



COMMUNIST MOVEMENT IN NILGIRI (1938 – 1947)

Jayanta Kumar Pradhan

Lecturer in History, Remuna Degree College
Remuna, Dist-Balasor, India

Abstract

In India the Gadjat states otherwise known as the feudatory states played tremendous role in the socio-political life of the peasants and downtrodden classes of Odisha. The famous feudatory state in India was Nilgiri. At Nilgiri was a so strong communist base in the state of Odisha. Both communist and congress organizations were actively played their movements for the better treatment of the peoples from various angles. The congress and communist movements played side by side in the state of Nilgiri. As the most of the peoples were backward and Adivasi predominant, they were easily attracted by the communist ideology. Most of the common volunteers like, Pranabandhu Agasti, Himansu Nandi were the close link with Banamali Das who led the communist movement fruit fully. By his endeavor efforts and determination Nilgiri marched front to front for liberating the mother Nilgiri. The youths of Nilgiri had participated directly under the banner of communist for the grand success against the tyranny ruler and mighty Britishers. It was a historic event.

Keywords: Nilgiri, Communist Ideology, Feudatory States, Common Volunteers.

Introduction

The State Nilgiri had the unique distinction of being the first state of India to be integrated to the Indian Union. It was successive by the Communist Movement in Nilgiri against the spearheaded against the tyrannical rule of the king of Nilgiri and Britishers. The study of formation, growth and achievements of communist party and its movements in Nilgiri is a absorbing historical interest. The communist movements of the Communist party in Odisha as well as in Nilgiri adhering to the Marxist-Leninist philosophy under the stamp of Congress Socialist Party and through its own identity, contributed and radicalizing the goal of freedom movement in Nilgiri and also in Odisha. The party played positive role in bringing the awakening among the peasants, students and downtrodden in society and dragged them into the national liberation struggle. The Communist Movement at Nilgiri from 1938 to 1947 was the significant and remarkable for projecting their strength against the tyrannical rule. Though Congress Movement was it force, it was the Communist Party who had remarkable success at last. It was the mile stone in the revolution of communist party in Nilgiri.

Aims and Objectives

- 1= To highlight some personality of the communist leaders.
- 2= To determine the communist base in Nilgiri.
- 3= To centralise the communist activities of the Princely state of Nilgiri.

Summary

Nilgiri was a small Gadjat state in the close proximity of Balasore District of Odisha. It was ruled by the ancient regime. The Britisher appointed chiefs for their own interest. They took the fixed amount of the taxes from tenants. The Rajas paying the fixed amount of the taxes became all in all of the state. The Rajas under the protection of the mighty Britishers exploited the people. The people were suppressed, oppressed and depressed. They had to pay 'Bethi', 'Begari', 'Magan' and 'Rasad'. There were no disciplined organizations to lead the people in organized way. Banamali Das was the son of soil of Nilgiri who raised the voice against the Rajas. When Banamali Das was came to existence the huge numbers of peoples were supported him from various sides as the worthy son of Nilgiri and a branded communist leader of Nilgiri as well as Odisha. Under his leadership a vast changed to be seen at Nilgiri. Under the communist banner he was elected four times as M.L.A of Nilgiri to Odisha Legislative Assembly. In pre independence era the communist base was too strong at Nilgiri due to proper leadership. On 5th June 1938 a unit of communist party was secretly opened at Nilgiri under the guidance of state leaders. In the unit among the members Banamali Das was important figure, who was worked hard for the spread of communist activities in whole region of Nilgiri. Under the leadership of Banamali Das, Pranabandhu Agasti and others the party members were distributing communist literatures secretly in whole Nilgiri. When the peoples were known about the exploitations of Rajas then were diverted towards the thoughts of the communist ideology. So, the communist movement had been started by the party in Nilgiri under the leadership of Banamali Das, Pranabandhu Agasti, Hadibandhu Das, Kashinath Behera, Baisnaba Pattnaik and Raghunath Sarangi. They unitedly worked for land less labors and against the Rajas of Nilgiri. During their movements the communist leaders were faced so many difficulties when Russia and Britain were allies in just before 2nd world war¹

