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NABAKRUSHNA CHOUDHURY AND HIS TIMES

Dr.Surendra Kumar Biswal

H.O.D. in History

Srinibas Degree College, Mangalpur,

Soro, Balasore,756045

Abstract:- (Nabakrushna Choudhury a touring personality, a freedom fighter, a leader of the Congress socialistic party started his career in Gandhian movement and accepted socialistic creed. He was a social reformer, educationist legislator and an activist per excellence. He applied his strength and efforts for integrity political struggle with socio economic issues. A politician with a rare mark of statesman with feeling and compassion for the down trodden and destitute placed him a high pedestal as a leader. Above all he was a multi personality of rare metal marked brilliant achievement in different works of life.)

Along with Rama Devi and Gopabandhu Choudhury another famous couple well-within the Choudhury family tradition and in no way less important in their contribution to Sarvodaya in Orissa is that of Gopabandhu's brother Nabakrushna and Malati Choudhury. Both Nabakrushna and Malati Choudhury had long association with the freedom movement right from the 1920 and followed up the Congress led struggle for freedom through the emergency until very recent times. Nabakrushna Choudhury, now survived by his wife, was a symbol of unpretentious humanity and described by Gopinath Mohanty as "an ideal human being, an ideal servant of the nation and an ideal leader". He was a man of free thinking and free conduct. He was generous, independent minded and fearless. A friend of the poor and exploited class, he was the representative of the people and revolted against exploitation, oppression and injustice. He was a man of self-less determination. He "stayed away from luxury and chose the life of hard work even when he was the chief-minister of Orissa (from 12.05.1950 to 19.10.1956). His righteousness was a quality which is very rarely found in others. In fact, no other Chief Minister had so much sympathy for the Bhoodan movement as Nabakrushna Choudhury. His political career was remarkable for the achievements he accomplished in the field of Constructive work as entailed in the Gandhian Sarvodaya plan. Together with his wife Malati Devi he worked with full faith in the Sarvodaya ideal and encouraged Bhoodan as the best land reform measure possible in the present context. Even after retiring from active politics he chose Baji Rout Chhatrabas at Angul as his dwelling place where he engaged in the welfare activities that incorporated various developmental programmes especially for the tribal people and the Harijans.

Unlike Gopabandhu Choudhury, Nabakrushna had devoted his life for the same social goals but in a different way. He started working from Tarikunda farm whereas Gopabandhu Choudhury had started operating from Alakashrama. The elder brother was less into active politics and in all his life had contested but in one election: the District Board Election, and there after never a second time. He was a fool-time constructive worker who chose to work in the Bari area. Even through

was Utkal Pradesh Congress President in 1938, he was critical of power-politics and obliquely criticized the works of Congress Government when he thought it had shortcomings. The younger brother, on the other hand, joined the socialist movement and led the peasants movement and the movement against the princely states. He became a leader of the Congress Socialist Party. He took part in active politics and became Minister and then the Chief Minister. During first two years of his chief-ministership, i.e. between 1951-52, there was a unique land movement in a place called Kujendri in Gunupur, Koraput, known as Bhoo-satyagraha. It was a movement which was not a programme to supplement actual Bhoodan programme of Vinoba. So, Vinoba turned away from it. But Nabakrushna Choudhury was happy with its prospects and took interest in the people's movement and gave Bhoo-Satyagraha a realistic twist. Nabakrushna had the same dedication to the cause of the poor, but his means he employed were different from those applied by Gopabandhu Choudhury. In his later life he was critical of Vinoba until the end. Nabakrushna Choudhury believed that it was possible to solve the problems of the poor by assuming power into one's own hands.

There was a big rift in the opinion held by the Congress and that of the members of Sarvodaya. In 1952 there was significant achievement in the field of constructive work under the leadership of Gopabandhu Choudhury. They received great success in Gramdan according to which all land owners donated a sixth of their land which was later distributed among the landless. All the land thus received was collectively put to cultivation by all the people in the village. It was Nabakrushna Choudhury's intention to accord government recognition to all the land received through donation which were distributed among the people through the Bhoodan Yajna bill of 1953.

