

DR.AKHAYA KUMAR MISHRA
LECTURER IN HISTORY
BALUGAONCOLLEGE, BALUGAON
KHORDHA, ODISHA, INDIA

CONTRIBUTION OF PRANANATH PATTANAİK IN FREEDOM MOVEMENT IN ODISHA

Prananath was one of those remarkable men in Odisha who fought for freedom. He was not only a blind fighter but also a far sighted one. His patriotism was fierce like fire, crystal clear like water and bold like heavy wind. He was also a socialist who dedicated his whole life for the poor and common people .Born in a lower middle class family of Dimiri, a small village near Kanasa under Sakhigopal Police Station in Puri district¹ on 16, November, 1905Prananath was the youngest child of his father Madanmohan Pattnaik who was a popular man in the area². Prananath started his education with the village Abadhana and then joined Kanasa Primary School. The school was some 2 miles away from his village. He was provided only one paisa daily as pocket money. But that was the time when the prices were as low as 16 seers of rice per rupee. After passing' Minor from Kanasa Primary School, Prananath was admitted in PuriZilla School in class VII (A). In 1920 due to Non-cooperation movement the students of Zilla School boycotted 'the School. Prananath had to return to his village. But soon joined school due to the pressure of his elder brothers.

After passing Matriculation in 1926 Prananath joined Ravenshaw College as a science student. By that time his vision had widened and he had already learnt the rudiments of Nationalism. He went through the speeches of S.N. Banarjee, Lajpat Rai, Tilak, Bipin Chandra Pal and Gandhiji. These political books of the age inspired him to be a freedom fighter. In western Hostel of Ravenshaw College, Prananath came in contact with some of the stalwarts of Modern Orissa⁴ They were Jagatbandhu Mahapatra, Prominent lawyer and Minister late Dinabandhu Sahu, retired RDC and educationist Ratnakar Sarangi, eminent economist and educationist Dr. Sadasiv Mishra, Late Lingaraj Das, Dr. Raaghunath Sahu , Dr . Mahendra Chandra Mishra etc. Bhagabati Panigrahi was also in the same Hostel. As Ravenshaw was the only premier educational institution in Orissa, it was natural on part of Prananath to have such friends.

In 1931, Pranath joined Kasi Vidyapitha with the aim of joining the national stream of National movement.⁵This institution was under the able guidance of men like Sriprakash and Acharya Narendra Dev. This National Institution was established in order ' to accommodate the students who had left their studies during the non-cooperation movement. During his life at Vanarasi Kasi Vidyapitha he came in contact with Lal Bahadur Sastri, Sri Prakash, and Pandit Sampurnananda. He was most influenced by the socialist stalwart. Acharya Narendra Dev. SaratPattanaik and Guru Charan Pattnaik from Orissa were there with Pranath. He returned to Orissa in 1935 via Calcutta with the degree of 'Sastri' writing a thesis on China.

Pranath's association with Freedom Movement goes back to 1920, the Non Cooperation Movement.¹While in Zilla School, Puri, the students organised a meeting in the Samanta Chandrasekhar Hall and Kalindi Charan Panigrahi addressed the meeting. Lokanath Mishra and Sridhar Das organised this meeting and advised the students to boycott the school. Everybody returned back to their respective homes. Pranath returned to Dimiri. The social dogmas and blind beliefs in the village life stirred him. Without the knowledge of the family members he used to distribute rice and other articles. He organized the village boys and engaged them in odd social works like deweeding the village pond, cleaning the village road etc.

While in Revenshaw College once Pranath wrote to Gandhiji requesting him to describe the role of the students in national movement.²Gandhiji's reply was to prepare oneself to serve the nation in future. In 1928, Simon Commission came to India for a fresh assessment of the Indian demands for Purna Swaraj. The Commission consisting of all Englishman under Sir John Simon was bound to voice only the views of the Government. The Congress therefore decided to boycott the Commission. A great national unrest took over the country. When the Commission landed in Bombay in February 1928, it was received with black flags, demonstrations and hartal. Protest meetings were held all over the country simultaneously. Where ever the Simon Commission went, it faced hostile procession with the slogan, 'Simon, go back'. Police resorted to lathi charge and repression. In the demonstration against the Simon Commission in the City of Lahore, the police brutally attacked Lala Lajpat Rai.³ He was injured seriously. An assault on a leader of his age and eminence was a great insult to the nation. Lala did not recover from either the injury or the sense of humiliation. He died shortly thereafter. The anger of the nation reached its boiling point. Pranath was no exception to it as a student of the Revenshaw College. All the students boycotted the college for one day on the 10th day of Lalaji's death. The boarders of the Western Hostel

contributed the cost of one meal towards the 'Lalaji National Memorial'. The English Principal enquired about the supporters of the movement in the hostel. Everybody feared repression. But Pranath was unmoved. During these days Pranath attended the meeting of Bipin Chandra Pal in the Town Hall of Cuttack.⁴

In 1930 Pranath returned to his village and spent some time enjoying village life. During his stay he organised some 20/25 youths to do some social work in the village. The activities of these progressive outlook wing was greatly resented by the orthodox people of the village. Even some tried to create misunderstanding inside the organisation. But Pranath through his determined leadership came across all the difficulties and the Organisation carried out its usual activities of social work.

