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MOHAN NAYAK-THE CHAMPION OF HARIJAN MOVEMENT OF GANJAM DISTRICT: A HISTORIOGRAPHICAL STUDY

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ABSTRACT

Mohan Nayak was a prominent person worked in the field the Upliftment of lower Caste people in Ganjam, Odisha. He was a social reformer and devoted his whole life for the upliftment of elevation the Harijans of Ganjam district. In Berhampur, a Harijan Sangha was started by Mohan Nayak .He wrote a book Kalanka Mochan. He actively played an important role in Hotel entry and Temple entry movement in Odisha. He was the president of All India Harijan Sevak Sangha, Orissa Branch. Taking all the activities into consideration he was an earnest social reformer of South Odisha who organized great movement for the eradication of untouchability all over Odisha. For his social activities he was bestowed with the prestigious Padmashree award.



KEYWORDS: Harijan Leader, Temple Entry Movement, Upliftment, Social Reformer.

INTRODUCTION

Mohan Nayak was a great social reformer and freedom fighter of Ganjam district. He devoted his whole life for the upliftment of Harijans and of other social services. As a social reformer during his student life, social problems like untouchability draw his attention and since that time he worked hard for the eradication of untouchability.¹ In this paper an attempt has been made to study on his contributions towards a casteless society in Orissa, especially Ganjam district.

He was born in a Harijan family on 3rd June 1921 at Dhanamera in Berhampur. His father was Bijuli Nayak. On a day of Dhanu Sankranti, the dealings of the Brahmin priests of kali temple made him intolerable. It had a deep impact on his mind and since that day he decided to organize the common people for the emancipation of the untouchable.² In 1937 he left studies and joined the National movement. He made a whole hearted effort to end the hatredness towards Harijans by Savarnas or Non-Harijans.

The Dandasis of Ganjam had been branded as a criminal tribe in 1911. So he tried to improve their social status by the way of Sanskritization. About one thousand Dandasis met in a conference on 18 April 1924 under the Presidentship of Sashibhusan Rath, M.L.C, and took a vow to give up wine, stealing and eating beef.³ In 1936 he joined Indian National Congress. In Berhampur, a *Harijan Sangha* was started by Mohan Nayak assisted by his brother Damodar Nayak on 18th December 1938. The Sangha organized meeting and created awareness for removal of superstitions and social dogmas.⁴ On

2nd October 1938 he published a handwritten fortnightly magazine '*Harijan*' which contained number of articles of Gandhian ideas and criticized the policies of the Govt. towards the Harijanas problems. For this he was arrested for a day.

He was actively working with Thakkar Bapa by going through the Harijan Basties. In 1941 he was jailed two times for his involvement in individual Civil Disobedience Movement. He took a leading role in during the Quite India Movement and he was detained in prison from 1942 to 1945 for taking an active part during the Quite India movement. During the time in prison, he wrote a book named "*Kalanka Mochan*". This book gave a complete description of the historic event of entrance of Harijans into the *Jagannath* temple. This book also narrates the views of Mahatma Gandhi on the removal of the untouchability and his struggle against anti-caste movement.⁵

He was a member of *Utkal Pradesh Congress Committee*, Ganjam District Congress Committee and Secretary of District Congress. He was also elected to District Board in 1945-46. He published a magazine '*Shevak*' from 1948.⁶ He was nominated as a Councilor of Berhampur Municipality by the state government in 1952. He established "*Thakkar Bapa Ashram*" at Nimakhandi near Berhampur. The Ashram to imparted educational facilities to poor Harijan and Adivasi students. It is still running. A primary school was established by the Ashram in the year 1953 for Harijans and lower caste students.⁷ The workers of this Ashram visited villages to propagate the removal of untouchability, merits of classless society and the upliftment of the lower caste people .

He was elected to State Assembly from 1953 to 1957 and 1967 to 1977 he was the Member of Parliament. He was president of *Utkal Harijan Sevak Sangha* and awarded with the title "*Padmasree*" for social service. In 1974, he was a minister in state council of minister. His literal contribution of article of "*BSNAMALA*" was publish in "*Dadhibamana*" Magazin 1970-1971.⁸

He remained as the president of *All India Harijan Sevak Sangha*, Orissa Branch. During this period he played an important role in the *Hotel Entry and Temple Entry Movement* .⁹ He was instrumental for Harijan entry to Jagannath temple Puri through agitation. On his request the then chief minister, Harekrushna Mahatab brought a bill in the Assembly for the abolition of untouchability. He was felicitated by Jadumani Sahitya Sansad and Utkal Pathak Sansad. He died on 26th September, 1983.

