



ISSN Print: 2394-7500  
ISSN Online: 2394-5869  
Impact Factor: 5.2  
IJAR 2017; 3(4): 225-231  
www.allresearchjournal.com  
Received: 03-02-2017  
Accepted: 04-03-2017

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## The contribution of congress socialists to the national movement in Orissa

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### Abstract

The Indian National Congress was the Organisation which spearheaded the anti-colonial struggle against the British in India. There were many strands popular protest which operated inside the broad framework of the Congress-led movement against the British. Among these, the Socialists played a very crucial role as they radically transformed the ideology of the national movement by taking it closer to the masses and increasingly reflecting their aspirations in the policies and programmes of the Indian National Congress. At the international level, the great economic depression of 1929, failure of the western capitalist economies to cope with its adverse consequences and the unusual recovery and exceptional economic gains made by the Soviet Union made the socialist ideology immensely popular in India and many young men who had been sceptical with the Gandhian methods gradually leaned towards socialist ideas. This radicalism in nationalist politics brought massive popular response, participatory politics and a steady erosion of the colonial power structure. The present paper tries to trace the roots of this socialist movement in Orissa in the thirties and tries to capture the broad spectrum of the movement till India attains independence.

**Keywords:** Samyavadi, Krushak Sangha, Karmi Sangha, Zamindari, Marwari, Harjan, Chaasi-Mulia, Inquilaab, Shramik, Prajamandal, Bethi, Bhatti, Magan, Rasad

### Introduction

The Congress Socialists played a significant role in the history of anti-colonial struggle in India. Their emergence at the international, national and regional level marked a radical transformation of the ideology in nationalist politics. Radicalisation of the nationalist movement had started in the 1920s after Mahatma Gandhi had taken over the reins of the Indian National Congress <sup>[1]</sup> but it became perceptible only in the 1930s. It was due to many national and international factors. At the international level, the great economic depression of 1929, failure of the western capitalist economies to cope with its adverse consequences and the unusual recovery and exceptional economic gains made by the Soviet Union made the socialist ideology immensely popular in India and many young men who had been sceptical with the Gandhian methods gradually leaned towards socialist ideas. This radicalism in nationalist politics brought massive popular response, participatory politics and a steady erosion of the colonial power structure.

At the regional level, mobilisation for the Civil Disobedience movement or the Salt Satyagraha, the creation of Orissa as a separate province in 1936 and the formation of the Congress Ministry in 1937 provided a definite push to the issues which had been at the forefront of nationalistic struggle for many years now. The popular protest against the problems of the peasantry in British Orissa and repressive and exploitative regimes in Princely states came to be highlighted in the ensuing struggle alongside the nationalist struggle for liberation from foreign rule.

It may sound a little unusual but Congress Socialists in Orissa formed the *Utkal Congress Samyavadi Karmi Sangha* (or Utkal Congress Socialist Workers League) almost a year before the Congress Socialists party was formed at the national level in 1934 <sup>[2]</sup>. However, before we go onto the contribution of the socialists to the Indian national movement at the regional level, specific issues related to the emergence of socialism and their functioning within the Congress needs to be analysed. First of all it needs to be kept in mind that the left trend represented by the Congress Socialists and Communists was structured very much within the Congress organisation and it wielded quite a dominating influence. And secondly, all the measures adopted by the Congress during the whole of 1930s bore a stamp of socialist

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orientation. In all these popular movements initiated by the Indian National Congress, the socialists undoubtedly played a very crucial role.

Emergence of Socialist line of thought in Orissa Congress can be traced back to February 1933 when *Utkal Samyavadi Karmi Sangha* (Utkal Congress Socialist Workers League) was set up at Cuttack by some Congress members. The members of this group were nationalists like Naba Krusna Chaudhury, Malati Chaudhury, Gouranga Chandra Das, Sudhir Chandra Ghosh, Nrupen Sen, Manmohan Chaudhury, S N Dwibedi, Rabi Ghosh, Pranathi Patanayak, Mohan Das, Bhagabati Charan Panigrahi, Dibakar Patnayak. Gatikrusna Swain and Lokanath Ray joined later <sup>[3]</sup>. A weekly organ named '*Saarithi*' was launched on behalf of this Karmi Sangha with Naba Krusna Chaudhury as the editor. It wanted to expand the nationalist base and was vehement in its criticism of feudal and capitalist exploitation <sup>[4]</sup>. In 1935 CSP launched another monthly journal '*Adhunika*' which was edited by Bhagabati Charan Panigrahi (who later became the leader of the breakaway communist faction) and CSP also started a cultural organisation called '*Nabayuga Sahitya Sansad*'. *Adhunika* carried a fair amount of discussion on Marxist ideology and leaned heavily towards Soviet Union and had a distinct communist orientation <sup>[5]</sup>.