In 1929, the Labour Party under Ramsay Mac Donald came to power in Britain. Acting upon the advice of Sir John Simon, he proceeded for a policy declaration. So, on behalf of the British Government the Viceroy, Lord Irwin announced in October, 1929 that the national issue of India's constitutional progress was the attainment of Dominion Status. He also declared that a Round Table Conference would soon be convened in London to discuss the constitutional issues. The idea of Dominion Status and discussion on it in a Round Table Conference with representatives of various groups from India and of England appeared to the Congress as a trap for delay as well as for 'divide and rule'. So the Congress met at Lahore on 29 December, 1929.⁵

The youthful Congress President Jawaharlal Nehru announced the Congress Policy that complete independence was the goal of India. It was to be "Complete freedom from British domination and British imperialism". In that historic session, on 31st December Mahatma Gandhi moved his famous resolution on "PurnaSwraj". The tri colour National Flag, signifying independence was unfolded by the Congress President Jawaharlal Nehru. The thunderous shouts of long live Revolution greeted the occasion from countless throats. The nation was first asked to take the Independence Day pledge on 26th January 1930. Gandhiji thought of a novel way to defy the Government and break its law. It was the 'Salt Satyagraha'. During this period Pranath and others left the college.

As per the resolution of the Lahore Session of the Congress, Independence Day was celebrated in Cuttack. A small contingent of Congress workers gathered at Lokseva Printing Press of Sri Rajkrushna Bose in Kathagara Sahi. Here the national flag was unfurled. The oath taking ceremony

was held in the courtyard of Gopabandhu Chaudhury's residence. Pranath was one among these oath takers.⁶

In February 1930 the Congress Working Committee met at Sabarmati and gave full authority to Gandhi to direct the nature of the Civil Disobedience Movement and direct its course. Before he started the campaign, Gandhi made the last appeal to the Viceroy to change his attitude towards India. The Viceroy did not agree for any talk with Gandhi. Finding the government adamant Gandhi began his Civil Disobedience Movement in shape of 'Salt Satyagraha' to start with. The Civil Disobedience Movement started on 12th. March, 1930 with Gandhiji's famous 'Dandi March'.

The long sea coast of Orissa produced fine salt since time immemorial. But the British authorities had stopped its production. It was causing misery to the poor people of coastal Orissa and the salt tax was considered the most iniquitous of all from the poor man's stand point.⁷ When Gandhi decided to break the Salt law, the people of Orissa welcomed it. The Utkal Provincial Congress Committee at its meeting on 16th March, 1930 at Balasore decided to launch the movement for breaking the Salt law in Orissa.⁸ Gopabandhu Choudhury was given the charge to organise it. The historic satyagraha started in Orissa when Acharya Harihar Das led the first batch of volunteers for manufacturing Salt at Inchudi in Balasore. Smt. Rama Devi and Smt. Malati Choudhury felicitated the volunteers. Young Pranath was one among many who had gathered at Cuttack to see off the Satyagrahis.⁹

In October, 1930 the congress workers decided to picket the exercise shops in Balasore under the leadership of Pandit Lingaraj Mishra. Pranath went there and took part in the picketing of excise shop.¹⁰ There he was arrested along with other satyagrahis at Motiganj excise shop of Balasore. The police officer Shaik Hamid could produce the name of Pranath from his old note book. This shows the importance of Pranath as a freedom fighter. From Balasore he returned to Puri to take part in picketing before excise shops and foreign cloth selling shops. By that time the Congress Office, Puri, was working from Ramachandi Sahi near present Laxmi Cinema Hall. Gatikrushna Swain, Gangadhar Mishra, Gokulmohan Raychudamani were his co volunteers. 'Satyabadi Tripathy was the leader of this group.¹¹ Here Pranath and other volunteers started a hotel called as 'National Hotel' in order to create funds for their nationalistic activities.¹² Their time was spent in spreading the message of nationalism among the common people. They used to be harassed by the police but continued their activities as before.

During these days Jawaharlal Nehru was arrested for his anti-British speeches. The congress volunteer all over the country arrest for similar speeches. Pranath and his colleagues were also arrested and put in Puri Jail. They were class 'C' prisoners thrown in an unhealthy conditions A in very small rooms. The Civil Disobedience Movement continued. Nearly one lack satyagrahis filled the jails in course of the campaign. The Viceroy was unable to control the situation by force alone. He decided to change the strategy. Towards the end of 1930, the British Government held First Round Table Conference in London without the Congress. It failed. The government, therefore, decided to step down for a compromise with Gandhi. The Viceroy was obliged to open negotiation which he had earlier closed. The talks resulted in the Gandhi – Irwin pact of 5 March, 1931.¹³ According to the terms of the pact Gandhi agreed to discontinue the Civil Disobedience Movement, and the government agreed to release all the prisoners. As a result Pranatha and others were released from the jail.

