

From the Tricolour Flag to the Red Flag Remembering Bhagirathi Pattanayak of Sambalpur of Odisha

Dr. Kamna Lohani

Asstt. Professor, Deptt.of History, Govt. Degree College, Chakrata,Dehradun (Uttarakhand)

Dr. Dinesh Narayan Verma

Director,S tudy and Research Centre, Uttarpalli, Rampurhat, Birbhum, W.B.

ABSTRACT

The valour and valiance of Bhagirathi Pattanayak (1884-1980), an outstanding dedicated freedom fighter, marked a revolutionary struggle for freedom in undivided Sambalpur of Odisha. His wife Jambuvati (1886-1943) accompanied him everywhere and actively supported the political activities of her husband. His son Prafulla Chandra Pattanayak (1917—2003) following the glorious path of his great nationalist parents also played a key role with his friends Shrikrishna Prasad of Bihar and K.Goplan of Kerala in organizing and leading tribals during nation-wide Quit India Movement 1942-1943 in Santal Parganas of Jharkhand. The political career of Bhagirathi started with his raising voice against the oppressive of Patana(a princely state) King Prithviraj Singh Deo. Later he joined Gandhian struggle against the colonial power and played a key role in its successive phases in Sambalpur and its adjoining regions. He participated in different sessions of Congress and led Quit India Movement in Sambalpur. Overwhelmed by the ideas and ideals of Mahatma Gandhi he also trained his wife Jambuvati and his son Prafulla Chandra Pattanayak to fight against British Rule. So they all actively participated in the successive phases of Gandhian Struggle for Freedom in Odisha and its neighbouring states and dedicated themselves to the service of the motherland. In spite of his unstinted contribution to the nationalist struggle, Pattanayak is not accorded due honour nor appropriate place in the history of Freedom Movement in India. But during last part of his life utterly disappointed by “corruption, nepotism and casteism flourished under ministerial protection” the ardent follower of Mahatma Gandhi, left Congress and joined Communist Party and proved to be its one of an important leaders. The paper traces and assesses multiple aspects of political life of Bhagirathi Pattanayak with radical change in his political thinking from the Tricolour Flag to the Red Flag.

Keywords: British, Struggle, Movement, Odisha, Freedom, Personality

Introduction:

The undivided Sambalpur of Odisha occupies an important place in the history of Freedom Struggle in India as a whole and in the State in particular. Many freedom fighters who led the people during consecutive phases of the Struggle played a ground role and sacrificed themselves for freedom from the bondage British rule. The freedom Struggle in Sambalpur passed through many ups and downs but remained firm and united in expelling the British from the country. Many freedom fighters facing colonial torture, arrested times and again, inspired and motivated people to come forward and join the Struggle for freedom but many of them remained unrecognized and unsung. In the galaxy of unsung freedom fighters of Sambalpur, the dynamic

personality, indomitable courage and unflinching patriotism etc. of Bhagirathi Pattanayak are still inspiring and needed to be traced and assessed in historical perspective.

Purpose and Motivation:

The underlying purpose of the paper is to trace and assess dedicated and dynamic role of Pattanayak of undivided Sambalpur of Odisha during consecutive phases of freedom struggle. Motivated by the idea and concept of nationalist school of Freedom Struggle, the paper mainly focuses on the political activities of Pattanayak during National Struggle in Odisha and its neighbouring states. Authentic historical sources disclose that personality

and political activities of Pattanayak with his wife and son inspired and motivated the people of Santal Parganas (then in Bihar, now in Jharkhand) to participate in National Struggle.

Methodology :

The paper is based on published sources published in Books, Journals and Souvenir. Swarnika(1984) published on birth centenary of Bhagirathi Pattanayak in Odiya and Hindi formed a most important source for authentic historical facts about the personality and political activities of Bhagirathi Pattanayak. Memoirs written by freedom fighters and contemporary scholars ,editors etc. are no less significant sources.

Hypothesis:

Sambalpur is a historical place ,mentioned by Ptolemy in his book, gloriously ruled by Chauhan Kings and finally came under British in first half of the nineteenth century. But Surendra Sai and his associates launched resistance movement against the British. These historical events much influenced the people and filled them with national feelings and many freedom fighters including Bhagirathi Pattanayak motivated them to join the Struggle against the British. It is replete with acts of indomitable courage, resolute dedication, unstinted sacrifice and unflinching patriotism.