Nabakrushna Choudhury encouraged all government employees to participate in the land reform activities. The villagers were greatly enthused by his support of bhoodan and gramdan. The first village that came under Gramdan in Orissa was Manpur where there was no personal ownership of land and where nobody was without land. Everybody lived in friendship with others and there was peaceful co-existence.

Nabakrushna Choudhury as the chief-minister of Orissa had brought many reforms for the peasants but ironically the peasants could not reap the benefit of the rules because of an indifferent and at times hostile bureaucracy which acted against the interest of the farmers. So, land donation could not be properly affected. But Nabakrushna was an ardent supporter of the peasants and land reforms. On 9th April, 1953 he mentioned on the floor of the Assembly that, no reform is possible without mental, spiritual, and social change..... without revolutionary change within the mind of man.

The success of Bhoodan came in a big way in Koraput because of a special reason. It was because people over there believed unanimously that land belongs to all and it is the mother of all. If the people did not have faith in such a system or if they took it lightly then Bhoodan and Gramdan would not have reached any success. Without people's cooperation, land received through gift would not be immediately re-distributed. Soon after Nabakrushna Choudhury quiet as Chief Minister, land donors did not give up their ownership of land and gradually shied away from voluntary gift programme. Unfortunately there gathered a strong opposition to Bhoodan in Orissa.

In Koraput the satyagrahis were prepared to go to jail while working for enforcing their land reform agitation. Nabakrushna as the Chief Minister was very sympathetic to the sensitive issue. He wrote a letter to Biswanath Patnaik for withdrawing the satyagraha of the area. He understood that the adivasis had lost the land to people who had taken ownership of their land and because there was no land settlement, it was impossible to know the actual record of ownership of such land. In a letter he wrote to Biswanath Patnaik, that, forcible re-distribution of land was no solution. It

was impossible to take away land without compensation. According to rule a full compensation must be paid for agricultural land. The land thus acquired after paying high compensation will be very little after the same is re-distributed among the land-less. So, the only way to remove poverty was to find new land and provide other works to the people.

Nabakrushna Choudhury also suggested that, alongside land reforms more people were required for working for building roads and 'bunds'. The 'adivasis' like 'Kondh- Sauras' could organize into a labour force and earn sufficiently. He thought, if Oriya labourers could move to far off places like Assam for working in the tea-gardens to bring profit to the private agencies, then they could also work for social service within the state. This would be done not for any profit motive or exploitation but for service to the nation. In 1952 as Chief Minister he dissuaded the adivasis from non-cooperation on this front and advised them to keep away from Satyagraha which means deliberate defiance, transgression of law and a willing acceptance of punishment. The Adivasis made it clear that "[They] won't leave our land even if [they] are beheaded. Land belongs to us. They did not raise any resistance when they were arrested. They were ready to go to jail and this unrest spread like wild fire. They had no faith on the government officials because they thought the latter supported the land lord.

Gopinath Mohanty was tipped as the officer deputed to solve 'Bhoo-Satyagraha insurgency in Gunupur, Koraput. He had a dialogue with the people and government officials and after careful study of relevant papers, he submitted a report on the deplorable state of the adivasis and suggested measures to alleviate their suffering. Nabakrushna Choudhury was improved by Mohanty's report and accepted his suggestions and sent him as the Sub-Divisional Officer of Raigarha sub-division on reaching Raigarha, Mohanty started new programmes and made ceaseless efforts to solve their problems. He protected the interest of the adivasis and ensured strict implementation of the acts like the prevention of Adivasi Land Transfer Act 1917, Bhaga-Chasa Act of 1947 and the Orissa Money-lenders act of 1939. To protect the interest of the Adivasi this was a very important step taken by the Government of Orissa. The adivasis heaved a sigh of relief when they were exempted from paying court-fee and were given government pleaders to support them in legal matters. The Adivasis were given unused or surplus government land and were further granted loan to develop these terrain into arable land. Apart from these, they were granted special assistance in the form of grain loans during agricultural seasons. They were given other employment during the days when there was no agricultural engagement. They worked for building, roads, digging ponds and were engaged in small irrigation projects.