The objectives/goals of the *Utkal Samyavadi Karmi Sangha* were outlined in the preamble of its constitution. It read, "Whereas in the interest of the struggle of the masses in India for political and economic freedom, it has become urgently necessary to organise in each of the Congress provinces a well-knit and disciplined party of those workers who are determined to fight till the bitter end for the economic and political emancipation of the masses along definite scientific lines of socialism based on past experiences and deep and realistic study of moral and material condition of the people and their psychology and whereas the wide democratic platform of the Congress and the place it has come to occupy in the popular mind due to great Civil Disobedience Movement of 1930-34 makes affiliation of any such party to the Congress possible and desirable" <sup>[6]</sup> The *Utkal Samyavadi Karmi Sangha* was later affiliated to the All India Congress Socialist Party and worked as its provincial unit from September 1934.

The peasant question in India formed part of a wider question of the struggle against British imperialism <sup>[7]</sup>. Acharya Narendra Dev, the President of the All India Congress Socialist Conference at Patna on 17 May 1934 in course of his address said, "The peasants are notorious all over the world for the incapacity to organise themselves and to develop common understanding. Left to themselves, they can lodge their protest by spontaneous peasant risings when conditions become unbearable. This has been the case in Ireland and Russia and India is no exception. The history of British rule in India is full of such risings. Whenever drastic changes were introduced by the government in the land system of the country and when the village community was being destroyed.....these ignorant people trampled upon by tyranny and sunk deep in superstition know only one way out and that is rush head-long into riotous conduct, and then the government makes short shrift of them. It is only the revolutionary intelligentsia that can organise them for disciplined action. Masses are important" <sup>[8]</sup>.

Surendra Nath Dwibedi, a prominent Congress Socialist in Orissa echoed a somewhat similar sentiment. About the

methods he said, "We decided to go from village to village holding meetings, getting peasant's signatures 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 oppose our move as they would also be benefitted by a corresponding rebate in revenue. Secondly we could easily enter the villages and organise the peasants by setting up *Krushak sanghas*. In the *zamindari* areas, the peasants had no rights over trees in their own fields or over the fish in the ponds 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 organising the peasantry on the basis of class struggle. Hence the strategy had to be designed in such a manner that the peasants became fearless <sup>[9]</sup> and cooperation of the non-socialists could be sought while the whole programme had to be under the Congress banner.

Acharya Narendra Dev <sup>[10]</sup> also stressed the need to coordinate and unite forces with Congress. He said, "The struggle of the workers should be linked with the struggle of the Congress and through it with the struggle of peasants and the lower middle class. It is only when they will all unite into one big effort that the battle will be won. All the forces that are working for the political independence of the country have to be co-ordinated with each other and this is possible only when all come to possess the same ideals".

During this period there was consistent ideological campaign against oppression, exploitation and arbitrary rule by holding public meetings and *Kisan* processions to expand the nationalist base among the oppressed masses. The CSP realised that the lower classes needed to be self-conscious. Acharya Narendra Dev said, ".....upper classes who wield economic power in the country and have existing social conditions in their favour need not be class conscious, because it is only in this way, they can really feel that they are defending not their class interest but the interests of the whole society. The social basis being very narrow they really feel stronger by entertaining the belief that they are acting in the interests of the society as a whole" <sup>[11]</sup> The poor peasantry in the countryside on the other hand had to be made aware of their basic rights and to do away with the culture of fear which engulfed their whole being.