Literature Reviewed

Apart from books a number of scholars also wrote papers on the History of Odisha and discussed its various aspects. But in most of books and research papers the ground level role of Pattanayak is not properly discussed. In History of Orissa by Purna Chandra Das (2004/2008),Pattanayak is mentioned in few lines. H.K.Mahatab(1958) and K.C. Panigrahi(1961) wrote on the history of Orissa but there is no detailed discussion of the role of Pattanayak in successive phases of nationalist movement in Orissa. In books by Patnaik(1957), Das(1957) and Patra and Devi(1983) also the role of Pattanayak is not assessed . The books written in national scenario of freedom struggle do not properly focus the nationalist struggles of Pattanayak .In History of Freedom Movement in India ,Vol.III and Vol. IV by R.C.Majumdar (1996)

and Tara Chand (1972) respectively nationalist role of Pattanayak is not mentioned.

Early Life of Bhagirathi Pattanayak:

Bhagirathi Pattanayak was born on 9 November 1884 at Barpali in Sambalpur of Odisha. (Swarnika 1984:;4)He got his early education at Bargarh and Barpali. (Swarnika 1984:14) When he was in class nine he had to left Zila School, Sambalpur because of unfortunate accidental death of his father Jadunath Pattanayak, an amin during the Sambalpur Land Settlement, in 1903 at Attaira. His mother Kumari Bani Pattnayak took care of her family. However, Bhagirathi had to face various ups and downs in his early life. She was a woman of religious mind and had general education.(Swarnika 1984:4) He sometimes worked as an Odia Teacher in 1904 at Simagaon near Raipur in Central Province. But he suddenly resigned from the post and later joined as a Nazir in the court of the Patana King Prithviraj Singh Deo. He was promoted to the position of Munshi and ultimately became personal secretary to the king .Meanwhile multiple National and International events including the Partition of Bengal 1905,October 1917 Revolution of Russia and reading of various newspapers and magazines(Keshari and Venketeshwar Samachar) profoundly filled him with national feelings and patriotic ideas. (Swarnika 1984:9;Gartia 1987:7-11)He was profoundly influenced by national feelings especially political activities of national leaders with the ideas and ideals of Mahatma Gandhi.(Gartia 1987:11-12) This marked a turning point in his political career as he became a staunch follower of Gandhi and his philosophy.

Bhagirathi Pattanayak and Early Phase of Gandhian Struggle 1920-1924:

Bhagirathi “as a deaf, dumb and blind man” witnessed the oppression of king Prithviraj Singh Deo for nine years. As he was soon overwhelmed by patriotism and nationalism, he started protesting against it, so he was arrested and sent to Bolangir Jail on 9 February 1920. This was his first journey to jail of his political life that profoundly influenced his coming political career. After his release from Bolangir Jail on 7 December 1920, he bought a Charkha and started spinning Khaddar. Admittedly Bhagirathi was a perfect disciple of Mahatma Gandhi. He also

trained his son Prafulla and wife Jambuvati in Charkha.(Das2012:52) When Gandhi launched the non-cooperation movement in August 1920 it was spread everywhere and in Sambalpur, it was received with enthusiastic response under the leadership of Chandrasekhar Behera.(Naik2018:71) Students left their educational institutions and joined the strike called by local leaders. During the movement, Bhagirathi played an important role in mobilizing people on a massive scale in Sambalpur. On 20th June 1921 a grand meeting was organized at Sunaripada of Barpali. As an active Congress leader, Bhagirathi played a prominent role in enrolling the people in the Movement. According to Seva(1921), people took much interest in enrolling their names as the members of the Congress.(in Das2012:53) With his political companions he toured several villages and preached patriotism and nationalism to the people. He prepared people for Gaya Congress Session and a meeting was organized at Balibandha in Sambalpur from 23rd October 1922 to 25th October 1922.He was selected to the Orissa Provincial Congress from Sambalpur. With his companions Bhagirathi participated in Gaya session of Congress 26-31 December 1922. (Gartia1987:12-13)With others Bhagirathi was filled with “a new spirit of Gandhian ideology of prevention of untouchability, spinning Charkha, and prevention of intoxication etc. Accordingly Khadi centres were opened in Bargarh, Barpali and Attabira. Bhagirathi was accompanied in this regard by Chintammanni Pujari, Laxminarayan Mishra, Achyutananda Purohit and others.”(Das2012:53) After the suspension of the non-cooperation movement and the Gaya session when Gandhi was arrested on 11 January 1923, Bhagirathi along with his friends observed ‘Hartal’ in Sambalpur town on 18 January 1923. (Gartia 1987::13)

