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SARANGADHAR DAS: THE GREAT FREEDOM FIGHTER OF DHENKANAL GARJAT MOVEMENT

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ABSTRACT:

India fought against two hundred years of misrule of British rule for her independence and got freedom on 15th August 1947. Peoples of every class and every section from every corner of India come forward to fight against British Govt. for their Independence. So many Leaders from Gandhiji to tribal, urban to rural, literate to illiterate, rich to poor men and women, children to adult participated in this National movement. Odisha/Orissa is one of the states of India

participated in this movement individually and with mass. Odisha was a single state where National movement and Odisha state formation movement was going on simultaneously. There were 26 Princely Garjat states in Odisha where peoples were suffering a lot with the misrule of rulers. Dhenkanal was one of the twenty six ex-feudatory states of Odisha. Ramachandra Mahindra Bhahadur, the then ruling chief of Dhenkanal received Sanad from the British and recognized them as the Paramount power. According to Sanad of 1862, Dhenkanal was described as the state and the ruling chief was finally described as "Raja." Sarangadhar was the son of Dhenkanal Garjat State. The King adopted "Bethi" system and it was the most oppressive method. The system like Rasad, Magan and Bethi were in vogue at that time. Sarangadhar observed that it was impossible to develop in agriculture and industrialization without the abolition of King's rule. So, he decided to take part in the Garjat movement. The objective of this study is to highlight the contribution of Sarangadhar in the Dhenkanal Garjat movement. To establish this theory the materials like primary and secondary sources may be consulted. This paper will establish Sarangadhar as a revolutionary, a scientist par excellence, a Parliamentarian and a prolific writer.

KEYWORDS: Garjat State, Dhenkanal, King Sankarpratap, Sarangadhar Das, Garjat Movement.

INTRODUCTION

The princely states of Orissa, twenty six in number, formed integral parts of Orissa from geographical, historical and cultural points of view. Dhenkanal was one of the twenty six ex-feudatory states of Orissa. Ramachandra

Mahindra Bhahadur, the then ruling chief of Dhenkanal received Sanad from the British and recognized them as the Paramount power. According to Sanad of 1862, Dhenkanal was described as the state and the ruling chief was finally described as "Raja." Sarangadhar was the son of Dhenkanal Garjat State. He was interested in going to foreign for technology. He was the second person who was going to establish Sugar factory

without help of the Government. But the king Sankarpratap wanted to exterminate the Sugar Factory. The King adopted "Bethi" system and it was the most oppressive method. The system like Rasad, Magan and Bethi were in vogue at that time. Sarangadhar observed that it was impossible to develop in agriculture and industrialization without the abolition of King's rule. So, he decided to take part in the Garjat movement. He was a

revolutionary, a scientist par excellence, a Parliamentarian and a prolific writer. He was popularly known as "Garjat Gandhi".

Context: The story of the freedom movement in Odisha would be incomplete without an account of the movement of the people in the princely states against the misrule of their autocratic rulers. This movement is known as people's movement. Dhenkanal was one of the twenty six ex-feudatory states of Odisha. It occupies a unique place in the annals of Odisha.¹

Sarangadhar Das was a vibrant freedom fighter. He was a Champion of Garjat Movement at Dhenkanal feudatory state. He was a revolutionary, a scientist par excellence, a parliamentarian and a prolific writer. He was popularly known as "Garjat Gandhi" for his sacrifices and love for the downtrodden.² Sarangadhar was born in the village Harekrushnapur on 17th October, 1886. His father, Harekrushna Das was a farmer who used to cultivate the land inside the terrains at the foot of Kapilas hill in his own village. He was blessed with three sons namely Gadadhar, Gangadhar and Sarangadhar and four daughters. Sarangadhar was the third child of his parents. His father passed away when he was only 11 years old. His mother Manika Devi was disturbed by his father's death. Tulasi Devi looked after him³.