Narratives in S N Dwibedi's books and books on Naba Krusna Chaudhury abound with examples of this culture of fear which was very much a part of the peasant's being in the rural surroundings. Dwibedi narrates an incident as to what extent people were scared of the agents of the *Zamindar* and anything related to any stamped paper. Literacy must have been around 5% at that time and there was hardly any newspaper available in the countryside. He narrates that "One day we (Dwibedi, Naba Babu, Malati Devi, Goura Chandra Das and Gouranga Charan Das) were talking to peasants in a village in Cuttack and asking them to sign a petition for remission of rent to the Government. Most of them seemed to be willing to sign the petition. In the mean time the *chowkidar* of the village came to the scene, sat down near us and started noting down something with a pencil. Then the *chowkidar* used to be a significant cog in the colonial police system. The villagers who saw him suspected that he was noting down their particulars for reporting their names to the police for co-operating with the Socialist leaders. Most of them dispersed without signing the petition". From this incident it can be imagined to what

extent people were scared of the official machinery and why it was very crucial to work towards dispelling this fear from their mind<sup>[12]</sup>.

Today's generation will find it hard to believe that 80 years back peasants could not dare to wear clean clothes or carry an umbrella in front of petty *zamindars* in the countryside. They were thrashed if they were found wearing shoes. At the very sight of the *zamindar* or the *mahajan* in the village, people used to prostrate themselves on the ground and pay respects. If any peasant became affluent, and by mistake made any display of his wealth, he was beaten black and blue in the so-called '*Mrudang Ghar*'<sup>[13]</sup> Poetry and slogans to change the traditional social practices formed a component of Socialist mobilisation of the peasants in the countryside. Naba Babu advised the people to refrain from paying their respects in the traditional mode. Kalandi Charan Panigrahi wrote the poem *Kiye saala saitaan*<sup>[14]</sup>

*Beelei kukura izzat bujhe  
Bujhe maan apamaan  
Manisha aame kee bujheebu naahin re  
Kiye saala saitaan*

(Roughly translated, the lines imply that when animals like dogs and cats understand the attitude of care and insult can't we as human beings make out who is the devil?)

The socialists also emphasized on the real issues which were of paramount importance than mere political freedom and the usual civil rights<sup>[15]</sup>.

*Kee heba se swarajya nei  
Jadi mora napoore peta  
Khathi khathi chaashimulia maleni  
Chashi chasi dana kana niyanta.*

(Roughly translated, the lines imply of what use is freedom if I don't get enough to eat? Even after back-bending labour the peasants don't get a stomach-full to eat or clothes to wear.)

Not only the *zamindar*, even their *goomasthas* (clerk) exploited and harassed the people in many ways. Daily, the fisherman had to give the *goomastha* Barju Mohanty from Cuttack (the *zamindaari* was in Nimapada), fish and beaten rice, the barber had to give massage, the milkman had to give milk, curd and cheese, apart from many types of *bhetti* and *bethi*. On top of that, Barju Mohanty had a habit of addressing everyone as '*saala*'. The milkman Danei Behera narrated this case to the peasant leader, Mohan Das. Accordingly, Mohan Das advised him that when Barju Mohanty was in the Nimapada Bazaar, in full public view, he should shout/scream 'hey saala Barjua'. Danei did that and taking clue from him everyone else started shouting 'hey saala Barju Mohanty'. Barju Mohanty left the place and left for Cuttack<sup>[16]</sup>. This kind of small incidents helped in dispelling fear from the mind of the peasantry in the countryside.

In course of hectic activities, highly educated young men like Bhagabati Panigrahi, Ananta Patanayak, Goura Chandra Patanayak, Baidyanath Rath, Saci Routray, Biswanath Pasayat, Rama Krusna Pati and Ram Mohan Mishra tried to reach out to the poor in the countryside<sup>[17]</sup>. The Socialists started wielding more influence inside the Congress once Naba Krusna Chaudhury became the Secretary of the PCC in 1937. In a meeting held at Cuttack during March 1937

several resolutions on the peasant problems were passed by the CSP. The most important of their demands were<sup>[18]</sup>.

- a) 50% reduction of land revenue
- b) Abolition of landlordism
- c) Repeal of anti-national and anti-democratic laws
- d) Guarantee of minimum wage of Rs 30/-
- e) Freedom of speech, press and association
- f) Withdrawal of British army and
- g) Right to possess arms.

The peasant leaders touched upon issues that were relevant to the existing problems of the peasants.