He joined Kakinada Congress Session held on 28th December, 1923 with the Congress representative ticket No.2447.(Gartia199987:13-16;Das2012:53) He met Muhammad Ali, the president of the Kakinada Congress and Motilal Nehru, the father of Jawaharlal Nehru. While returning from Kakinada Congress, Bhagirathi came in close contact with the Berhampur Congress Committee and reached to Puri to join a meeting with Ramdas Babaji and Nrusingha Pattnaik. The meeting was intended

to immediate and unconditional release of Gandhi from jail.(Gartia19987:160).He announced the message of Kakinada Congress at Bhubaneswar, Khordha, Kantilo, Baud, Sonepur, Kumbhari and Barpali.”(Das2012:53) These meetings much added to his political stature in region consequently Bhagirathi came to be known as one of stalwarts of Congress. Therefore Bhagirathi received special delegate card for 39th Session of Congress held at Belgaon in 1924 issued by Jawaharlal Nehru. He distributed cyclostyled copies regarding negligence of the Pradesh Congress Committee.(Naik2018:71) But the request of Gopabandhu and his affectionate words changed his heart and Bhagirathi withdrew the resolution copies from Nehru and others. (Gartia1987:19-20;Das 2012:53)

Bhagirathi Pattanayak and Freedom Struggle 1928-1941:

With Kasturba Gandhi and Dev Das, Mahatma Gandhi visited Sambalpur on 23rd December 1928. Bhagirathi organized a meeting in the memory of Lala Lajpat Rai who was beaten by an English officer and ultimately died on 17 November 1928. He strongly protested Britishers and gave a Khaddar dhoti and a coat to his son Prafulla Chandra Pattanayak. (Das2012:53) He led de-addiction campaign and it was so successful that during 1928-1929 all distilleries were closed and the contractors had to return their license to government. Consequently Deputy Commissioner could not deposit due amount and suspended by government. (Swarnika1984;10). He also made all arrangements to celebrate Independence Day at Sambalpur after passing of the resolution of “Purn Swaraj” in Congress session held at Lahore in 1929. Bharat Chandra Nayak, District Magistrate . of Sambalpur was present to observe the situation But Bhagirathi with undaunted spirit read out the resolution paper passed by the Congress. (Das2012:54) It is to be noted that Sambalpur played an important role during the Salt Satyagraha Movement in 1930. Not only Hartal but picketing also on a massive scale was organized in the region. Bhagirathi organized public meeting at Bargarh with friends and encouraged people to join the movement and oppose foreign rule. When the Satyagraha was renewed in 1932 after the failure of the Gandhi-Irwin

talk, Bhagirathi along with his revolutionary workers was arrested on 8 July 1932. (Gartia 1987:42) This was his second arrest and second journey to jail of his political career. After their release, he started Individual Satyagraha along with his wife and son. They were arrested on 22 September 1933 while picketing in Bargarh (Gartia 1987:44). This was his third sentence when he was sent to jail. After they were released they visited Munger (Bihar) to help in relief work (Swarnika 1984:10) which was devastated by an earthquake. (Roy Chaudhury 1962:116) In 1934, when Gandhi visited Sambalpur to oversee the Harijan contact programme. Bhagirathi was with him and accompanied him to various Harijan villages and worked out a welfare plan with him. He also apprised him of the success of closing wine shops in different villages. He took active part in election campaign of Congress in 1937 under the provision of Government of India Act 1935. These political activities much added to his political image so he emerged as one of revolutionary freedom fighters of Sambalpur.

Bhagirathi Pattanayak and Quit India Movement 1942-1943:

On 8 August 1942 Congress adopted historic resolution on 'Quit India', and Mahatma Gandhi called for Quit India Movement in August 1942. Bhagirathi with his companions joined the movement and played an active role in the Movement 1942-1943. It is to be noted that during days of Quit India Movement, almost whole Odisha got agitated and its leaders played an active role in different parts of the State. (Patra & Devi 1983:297-304). Bhagirathi organized a meeting at Sambalpur where his wife and son joined him in mobilizing funds for the Movement. But Bhagirathi and his son were arrested on 25 August 1942. Unfortunately, his wife died of heart fail on 17 April 1943 when Bhagirathi and his son were in jail. At Dharmshala, Sambalpur, he presided over a meeting organized against the anti-people policies of the Interim Government. He supported students' movement at Sambalpur and condemned firing and lathi charge on students in Calcutta. He also organized students at Bargarh and Barpali in protest of government's action against students.

