



JAYAMANGAL RATH-THE ICON OF DALIT UPLIFTMENT IN GANJAM

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Abstract

Jayamangal Rath played an important role in the social change in Ganjam during the 19th century. The most important mission of Jayamangal was the assertion and the articulation of Dalit identity in Ganjam which was necessary for the making of modern Orissan Society. Jayamangal Rath was a staunch follower of Mahatma Gandhi. He worked for the spread of widow marriage in Ganjam being inspired by the Arya Samaja of Dayananda Saraswati. In 1923 he was the secretary of the Ganjam District Congress Committee. The sweepers (Hadis) of Lochapara area of Berhampur were most neglected people who wanted to take up the problems of the sweepers. By the inspiration of Jayamangal the lady sweepers like Sita attended the programme of the night school and many lady sweepers also came forward to end all social superstitions. He had also taken many steps to educate the fishermen community of Sorala in 1924 near to Brahmapur. His message of Khadi and charakha was well appreciated by the fishermen of Sorala who had given up the practice of Gandhi worship. He had also insisted on the formation of a *Yubak Sangha* (youth organization) in that time for social harmony. By the end of 1934 as the secretary of the Ganjam district Harijan Sevak Sangh Jayamangal had an elaborate reform scheme for the dalits of Ganjam. To express dalit identity in South Orissa was the Patitapabana Mission which was active under his leadership from 1926 at Berhampur.

Keywords: Ganjam District Was the Largest on The Northern Most District of Madras Presidency.

Introduction

The rise of a new class of reformist thinker and activities in Orissa had fostered the spirit of protest, dissent and reconstruction. This remarkable social change had appeared in Ganjam during the 19th century. Jayamangal Rath played an important role in the social change in Ganjam. He was a popular reformer in Ganjam in the first phase of 20th century for his multi-dimensional activities. From 1914 to 1952 he was entirely dedicated to the reformative activities in Ganjam which included the spread of Gandhian ideas and ideals in the rural and urban areas of Ganjam for the spread of women education and the encouragement of widow remarriage and many other social reconstruction programmes. The most important mission of Jayamangal was the assertion and the articulation of Dalit identity in Ganjam which was necessary for the making of modern Orissan Society.

Jayamangal Rath was a staunch follower of Mahatma Gandhi in the 1920s who wanted to implement the Gandhian programme of socio-economic reconstruction in Ganjam for the development of the so-called Dalits (the Harijans). The removal of untouchability and the progress of the dalits constituted an important part of his Gandhian programmes. But he had not only followed Mahatma Gandhi in this respect, he also articulated many other reforms for social reconstruction in Ganjam.

He was born in a Brahmin family in Manjusha in typical conservative set-up, but he could not remain confined to his narrow circle.¹ He was an orthodox Brahmin of Berhampur town. He married a lady of *Hadi* caste (that lady Nayani is still alive and his son Siba Sundar Rath is a teacher of Nachuni High School, Nachuni of puri District). He stayed in the *Hadi Sahi* near Gate Bazar of Berhampur.²

His association with Sribasha Panda, a great reformist thinker during this phase and he visited different rural areas in South Orissa as a teacher. He worked for the spread of widow marriage in Ganjam being inspired by the Arya Samaja of Dayananda Saraswati. An editor of a Magazine called *Samajamitra* had also fostered in him a keen desire to help and support the depressed classes.³ He saw the suffering and loss of the dalit in the rural areas and started to protect. The issues of the depressed sections were then highlighted in the periodicals and newspapers in Orissa by many elites. There was no organization to take up their problems and the activists were unable to understand the depth of the problems. In 1920 while he was busy in the spreads of Gandhian ideals in the rural areas saw this class and their misery.

Social work

In 1923 he was the secretary of the Ganjam District Congress Committee and he was responsible for organizing a district conference at Belguntha on November 10 and 11, 1923 which was attended by many Congress workers. In that meeting Jayamangal had expressed his sympathy for the dalit class and wanted to convince the higher class for ending their unwanted authority over this class. He had considered untouchability as a great sin in that conference.⁴

The sweepers (Hadis) of Lochapara area of Berhampur were most neglected people and they came to the notice of Rath during that period. He wanted to take up the problems of the sweepers of Berhampur.⁵ He first of all decided to educate the sweepers of Lochapara and for that purpose he started and managed a night school in the *Hadi Sahi* of Berhampur on the Lochapara road from