The communist leaders were tried to strengthen the communist movement. They were organized meeting after meeting in the villages to divert the minds of people to join in their movement. Basically, the leaders were targeted to the down trodden peoples and



tribal peoples that how they should be come to the front line of the society. This thought had successes to the communist movements at Nilgiri. The communist leaders were believed on physical power i.e., mass gathering at the time of movements. To success the movements they collected various weapons for the participants. The tribal volunteers were handled weapons like Dhanusara(bow & arrow), Talwar(sword) and handmade Gun. The leaders were contacted with central leaders and invited few Naga People for preparation of Guns. The Guns prepared secretly in underground.² The communist movement was fall of monarchy brought into an end the tyrannical rule and feudal social orders. It paved the way for enjoyment of democratic rights and freedom at a whole in Nilgiri.

Few of The Communist Luminaries:

The communist movements were found too achievements in their aim and objects due to the benevolent leaderships. Few of the luminaries were:

BANAMALI DAS
HADIBANDHU RAJ
PRANABANDHU AGASTI

Banamali Das was the communist luminary in the galaxy of the freedom struggle of Odisha. He was born in Kadambasahi of native Nilgiri town on 29th August 1918. He was the son of Harihara Das and Chintamani Devi. His family belongs to a higher middle-class family belongs to three brothers; two were elder to Banamali Das and one younger brother. Banamali Das lost his father when he was only four years old. His elder brother KalandhiCharana Das was a kind hearted man. His mother had religious bent of mind that who had more knowledge on the religious texts like Ramayana and Manabharata. Banamali Das completed his early education at Nilgiri then completed his matriculation at Balasore Zilla School on 1938.³ He was a student leader from 1936 to 1938 and was the Secretary of District Students Union; Balasore.⁴ Banamali Das was very much influenced by the Gopal Kumar Kanongo a socialist teacher of the Zilla School. Gopal Kumar Kanongo had introduced to Banamali Das with BhagabatiCharanPanigrahi the eminent communist leader of Cuttack. Banamali Das was enrolled his name in the 'Voluntary Corps' founded by BhagabatiCharan Panigrahi.⁵ Then Banamali Das had been a committed leader of the communist party. In those circumstances he became the ardent communist in his outlook.

In the year 1938 he left the school from Cuttack with Chitanya Mishra of Dasapala, Chakradhara Rout of Sukinda, Giridhari Panda of Mahanga and Brundaban Sarangi of Kahalia and established a political organization in a mess named by 'Sarbahara' mess at Balasore.⁶ When the communist party was formed during that time the Prajamandal movement had been continued. As the communist party member Banamali Das was became first Secretary and Kailash Chandra Mohanty was the first President of Prajamandal movement. Banamali Das was too trained for monitoring the movement so he worked hard achievements. In this connection he was jailed many times. Other side Banamali Das also given time to strengthen the communist party, for his communist link he was expelled from the post of secretary and membership of Prajamandal in 15th June 1940. It was great shock for him. Finally, he was determined to start the communist movement with his followers at Nilgiri.

Hadibandhu Raj was a prominent leader of the Prajamandal as well as member of Nilgiri communist party. He was born in the village Ajodhya. When Banamali Das was suspended from Prajamandal then hadibandhu Raj left the Prajamandal and actively worked for communist party. He led hundreds of residents of Nilgiri to Balasore, as a protest against the tyranny Rajas of Nilgiri. He was opened his mouth against the taxes like 'Bethi', 'Begari', 'Magana', 'Sikar' and 'Hatidhara' which were continued by Rajas of Nilgiri. He was instrumental on instigating the people did not cooperate with the activities of Rajas. During the sikar at Baulagadia in Nilgiri some communist members ware come to front and protected to sikar of Rajas. At Nilgiri among the communist leaders Hadibandhu Raj was next to Banamali Das due to his dedication and devotion towards the communist party. The communist leaders were started to motivate the youths of Nilgiri. So, they started the organization 'Yubak Sangha Samiti' for the youths. Hadibandhu Raj was the first president of the Samiti.⁷ Hadibandhu Raj was very nearest to Banamali Das. Like this PranabandhuAgasti was also too closed to Banamali Das. They were worked dedicatedly against the Rajas and mighty Britishers.

