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## Role of two eminent person from Ganjam in anti-caste struggle in Odisha

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### Abstract

This study will focus on the important role played by two eminent persons of Ganjam in the field of lower Caste people in Ganjam, Odisha. In this paper an attempt has been made their contribution, Co-operation towards a casteless society in Odisha, Specially Ganjam.

Mohan Nayak, the dazzling star of Ganjam District was a social reformer. He wrote a book Kalanka Mochan. He actively played an important role in temple entry movement in Odisha. He also did commendable job in the temple entry movement.

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 conferred with the prestigious Padmashree award.

Sribatasa panda was a pioneer of Arya Samaj movement in Odisha. He edited and published monthly journals, sanskar and Arya. He opened a network of Gurukul Ashrams in Odisha and contributed a lot against untouchability.

**Keywords:** Upliftment, temple entry movement, hotel entry movement, sanskar, casteless

### Introduction

#### Mohan Nayak

Mohan Nayak the dazzling star of Ganjam District a freedom fighter and a leading social reformer was born on 3<sup>rd</sup> June 1921 at Berhampur. Born in a Harijan Family, he devoted his whole life for the upliftment of Harijans and other social services <sup>[1]</sup>. He has immortal fame as a social reformer. Early in his student life social problems like untouchability draw his attention and since that time he worked hard for the eradication of untouchability. One event of his childhood days made him to work for the Harijanas. 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 untouchables <sup>[2]</sup>. He organized *Berhampur Harijan Sangha* on 18<sup>th</sup> December 1938 and proceeded towards reformation.

He initially published a hand written magazine "*Harijan*" on 2<sup>nd</sup> October, 1938 <sup>[3]</sup>. This magazine criticized the policies of the Govt., towards the Harijanas. For this work he was put into the custody. In 1942 Mohan was arrested for his participation in the Quit India movement. During the time in prison, he wrote a book named as "*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 <sup>[4]</sup>.

He was a great writer as well a good organiser. He was inspired by the ideas and ideals of Gandhiji. He organized an Institution known as *Utkaliya Kendriya Bala Sangha*. It looked after the improvement of Harijan students <sup>[5]</sup>. He also established an Ashram namely "*Amritlal Thakkar Bapa Ashram*" in 1952. This Institution imparted education to the scheduled caste boys and girls. A primary school was established by the Ashram in the year 1953 for Harijans and lower caste students. The workers of this Ashram visited villages to propagate the removal of untouchability and merits of classless society and the upliftment of the lower caste people <sup>[6]</sup>. Mohan Nayak 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* <sup>[7]</sup>. On his request the then chief minister, Harekrushna Mahatab brought a bill in the Assembly for the abolition of untouchability <sup>[8]</sup>.

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Government passed a law which declared that any body's obstruction of the Harijans in the entry of hotel, temple and public places, well and will be fined Rs. 50/-and will be liable to imprisonment. With the advice of Dr. Mahatab he experimented the Hotel Entrance Movement at Berhampur<sup>[9]</sup>. He was assisted with Krupasindhu Panda, Dibakar Panigrahi and Jagannath Panda. Harijans entered into the hotels in groups in some places they were allowed while in some other places they were misbehaved. The hotel owners who misbehaved and did not allow them to entry hotels were imprisoned and paid fines. From that time Harijans got their right to enter into the hotels and public places etc.<sup>[10]</sup>.

Mohan Nayak also did commendable job in the temple entry movement. During this period Harijans were debarred 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. In view of that 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<sup>[11]</sup>. The entrance 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) will allow the Harijans and the lower caste people into temple he will have no objection". The Pujaks then gave way with no objection<sup>[12]</sup>.

The Congress leaders tried to persuade Harijans for entrance in to the temple, but some people created fear in the minds of the Harijans that if they make entry into the temple the famous car festival will be postponed for years. The Harijans of Puri denied to enter into the temple. So the Congress leaders decided to call the Harijans to entry into the temple under the leadership of Mohan Nayak<sup>[13]</sup>.

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 12<sup>th</sup> 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 be 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 rise our hand in the face of blows and no satyagrahi will remain responsible for the death of others". They arose the spirit of stability and encouragement in their heart<sup>[14]</sup>.

