



NON-COOPERATION MOVEMENT AND PEASANT UPRISING IN ODISHA

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(Abstract-The emergence of Mahatma Gandhi into active politics in India took a dramatic turn. Under his charismatic leadership he waged the first mass movement against the colonial power in 1920 with basic and cardinal principle of nonviolence and satyagraha, which worked like magic in the mind of Indian. Following the footsteps of Gandhi in Odisha Gopabandhu Das and other contemporary leaders mobilized the downtrodden masses against the colonial power. The most notable feature of the Non-Cooperation Movement in Odisha was the participation of popular peasant masses who suffered under colonial rule. Most significantly the peasant movement in Kanika Estate was prominent. The peasants of the Kanika Estate consider the Non-Cooperation movement as panacea for their sufferings in which they whole heartedly implemented the Gandhian programme. Besides that, the present research paper explores exiting popular peasant discontent in other parts Odisha to till 1928.)

(Index Terms- Utkal Union Conference, Non-Cooperation, Mahatma Gandhi, Indian National Congress, Utkal Pradesh Congress Committee, Gopabandhu Das, Kanika Estate)

The first Utkal Sammilani or the Utkal Union Conference was held at Cuttack Town Hall from 30 to 31 December 1905,¹ under the leadership of a veteran patriot Madhusudan Das, the Kulabruddha or the grand old man of Orissa. The aims and objectives of the Utkal Sammilani were to carry on the Oriya struggle for the formation of Orissa into a separate linguistic province.² The representatives from Midnapore, Sambalpur and Ganjam flocked in hundreds to attend the conference. The princely rulers of Talcher, Keonjhar, Athagarh, Dhenkanal and hundreds of government servants also attended the session.³ Till 1920 it dominated the political scene of Orissa, which represented the hopes and aspirations of middle class intellectuals including those of the landed class.⁴ The circumstances however took a dramatic turn when Mahatma Gandhi came to the active politics of India.⁵ Gandhi's

¹. Report of the Utkal Union Conference, Acc. No. 1600, OSA, Bhubaneswar, Orissa.

². W.W.Hunter, *A History of Orissa*, vol.II, Calcutta, 1956, p.400.

³. H.H. Panda, *The Oriya Movement (Being a demand for a United Orissa) Two Bachelors of Arts*, Aska, 1919,p.10.

⁴. Biswamoy Pati, *Resisting Domination: Peasants, Tribals, and the National Movement in Orissa, 1920-50*, New Delhi, 1983, p. 61.

⁵. B.N. Pandey, ed, *A Centenary History of Indian National Congress*, vol.II, New Delhi, 1985, pp. 25-6.

taking up active politics in 1920 and his message of non-violent Non-Cooperation Movement against colonialism gave birth to a new sense of nationalism in Orissa.

Although the Indian National Congress in 1920 had no definite programme and policy for the peasants,⁶ Gandhi knew the necessity to include the peasant issue for India's march towards freedom. This was apparent from his following observations in 1916 when he stated "our salvation can only be achieved through the farmers neither the lawyer nor the doctors nor the rich landlords are going to achieve it".⁷ He had great love and sympathy for the dumb masses and was looked upon as the incarnation of poor peasants.⁸

In the special session of the Indian National Congress held in Calcutta on 24 September 1920, Mahatma Gandhi submitted the scheme of non-violent, non-cooperation as the only means of fighting against the foreign rule for the attainment of independence. There was heated argument over the question ultimately the overwhelming majority accepted Gandhiji's proposal. From Odisha Pandit Gopabandhu Das and Hare Krishna Mahatab attended the Calcutta session of the Indian National Congress.⁹

The Non-cooperation Movement as planned by Mahatma Gandhi was to progress through four carefully graded stages, as the country was prepared for them. Firstly, to give up all titles and honorary offices, second was to withdraw from all government appointments including a refusal to participate in the civil and judicial administration, thirdly to withdraw from police and military administration and the last phase was mass civil disobedience including non-payment of taxes to the colonial government.¹⁰

In the 35th session of the Indian National Congress held at Nagpur in December 1920¹¹ a good number of delegates from Orissa, including Gopabandhu Das and Hare Krishna Mahatab (the later being a strong believer in the Gandhian principle of non-violence) attended this session.¹² In that session a resolution was passed for the constitution of a Pradesh Congress Committee in each linguistic region.¹³ So Utkal (Oriya), which had no separate Provincial Congress Committee till then, now became entitled to have one and accordingly constituted the Utkal Provincial Congress Committee in 1921 with Gopabandhu Das as its first President.