The British authorities came to resent the speeches made by certain prominent socialists. On 20<sup>th</sup> November 1937, during the celebration of students Day, Naba Krusna Chaudhury exhorted the students 'to organise revolutionary discipline with a view to ousting Government and stressed on the justification for violence when necessary<sup>[19]</sup>. During one of his visits to Orissa in 1936, Pundit Nehru attacked the *Zamindari* system in all his speeches and pointed out that the British and the *zamindari* system of administration was like two grinding stones between which the peasants were ground to poverty<sup>[20]</sup>. One of the important tools used by leaders in Orissa to mobilise the masses was through their speeches on the occasion of various annual days such as *Shradha* (death anniversary) of important leaders like Pundit Gopabandhu Dash on 7 July, Bal Gangadhar Tilak on 1<sup>st</sup> August, Birth day of Mahatma Gandhi on 2 October, *Shramik Divas* on 1 may etc. *Krushak Divas* was celebrated on 1 September<sup>[21]</sup>. Slogans like '*Chaasimuliaki jai*', '*Bande Mataram*', '*Biplavki jai*', '*InquilabZindabad*' were raised to arouse and inculcate unity in the masses<sup>[22]</sup>.

The All India *Kisan* Day celebration at Cuttack Municipal ground on 1<sup>st</sup>September 1937 was a major event in the history of the peasant movement in Orissa<sup>[23]</sup>. Nearly ten thousand peasants attended the conference which was organised under the leadership of Naba Krusna Chaudhury and Malati Chaudhury (According to an official estimate 15000 to 20 000 peasants attended the conference)<sup>[24]</sup>. They marched in a procession to the Cuttack Municipal ground holding placards and shouting slogans electrifying the town and the countryside. The placards displayed their basic demands i.e, rent reduced by half, abolition of *Zamindari* system, unity of *Kisan* and labour, water tax to be reduced by half, abolition of mutation fees, confiscation of math properties (*matha dhana kotha heu*), abolition of forest tax etc. Holding national and red flags with hammer and sickle, they shouted slogans such as down with imperialism and landlordism, etc<sup>[25]</sup>. On occasions, the CSP was also critical of the functioning of the Congress ministry in the province. It passed a resolution which said, "The Congress Ministry has not fully satisfied the demands of the people as laid down in the manifesto". It called for organising the peasants to fight for their own class interest and to join Congress in large numbers<sup>[26]</sup>.

During 1937, Congress Enquiry Committees were set up by both Cuttack and Balasore DCs to enquire in to the complaints lodged by the tenants against the police and the landlords. Individual enquiries were undertaken by Congress leaders. Radha Krusna Biswas Ray personally conducted enquiry in to the alleged grievances of the tenants of the Jeypore estate in Koraput<sup>[27]</sup>. Rajkrusna Bose, the veteran Congress leader advised the peasants in a meeting at Cuttack to stop payment of illegal taxes to the *Zamindars*

and to continue to agitate for the remission of rent<sup>[28]</sup>. At the Bargarh peasant Conference held at Padmapur on 11 October 1937 presided over by the socialist leader S M Joshi, the peasants were told. "Zamindars would be powerless if the *ryots* adopted the attitude of the people of Bardoli and took to *satyagraha* in the form of non-payment of rents". The meeting passed many resolutions including one on the boycott of Japanese goods<sup>[29]</sup>. Malati Devi, a prominent Congress Socialist was elected to the All India central *Kisan* Committee in March 1939. The All India *Kisan* Conference deputed Jayaprakash Narayan and Sahajanand Saraswati to visit Cuttack and hold an enquiry to review the activities of the Provincial *Kisan Sangha*. It is unfortunate that at that point of time, Orissa PCC was going through 'most deplorable political factionalism' and most of the *kisan* leaders were pre-occupied with 'States Peoples activities.' The report pointed to an ever expanding base of the *kisan* organisation in the state and it is evident from the fact that in Puri there were 18 *Kisan Sabhas* functioning in a total of *twenty three thanas*<sup>[30]</sup>.

In general, peasant Conferences were held in Cuttack, Puri, Balasore, Sambalpur, Ganjam, where resolutions advocating pro-peasant laws and abolition of *bethi* and *rasad* were passed<sup>[31]</sup>. Besides, resolutions demanding compulsory education for children and facilities for the *harijans* formed the other notable aspect of such demands<sup>[32]</sup>. The effectiveness of the CSP received a minor setback when the Communists were removed from the CSP in 1940. Naba Krusna Chaudhury was the one who had very close relations with the communists and he had been the one who had brought many of them into the state politics. So he was quite unwilling to expel them from the party<sup>[33]</sup>.