Government passed a law which declared that if any body created obstruction of the Harijans on the way of the entry into hotel, temple and public places and wells would be fined within the Rs. 50/- and would be liable to imprisonment. With the advice of Dr. Mahatab he experimented the Hotel Entrance Movement at Berhampur. ¹⁰ He was assisted with Krupasindhu Panda, Dibakar Panigrahi and Jagannath Panda. Harijans entered into the hotels in groups in some places were allowed while in some other places they were misbehaved. The hotel owners who misbehaved and did not allow them to enter hotels were imprisoned and impose fines. From that time Harijans got their right to enter into the hotels and public places etc.¹¹

Role Of Temple Entry Movement

Mohan Nayak also did commandable job in the temple entry movement. During this period Harijans were disqualified from entering Jagannath Temple. For this reason Mahatma Gandhi never entered into Jagannath temple during his life time. The representatives who remained in charge of distributing the ashes of Gandhi in different parts of India denied to send it to Puri on the ground that Mahatma Gandhi never entered into the temple of Jagannath. It was a shock for the leaders of Orissa as Puri was considered as the gate of heaven and had been famous all over the world and if the ashes of Gandhi would not be thrown in to the sea at Puri, it would be a great insult to the people of Orissa. Accordingly Dr. H.K. Mahatab announced that "the Harijans who were not allowed to enter into Jagannath temple during the life time of Gandhi, will be allowed on the day of throwing of ashes of Gandhi into sea". The leadership was taken by Dr. Mahatab and the members of Service Committee agreed to send the ashes to Puri.¹² The entry of Harijans into the temple was a great event, though it was very difficult to convince to the orthodox Pandas (priests). Sri H.K. Mahatab and Nityananda Kanungo convinced the Pandas on one hand and Thakur King of Puri on the other. The king gave

assurance that if the Pujaks (priests) allowed the Harijans and the lower caste people into temple he would have no objection". The Pujaks then gave way with no objection.¹³

The Congress leaders tried to persuade Harijans for entry into the temple, but some people created fear in the minds of the Harijans that if they made entry into the temple the famous car festival would postponed for years. The Harijans of Puri denied to enter into the temple. So the Congress leaders decided to call the Harijans to enter into the temple under the leadership of Mohan Nayak .¹⁴

With the call of H.K. Mahatab, Mohan Nayak organized a group of Harijans from Berhampur and started his journey towards Puri. They also decided to continue Satyagrah in case of denial of the entry in to the temple. They wrote a promising letter which read, "We are Hindus and have every right to enter in to the Jagannath temple. On the 12th day of Gandhi's death all of us will enter in to the temple unitedly. Without entering in to the temple we will not return to our house. During the continuance of Satyagraha we will obey the direction of Mohan Nayak. We will be ready to bear every kind of pain at the time of Satyagraha. We will follow hunger strike in front the temple gate if necessary. We will not raise our hands in the face of blows and no satyagrahi will remain responsible for the death of others". They were arose the spirit of stability and encouragement in their heart.¹⁵

Under the leadership of Mohan Nayak the lower caste people and the down trodden started their historic journey towards the Jagannath temple and took the triple decision. First to enter into the temple freely, if there would no obstacle from outside, secondly to sit down If there would be obstacles and sleep in front of the temple if beaten. After understanding the point, they remained standing near the *Arun pillar*. The moment they stood near the Arun pillar (Arun Stamba), hundreds of worshippers came forward to obstruct them. At the time of harassment a social worker Satyabadi Nanda whispered to Mohan "do not fear, Dr Mahatab is residing in the guest house and you continue your Satyagraha till the work is completed". Mohan directed all the satyagrahis to keep their face down and sleep silently. The pandas who were standing in front of the satyagrahis started backward move feeling that they may be touched by the untouchables. When the satyagrahis reached the main door the pandas shut the door. After the closure of main door, the Harijanas sat down silently just near the door throughout the night in spite of heavy rainfall.¹⁶ On 13th February, 1948 the Government took the entire responsibility of the temple and the backward Harijan or untouchable people entered into the temple. That day was significant and historic day in Orissa because, Mohan Nayak, with the low caste people from Puri and other areas entered the temple and offered their prayers.¹⁷

CONCLUSION

In the National movement the participation was never considered whether somebody Harijan or not. This is the unique feature of National movement though India was riddled and crippled with caste system over the years. It was Gandhi who started a movement to end this. Mohan Nayak, a true Gandhian, followed his path and materialised the dream of the Temple Entry Movement into a reality in Orissa in general and South Orissa in Particular. Taking all these activities into consideration it has been said that late Mohan Nayak was an earnest social reformer of South Orissa who organized great movement for the eradication of untouchability all over Orissa. During his life time he was successful in most of his attempts in the removal of untouchability. For the above social works he was conferred with the prestigious Padmashree award.

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