Tricolour Flag to Red Flag: From Congress Party to Communist Party:

Even after gaining of independence Bhagirathi continued his activities as an ardent follower of Mahatma Gandhi. He organized a condolence meeting at Barpali on the death of Mahamana Madan Mohan Malviya. He performed the last rites of Gandhi at Barpali according to Hindu tradition and also got his head shaved on the eleventh day. He led Harijan entry campaign and entered into the Jagannath Temple at Barpali with the untouchables. He also took an active part in the Bhoodan Movement in 1957. (Swarnika 1984:11, Gartia 1987:86-91) Meanwhile he was utterly disappointed by "corruption, nepotism and casteism flourished under ministerial protection". He was deeply moved by negligence of dedicated Congress leaders to represent people in proper forum. He never expected that opportunists and old rich rulers would get ticket in the elections. Administrative corruption, immorality of the leaders and its effects on Government officials who acted as stooges to the ministers etc. deeply disappointed him that effectively changed his political ideals of being attached with Congress. Gartia rightly pointed out that "The policy makers of free India dumped Gandhi's guide lines to the dustbin and encouraged wine trade for a few crores of revenue. Nothing was done to remove the hardship of the peasants and industrial workers. Prices of essential commodities moved up giving a tough time to the common man. Disparity in the fixation of price between agricultural produces and industrial products gave an upper hand to the mill owners and industrialists. Land reform became a table talk of the bureaucrats, so also the projects for uniform irrigation. Though the Zamindari was abolished, under the new system each and every employee of the revenue department became a Zamindar. Gandhi had coined a respectable name 'Harijan' for the untouchables. But it soon became a pet word to identify the untouchables. Temple opening for them was a farce. Concern of the Government for the welfare of Adivasis and Harijans was only skin-deep. Atrocities against them increased day by day. Those small Khadi houses run by sincere spinners changed to Khadi Emporium overnight. Congress leaders and rich men use Khadi as a means to their end. They defiled khadi and used it as a garb to dupe people." (Gartia 1987:82-83) In fact, Bhagirathi was not happy being in and with the

Congress and was highly critical of its socio-economic policies. So “his long association with the Congress no more allured him. He became disillusioned and searched for more a radical philosophy .He was not a politician in its sense of the term as it is being used now. His politics was altruistic. Deep concern for the welfare of the poor and the exploited had induced him to join the main stream of national movement. So the post-independence maladies, which multiplied the misery of the poor, once again prompted Bhagirathi to fight against battle ,at the age of 64. This time he pinned his hopes on socialism. He began to attend the meetings and conferences of Socialist and Communist parties with an open mind.” (Gartia 11987:84)So a devoted Congress leader in the last part of his life deserted Congress and identified himself with the Communist Party of India with Red Flag. He wrote a letter to the President of the Pradesh Congress Committee “complaining that with the death of Gandhi the Congress had also died.” (Gartia1987:84).At the age of 92, he led the Communist Movement against the price rise in Jamshedpur(Swarnika1984:11), unemployment and corruption in 1976. This was his last political movement as he left for his heavenly abode on 9 July 1980 at Barpali in Sambalpur .(Swarnika1984:11; Naik2018:71)His Diary of seventy five years is kept and preserved in Sambalpur University, Sambalpur.

Conclusion:

Thus Bhagirathi played a significant role in the successive phases Freedom Struggle. It is priceless and immeasurable as he sacrificed his life for the Nation and crores of Indians . (Naik2018:71). He participated in Gaya 1922,Kakinada1923 and Belgaon 1924 Sessions of Congress and represented Sambalpur district. (Swarnika1984;10). He was not only active in undivided Sambalpur of Odisha but also in Santal Parganas of Bihar, now in Jharkhand. After independence he was deeply disappointed by the functions of the Congress and its policies, so he left it and joined Communist Party..Courage, patriotism, honesty, devotion ,sacrifice, simplicity, selfless, the characteristic features of dynamic personality of Bhagirathi Pattanayak. (Swarnika1984:1-12) are significantly relevant in context of politics and administration of Contemporary India.

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