Because of the Socialists in the ranks, the Congress Government in 1937 initiated and adopted many measures which were pro-people. The ministry remained in power for about two years and four months. During this period, legislations related to issues like Madras Estates Land (Orissa Amendment) Bill, Orissa Tenancy Bill, Orissa Moneylender's Bill, Upliftment of *Harijans*, Small Holder's Relief Act, Prohibition etc, were moved. Since it was house which had rich, well-to-do and people with feudal interests, these issues were bound to arouse controversy and debates. But it definitely reflected the radical and progressive ideas that were associated with the socialists in general and the members with left orientation in particular.

Apart from the specific agrarian issues and the issues of the peasantry, the Socialists also played a significant role in the peoples' movement in the princely states of Orissa. The princely states were like islands of misrule and the regimes were so repressive and inhuman that they were known as dark areas or *andhari mulak*. The people were denied basic civil rights and groaned under innumerable taxes that were decided on the whims of the rulers. The first Orissa States Peoples Conference was organised in 1931 at Cuttack. As the freedom struggle in the neighbouring British areas gathered momentum and a popular Congress Ministry formed in Orissa in 1937, the people in the states were awakened to resist the autocratic regimes in their states. The Congress expressed its sympathy for the cause of the people in the states but owing to the larger picture of the anti-colonial struggle against the British did not undertake an active course of action in the states peoples' movement. It was the socialists in the Congress who championed the

cause of the people in the princely states and organised them in their struggle for basic civic and political rights<sup>[34]</sup>.

Here it would be worthwhile to mention in brief about the prevailing conditions in the princely states of Orissa. The princely states of Orissa witnessed the worst repression and misrule than probably any other group of states in India<sup>[35]</sup>. The province of British Orissa was surrounded by twenty-six *Gadjet* States of which Mayurbhanj was the biggest and Tigiria, the smallest. Many states didn't have any semblance of a civilized administration and the people in most states were subjected to medieval savagery and torture. Though the people of these states had everything common with their neighbours in the province of Orissa, a common, culture, common social usage, religious thought and mode of living they were cut up in several political jurisdictions which brought them under different administrations<sup>[36]</sup>.

An issue around which the popular agitation in the states veered was *bethi* or unpaid labour. A peasant used to spend over 100 days in a year in doing forced labour for the state or for the official. He could be called up at any time of the day or night and had to quit his own work (however urgent it might be) for fear of being beaten, fined or imprisoned. If unable to perform *bethi* work, the peasant had to send someone else on his behalf on payment<sup>[37]</sup>. Personal works of the state officials and almost all the works of the state were managed through *bethi*. Of all the exactions suffered by the peasant, *bethi* was the most oppressive and it reduced him to a state of serfdom.

*Rasad*, *Magan*, *Bhetti*, *Shika* and *Kheda* were the other forms of exploitation which a peasant had to live with. *Rasad* was forced requisition of provisions which a peasant was compelled to supply when *Raja*, his friends, guests and all other officials passed through any village. *Magan* was the compulsory contribution on the tenants at the rate of one-fourth of their annual land rent on several ceremonial occasions. (Marriage, birth of children, foreign visits etc.) *Bhetti* was another forced present like *sunia bhetti*, *pariba bhetti* or *darshan bhetti* etc. During *shikar* the peasants had to accompany the king to assist him in hunting and *Kheda* was capturing of elephants during harvest time. There was no security of life and property in the states.

The life of an average peasant was hedged in with so many restrictions that he confronted a fine or physical assault at every turn. In addition to all these, forest rules were totally anti-people and monopoly to trade in many goods was given by the king to his own agents who fleeced the common people in very many ways. This is just a very brief list of ways in which people were exploited in the states and one should not forget that in many states there were frequent acts of rape and indecent assault on women by police officials and other officers of the state. Rape and molestation of women in custody had become so rampant that the people had come to regard it as part of the normal penalty for a woman offender. Just to cite one example, Sri Nanda Ram Singh, the sub-inspector from Motagaon village in Dhenkanal had built up a sinister reputation for ravaging the modesty of women.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> session of the Orissa States Peoples' conference was held on 23<sup>rd</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup> June 1937 at Cuttack and was presided over by Dr Pattabhi Sitarammaya, the president of the All India States Peoples Conference. Only about 100 people from 8 of the 26 states were able to attend as preventive measures had been taken by the state administrations. Balunkeswar Acharya was the chairman of the Reception

Committee. A constitution for the OSPC was drafted and many resolutions were passed. The first resolution deplored the absence of codified laws and acts in the states and the Conference urged upon the rulers of the Indian states to immediately confer on their subjects

- a) The right of occupancy of their holding
- b) Fundamental rights of citizenship and
- c) Responsible governments.