Meanwhile after the in the Nagpur session of the Indian National Congress, Gopabandhu Das, Utkalamani or the Jewel of Orissa, and other Congress stalwarts went to Chakradharpur, where the Utkal Union Conference was to be held on 30 December 1920, under the leadership of Jagabandhu Singh.¹⁴ In that session Gopabandhu Das, argued before the leaders that, Utkal Union Conference is a part of Indian National Congress and it needs to fight for an independent nationality on the national plane not on the regional plane.¹⁵ In that session, the Utkal Union Conference finally accepted the non-cooperation resolutions of the Indian National Congress.¹⁶

⁶. Indian National Congress Report, Roll No. 1.

⁷. Kapil, Kumar, *Peasant's Perception of Gandhi and His Programme: Oudh 1920-22*, Social Scientist, vol. II, No. 2, February, 1983.

⁸. Jack C. Wilson, and V. Elwin, *The Dawn of Indian Freedom*, London, 1931, rpt. 1932, p. 48.

⁹. N.K. Sahu and Sushil Chandra De, eds, *Who's Who Freedom Works in Orissa: Balasore District*, Cuttack, 1967, p. 62.

¹⁰. Jack C. Winslow and V. Elwin, op. cit. p. 136.

¹¹. *Indian National Congress Report*, op. cit. Roll No. 6.

¹². Ibid., Appendix-B, p. 118, and Godavarish Mishra, *Godavarish Granthavali* (Oriya), Part-I (An Autobiographical work of Godavarish Mishra), Cuttack, 1960, pp. 110-1.

¹³. Indian National Congress Report, op. cit., Appendix-F, P. 7.

¹⁴. H.K. Mahatab, *History of Freedom Movement in Orissa*, vol-III, Cuttack, 1957, p. 55.

¹⁵. R. Barik, *Gopabandhu and the National Movement in Orissa*, Social Scientist, vol. 6, No. 10, May 1978, p. 43.

¹⁶. Ibid., p. 43.

Although Braja Sundar Das and a few other leaders opposed it, an overwhelming majority accepted it. After which the political movement in Orissa changed. It's scope was widened and it transformed from a regional level struggle to that of the national level. All the political workers were extremely busy in establishing and organizing Congress institutions and spreading Congress ideas and programme among the masses.¹⁷

Mahatma Gandhi visited Orissa on 24 May 1921 and his speeches on the bank of the river Kathjori in Cuttack, Puri, Bhadrak and Berhampur in the beginning of Non-cooperation Movement acted as a catalyst. Within ten days of his stay unprecedented enthusiasm among the masses of Orissa sparked off.¹⁸

During his visit to Cuttack, Mahatma Gandhi remarked that, 'I used to co-operate with the Government and entertain the belief that co-operation would do well, but I find I was mistaken. No good can be had of a satanic system of Government'. He appealed to the masses to participate in large numbers in the Non-Cooperation Movement.¹⁹ Hare Krushna Mahatab (DCC Secretary Balasore), who was charged and tried at Balasore in 1922 for disseminating the idea of Non-Cooperation Movement through Samaj and Utkal Dipika, appealed to the masses to participate in the Gandhian movement. He made an appeal to the government servants too and particularly the military departments to give up their service and join the movement. He stalwartly condemned the British Government as oppressive and appealed to the masses that Non-Cooperation movement 'has shown the simple and open course for its remedy'.²⁰ He also circulated a number of leaflets from Swaraj Ashram Balasore called Swaraj Samachar amongst the masses to popularize the mass movement in Balaosre and many parts of Orissa, where an attempt was been made to describe how the peasant masses of Orissa looked upon Gandhi. What was the involvement of the Congress leaders of Orissa such as Gopabandhu Das and others?

The peasant movement in Kanika Estate was perhaps most important peasant movement during the Non-Cooperation Movement. But before discussing the events, it would be better to understand the short history of the estate and the geographical terrain of the area in order to visualize more clearly the conditions under which the trouble arose.²¹

The Kanika Estate, with an area of 440 sq.ml. was situated along the coast of the Bay of Bengal and it had four main fiscal divisions, Panchamukha area was under Balasore revenue role. Chhamukha, Kerara and Kaladwip were under Cuttack revenue role.²²

In 1803 the first Commissioner of Revenue confirmed the Peshkush at 84 840 of cowries, equivalent to Rs 20,408, to the British government. But in 1805 the Raja of Kanika found indulged in malpractices and the estate was placed under the Khas Management.²³ Since then, there were frequent settlements of the Kanika Estate resulting the increase of rent from about Rs.

¹⁷. Sushil Chandra De, *ed.*, *Trends of Political Events in Orissa from 1882-1936*, Cuttack, 1966, pp.97-8.

¹⁸. Bidyut Kumar Samal, *Orissa During National Movement*, Orissa Review, vol. XLVI, No. I, August, 1989, pp.97-8.

¹⁹. P.C. Bamford, *Histories of Non-Cooperation and Khilafat Movement*, New Delhi, 1925, (reprint-1974), pp. 9.