August 1923. Due to his effort five sweepers of that area came forward in giving up the wine drinking towards the end of 1923 and Gandhian ideas began to spread among the sweepers of Berhampur.⁶

In 18th January, 1924 the sweepers of Berhampur celebrate the marked Gandhi Day at the instigation of Jayamngal. The sweepers associated them with other caste people by the effort of Rath and they were dressed with *khadi* clothes on that day. There was a big meeting at the Hadi Sahi of Lochapara in the night of 18th January 1924 where Jayamangal presented the report of the night school. By the inspiration of Jayamangal the lady sweepers like Sita attended the programme of the night school and many lady sweepers also came forward to end all social superstitions. They supported Jayamangal for the articulation of dalit identity.⁷

As the Secretary of the Ganjam District Congress Committee he had also taken many steps to educate the fishermen community of Sorala in 1924 near to Brahmapur. As a great reformist he wanted that the fishermen of Sorala instead of worshipping the so-called *Gandhi Thakuran* should devote their time in spinning and weaving by the help of Charakha.⁸ His message of Khadi and charakha was well appreciated by the fishermen of Sorala who had given up the practice of Gandhi worship.

In the new spaper, The Asha from Brahampur on 3rd March, 1924, Jayamangal had made an interesting report of the conversion process of the tribals and dalits of Aska and other areas of South Orissa. He had decried this process and appealed to all caste people to cooperate with the tribal and dalits for social progress and for the articulation of Hindu Identity. He had stated that such conversion would help in the disruption of the Indian Society and it would strengthen the Christianity at large. He had suggested that they needed to be educated first before conversion and education would make them conscious of their deplorable position in the Hindu Society. They would ventilate their problems after proper education and this was necessary for Hindu Indian solidarity. He had published another article on this dalit issue in The Asha of March 10, 1924 highlighting the debate in the All India Hindu Mahasabha on the issue of the abolition of untouchability. In that article, he had strongly condemned the movement of conservative Hindu leaders of India against the untouchability. He had presented potent argument for the proper progress of the dalits in the Hindu society and the dalits must be given opportunity to have equal position in the society. According to Rath, untouchability was a great blot on the Hindu society and he did not accept any term like Hindu Jati and decried the terms like *Panchama Jati* and *Ashprushya* which were attributed to the dalits. He considered such treatment of the dalits as a blind belief and had no shastric support in its favour.

He had given a long report on the dalits as the secretary of the Ganjam Congress Committee in the newspaper Utkala Dipika of 26th July 1924. He had described the deplorable condition of the dalits in the Hindu society where the caste people had enjoyed all privileges and they were treated as untouchables and branded as fallen (*patita*). He had appealed to all caste people of India to establish social harmony by giving all possible support financially and morally to the dalit and tribals. The dalits are to be allowed to enjoy all rights with caste Hindus. They would no longer be dressed and oppressed in the society. He had declared that in the coming session of the Utkal Provincial Congress Conference the issue of the dalits would be given proper attention. The new member of the Congress Committee must be prepared to work out for the abolition of untouchability in Orissa. He had appreciated the Khadi and untouchability as the two significant steps for Gandhian Swaraj and for Hindu resurgence in India. The economic, social and educational progress of the dalits would be possible only when they would be prevented from wine drinking and all bad habits and they should be inspired to live equally well with other caste Hindus. Some of the volunteered among the dalits would come forward to prop up the so-called fallen. He had stated that the fallen dalits must be allowed into the temple of Patitapaban-Jagannatha and if this was not done then the people of the other provinces would come to Orissa for this mission for the uplift of the harijans and dalits. From 1924 Utkala Swaraj Ashram at Berhampur became the main centre for the progress of the dalits (their education and support) under the leadership of Jayamangal.⁹

In 1926 as the manager of Sanskar and Sevasnagha of Berhampur, he had also contributed to the solution of the dalit problems like the uplift of the untouchables by giving them material and educational.¹⁰ In the second annual session of the Sanskar Sevasangha Conference at Boirani on 12th September 1926 more steps were taken by Jayamangal and his associates like Gangadhar Prahara Mohapatra, Pitambar Misha, Dibakar Das, Nilakantha Mishra, Gobinda Pani and others for the development of the dalits.