By receiving such encouragement the lower caste people and the down trodden started their historic journey towards the Jagannath temple, under the leadership of Mohan Nayak, and took the triple decision. First to enter in to the temple

freely, if there would no obstacle from outside, secondly to sit down if there would be obstacle 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, hundreds of worshippers came forward to obstruct them. At that 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 satyagrah is to keep their face down and sleep silently. The pandas who were standing in front of the satyagrah is started backward move feeling that they may be touched by the untouchables. When the satyagrah is reached the main door the pandas closed 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<sup>[15]</sup>. On 13<sup>th</sup> February 1948 the Government took the entire responsibility of the temple and the backward Harijan untouchable people entered into the temple. That day was a significant event. Mohan Nayak with the low caste people from Puri and other areas entered the temple and offered their prayers<sup>[16]</sup>.

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. Sribatasa Panda

It is of common knowledge that Maharsi Dayanda Saraswati was a famous reformer and a towering personality of the 19<sup>th</sup> century India and Indian renaissance. He appeared as a great mesiah in the religious horizon of India. He was a great champion of Indian culture and oriental learning. He spearheaded his crusade against social dogmas and revival of the glorious cultural heritage of India. His clarion call "Go back to the Vedas" gave a new shape to entire Indian subcontinent. He dreamt for a modern and advanced India. In order to materialize his dream he founded the historic *Arya Samaj* at Bombay in 1875. His *Arya Samaj* was a powerful organization for the socio religious reforms in modern India.

Sribatsa Panda was the Pioneer of *Arya Samaj Movement* in Orissa. He was born in 1870, at the village Mandara near Bhanjanagar of Ganjam District<sup>[17]</sup>. Sribatsa Panda played a significant role in the Oriya Movement, Non-co-operation Movement and the Arya Samaj Movement in Orissa. In fact the Arya Samaj Movement in Orissa was the life and legacy of Sribatsa Panda.

After completing his school and college he joined the Rajmahendri College in 1896 for higher studies. He was deeply influenced by the writings of Swami Dayananda Saraswati and Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar. He translated the monumental work of *Satyartha Prakash* of Dayanda Saraswati in to Oriya. In order to implement the Arya Samaj ideals in Orissa, he adopted four-fold programmes. He established branches of Arya Samaj in Orissa.<sup>18</sup> He selected a band of dedicated workers for the spread and implementation of Arya Samaj activities in Orissa. He sent a number of Oriya youths to *Lahore Gurukul Training School* for training and made press was the most powerful media for arousing public opinion. Therefore in order to eradicate the blind faiths, believes and prejudices from society he

published articles in the newspapers and journals. He edited and published monthly Journals like 'Sanskar' and 'Arya'. As a literateur and dramatist he composed and published 37 books including dramas. He devoted his entire life and resources for the social reforms and upliftment of the down trodden.

Eradication of untouchability was another praise worthy work of Sri Panda. To him it is a social crime. For the purpose of eradication of this social evil he chalked out two plans. Firstly he made the best use of his talents in publishing articles, journals and books in support of eradicating of untouchability. Secondly he himself along with some of his friends used to take water and food from the hands of the untouchables before the public. It is more interesting that he started his agitation for the eradication of untouchability much before the Harijan movement of Mahatma Gandhi started in Orissa. He endeavored to remove the defects of the depressed classes and wanted to provide them equal status with other general castes of the society. His book *Acchabajati* is a shining specimen in this regard. Puri, Berhampur, Bhanjanagar and his village Mandar were the main centres of his reformation activities. He always criticized the conservative Brahmins of Orissa. Once while he visited Puri he criticized the pundits of *Muktimandap* in strong words. As a reaction to this Sri Panda was rebuked and disgraced by the Pandits and Sevayats of Puri temple as "*Dutiya Kalapahada*". It is interesting to note that Jaya Mangal Rath a co-worker of Sribatsa Panda and an orthodox Brahmin of Berhampur married to a lady of Hadi (sweeper) Caste.

Another most notable achievement of Sribatsa Panda was the spread of Arya Samaj ideas in Orissa. He founded a branch of Arya Samaj in 1903 at Bhanjanagar. He donated a portion of his own building at *Rasulkunda* for this purpose. It was said to be the first branch of *Arya Samaj* in Orissa. Jayamangal Ratha, Antaryami Patanaik, Mahadev Rout and many others became the members of this branch.

In order to propagate the gospel of Arya Samaj in Orissa, he opened a network of Gurukul Ashrams in Orissa. Efforts were made in these Gurukul Ashrams to recite the Vedic mantras, Sanskrit slokas. Much importance was given on character building and social reformation activities. For all his reformatory measures he can be compared with Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar of Bengal. He was very much praised by Radhanath Roy and Fakir Mohan Senapati for his selfless service for the causes of the poor and the untouchables.

From the above analysis it may be concluded that Arya Samaj Movement succeeded in creating a healthy atmosphere in favour of socio religious reform in Orissa <sup>[19]</sup>.

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