²⁰. Home Political Department File, Government of Bihar and Orissa, Special Section, 1922, File No, 334, Acc No.118, OSA,

Bhubaneswar, Orissa.

²¹. *Home Political Department File*, Acc. No. 3628, 1922, OSA, Bhubaneswar, Orissa, This is the Kanika debate by Mr. Mac Pherson in the Bihar and Orissa Legislative Proceedings on 25th August 1922, (Henceforth it became the Proceeding), p. 2.

²². O' Malley, L.S.S., *Gazetteers of India: Bihar and Orissa District Gazetteer*, Patna, 1933, pp.246 - 7.

²³. *Ibid.*, pp. 246-7.

50,000 in 1884 to Rs 1,36,000 in 1894.²⁴ Interestingly, the rent of the Kanika Estate rose from Rs 105,338 in 1880-81 to Rs 138,893 in 1893-94. And it was till 1893-4 the rents used to be collected through the village Mustagirs, who were known as the natural leaders of the peasants.

The Mustagirs generally used to get a commission of 10 per cent on the total amount collected from the tenants and used to get some privileged posts in the estate's administration. But this system was abandoned in 1894 and many of the Mustagirs were swept away.²⁵ The reason being that the Mustagirs organized *melis* (no tax campaign) at every revision settlement.²⁶

While exploring the Non-Cooperation Movement, it is significant to understand the changes that had taken place between 1893-4 and 1921-2. The Mustagirs, in addition to their commissions from the rent collected, enjoyed some other commissions and privileges. Their class interest naturally allied more with the Raja than with the peasants. However, the village Mustagirs played notable role in the peasant movement of Kanika during the year 1921-2, especially by some ex-Mustagirs like Dinabandhu Khandaita Rai can not be denied.²⁷

Besides, certain changes took place on the population density of Kanika during this period. In 1893-4 the lowest density of population was 200 per sq. ml. and highest density of population was 440 per sq ml. In 1921 it was 250 and 900 respectively. The two district of Cuttack and Balasore had the highest density of population²⁸ and therefore the pressure on land was much heavier in the Cuttack side of the Kanika Estate.²⁹

As mentioned earlier, the rent of the estate rose between 1880-1 and 1893-4. A council was formed in 1922 under the leadership of Rai Bahadur Brajendra Nath Rai, to enquire into the Dukhini Kanika (Distressed Kanika) grievances. Accordingly, in February 1922, the Collector of Kanika made a local enquiry into the grievances of the peasants of Kanika. In the course of the enquiry he found that the record of rights made between the period 1889-94, when the Kanika Estate was under the Court of Wards, was correctly maintained, changes were made in the following three respects.³⁰ Firstly, the rental of the Cuttack side of the Kanika Estate was improved by two annas about 6 years ago *i.e.* 1916. Secondly, the Court of Wards raised the forest cess. Thirdly, the grazing taxes on buffaloes at eight annas per head were being levied. The enhancement was protected by the provision in Section 84 of the Orissa Tenancy Act, 1913. The right to forest cess was questioned in the Court in 1912-3 but it was decided in favor of the Raja Rajendra Narayan Bhanja Deo.³¹

Raja Rajendra Narayan Bhanja Deo, who became Raja of the estate in 1902, made a petition in 1912 to the colonial government for his hereditary proprietorship and was thus ascertained according to the Regulation of XII of 1805.³² However, his petition for

²⁴. Maddox, S.L., *Final Report on the Survey Settlement in the Province of Orissa (1890-1900)*, vol.II, Calcutta, 1900, p.418.

²⁵. Mac Pherson, *op.cit.*, p. 5.

²⁶. S.S. Hossein, *Completion Report of Survey Settlement for Kanika Wards Estate: District Cuttack, 1889-94*, Calcutta, 1895, pp. 1, 65, 66 and 71, (*melis* were no-tax campaign).

²⁷. Biswamoy Pati, *Peasants, Tribals and National Movement in Orissa 1921-36*, *Social Scientist*, vol II, No. II, February, 1983, pp. 26-7.

²⁸. Lacey, W. C., *Census of India, 1931: Bihar and Orissa*, Patna, 1933, p.1.

²⁹. See Report of W. C., Lacey, *Census of India, 1921: Bihar and Orissa*, vol. VII, Patna, 1923, also see the Report of P. C., Tallent's, *Census of India: 1911*, vol. V, Calcutta, 1913.

³⁰. Mac Pherson, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

³¹. *Home Political Department (Confidential) File*, No. 17/3, 1912, OSA, Bhubaneswar, Orissa.

