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ROLE OF LABANYA PRABHA GHOSH IN FREEDOM MOVEMENT OF MANBHUM DISTRICT

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Abstract:

Over the last few decades, historians and researchers have been increasingly inclined to conduct research on the regional history. From that source, the interest of knowing the history of freedom struggle of Manbhum district has been increased. In 1833, Manbhum district was formed through various setbacks. It was one of the largest districts of India and can be said to be one of the areas of the anti-British war of independence. Many leaderships were emerged at the local, regional, as well as at the national level through this anti-British freedom movement. Their dedication, self-sacrifice, sense of responsibility, taking risk of life was no less than the national leaders. Stepping out beyond the boundaries of the four walls, women also joined the anti-British freedom struggle along with men, whose entire history still remained in darkness. Labanya Prabha Ghosh, who later became famous as Manbhum Janani, was one of the women leaders who came forward to organize and lead the organization of the women of Manbhum in the anti-British war of independence. The article highlights her role in freedom struggle of Manbhum district.

keywords - Manbhum, Movement, Freedom, Satyagraha, Labanyaprabha, Shilpashram, British, National, Women, etc.

INTRODUCTION:

Manbhum district was formed in 1833 by dividing jangalmahal district in bengal province as a result of the Ganga Narayan hangama.¹ It was one of the largest districts in India. The district consisted of several areas, including the present Purulia district. From 1911 to 1956 it was under Bihar province. Although at present the name of the Manbhum district has been abolished, the history of various setbacks, anti-British struggles, traditions and culture have made the name 'Manbhum' immortal. The name 'Manbhum' seems to the pulse of the people here. India's national movement spread all over the country. There is evidence in Manbhum district of the then Bihar province also. The leaders who took the leading role in the freedom movement of this district, came forward to organize and lead the women of Manbhum in the national movement of India. Labanyaprabha Ghosh, who was initiated into the Gandhian ideology, became a popular leader in freedom struggle of Manbhum district. She was not only a freedom fighter but also one of the most successful leaders of the language movement of Manbhum after independence.

MAIN DISCUSSION:

Labanya Prabha Ghosh was one of the leaders inducted by the Gandhian ideology during the anti-British freedom movement in Manbhum district. She was born on August 14, 1897 in Hooghly district of West Bengal. Her father was Aghor Chandra Roy.² He came to purulia by profession. He had five daughters and a son. Labanya Prabha was the fourth of five daughters, named Kiran Prabha, Indu Prabha, Kanaka Prabha, Labanya Prabha and Usha Prabha.³ Since an early age Labanyaprabha Ghosh got the lesson to service other from her

family and later she engaged in the service of the and nation and country. In 1908, at the age of 11, Labanya Prabha Ghosh was married to Atul Chandra Ghosh who was the prominent leader of freedom struggle in Manbhum District.⁴

After the partition of Bengal by the British government in 1905, Manbhum district became the part of Bihar Province. Although the British government abolished the partition of Bengal in 1911 due to the swadeshi and anti-partition movement, Manbhum district remained within the province of Bihar. Naturally, people of Manbhum have erupted in protests against the British. The wave of the anti-British freedom movement spread like wildfire all over India, and Manbhum district of the then Bihar province was not excluded from it. The first all India movement led by Gandhiji was the non-violent non-cooperation movement, which spread to different parts of India. The people of Manbhum district joined the movement at the call of Gandhiji. Nibaran Chandra Dasgupta, Atul Chandra Ghosh came forward to lead the freedom movement in Manbhum.⁵

In 1920s, Nibaran Chandra Dasgupta, pioneer of freedom movement of Manbhum district, campaigned from village to village with the intention of mobilizing the people of Manbhum. He realised that in order to strengthen the movement, it was necessary to involve men as well as women, irrespective of caste, creed and religion. And that is why, like Gandhiji, he also inspired the women of Manbhum. In 1928, he held an organisational meeting with women.⁶ Khiroda sundari devi, kalyani devi, Basanti Devi etc joined this meeting. Labanya prabha Ghosh was inspired by this meeting and called the women of this district to organised for the emancipation from British raj. Many women came out from the house under the leadership of Labanya Prabha Ghosh. They gave up wearing silk, bangles etc and chosed to use domestic products.