He had also insisted on the formation of a *Yubak Sangha* (youth organization) in that time for social harmony. He had established *Patitapabana Pathagar* for the enlightenment of the dalits at Sorala which was a very commendable. Decision was taken for an awakening among the dalits of South Orissa by the Sangha by which they would get equal opportunity in the society with other sections. He also wrote article in the magazine called Sanskara for highlighting dalit problems of South Orissa. But he did not appreciate the proposal for membership on behalf of the dalits for nomination to the legislative Council because it would not solve their problem. He had pointed out that such nominated members would not help in solution of the problem of the dalits. There were many enthusiastic dalit workers like Ramachandra Das of Cuttack who should be nominated to the council for articulation dalit problems.¹¹



Role of Patitapabana Mission in Ganjam

The most important forum to express dalit identity in South Orissa was the Patitapabana Mission which was active under his leadership from 1926 at Berhampur. It was included in the Sanskar and Sevasangha as a part of the Organisation by his effort. Antanjami Behera of Sorala became another secretary of this forum. It was actually founded by the great reformist thinker Sribasta Panda.¹² The main aim of this organization was to make the Dalits conscious about their deplorable condition in the colonial society. It also wanted to abolish untouchability. The members of this organization were required to obey it in their daily life. Jayamangal as an important organizer of this institution had decided to bring about a large scale of reforms in the dalit life set-up, arrangement for education and sanitation for the dalits. He had expressed his objective in a session of the Patitapaban Sangha in Brahmapur on July 25th 1926.¹³

There was another session of the Patitapaban Sangh on the Sonapur sea shore near to Brahmapur on 21 October, 1926 under the presidency of Jayamangal Rath. About three thousand people attended the conference and the meeting had five hundred dalit men and women. The president in his address gave emphasis on the uplift of the dalits and abolition of untouchability.¹⁴

In 1928, another organization was formed for the dalits like *dandasi* in Ganjam and Jayamangal became active in awakening them along with the *hadis* (sweepers). In December, 1928 an association called Adima Odiya Samaj was formed in Ganjam in which the president was Nityananda Mandhata and Jayamanjal Rath was its vice-president. This Samaj was aimed to bring development for the dalits by eradicating all oppressive measures of the upper classes for the dalits. By 1931 the Patitapan Sangha had become successful in its mission for articulating dalit identity in south Orissa under the dynamic leadership of Jayamangal. He got the help and cooperation of others like Chandramani Devi, Swamidharmananda, Balakrishan Rao, Purushottama Behera, Antanjami Behera and Kumudini Devi in his mission. They had carried on large-scale propaganda for the progress of the dalits in about fifty villages of Ganjam like udyanakhanda, mahurikhanda, ichhapur, khalikote-athgarh and ghumsar.¹⁵ A new consciousness had emerged among the Dalits of Ganjam due to their efforts.

In 1933, Jayamangal had taken steps for reforming the dalit society by the utkalasanskara asharam at sorala.¹⁶ His dalit development mission came to focus in 1933 when he became the secretary of the Ganjam district *Harijan Sevak Samaj*.¹⁷ He was assisted by Banchhanidhi Pattnaik, Parsuram Mohanty and others in this mission. They visited the houses of the sweepers [hadis] in the different hadisahis [sweeper areas] of Brahmapur and convinced them about cleaning the roads and other sanitary measures. Jayamangal had given them moral lessons for a noble life without all vices. He advised them to stop gambling and other bad habits. By the end of 1934 as the secretary of the Ganjam district Harijan Sevak Sangh Jayamangal had an elaborate reform scheme for the dalits of Ganjam and a branch of this organization was opened at Gopalpur for the abolition of untouchability and for the reform of the dalits.¹⁸

In 1934 in the month of April Jayamangal had written a long article on the issue of the abolition of untouchability in a well-known weekly of Brahmapur named 'Nabeen'. He mentions that a group of Hindus have called themselves as caste people branding others as uncaste Hindus and untouchables (ajatiaasprushya). There was also division among the so-called untouchables. A caste Hindu is one who does not touch the Untouchables. This idea was rooted in the Hindu society. The Hindus do not fight against this superstition. The National Congress from the day of its activity had taken the abolition of untouchability as an important programme. Brahma Samaja, Arya Samaja and Christian Samaj were all active in the mission to end this untouchability in the Indian Society. They were all making attempts to bring an all-India consciousness. According to Jayamangal although there was a feeling to an untouchability in India but there was yet no resurgent movement for this. Many Congress leaders had not given up the untouchability and many others were silent on this issue despite the advice of Mahatma Gandhi. In Orissa such type of movement for the uplift of the dalits was still in the beginning process. The Harijan Sevak Sangha has a great responsibility in this respect. The attitude of the Caste Hindus towards the dalits needed to be changed. The doors of the temple should be opened for the harijans for worship. The so-called Panchama Schools for the dalits should be closed and the schools for the Caste Hindus should be opened for both the sections of students without any feeling. The dalit students needed proper training and good behavior from the side of the Caste Hindus groups. Jayamangal in his compressive survey and report has made it very clear that Harijan Movement would be powerful in all parts of Orissa with collaboration from all sections of the society and then only considerable progress in this respect could be achieved. In that report he had provided a powerful critique of the expression of the dalit identity in Orissa and he had explained a practical view point in that respect.¹⁹

