, cheap credit, all of which ignored the specific need and interests of the peasantry and the relationship between the peasant movement and the national movement in Orissa was one of reciprocity. Thus the anti-imperialist attitude of the peasantry could be estimated through the anti-landlords, anti-rulers and anti-moneylenders agitation of Orissan peasantry during this period.

Although the control of the Congress was not uniform, but the establishment of Congress Ministry in 1936-37 brought about a drastic change in the agrarian structure of Orissa by initiating various land revenue and other such reform measures. The prominent reform measures undertaken by the Congress Ministry was the Madras Estate Land (Orissa Amendment) Bill 1937, Orissa Tenancy (Amendment) Bill 1937, Orissa Co-operative Land Mortgage Bank Bill 1938, Orissa Moneylenders Bill 1939. But the two amendments made by the Congress Ministry such as the Orissa Tenancy (Amendment) Bill 1937, Madras Estates Land (Orissa Amendment) Bill 1937, were most significant than the others. Because by it the conferment of full rights of occupancy-tenants on the trees standing in their land and also permission to transfer their land without payment of fees to landlords were most significant. Necessary provisions for carrying out the mutation of landlords' papers were also made. The right to sublet or mortgage of the occupancy right was also stipulated as necessary concomitant to these facilities. These agrarian reform measures, which were introduced was the indication of the success achieved by the peasant movement during this period. In fact the Utkal Pradesh Congress Committee, Krushak Sangh and Prajamandal claimed to have gained enormously through the movement.

By and large, however, the movement fell short of the desired objectives. It failed to transform the agrarian structure radically. Besides this, the future of the movement can be analyzed from different angles. To begin with, wherever such peasants' agitation had taken place the colonial police forces got identified with the landlords, Princely States rulers to suppress the movement. So that in many cases the peasants had to evacuate their places. Secondly, tenants listened to their landlords and rulers instructions with respectful bows could not easily make the psychological break with their past. In Orissa the peasants could not even stand erect in front of the landlords and rulers of the states. Even when they visited the landlords or rulers he would have to greet them by performing the "*Sastanga Dandabata*" or "*Pranam*" (prostrate on the feet). These customs were very difficult to wipe out.

Besides these, the demands made by the peasantry could not attack the very fabric of the agrarian structure. The stress was more on the exploitation by the landlords and rulers of the states. Though abolition of Zamindarism and landlordism were included in the list of the demands, the immediate target of the peasants was to bring a change in the exploitative system. At the village level the agitation was about the excessive rent, *bethi*, *rasad*, *maqan* etc. Over emphasis

and concession in these aspects subsequently led them to neglect if not ignore the vital issue of a changing system.

Although the colonial authorities interfered when the peasants' agitation had taken place, but they failed to bring about lasting solution in the agrarian problems of Orissa. It may be pointed out that it was utter negligence and failure of the colonial government, incompetence of the landlord and rulers of the Princely States.

Thus, the peasant movement during this period experienced both success and failure. If the success is seen in the reduction of rent and concession by landlords and rulers of the states than the failure rooted in the structure which could not be changed completely till India got her independence in 1947. The most important achievement of the movement could be surmised as the increased consciousness among the peasants, which paid dividend later.



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