PranabandhuAgasti of Nilgiri was born and brought up in a higher-class family. But he was interested to save Nilgiri from two mighty exploiters. After his education he was directly joined in communist party. He resigned from Prajamandal. He raised his voice against the all taxes which were imposed by Rajas. He was motivated to tribal and lower caste peoples against the rajas and Britishers. For the freedom of Nilgiri he did not pursued his higher education.

The Communist Movement in Pre-Independence Era

It was only after the communist party branch in Odisha became active under the role of PranabandhuAgasti, BhagabatiCharanaPanigrahi and KalandiCharanaPanigrahi to spread and strengthen their organizational net - work in different parts of the Odisha. In this juncture Banamali Das, Hadibandhu Raj and others were started to spread communism in the feudatory state Nilgiri. On 15th June 1938 a unit of Nilgiri communist party was secretly opened at Nilgiri. From the beginning it had only seven members. These seven members were worked hard to develop their strength. They were spread the communist ideology in



the different parts of Nilgiri. Very secretly they moved village to village and motivated the peoples and tribal peoples. They circulated communist pamphlets among the peoples. Their exemplary efforts produced the great result at the end of 1938. They were functioned 16 underground camp groups with titled as 'Muktisena'. Excluding pamphlets, they were given communist literatures to the peoples which had been collected other states by them. They were also conducting study circles to preach communism to the people and to educate them different aspects of Leninism and Marxism.⁸

The communist leaders of Nilgiri tried to give their best for success their movements. They continued various activities as secret as possible and not give any impression to other leaders of the any other revolutionary organization that had been converted to communism ideology. Their policies were to work within the Prajamandal and influence its policy on Marxist line from within. The leaders were searched out the causes for which many people should be joined. Regarding this they were taken up the causes of poor peasants and agricultural laborers. Through the communist movements they raised their voice against high rate of interest paid by the people and also advocate for improvement of irrigation facilities for the benefit of the peasants. On 1st September 1939. The British Government imposed the defense of Indian Ordinance which was very repressive in nature. The first man to be arrested under his ordinance was Acharya Krupalini. It is important to note that Banamali Das, the peasant leader of Nilgiri was the second man of India to be arrested under that ordinance. At the time of arrest a parcel of "Agechala" the communist magazine was recovered from him. This incident exposed him as a communist member as well as leader so the Nilgiri Prajamandal was taken action against him. He was ousted from the post of Secretary of Prajamandal. It was the great offence for him. After that Banamali Das and other leaders were openly with vigorously worked for communist party. Many intensity study circles were organized by the party and various communist literatures were distributed among the people in larger number.

The Quite India Movement had started on 1942. The communist party emerged as the powerful political force in the state of Nilgiri.⁹ At no stage the Prajamandal movement did not went against the Rajas of Nilgiri. But the communist party went against the Rajas of Nilgiri from very beginning. One side the Prajamandal movement continued under the leadership of Kailash Chandra Mohanty but in other side the communist movement continued under the leadership of Banamali Das. The communist party had been founded more support from the general peoples and Adivasis so it was stronger than the Prajamandal. No doubt the Prajamandal organization was the largest organization in Odisha but its members and supporters were not worked sincerely. The communist party members and supporters were worked hard with committed and dedicatedly. Its members were committed to encounter, challenge and sacrifice for the sake of party.¹⁰