A strong plea was made to abolish evil practices like *rasad*, *magan*, *bethi*, *bhetti* etc.

A committee of enquiry was instituted to investigate into the illegalities, excesses and acts of repression. The leaders from the states who attended this conference were Sarangadhar Das from Dhenkanal, Dr Bishwambhar Rath (Nayagarh), Lal Mohan Pati (Mayurbhanj), Balunkeswar Acharya (Hindol), Radhanath Rath (Athgarh), Harmohan Patnayak (Dhenkanal), Gobind Chandra Mishra (Daspalla), Madhusudan Mohanty (Athgarh), Madhusudan Patanayak (Tigiria) and Gangadhar Mishra (Ranpur). The touring of the Inquiry Committee practically marked the beginning of mass awakening in the states of Orissa. Initially the students who were exposed to Gandhian ideas in the neighbouring areas of British Orissa took the initiative of reising the banner of resistance in the princely states. They were helped and led by the socialist and the left leaders in the Congress like Nabakrusna Chaudhury, Malati Chaudhury, Rabi Ghose, Bhagabati Panigrahi, Pranakrusna Padhiary, Gokul Chandra Ray Chudamani, Anant Pattanayak, Guru Patanayak, Goranga Chandra Das and Surendranath Dwibedi. The weekly paper of the Socialists *Krushak* gave wide coverage to the states affairs.

Under the auspices of Cuttack District Kisan Sangha a Kisan rally was organised on at Jenapur (bordering Cuttack and Dhenkanal) to observe the All India *Kisan Day* on 1 September 1938. Influential leaders like Naba Chaudhury, Malati Chaudhury, Prana Krusna Padhiary, Sarangadhar Das, Bhagabati Panigrahi and Surendranath Dwibedi attended the rally. The second day of the conference was devoted entirely to Dhenkanal affairs. At the invitation of the Dhenkanal *Prajamandal*, around 12000 men and women had assembled at Jenapur on 2nd September 1938<sup>[38]</sup>. This particular event seems to have galvanized the people in the states and most of the *Prajamandals* formed around this period virtually made the same demands of a minimum of a dignified existence in the states. Agitations in Nilgiri, Dhenkanal, Talcher, Ranpur virtually reached a feverish pitch during this period. The leadership in the state cautiously monitored the events in the princely states and provided all possible assistance in keeping the morale of the agitators high in face of strong repressive measures adopted by the state administrations.

While posing to negotiate with the *Prajamandal* for redressing the grievances of the people in the Dhenkanal state, the king ordered for massive clampdown on the protesters and in the ensuing developments 2 people were killed in Bhuban and 6 more at Nilkanthpur including the 12 year old boy Baji Rout. His death shocked the people and evoked widespread condemnation from all quarters. He became a symbol of sacrifice in the national movement in the states and the province. In all, 17 people were killed in the Dhenkanal state. On Gandhi's insistence there was to be no outside interference as per the Haripura resolution and it was decided that the struggle (Offering *satyagraha* in

batches) was to be carried on by the workers of Dhenkanal. For imparting necessary training in principles and rules of *satyagraha*, a training camp was to be opened in British Orissa<sup>[39]</sup>.