³². *Ibid.*

raising arms and ammunition was denied by the colonial government.³³ When his hereditary proprietorship was retained, he got a wide opportunity for further enhancement of land revenue, when the Orissa Tenancy Act was passed in 1913.³⁴

As an influential member of Bengal Legislative Council and thereafter in the Bihar and Orissa Legislative Council, Raja Rajendra Narayan Bhanja Deo was successful in moulding several provisions of the Orissa Tenancy Act of 1913 to his own interest. Besides, Section 16 of the Act, which empowered the landlord to coerce the peasants to increase the fees for mutation and transfer of the land, sections 136 and 137 were most draconian to the extent that it empowered him to increase the rent on his own sweet will on a so called 'compromise' basis.³⁵

Besides, the land revenue and other means of revenue provided in the Orissa Tenancy Act of 1913, it struck the fancy of Raja Rajendra Narayan Bhanja Deo and his cohorts that extracting any other cesses was not provided in the law. This gave birth to 64 kinds of Abwabs *i.e.* illegal cesses known as Chausathi-Kara, which sound peculiar to outsiders, but was bone breaking to the poor peasants.³⁶ A few of the illegal cesses to squeeze the peasant were as follows: Banakara (forest cess), Macha Kara (fish cess), Gochar Kara (grazing cess), Chama Kara (hide cess), Hada Kara (bone cess), Anda Kara (egg cess), Para Kara (feather cess), Singh Kara (horn cess), Hata Kara (creeper cess), Hentala Kara (mangrove trunk cess), Pinch Kara (mangrove leaf cess), Khala Kara (harvesting place cess), Angar Kara (coal cess) Fala Kara (fruit cess), Namkata Kara (mutation cess), Namelekha Kara (mutation cess), Bhul Sansodhan Kara (mutation cess), Namjog Kara (mutation correction cess), Namyog Ghata kara (ferries cess), Nata Kara (Dance cess) Bata Kara (road cess), Bhandha Kara (embankment cess), Polo Kara (bridge cess), Kesha Kara (hair cess) and Madhusajya Kara (honeymoon cess).³⁷

Rajendra Narayan Bhanjo Deo was a very polished and sophisticated tyrant so he did not enhance or impose those abwabs or cesses half-hazardly. To impose them throughout his estate in a systematic way and within a specified period he appointed an officer named Indramani Mohanty to act as the head of the settlement operation, who would be known as Superintendent of Kanika Estate.³⁸

For the peasant of Kanika such a private settlement operation was a 'nightmare' and the peasants were feeling helpless and desperate under the iron heel of the oppressive Raja.³⁹ The peasants of Kanika were harassed in their everyday life on various issues and the Raja used to exploit them in various counts, leading to dissatisfaction.

Many times the tenants were forced to work for the constructing of embankments, roads, ponds (Chandnapukhari), bridges using the bethi system (without remuneration) and were forced to pay eight annas per acre whenever or wherever any such construction was undertaken in the estate.

³³. Home Political Department (Confidential) File, No. E/9, 1912, OSA, Bhubaneswar, Orissa.

³⁴. J.A. Samuel, *The Bihar and Orissa Code*, Vol. III (Bihar and Orissa Act of 1913-1933), Patna, 1936, p. 56.

³⁵. Prafulla Das, *Non-Cooperation Movement in Kanika and the Peasant Agitation in 1922*, Raj Kanika, 1994, p. 13.

³⁶. *Ibid.*, p. 14.

³⁷. Home Political Department (Confidential) File, Acc/No-124, 1922, OSA, Bhubaneswar. This is the pamphlet of Ananda Chandra Jena's '*Dukhini Kanika*' (Distressed Kanika), which describes the illegal cesses imposed on Kanika and Interview with Prafulla Das (Age-74), on 12-7, 1999, Sebasahi, Rajkanika (My regards and thanks to him for his kind help he rendered to me when I visited Raj kanika).

³⁸. Prafulla Das., *op.cit.*, p.13.

³⁹. *Ibid.*, pp. 13-4.

The peasants were forced to pay grazing cess at eight annas per buffalo, forest cess, pond cess, health cess, education cess and other such cesses. As far as loans were concerned the estate gave the peasants money in advance and took away their paddy. The interest of the loan was 6.35 per cent or 12.5% per cent per annum. The estate adopted strict means at the time of repayment of the loan.⁴⁰

During 1919-20, huge floods affected Kanika. To alleviate distress, the estate authority sold 22 gaunies of paddy to get the ten gaunies of rice. They worked on the principle of trade and opened godowns at several places. The manner in which the rice was sold was highly profitable. The estate made huge profits at times of distress.⁴¹

The peasants of Kanika were never allowed to take loans from other village creditors or moneylenders. The estate granted them loans at an interest rate of 12.5 percent. When they failed to repay the loan, the estate took away their lands forcibly and if they refused to give up their lands then were severely beaten up.⁴²