After the outbreak of Second World War in 1939 the political situation of Nilgiri took a sharp turn. The England had involved in the war against Axis Powers and declared India to be a belligerent state in the war without consulting the popular Congress Ministry. The Congress leaders were regarded this declaration as undemocratic and protested it various places of the Country. Under the direction of congress party, the Prajamandal leaders were protested it in Nilgiri state. The communist leaders were forcibly continued to protest the British Raj and mighty Rajas of Nilgiri. The communist party had been started their underground works by the leadership of Banamali Das. Regarding this linkage He was arrested in 1940 under the section- 38 and 39 of the Indian Defense Act and remains in the Jail of Nilgiri.¹¹ The Rajas of Nilgiri banned to communist party on 1942 under the heavy presser of Britishers. The communist leaders and party members were continued their activities to avoid the bane. In this critical juncture the communist leaders were played dual policy very tactfully. They played two important rules simultaneously, on the one hand joined the hands with Prajamandal for against the Raja of Nilgiri and on other hand, they championed the cause of the landlessness, laborers, and for the tribals (adivasis) those who had been exploited by the local privileged classes.¹² According to the situation the communists had no way to supported the Rajas ideologically and they had no sympathetic for the economic interest of landless tribals.¹³ Unlike Raja the communists had been guided by no communal consideration because the majority of their members were tribals. They were determined to face the loyalist tribals even by the use of arm.

There were in fact three distinct factions of the tribal population, each caught up in the vortex of an ominous civil war. The Prajamandal which had in its cadre rich aboriginals were anti-Rajas. Secondly the communist whose followers were the poor aboriginals were anti-Rajas, anti-Britishers and against the exploitation by the higher or upper classed. Finally, the loyalist tribals those who were supported the Rajas and opposed the Prajamandal as well as the communists. They were known as 'Rajabhaktas'. They had done their duty to protect Rajas, obey the orders and loyalty towards Rajas of Nilgiri.

During the Quite India Movement, it was rumored that the activities of Prajamandal would forcibly the palace and break it into pieces. After hearing this Raja had alarmed took prompt steps to counter the imminent danger. On his request the 200 soldiers of Eastern Command of Joint Union Force arrived at Nilgiri. Moreover, the soldiers entered in to the village and had been started looting the wealth by the name of the collecting taxes. They molested and raped many women. This dark operation was conducted under the supervision of the political Agent of Nilgiri. After the alliance of Russia and Britain in 2nd World War, the communists were felt that it has been functioned at Nilgiri by the support of British administration. They convinced to the people that the war against Nazis and



Fascists were for the greater interest of the world. In these circumstances, the Prajamandal members were criticized the role of communists and prevented that the communists were the slaves of Russia and the friends of British colonialism. The Prajamandal also commented that if the communist party should be come to power in India, no man would be allowed to have property and political power but they were punished too with target. Against these comments of Prajamandal, the communists were propagated that they were in favor of poor, anti-rich and tribals. The conflicts were started in few places among the supporters of Prajamandal and communists.¹⁴

In 1947 the popular uprising against the Raja was greatly intensified. The freedom loving people being encouraged by the Independence of India on August 14th 1947 formed an azad government in Nilgiri. The king lunched violent repression and instigated the tribals to rise against the peasants. The loyalist tribals of Rajas already called as "Raja Bhaktas". They were forcibly cut the paddy corps of the clean castes (people belonging to the Brahman, Karan and Khandayata castes) and peasants. The Raj Bhaktas were set fire to their houses. In this critical period the communist supporters were come out from their houses with large numbers and countered to the Raja Bhaktas front to front. The movement was started by the communists against the Raja as well as Raja Bhaktas. The leaders of the communist units in Odisha, C.P.I leaders like BaishnabaPattniak, Sadananda Mohanty, Harihara Das and Manmohan Mishra camped at Nilgiri to help the local comrades.¹⁵ They decided upon them that their two strategies would be faced the situation. First, they tried to establish contact with the poor tribals and landless tribals from the explorations of mighty Raja and mighty Britishers. The Raja of Nilgiri implemented the policy of divided and rule to disturbed them. But the strategy did not yield much result. The tribals who had been exploited by the local rich peasants (nobles) or clean castes for a long time were easily persuaded by the Raja who imposed on them about their suffering at hands of the clean castes people. So they did not pay much need to advice of communists.¹⁶