Just about this time Political agent of Orissa States, Maj.R L Bazalgette was killed by a mob on 5<sup>th</sup> January 1939 at Ranpur. This provided an alibi for the State administrations to order reprisal measures. The people of Ranpur and adjoining villages took shelter in jungles and other places outside the state boundaries. The entry of weekly like *Krushak* and daily newspaper *Samaj*, published at Cuttack was banned in Dhenkanal, Talcher and other states where educated and well-to-do people were leading the movement for responsible government. Because the reprisals were brutal, the people from the Talcher state decided to leave their home and hearth and move to the neighbouring British territory, Angul as a mark of protest. Exodus of people from the states was suggested with the objective that it would exert pressure on both the ruler of the state and the Political department to redress the grievances of the people. Exodus started on 8<sup>th</sup> November 1938 and by end of December 1938 it had swelled to about 30,000. It needs to be kept in mind that people resolved to even leave their ripe crops in their fields in face of uncertainty that they were bound to come across in the refugee camps in British Orissa once they left their villages. It is an accepted fact that Dr Hare krusna Mahtab played a significant role in negotiating with the Political department for a solution of the problem of the people in the princely states. But it is also a fact that it was mostly the socialist leaders who played a significant role in awakening the people, mobilising them in resisting the repressive government of the autocratic rulers and linking them with the mainstream Congress-led nationalist movement of the British provinces. Naba Babu and Malati Devi were instrumental in providing the people with relief in the refugee camps when they left the Dhenkanal and Talcher state and kept their issues alive by organising meetings in Cuttack and by regularly publishing harrowing tales of repression in their weekly, *Krushak*.

Most of the *Prajamandals* resolved to adopt a standard modus operandi of

1. Start non-co-operation with the government by launching a massive boycott of its employees and supporters and to defy government orders
2. To raise volunteer corps in villages for carrying *satyagraha*
3. Strengthen the organisation by holding meeting and procession in defiance of prohibitory orders
4. To enrol citizens as members of *Prajamandal*.

This continued till a negotiation was reached between the agitators and the Rulers. In Dhenkanal and Talcher the agitators went back to their respective villages after being promised of certain concessions to the people. Gandhi had also sent his emissary Agatha Harrison to work towards a workable formula for finding an end to the states crisis. It is not that the British as the Paramount power denied the existence of the genuine grievance of the people in the states. But they had their own reasons for not pressing for redressing these grievances. The rulers could bank upon the help of the British in case things went wrong. But with massive mobilisation of the peasantry in British Orissa and the neighbouring princely states, they became vulnerable to growing pressure of the awakened masses in their states.

This process of agitation almost continued unabated throughout the interim period till the Second World War broke out and the political events started moving very fast.

With the unilateral declaration of war by the British dragging India into the vortex of the war without its consent, the Congress Ministries in the province resigned in protest. The Congress did not intend to embarrass the British at a time when they were fighting for survival but at the same time it could not remain a helpless spectator to the events happening all around. In 1940 Gandhi gave a call for a limited Individual *Satyagraha* with an initial list of 78 *Satyagrahis*. In the meantime, the Japanese had advanced through whole of South East Asia and were knocking the eastern frontiers of the British Empire. The Congress called for the Quit India Movement in August 1942.

The Quit India Movement was fought in the name of Gandhi and in the name of the Congress but it was totally un-Gandhian in nature. It witnessed massive acts of violence and turned out to be the biggest blow to the British administration after the Revolt of 1857. Unwilling to let the Congress affect the British war efforts, all the top ranking leaders of the Congress were rounded up on 9<sup>th</sup> August 1942 from their respective hotels in a pre-dawn drive. However, this measure of the Government backfired and innumerable acts of violence and bloodshed were witnessed all over the country. Rendered leaderless from the beginning, the people interpreted Gandhi's *Mantra* of Do or Die as per their inclination and paralysed the administration in many areas of the Country.

In Orissa also, the top leaders of the province were rounded up and Congress was declared illegal. Their offices were taken over by the government. In many areas of the state there were spontaneous reactions to protest against the government action and mostly the students and the Congress members who had managed to evade arrest organised this movement. Once the initial phase of protest was dealt with strongly by the government, agitators moved to the countryside and raised the banner of revolt. A carefully planned underground movement in the province was organised by the Congress Socialist leader Surendra Nath Dwivedi. Making his friend, Mathura NandSahu's house in Alisa bazaar, the head quarters, Dwivedi provided directions for bringing out Congress Bulletins and managed to establish a network of underground organisation linking it with the underground organisation in Bihar and Bengal. Both Malati Devi and Dwivedi had evaded arrest while coming back from the Bombay session of the Indian National Congress. But since as a lady it would have been difficult to operate from underground, she courted arrest by giving an anti-war speech in Cuttack. Popular uprisings were seen in Koraput, Bhandari Pokhari, Mathili, Papadahandi, Cuttack, Kaipada, Jajpur, Nomapada and Lunia. Firing by the government forces were also resorted to in Tudigadia, Khairadiha and Eram. But since we are discussing only about the role of the Congress Socialists I am just touching upon the role played by Dwivedi and his small band of followers who managed to dodge the police and operate underground till October 1942<sup>[40]</sup>.