The situation worsened, with scarcity of rains and then the floods hitting the estate successively for two years, *i.e.* 1919-22.⁴³ No steps had been taken to relieve the peasants. Rather due to the loss of crops the prices of paddy and rice had went up. The proprietor of the estate Raja Rajendra Narayan Bhanja Deo turned a deaf ear to the demand of the peasants, *i.e.* for the exemption from the land revenues.⁴⁴ Although the colonial authority distributed rice and *takavi loans* after the floods, Rajendra Narayan Bhanja Deo, prevented them from doing so. Three rice distribution centres became operational in the estate when the District Magistrate visited the place. No sooner did he leave the place the relief work was stopped by the beat of drums⁴⁵ and were sold to the tenants in higher rate. Ananda Chandra Jena in his *Dukhini Kanika (Distressed Kanika)* booklet had remarked that the estate oppressed the peasants in various ways, the oppression committed by the estate cannot be described by words.⁴⁶

With this historical backdrop that the Non-Cooperation Movement started in Orissa in 1920. It became an eye opener to the peasants of Kanika. In July 1921 the Raja of Kanika delivered a speech openly condemning the Non-Cooperation Movement and greeted the peasants for having remained⁴⁷ silent by the propaganda of non-cooperators. True to Gandhi's perception of the zamindars, that zamindars proved to be the main obstacle to the non-cooperation programme. However, they were brought to senses and persuaded not to pay rents.⁴⁸

When the Raja of Kanika opposed the Non-Cooperation programme, complaints were made against him in Oriya newspapers such like *Samaj*, *Utkal Dipika* and *Seba*. The non-cooperators considered the condemnation of Non-Cooperation by the Raja as a challenge.⁴⁹ Ram Das Babaji a youth from Uttar Pradesh, associated with the Congress work in Orissa arrived at Kanika from Aul,

⁴⁰. Home Political Department (Confidential) File, op.cit., pp. 9 -12.

⁴¹. Ibid., p. 19.

⁴². Ibid., pp. 19 -20.

⁴³. Kar, Purusottam, *Indian National Congress and Orissa*, Cuttack, 1987, p.114.

⁴⁴. Home Political Department (Confidential) File, op.cit., pp. 19-20.

⁴⁵. Ibid., pp.8-9.

⁴⁶. Ibid., pp. 19 -20.

⁴⁷. Mac Pherson, *Proceedings*, op. cit., p.8 and Home Political Department (Confidential) Report, 10th July 1922, OSA, Bhubaneswar.

⁴⁸. Home Political Department (Confidential) File, No.75, January 1922, NAI, New Delhi,

⁴⁹. Mac Pherson, *Proceedings*, op. cit., p. 8.

a neighbouring estate, and gave a rousing speech at Kanika High School. In the disguise of a Sadhu Ram Das Babaji commanded tremendous impact on the peasants of Kanika.⁵⁰

Ram Das Babaji had a sharp tongue and said the sinful oppressive government which has been ruling over India for two hundred years have ruined us. Do not trust this Satanic Government. The Raja of Kanika is a creature of this Satanic Government and he has been oppressing the peasants and opposing Non-Cooperation Movement in various ways; do not be deceived by this 'satanic government', they are swindlers. Although the peasants were asked not talk to thee non-cooperators by the Raja, but that order hardly had any impact on them.⁵¹

Thus, Rama Das Babaji, who created political consciousness among the peasants of Kanika by holding a public meeting in the disguise of a Sadhu seems to have close similarity with⁵² Baba Rama Chandra, who worked in Oudh area carrying a copy of Tulsi Das's Ramayana from which he would often recite verses to the rural audience.⁵³

Ram Das Bhabaji was arrested at Raj Kanika under Section 108 of Indian Penal Code, but by then he had already become successful in rousing the peasants of Kanika from their stupor. It was also during this period that Ananda Chandra Jena, the rebel poet who wrote Dukhini Kanika (Distressed Kanika) booklet, was dismissed from service from the Kendrapara Local Board. Chakradhara Behera in this stormy situation of Kanika had to resign from the service of the estate (a few days before Ram Das Babaji's visit to Kanika) as he protested against the Government's conferment upon the Raja of the power to confiscate land on allegation of arrears of rent. All this happened at such lightning speed that the peasants of Kanika were captivated and their spirit of rebelliousness stiffened.⁵⁴

Rama Das Babaji who visited Kanika was promptly arrested the Utkal Provincial Congress Committee then identified with the peasants and organized them against the Raja. In protest against the Raja and to participate in the anti-imperialist movement the students of Kanika High School left the school.⁵⁵

A Swaraj Ashram was set up at Chandbali-Kantapara road and Swaraj Jagyan was held. A tri-color flag was raised on a tree, which came to be known as *Gandhibata*. Bhagirathi Mohapatra, the Secretary of the Utkal Pradesh Congress Committee and Jadumani Mangaraj,⁵⁶ Sarala Devi (wife of Mohapatra) and Atal Bihari Acharya travelled all over the Chhamukha area of Kanika and attracted huge crowds by making exciting speeches. They said that 'Swaraj' would come into being within a year and the peasants would not be required to pay their rent.⁵⁷ Chakradhara Behera, a young peasant leader mobilized the people not to give false witness against Rama Das Babaji.⁵⁸

⁵⁰. Prafulla Das, op. cit., p.24.