Sarangadhar had to struggle hard after the death of his father. But his mother encouraged him to pursue his studies. After passing entrance examination from Dhenkanal Garh High School, he studied B.Sc. degree at Ravenshaw College⁴. The aim of Sarangadhar was not to join in Govt. Service but to establish Industry. He was interested in going to Japan for technology. But he had not sufficient resource to go there. Pyarimohan Acharya a well-wisher, informed him that a student helping organization at Calcutta was providing the financial aid to the meritorious students for going abroad for higher study in technology. He got Rs. 51/- per month for two years for his higher studies. But this amount was not adequate to go abroad. So, he had to request the ruler of Dhenkanal for financial aid. Finally, the ruler agreed to his proposal. He was also helped by Gopabandhu Das and Acharya Harihar in this regard. Then he was able to go to Japan for further study in the year 1907⁵.

He studied Chemistry for two years i.e. from 1907 to 1909 at Technological Institute of Tokyo⁶. He felt that Japan was not the worthy place to study Chemistry. So, he moved to America. He got himself admitted at the California University. He met a Sweden lady named Frieda Hauswirth. She was a writer and painter. Sarangadhar got married to Frieda in the year 1917⁷.

Sarangadhar returned to India with Frieda in the year 1917. He was a high styled sahib at that time. He had a dream how to make India an industrially developed country. But in each step, he faced difficulty. There was no significant development in field of industry. So, He was soon appointed as an advisor of the sugar Industry at Rangoon and Subsequently as secretary of a sugar Industry under TATA, General Manager of the sugar company at Niraluvi of Barmati. But he was not satisfied with all these jobs⁸. He did not forget his own village. The love of village pulled him to its lap. So, he took 12 acres of land on lease basis from the king of Dhenkanal for Sugar cane cultivation at Brahmakunda Jungle of Dhenkanal Garjat State.

He brought improved quality of agricultural equipment from different places. All the machinery parts were brought from Philippines by Sarangadhar. After Madhusudan, he was the second person who was going to establish a sugar Industry without the help of the Government. He had to labour hard in unhealthy condition and faced a lot of health hazards.⁹ In the year 1925, Sankarpratap was crowned as the king of Dhenkanal. His aim was to throw Sarangadhar out from Brahmakunda Jungle. The decision of the king at Dhenkanal came as a bolt from the blue. The king believed that Sarangadhar had a secret plan to go to foreign country again. The king was jealous of him. He motivated the subjects through the police not to work under Sarangadhar. The king wanted to exterminate the sugar factory. When Sarangadhar went to Calcutta for better treatment, Sankarpratap got the chance to destroy the factory. After returning from Calcutta, Sarangadhar marked that his factory had been completely destroyed. Sarangadhar was disheartened. His zeal broke down and felt frustrated.¹⁰

The king of Dhenkanal had reached at the peak of corruption and exploitation. He was involved with inhuman activities. He suppressed the people and the poor people fall a prey to him. The king adopted 'Bethi' System and it was the most oppressive method. The systems like Rasad, Magan and

Bethi were in vogue at the time. There was a turning point in the life of Sarangadhar when Frieda left him. The injustice and Maladministration of Dhenkanal was discussed in the Indian parliamentary rule. The king of Dhenkanal suspected Sarangadhar that he had given secret information to Bhubanananda Das, the member of British rule and had written letters to Gandhiji in order to form prajamandal movement. Sarangadhar understood that the main obstacle for industrialisation was king. He also observed that it was impossible to develop in agriculture and industrialization without the abolition of king's rule. So, he decided to take part in the freedom struggle. He thought of a revolution and that was translated into as Garjat movement.¹¹

The flame of the Garjat movement was vibrant, violent and Sarangadhar Das took the lead. He established an institution like "Praja Samilani". The Movement spread in the nook and corner of the entire Dhenkanal Garjat.¹²

Sarangadhar got inspiration from high personalities like Nabakrushna Choudhury, Malati Choudhry and Bhagabati Panigrahi. He gathered subscriptions from the well wishers from different parts of the country and arranged "Praja Samilani". In the year 1938, the first "Garjat Praja Samilani" was organized at Cuttack town hall under the chairmanship of Pattavi Sitaramaya. The praja Samilani decided to appoint an enquiry committee to probe in to the matter. The enquiry committee took evidence from different parts of Odisha. A strong organisation of prajamandal was formed by Sarangadhar at Dhenkanal. In the year 1938, Sarangadhar joined in the Congress Party being inspired by Gandhi. He also became secretary of All India People's Conference. The President of this organisation was Pt. Jawaharlal Neheru¹³.