The year 1928 was a landmark year in the history of Manbhum district. The first political convention of the Manbhum District Congress was held in this year where Nibaran Chandra Dasgupta and Annada Kumar Chakraborty took the lead role in the conference.⁷ They went to every village and campaigned. Subhas Chandra Bose presided over the conference. As a result, it got another dimension. There was a stir all over Manbhum district, many leaders from Bengal and Bihar attended the conference and made the conference successful. Manbhum Congress workers including Atul Chandra Ghosh, Labanyaprabha Ghosh, Jimut Bahan Sen, Surendranath Niyogi, Bholanath Mukherjee, Nilkantha Chattopadhyay attended the conference.⁸ As a result of this conference, the people of the entire Manbhum district were deeply involved in the anti-British struggle, especially in the presence of Subhas Chandra Bose.

The District Congress Committee was formed in Manbhum district to organize the freedom movement properly. Members of this Congress Committee transfered the Shilpashram at Telkalpara of Purulia in 1928.⁹ It became the political office of Manbhum Congress. Here all the anti-British activities were discussed regarding the political meetings, rallies and various programs of the Manbhum Congress. Nibaran Chandra Dasgupta and his family started living in this ashram. After the death of his wife, Atul Chandra Ghosh's wife labanyaprabha Ghosh along with her family started living in Shilpashram as a guardian of two families and became the head of the Shilpashrama. She was entrusted with the sole responsibility of the ashram. The nationalist movement continued in Manbhum around this Shilpashram. Gradually, she emerged as a mother to the people of Manbhum (Manbhum Janani).¹⁰ Gandhiji, Chittaranjan Das, Subhas Chandra Bose etc leaders also visited this Ashram.¹¹ The Lahore session of the National Congress, chaired by Jawaharlal Neheru in 1929, was of special significance. In this session, the proposal for purna swaraj was first introduced. Gandhiji had proposed a complete boycott of the British government in this session. A few leaders from the Manbhum Congress and Shefalika Basu as a representative of the women attended the session from Manbhum. Demonstrations were organized in different places and picketing, boycott, etc. programs were continued. Everywhere the leaders of the Manbhum Congress continued the campaign to convey the significant speeches and decisions of the Lahore session to the people of the villages. Labanyaprabha Ghosh, Shefalika Basu, Kalyani Devi, Khiroda Sundari Devi etc women leaders urged the rural women to join the anti-British struggle. Ghosh's fiery speech inspired the women of Manbhum and Santa Mahato, Bhavini Mahato also joined in the movement.¹²

In 1930, with the call of Gandhiji, the second anti-British all-India civil disobedience movement started in India. The movement also started in Bihar and Manbhum district. On April 10, 1930, the District Satyagraha Committee was formed in Manbhum to conduct the civil disobedience movement. This committee used to go from village to village and carry out campaigns and formed various organizations. As Manbhum district was not situated in coastal area, there was no option for making salt in violation of the law, but the leaders here came out of that barrier and the Satyagraha force splitted into two groups, one at Kanthi in Medinipur and the other at the seashore of 24 Parganas and violated the law by making salt. This incident created a huge stir in the entire Manbhum district and the sense of nationalism started increasingly among the people here. The youth became emotional and started participating in this satyagraha. Arrangements are made to sell this salt in the open market of Purulia. The procession of salt sales began, in which all the students, young men and women, participated. Labanyaprabha Gosh formed the Mahila Satyagraha Bahini on May 10, 1930, to organise the women of

Manbhum. Under her leadership, this force joined the movement at different times.¹³ The Mahila Satyagraha Bahini, led by Labanyaprabha Ghosh, took part in the Salt Satyagraha, along with Shefalika Basu who came forward to lead the movement. They carried out extensive campaigns at the call of Labanyaprabha Ghosh when the women left the household work and participated in the Salt Satyagraha. At the same time, the women started boycotting foreign goods and foreign clothes and started using domestic items. According to the report of the then Deputy Commissioner of Manbhum district, the participation of women in the salt satyagraha in Manbhum district was remarkable.¹⁴

The civil disobedience movement, like in other parts of India, received a massive response in Manbhum district, but the British police did not sit with folded hands. There was a lathi charge and arrest warrant issued by the British on various occasions. Yet the movement could not be suppressed, the arrest were even more acceptable to them than the slavery of the British. According to the decision taken at the Lahore session in 1929, January 26 was celebrated every year as Independence Day. On January 26, 1932, Labanyaprabha Ghosh called upon the women of Manbhum to celebrate Independence Day with a grandeur. The aim was to raise awareness against the British government among the people of Manbhum. On that day, the women volunteers of Shilpashram, holding the national flag, led by Labanya Prabha Ghosh, circumambulated purulia town. Carrying the national flag of India, they marched on the streets to sing various patriotic songs of the country.¹⁵ As a result the British government arrested several women, including Labanyaprabha Ghosh and sentenced them to rigorous imprisonment for 6 months.¹⁶ In 1934, when the National Congress withdrew the civil disobedience movement and the front-line leaders were arrested, the movement gradually became dull in Manbhum district also. The next year, in 1935, when Nibaran Chandra Das Gupta died suddenly, the freedom movement in Manbhum was shaken. As his successor, Atul Chandra Ghosh, husband of Labanya Prabha Ghosh, took over the leadership of manbhum district Congress. Naturally, Labanya Prabha Ghosh got associated more in political activities.