⁵¹. Prafulla Das, *Kanika Praja Andolonara Itihasa, Sahid Basu – Bisuni*, (Oriya), Cuttack, 1987, pp.168-9.

⁵². Biswamoy Pati, *Peasants, Tribals and National Movement in Orissa 1921-36* in Kapil Kumar ed., *Congress and the Classes: Nationalism, Workers and Peasants*, 1988, p.127.

⁵³. See S.K. Mittal and Kapil Kumar, *Baba Ramachandra and Peasant Upsurge in Oudh*, *Social Scientist*, No.71, 1987.

⁵⁴. Prafulla Das, op.cit., p. 24.

⁵⁵. Ibid., p.169.

⁵⁶. Biswamoy Pati, op.cit., p.28.

⁵⁷. Das, Prafulla, *Non- Cooperation Movement in Kanika*, op.cit., p. 25.

⁵⁸. Muralidhar Mallick, *Biplabi Chakradhar*, (Oriya), Cuttack, 1973, pp. 12-3.

Ananda Chandra Jena, Jairam Rai, Upendra Subudhi Rai joined the movement. Upendra Subudhi Rai, a Pattadar of the Raja resigned from the post to contribute in the meli. Bisuni Madual a tenant and Basu Sethi (a washerman by profession) also joined the movement. The Congress workers actively worked among the peasants and formed several village sabhas in different places to protest against the land laws. A large number of peasants were enrolled in the Congress organization as four-anna members and were directly linked with the Congress organisation.⁵⁹

In such a situation in between April-March 1922, the peasants entered into the militant phase of their struggle in Balasore and Cuttack areas of Kanika Estate. As a result of which the peasants consisted of 100 villages, containing as many as 4000 members formed a meli. An office with office-bearers was set up Meghapur village to co-ordinate their activities.⁶⁰

The estate did not agree to accept rent unless paid at the proposed higher rate which the peasants did not agree to pay. Many of them therefore paid their rent at the original rate at Kendrapara Government Sub-Treasury under the provision of the Orissa Tenancy Act of 1913. But those who refused to pay taxes were boycotted and intimidated. In February and March 1922 the Collector and the Commissioner conducted an enquiry but that socio-economic condition of the peasants did not improve.⁶¹

Hare Krishna Mahatab and other Congress workers wanted to hold a meeting at Moto on the way to Chandbali but the Tehsildar sent a notice to Utkal Pradesh Congress Committee, by which the meeting was banned. Hence, all meetings were banned in Kanika. Nevertheless meetings were held secretly to keep the movement alive.⁶²In one of a meeting held at Khurda, Gopabandhu Das had called upon the peasants to pay rents and forest taxes. Although the Indian National Congress called off the Non-Cooperation Movement on 10 February 1922, the militant peasants of Kanika continued their struggle.⁶³

Raja Rajendra Narayan Bhanjo Deo proposed to the colonial administrators to suppress the movement once and for all. In April 1922, when a violent crowd at a village called Patarpur assaulted a peon accompanied by two others who had been sent to serve a notice on certain judgments related to trouble in Kanika, the British Government came into fray.⁶⁴

When Gopabandhu Das saw the peon blood stained he took him to the Swaraj Ashram at Kantapara where first aid was given. He was offered a Khadar Cloth to change the torn and blood stained uniform because nothing was available in the Ashram. That peon however deposed in the trial against Gopabandhu Das, that it was the latter that had so severely assaulted him and forced him to put on the Khadar Cloth. The two Congress leaders, Gopabandhu Das and Bhagirathi Mohapatra were convicted and sentenced to two years of rigorous imprisonment.⁶⁵

The arrest of Gopabandhu Das and Bhagirathi Mohapatra led to further trouble in Orissa resulting violent clash between police force and the peasants of Kanika in April 1922. Consequently, Basu Sethi and Bishuni Madual were killed arresting many.⁶⁶ Basu

⁵⁹. Biswamoy Pati, *Resisting Dominations, Peasants Tribals and National Movement in Orissa 1920-1950*, New Delhi, 1983, pp. 64-5.

⁶⁰. Mac Pherson, *Proceedings*, op. cit., pp.11-2.