The Quit India movement was not only confined to British India alone. It made deep inroads into the princely states and inspired the people there to make their contribution to the cause of India's independence. Initially, there were demonstrations against the arrest of the Congress members in Nilgiri, Dhenkanal and Talcher states. But the movement

really caught up with the escape of Pabitra Mohan pradhan from Talcher jail on 31st August 1942. The movement was widespread in the Dhenkanal and Talcher states as the repression was most brutal there.

After being critically wounded, Baisnab managed to sneak into Cuttack with a fellow-fighter Nabaghana Behera and with the assistance of Surendranath Dwivedi left for Calcutta for treatment in the guise of a *marwari*. After Baisnab's disappearance, another party led by Debraj Patra set fire to the police out post and the beat house of the forest department at Gengutia of 5th September 1942.

The movement in Talcher was led by Pabitra Mohan Pradhan who escaped from the state jail on 31st August 1942 and inspired the setting up of a separate "parallel government" (or national government) in the area<sup>[41]</sup>.

It needs to be kept in mind that there was a Coalition ministry in the province and there wasn't much of resistance in the province once the initial burst of enthusiasm died down with the arrest of the lower rung of the leadership. From October 1942 till end of the war there doesn't seem to be much that can actually be classified to the Socialist leadership.

The Congress Socialists remained politically active and effective in the province for approximately ten years. They played a significant role in raising many crucial issues related to the agrarian structure and the life of the peasantry. They managed to carry it to the level of legislation and bills were passed in the house both in 1937-39 and the Ministry formed in 1946. But it remained virtually in form of legislations only. They made very little difference to the lives of the people at the ground level. This was partially because, most of the leaders from among the Ministers came from the upper crust of the Odiya society and there was bound to be contradiction in their ideology and practice. No one gives up power voluntarily and many of the Congress leaders were reluctant to bring about qualitative change by bringing about radical transformation in the socio-economic lives of the people. They were worried that it may upset the traditional structure and lead to chaos and anarchy in societal equations. Dr Mahatab belonged to this group and for a very long period of time he remained a very powerful political force in the province since 1930s. The Socialists wanted change but they probably were too depleted after the Communists broke away and did not have the numbers to put their ideas into practice. In any case, fighting for an ideology, initiating a movement and running a Government are different ball-games all together. A Banka Bihari Das, Nishamani Khuntia or Goura Chandra Das probably couldn't have done wonders when their leaders like Naba Choudhury and Malati Devi kept changing and re-changing their priorities in political lives. Once Surendra Nath Dwivedi left the Congress Socialists Party, it was reduced to a spent force and hardly had a say in the provincial power politics.

However, Socialism inside the Congress has not been an irrelevant ideology and even in this age of post-Marxism, it still remains a creed that has potential to inspire millions of the disadvantaged to transform their society and polity. The slogans like "*Yeh azaadi jhoothi hai*" immediately after the country attained independence, spoke a lot about the gap between what the makers of this nation aspired and what they managed to achieve. And hence, the phrase "Socialist Secular Democratic Republic" was inserted in the Preamble of our Constitution through amendment in the 1970s by Mrs

Indira Gandhi. In a huge country of 120 crore plus population, probably no single ideology can be effectively implemented. If by any stroke of luck, India has managed to reach a status of a potential global economic power, it is primarily because of the decades of Nehruvian brand of socialism that prepared the platform for the eventual capitalist take-off in the 1990s.

### References

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3. The list of names of the Socialists who started the Workers league as given in different sources varies. But it started with a small group of dedicated workers who were charged with idealism and took pledge of non-acquisition of property. Nayak Padma Charan, *Anirban (Odia)*, Vidya Prakashan, Cuttack, p. 63. Also see Nayak Anadi, *Lokashaktira Sandhane: Nabakrusna Choudhury, (Odia) Grantha mandira, Cuttack, 2001, 35* and Rabi Shailaj (ed.) *Pathikruta (Odia)*, Lohia Academy Trust, 2004, 35.
4. Rabi Shailaj (ed.), op. Cit., 36-37.
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41. For details on the disturbances during the Quit India Movement see sub-chapter 'Quit India in the Princely states' in Nath, S K, op. cit. 89-99.