Due to The Second World War, the international situation became increasingly turbulent. In 1940, when the Working Committee of the National Congress of India demanded full independence, it was rejected by the British government, and the then Viceroy of India, Lord Linlithgow, called for Dominion status through the August Resolution. In such a situation, the whole of India erupted in anger against the British government. The National Congress strongly opposed the August resolution and called upon the citizen to wage a vigorous struggle against the British. In the meantime, the British government had declared India a war-torn country. This hurt the sentiments of the people of India and they strongly protested against it. In 1940, Gandhiji called for a personal Satyagraha in a non-violent manner. Responding to his call as India's first Satyagrahi, Vinova Bhave defied the law on October 17.¹⁷ He started a personal satyagraha, created a huge stir across the country. Everyone expressed their desire to join a personal satyagraha but there were certain conditions as eligibility to participate in this personal satyagraha as directed by Gandhiji. Protests against British imperialism were started in various parts of India by conducting this personal satyagraha. Like in other parts of India, in the state of Bihar, as the first Satyagrahi, Dr. Sri Krishna performed a personal satyagraha and raised anti-war slogans. President of Manbhum District Congress Committee Atul Chandra Ghosh became the first Satyagrahi from Manbhum to launch a personal satyagraha at Manbazar police station on November 27.¹⁸ As the second Satyagrahi, Bibhutibhushan Dasgupta defied the law with anti-British slogans, and the third Satyagrahi was Tikaram, who initiated the personal Satyagraha in Dhanbad. Labanyaprabha Ghosh, one of the most important and fourth satyagrahi of Manbhum district, was the only woman satyagrahi at this time to be imprisoned by violation of the law at the Puncha police station.¹⁹ No one was spared from police arrest, the first three Satyagrahis were sentenced to one year of rigorous imprisonment while Labanyaprabha Ghosh was sentenced to six months of imprisonment.

The failure of the Cripps Mission forced Gandhiji to take the oath of 'Do or Die'. On 9th August 1942, at the Bombay session of the National Congress, Gandhiji called for the Quit India Movement. In order to resist the movement, the British government arrested the frontline leaders of the Congress on the same day and at the same time declared the provincial and regional Congress organizations including the National Congress as illegal and conducted search operations at various organizations and revolutionary centers and forced the leaders including Labanya Prabha Ghosh to vacate the Shilpashram. When she did not comply the govt order, police arrested her and sentenced for 2 years of imprisonment.²⁰ After the emancipation from jail the Manbhum Congress leaders continued their constructive and political activities against British govt. by establishing a new ashram at Kanapara. "Labanya Prabha Charka centre" was established in Barabazar.²¹ Labanyaprabha Ghosh participated in Pataka satyagraha in 1945 and again she was imprisoned for 3 months.²² India gained independence in 1947, bowing to the sacrifice and bravery of india's pioneering leaders.

CONCLUSION:

Thus we can see that Labanya Prabha Ghosh has contributed immensely to the freedom struggle of Manbhum as well as India. Through her repeated imprisonment and sacrifices, she influenced the women brigade of Manbhum to come out of the family barrier and transformed them into the national flag bearer for contributing to the freedom movement. She started the social movement along with the nationalist movement. Uniting women from all walks of life was not an easy task even in 20th century. She had to face many obstacles, yet she remained firm in achieving her goal. On one hand, she showed firmness in the uncompromising struggle against the British, on the other hand, her heart was moved by the misery of the common people. Thus she was able to be the motherly figure of all the people of Manbhum and became famous as 'Manbhum Janani' in this district. Undoubtedly, the contribution of Labanya Prabha Ghosh in the history of Manbhum and India is undeniable. After Independence she fought for the sake of the country and the nation throughout her life, which remained elusive in this article. The full history of Labanya Prabha Ghosh's fight will surely be discovered with the work of researchers.

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