The Second - Round' Table Conference began in London in September, 1931. Gandhi made it clear that India could think of Dominion Status if it was to be given at once and in full, with Britain and India as absolute equals. But the British political leaders in the conference went by an opposite view. Through their proposed constitution they wanted to separate the Muslims from the Hindus. They further wanted to separate the Depressed Caste Hindus from high Caste Hindus. Communal consideration was the chief concern of the British. Gandhi returned empty - handed and disappointed. The congress had no other alternative but to resume the civil disobedience movement. Throughout the year 1932, The movement continued in full fury. Pranath had returned from Kasi Vidyapitha to Orissa to take part in the movement. In October 1932, Pranath with thirty congress workers came to Jatani for picketing at foreign cloth selling shops. It was part of foreign cloth boycott movement. Nobody came forward to accommodate the volunteers. They had to camp at the Siva Temple, some one mile away from Jatani town. In one evening all the volunteers reached Jatani town and obtained agreement not to sell foreign cloth from the cloth shop owners. The police reached there, and everybody fled through the railway colony. There was an ammunition depot near the railway colony. The sepoy on night duty challenged the fleeing party. Pranath was the last man in the line. He gave a satisfactory reply to the sentry on duty and everybody escaped luckily without any bullet on them.¹⁴

In 1933, while in Patana Camp Jail, Pranath used to take regular classes among the inmates of the jail. The young prisoners from Orissa, especially from Puri district, used to discuss about the

future course of action of the movement. Under Pranath's guidance they formed a "Friends Society". Its initial members were Pranath, Gangadhar Mishra, Parsuram Padatikray, Jagannath Mohanty, Sriharsha Mishra, Gokulmohan Raychudamani, Balaram Paikray, Loknath Ray and Gatikrushna Swain. They opened a Hotel and a Tailoring shop at Puri to fund the society. Pranath used to bring Banarasi cloth from Varanasi to be sold here. No doubt the Society vanished but during its short span it brought intimacy among its members to be carried to the future.¹⁵

The third round table conference was held in London at the close of the year. It served no purpose. But the British published a white paper on 15 March, 1933 giving an outline of a new constitution for India. It became obvious that the government would impose a constitution on India whether the congress liked it or not. Gandhi felt upset and began fast for 21 days on 8 May 1933, inside Yeravda Jail. But the government released him so also, Pranath, Gangadhar Mishra, Gokulmohan Rayachudamani and others were released from the prison, Pranath once again returned to Kasi Vidyapitha. In 1934 Pranath became the first President of the congress socialist party. He was very much influenced by the socialistic ideas. These socialist trends, in Pranath, developed while at Kasi Vidyapitha, Varanasi. Later he became one of the exponents of socialist ideas in Orissa. In 1935, while returning from Varanasi, Pranath became a secret member of the communist party of Calcutta. As the communist Party was banned in India, Pranath opted to remain inside the congress and worked for socialistic ideas. Thereafter Pranath took active part in forming the 'KrushakSangha' and playing a vital role in 'Prajamandal Movement'. In April 1936 when Orissa became a separate province Pranath fought the election on a congress ticket. He was elected to the Orissa Legislative Assembly from East Khurda constituency. In 1939 Pranath organised antiwar (World War-II) agitations and opposed the sale of the war Bonds. He organised 'Paik conference' and 'Youth conference' in Khurda. In 1942 Pranath offered Individual Satyagraha as part of Quit India Movement. He was arrested and sent to jail. Again in the same year Pranath was arrested and kept under detention as a security prisoner for 2 years and 6 months.¹⁶In 1945, Pranath left congress and openly became a communist. Till his death he remained a communist. He suffered imprisonment for a total period of about 5 years.

References

- 1- Whos' who of freedom workers in Orissa. P-53
- 2 - Mishra op-cit – p-7
- 3 - Manmathnath Das, History of Freedom Movement in India and National Integration, Cuttack, 1986-P-65
- 4 - Mishra, opp-cit p-9
- 5 - Das opp-cit, p-69
- 6 - Mishra, opp-cit p-14
- 7- J.K. Samal, History of Modern Orissa, Calcutta, 1989. p – 185
- 8 - UtkalDipika, 3.7.1930
- 9 - Mishra, op-cit. p - 15
- 10- Whos' Who of Freedom Workers in Orissa,p-54
- 11 - Mishra, op - cit. p-17
- 12 - Article of BaidyanathRath in A.K. Mishra (ed) 'Prananath Parikrma', BBSR, 1990, p - 129
- 13 - Das, op - cit. p-78
- 14 - Article of Gatikrushna Swain, "Mora Ajibana Sahakarmi Prananath Babu" (Oriya),A.K.Mishra (ed), PARIKRAMA, p-34
- 15 - Ibid-p-87
- 16 - Who's who of Freedom Workers in Orissa, BBSR, 1970, p-53-54.