On 1st and 2nd September 1939, a mass meeting of the Prajamandal was held at Jenapur in Cuttack, quite close to the border of Dhenkanal under the Presidentship of Sarangadhar Das. The proceeding of the meeting displayed a quiet but determined enthusiasm which appeared surprising and unprecedented to those who had known the state of affairs in Dhenkanal for last twelve years.¹⁴ One incident occurred on 10th October 1938, in the village of Bhuban. The state authorities had issued warrants of arrest against eighteen persons of the village. On the night of 10th October, a magistrate of the state was sent there accompanied by an armed force of forty under a sub-Inspector of police. The police arrested these eight of the persons. The villagers demanded immediate release of the arrested persons. The mob soon became uncontrolled. Police started firing at the crowd. Two persons were killed on the spot. The police chased by the villagers for about two miles reached the ferry ghat at Nilakanthapur and boarded a boat. But, the ghatmen refused to ferry the police party across the river. The chasing mob turned over the boat with the police party. The latter started firing at the mob. Four persons were killed at the place including a boy of 12 named Baji Rout. The next firing took place that night near the Hindol Railway station. The bodies of the six dead persons were taken to Cuttack and paraded in the streets of the city placing the Corpses on the bullock carts.¹⁵ The story of young Baji Rout who sacrificed his life at the age of 12 was an unforgettable incident of this Prajamandal agitation.¹⁶

On the occasion of the Bhuban firing on 10th October, all the different parties concerned with the Dhenkanal issue gave a call for the observance of the Garjat Day on 29th October. This was observed in many places particularly at Cuttack through processions and public meetings. In this meeting, Sarangadhar Das delivered a speech presenting the picture of a collaboration of British imperialism with the feudal autocracy of the princely states.

In the year 1946, Sarangadhar was elected as a member of Legislative Assembly of Odisha in the Tirtol-Erasama Constituency. Sarangadhar argued in the Assembly about the merging of Garjat States with Odisha Province. In the year 1948, he became the President of Utkal Nava Jivan Mandal. This Organisation's sole aim was to develop the intellectual awareness of the Scheduled Tribe. He marked that the Congress Party was working for the benefit of king's landlords and industrialists. But it was not working for the benefit of exploited subjects, landless farmers, labourers and Harijans. That's why; he resigned from both Assembly and Congress Party in the year 1948.¹⁸

He joined as a member of the socialist party in the year of 1949. In the year 1951, he was elected Member of Parliament from Dhenkanal-west- Cuttack joint Parliamentary constituency. His rival was

Madan Mohan Pradhan of the Congress Party. The Central Government gave importance to Sarangadhara's demand in Parliament on the Project of Hirakud Dam and the steel plant of Rourkela. The emotional speech of Sarangadhar in relating to the demand of merging Seraikela and Kharsawan with Odisha attracted the attention of all the members of Lok Sabha.¹⁹ In the years 1957, Sarangadhar was defeated by Nityananda Kanungo, the member of the Congress Party. He could not tolerate his defeat. He was not only mentally harassed but also physically weakened for this matter. He was admitted in a clinic of Cuttack for his treatment. Then he called a media Conference in order to donate all the materialistic pursuits to Acharya Narendra Dev Trust, Janaki Memorial Women and Children trust and Janaki memorial Education Trust. He contributed a lot to establish an Agricultural University and an Engineering College in Odisha. He was the member of managing committee of Agricultural faculty, Agricultural College and Burla Engineering College.²⁰

Sarangadhar Das was not only a social worker and a politician but also a prolific writer. Each of his letters was a literary creation. It described the sorrow, suffering and exploitation of the common mass. He had published a lot of works in the pseudo-name of "Landa Dehury".

His works are original out and out. He was a literary genius. All his letters were published in a magazine "Krushaka" edited by Surendra Dwivedy.²¹

CONCLUSION:

The last chapter of his life closed on 18th September 1957. Nehru said that Sarangadhar was his colleague in All India Garjat people Conference. Both of them worked as colleagues in the Parliament. It is unfortunate to say that Odisha has not yet tried to evaluate this great personality. He died with a great heritage leaving behind him. His contribution to freedom struggle is yet to be remembered. His Untimely death was a great loss not only for Odisha but also for the whole country.²² Really, he was a revolutionary, a scientist par excellence, a Parliamentarian and a prolific writer and Gandhi of Garjat movement.

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