⁶¹. H.K. Mahatab, *History of Freedom Movement in Orissa*, vol. III, Cuttack, 1957, p. 67.

⁶². Prafulla Das, *Kanika Praja Andolanaro Itihas'* (Oriya), op.cit., Appendix – 3, This is the letter of Hare Krishna Mahatab to Prafulla Das, which describes the ban on Congress activities in Kanika, 9 July, 1984, p. 271.

⁶³. Biswamoy Pati, *Resisting Dominations*, op. cit., pp. 64-5.

⁶⁴. Mac Pherson, *Proceedings*, op. cit., pp. 12-3.

⁶⁵. Ibid., pp. 12-3.

⁶⁶. Ibid., pp. 12-3.

Sethi and Bishuni Madual were the two peasant leaders of the Gandhian movement in Orissa who laid down their life in the oppression of the Raja.⁶⁷

B-Withdrawal of the Congress and Collapse of the Peasant Movement in Kanika

There was a tragic turn of events in the Non-Cooperation Movement. Gandhi withdrew the 'Satyagraha' on 12 February 1922. So the die was cast by the government and certainly for the Raja. Within no time the Congress offices closed at Raj Kanika and Ayatan. The Congress workers, who participated in the peasant agitation of Kanika, dispersed as disciplined soldiers. They did not even get time to cross over the office premises.⁶⁸

Raja Rajendra Narayan Bhanja Deo, who was identified with the British Government, carried out large-scale repression on the peasants with the help of the colonial police force.⁶⁹ The forces sent from Cuttack to suppress the movement looted the houses of the peasants and assaulted their womenfolk.⁷⁰ The men were mercilessly beaten up and the women who were pregnant had premature deliveries due to various assault.⁷¹ Many peasant activists were arrested and were tried in the Raja's house for the disturbance in the Estate of Kanika. About 150 of them were fled away from the estate and made to walk up and down from Cuttack side of the estate to the Balasore side, *i.e.* between Chandbali and Bhadrak.⁷²

Along with suppressive measures to suppress the movement the Raja imposed Rs 10,000 fine on the protestors. The colonial government empowered the Raja to collect rents by the Certificate Procedure those who failed to deposit the rent. Those who became unable to pay the taxes were forced to evacuate the estate. Punyanda Raut Ray and Dinabandhu Khandayat Ray, the two most important leaders were driven out from the estate and their properties were confiscated.⁷³ These repressive measures by the Raja of Kanika lead to the collapse of the movement in the Estate.

Besides these, few important peasant leaders who were behind the movement like, Sadananda Samant Rai and Raghunath Samant Rai changed sides and withdrew support to the meli. The Dukhini Kanika booklet of Ananda Chandra Jena, which was banned at that time, vividly describes the decline of the peasant movement.

Ananda Chandra remarked thus:

Kanika Devi is our mother (Goddess of Kanika).

Her husband (lord) is our father;

We will never forsake our father and we will always prostrate before him.

We will not mind the insults, which he may inflict upon us. We should again prostrate at his feet and fight for having our grievances redressed.

⁶⁷. Das, Prafulla, *Non- Cooperation Movement in Kanika*, op. cit., p.1.

⁶⁸. *Ibid.*, p. 29.

⁶⁹. Das, Prafulla, Appendix – 3, op. cit., p.274.

⁷⁰. K.C. Mishra, *Land System and Land Reforms*, Bombay, 1990. p.122.

⁷¹. *Home Political Department (Confidential) File*, No. 129, OSA Bhubaneswar. This is the booklet of Ananda Chandra Jena's *Dukhini Kanika* (Distressed Kanika), which depicted the oppression during this period, p.122.

⁷². H.K. Mahatab, op.cit., p. 68.

⁷³. Prafulla Das, op. cit., p.

As the peasants of Kanika were faced with severe tyranny and oppression they appealed to the Lord of India (naturally refers to the British Government) for help. As Ananda Chandra Jena wrote,

“To get out of this trouble,

Let remember to the Lord of India”

This desperate appeal to the ‘Lord of India’ for help was repeated number of times in the booklet.⁷⁴ Around that time rumors started floating in Kanika that Gandhi’s army is about to reach from Ranchi to help them against the Raja and the Colonial police force. It was clearly evident that an attempt was made to keep the struggle alive and to encourage militancy.⁷⁵

Unlike Ananda Chandra Jena, Banchanidi Mohanty a Congress worker in a Balasore District Conference held in 1924 sang a song depicting the endless miseries of the peasants of Kanika at length and appealed for remedy. He narrated thus how a little kingdom and zamindari Kanika is? Such oppression, such inhuman brutality (rape)! Had it been either Mysore or Jaipore, none could say what would come to pass there. A man of oppression and devils in human garb and oppression is their lust. If the sinner does not commit sin a single day, he will not test his food well. Constant sufferings made the poor Kanika to be like Ahalya Sundari (stone). Is there no such hero like Rama that may rescue her by the touch of his feet? Are there no Akali in Orissa to proclaim the heroic tale? Had it been so it would be great War like Nagpur, Nabha and Gurukabag in a day?⁷⁶