Gopinath's personal relationship with them destroyed their fear for their exploiters. The land lords were bound to give them their shares and return them their dues accrued over the years. Illegal collection of interest amounting to three times of its principal was no more possible. This is how the adivasis got rid of their fear. They developed great faith in the legal system as soon as they rightfully received the ownership of land which they believed was their own. They had nothing to complain about and were pleased to receive such government favour with regard to land ownership.

While the Sarvodayis were busy in their social reforms work and achieved their goal by appealing to the good sense of the people and touched every front of the rustic life of the adivasis, the Governmental reassurance during Nabakrushna's regime was a very good support that complemented the Sarvodaya activities in the region.

Nabakrushna Choudhury had accepted a view that power politics could be pursued to solve the problems of the people but gradually changed this position and came to realize that the situation changed from bad to worse after independence. He was disillusioned with the state of affairs and resigned from politics. He was all along a supporter of Bhoodan and loved the basic principles of Sarvodaya. He was an absolutely pure soul that lived a life of simplicity far from

creature comforts. He equated himself with the poorest of the poor and shared the fate of the neglected, the miserable, and the poorest person in the social order. Towards the end of his life he really lived and died like an ordinary poor villager and shared the same fate as that of a labourer and a Harijan.

Gopinath Mohanty writes about his simplicity: "No luxury or laziness touched him and he was self-reliant in matters of his personal work. He lived like a very common man, fixed his bed, swept his floor..... wore a short khaddar dhoti and a kurta, ate simple food.... Walked untrodden ways to meet the people and understood their problems..... exchanged words with the workers and those he considered as unforgotten brothers as he walked up to them..... Once, in an Adivasi village called Murtuli he had lunch with 'Nishamani apa', a female worker. When everybody sat down, he addressed a peon as his brother and invited him to sit next to him for lunch.

He chose Angul as his home and set up the Baji Rout Chhatrabas as a home for the children of political prisoners. But it grew into a hostel for adivasi and harijan students of the basic school started under the programme of educational reconstruction.

After he quit as Chief Minister, he joined the Bhoodan movement by turning away from the Congress party which he thought was becoming corrupt and selfish. "He saw the possibility of a revolutionary upsurge of a Bhoodan Gramdan movement and threw himself heart and soul into it. But the real turn in his life came when he joined Vinoba's national movement of Bhoodan. This time he resigned from Chief Ministership to become a leader of Sarvodaya. Within a year he was made the President of Nikhil Bharat Sarva Seva Sangha.

But he was disappointed with the outcome of the Bhoodan movement and confessed to having been an accomplice in the crimes that were committed by the politician against the people and became a crusader in the "Congress Hatao" movement of 1967 which unseated the congress government in some states.

His full hearted support for the Sarvodaya Movement can be said to have resumed in 1956 which was after he resigned as Chief Minister and embraced the simplest life possible. As the Chief Guest in a public meeting organized by the Wardha district Sarvodaya mandal, he elaborately talked on the national situation without referring to the huge "sacrifice he had cheerfully made only a week ago.

As the Chief Minister and as a socialist his political life was committed to work for Adivasis and other down-trodden communities. He worked for basic education which he thought could help solve the problems of India and remove social disparity. While serving as Chief Minister, he spent a considerable amount of time for Bhoodan work in the state. His contribution in the field of relief work was also commendable. His humility remains unsurpassed. "He cleaned the leaf-plates of the Sarvodaya workers when a Sarvodaya meeting was held in Orissa".

Nabakrushna Choudhury was associated with constructive work in the beginning of his career. He had resigned a minister's post to promote education and that is why he had started the Baji Rout Chhatrabasa at Angul. For some time he was an organizer for basic education and worked in this capacity from January 1949 to April 1950.

After 1956, Koraput witnessed a wonderful social revolution in the shape of Gramdan and Bhoodan and attracted the attention of the whole country. Such achievement in an Adivasi infested area was possible because of the dedicated work of some totally devoted workers engaged in constructive work. But sadly enough the pace of Sarvodaya decelerated in India as well as in Orissa. Jayaprakash Narayan had sought to lead the country to total revolution and Vinoba grew

suspicious of the totality of the revolutionary changes that Jayaprakash Narayan hoped to achieve. Thus, one Sarvodaya movement was split into two and Nabakrushna Choudhury owed his allegiance to Jayaprakash Narayan.

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