In April 1934, a branch of the Harijan Sevak Sangh was set up at Haladiapadar Santi Asharam in Ganjam under the supervision of Jayamangal. A school and a library was established there for the dalit students and in the inauguration ceremony of the two institutions both Nirmal Nalini Devi and Pandit Banikinkar Sharama had delivered very valuable discourse on the dalit resurgence in Orissa.²⁰



From 1934 as the president of the Patitapabana Mission of Berhampur Jayamangal had brought to light several problems of the harijans of Berhampur. He had started a movement for the solution of the problems of the sweeper of that area. He demanded before the municipality for the electrification of the Hadisahi of Lochapada zone. By his continuous focus and demand street light arrangement was made for the area inhabited by the sweepers at Lochapade.²¹

In the month June 1934, he had spread the message of the abolition of untouchability in the Khallikote–Athagarh Taluka and in this regard, he was assisted by Brahmachari Swami and Binayak Samantaray of that area.²² He demanded the unity among all sections of the people of the villages. In a meeting in Balantara, people from Nalinakshyapur, Alapur, Dophuli and Patharahad attended his address. At Patharahe had set up a village organization centre [gramasangathan Kendra] which consisted of 14 members of each village from all sections of the society. Harihar Panda became its secretary. At Langaleswarhe addressed another meeting for the end of untouchability and social harmony. He had also established a centre for Patitapabanmission at langaleswar for the cause of the dalits and Agadhucharan Das became its secretary. These measures promoted the dalit movement in that area. From 1920 for about 15 years the Patitapabanmission had been successful in the promotion of harijan movement in south Orissa under the supervision of Jayamangal Rath. He was collaborated by the famous reformist thinker Sribatsa Panda and even the great nationalist leader Jagabandhu Singh had also supported him in 1937 when he became its president in the 16th session at Rambha.²³ In that session an important sub-committee called harjanpracharsabha was set up under the supervision of Jayamangal Rath.²⁴

Several branches of the Patitapabanmission were setup during his life time in Ganjam. This mission was designed to promote the dalit identity movement in South Orissa. Many high caste people and dalits like Pandit Damodar Kaviratna, Antarjami Rayaguru and dalits like Giridhari Behera and Iswar Behera had collaborated with him for the cause of the dalits. In 1939 he had taken up the issue of the fishermen community of Ganjam and had given focus to their problems in the newspaper, *Deshakatha*.²⁵ An important step for the dalit identity was the publication of an Oriya magazine named *Mahima* in 1940 published from the village of Khodasingi [Brahmapur]. This was designed not only to publish the *Mahima* cult from different perspectives but also to highlight social issues related to the dalits. It is needless to say that he wanted a castless and classless society in Orissa.²⁶

Conclusion

Thus, Jayamangal had given considerable attention to the dalit problem in south Orissa and he was not a dogmatic thinker. He wanted sincere devotion and cooperation from the congress workers and leaders in this context. He was able to put forth major issues of the dalits of Ganjam and even wanted to spread his message of dalit progress into the whole of Orissa and Bengal by his Patitapabanmission. He had understood the problems of the Hadi community (sweeper class) in Brahampur and other areas of Ganjam and had remained with them in Lochapada area facing considerable opposition from the side of the orthodox Brahmins. He had also supported the cause of many other untouchables of Ganjam with a practical mind and open heart. As a Gandhian thinker and congress activist, he had deep respect for the programs of the abolition of untouchability. He had also gone beyond that stage and had established the dalit identity which was later on followed by many grass-root levels leaders like Mohan Nayak and Binayak Acharya. His constructive programs and his articulation on the dalit issues published in different periodicals and journals in Orissa opened a new vista in the dalit identity in colonial India. In spite of all the hurdles, criticisms from various angles and at the risk of his life Jayamangal continued his crusade to abolish untouchability and uplift of the Dalits for nearly one and half a decade which forms a brilliant chapter in the socio-religious history of modern Odisha.

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