The second strategy had been adopted by the communist leaders that they were started to increase their physical power. Many volunteers were taken training in camps of various places in Nilgiri. At the camps they were trained to handle weapons like, Dhanusaras (bow and arrow), Talwars (swords) and guns. Under the leadership of BaishnabPattnaik the communist movements in pre-independence era had started with violent way. The communist volunteers armed with above different weapons then they proceeded to confront with Raja Bhaktas. Near Banasima (forest village) area in different places several round of confrontation in between the two sides. In the first phase of communist movements the tribals were given success to communist movements without any doubt. They were (tribals) mostly armed with their traditional weapons, especially dhanusara (bow and arrows) and faced to the loyalists of Raja. So, it was cleared that most of the battles had been won by the communist organization.¹⁷ This first phase of the communist movement had gone through wars with remarkable success from their side. It should be an exaggeration to say that the Raja of Nilgiri surrendered near communists. It was also a great physical offensive for Raja that their loyalists Raja Bhaktas failure from every angle near the communist attack. But there is a little doubt that they rose with to occasion heroically and their contribution towards the downfall of the Raja or king was significant.¹⁸ It has been a demised in the royal political history and monarchical state of government in Nilgiri.

These great achievements of communist movements in pre-independence era were the great taught and lesson for the clean castes, Raja Bhaktas, mighty Raja and indirectly for the Britishers. The communist banner was hosted first time by the leaders and workers on the soil on Nilgiri. It was last but not least that the communist activities had found a great support from the bottom of the heart of peasants, tribals and common men. Comrade Banamali Das was the master mind of this socio-political war in pre-independence era.

Thus, the rule of communist party for igniting the communist movement was no less than important with congress movement. Communist movement was practical and sagacious than the congress movement in the state. Had there not been communist movement, the kind would not have been overthrown and the state would not have been integrated into Indian Union. Thus, the Prajamandal movement in Nilgiri was the combined effort of compressed communist movement with common goal of achieving Independence on 14th November 1947.

References

1. Biswal, Dr. Surendra Kumar: "Integration of the princely state Odisha- A case study of Nilgiri", "Pacific publication, New Delhi, 2017. PP- 2 to 4.
2. Singh, Dr. Chandan Kumar (edited): "Kramasha", The Autobiography of Banamali Das", SikshyaSadan , Cuttack publication, 2018, PP-14 to 15.
3. Pattnaik, P.K: "Prajamandal movement in feudatory states of Odisha (1938-1948), Friends Publication, Cuttack, 1985, P- 173.
4. Rout, Dr. S: "NilagiriPrajaAndolanarItihasa", PrajaandolanaraItihasa Committee, Balasore, 1970, P- 128.
5. Pattnaik, P.N: "Odishare Communist Party Janma", Friends Publication, Cuttack, 1985, PP- 70 to 72.
6. Ibid, P- 173.
7. Rout, Dr. S: op-cit, P- 63.



8. Interview with Banamali Das, dated – 20.12.2005.
9. Interview with Urmimala Das, the daughter of Banamali Das, dated – 28.4.2004.
10. Mahatab, H.K: “SadhanarPathe, Vol – II, Friends Publication, Cuttack, 1972, P- 185.
11. “PrajatantraSaptahika”, June – 22 to June – 28, 1997.
12. “PrajatantraSaptahika”, June – 29 to July – 5, 1997.
13. Raj, Balaram: “History of Kisan Agitation”, Anusaya Publication, Balasore, 1982, PP – 9 to 12.
14. Biswal, Dr. Surendra Kumar: op-cit, P- 255.
15. Indian Annual Register, 1940, vol. - IV, No-1, P-32
16. Pattnaik, P.K: op-cit, P-203.
17. Pradhan, A.C: “The Journal of Odisha History”, vol-IV, NO-I, P-32.
18. Biswal, Dr. Surendra Kumar: op-cit, P-272.

Filename: 19
Directory: C:\Users\DELL\Documents
Template: C:\Users\DELL\AppData\Roaming\Microsoft\Templates\Normal.dotm
Title:
Subject:
Author: Windows User
Keywords:
Comments:
Creation Date: 4/16/2021 4:41:00 PM
Change Number: 6
Last Saved On: 4/30/2021 12:33:00 PM
Last Saved By: Windows User
Total Editing Time: 17 Minutes
Last Printed On: 5/15/2021 11:21:00 AM
As of Last Complete Printing
Number of Pages: 5
Number of Words: 3,826 (approx.)
Number of Characters: 21,810 (approx.)