However, the role of the Utkal Pradesh Congress Committee at this juncture seems to be quite striking. A day before the firing, announcement was made to build up a good relationship between the landlords and the peasants. Since Kanika incidents there were prosecutions against those people believed to be behind the incident. Therefore, the Raja and the British Government further tightened security in July and August 1922 by sending additional forces to Kanika. It was decided that, one-fourth of the costs would be paid by the Raja himself and three-fourth by the peasants.⁷⁷

Ruthless repressive measures were deliberately adopted to create panic among the people so that they may not join the political movements. The sub divisional officer of Bhadrak promulgated an order under Section 144 Penal Code prohibiting any meetings in Bhadrak side of the Kanika areas. Pandit Gopabandhu Das and Bhagirathi Mahapatra, who had come to Bhadrak for investigation into the causes of Kanika trouble, had fixed a meeting at Bhadrak and they were arrested and sentenced to 6 years of imprisonment each. Besides, Jadumani Mongaraj, Mohmmad Ekram Ruosil, Pandit Ananta Mishra and Atal Behari Acharya were arrested and sent to jail.⁷⁸

By this time the meli had been crushed. However, all this was happening in the Cuttack area of the Kanika zamindari but in Panchamukha, *i.e.* in the Balasore side of the zamindari, everything was practically calm and it was mainly due to the intelligent

⁷⁴. Home Political Department (Confidential) File, No. 1922, p. 6.

⁷⁵. Mac Pherson, *Proceedings*, op. cit., pp. 14 - 15.

⁷⁶. Board of Revenue Confidential File No.155, 1924, OSA, Bhubaneswar, Orissa. (Only some parts of the Banchanidhi Mohanty’s song translated into English have been narrated here. This song was sung by Banchanidhi Mohanty in the Balasore District Conference in 1924)

⁷⁷. Biswamoy Pati, op. cit., p. 67.

⁷⁸. N.K. Sahu, and Sushil Chandra De, eds, *Who’s Who Freedom Works in Orissa: Balasore District*, Cuttack, 1967, p. 69.

handling of the situation by Hudson, the then Superintendent of Police of Balasore. Besides, there was also a lack of organizational support.⁷⁹

However, towards the close of 1922 there was a strong peasant agitation in Balasore district against the settlement operations. In consequence of which, the settlement operation was stopped. Mathura Mohan Behera who organized the peasant agitation was arrested and sent to jail for one year.⁸⁰

The most striking example of the Utkal Pradesh Congress Committee's attempt was to keep the Non-Cooperation Movement in Bhadrak side of the Kanika. The peasants were stopped paying rents during this phase. Subsequently with the mediation of Banchanidhi Mohanty, some defaulting tenants who did not pay rents were bow to the Congress office. Further due to the help of the village panchayat the Utkal Pradesh Congress Committee took the charge to collect rent after the withdrawal of the Bardoli Satyagraha.⁸¹

In Puri the District Congress Committee was formed under the leadership of Gopabandhu Das. At the beginning of the Non-Cooperation Movement the district of Puri responded well. Mahatma Gandhi visited Satyabadi in Puri district in 1921. It was the most important political event in the Congress movement in the district of Puri in 1921. The visit of Mahatma Gandhi created unprecedented enthusiasm among the peasant masses of Puri, and consequently, the Congress call for a national struggle met with a ready response. In 1921, picketing of excise and foreign-cloth shops was carried on with full vigour.⁸²

The peasants of Puri also started a 'no-rent campaign. On 16 October, 1921 a meeting was held at Khandagiri. A good number of peasants attended it. The meeting was organized by Gopabandhu Das himself to explain the elements of non-cooperation. In that area Sabarkars violated the forest laws and started no-rent campaign when their rights were denied.⁸³

In Sambalpur, Baragarh, Jharsuguda, Talpatia, Rampella and several other places the peasants showed their enthusiasm and actively participated in the Non-Cooperation Movement. In two places of Sambalpur district, where land revenue settlement was in operations had to face passive resistance from the locals.⁸⁴

Mahatma Gandhi visited Berhampur, where he delivered a speech stirring up the national spirit among the people of Ganjam. His address to a mammoth gathering at Barracks Maidan (Berhampur) and facilitated the enrolment of Congress members and volunteers. Besides Gopabandhu Das, V.V. Giri who later became President of India hailed from the district, and his family members also actively worked for the Congress organization and mobilized the masses.⁸⁵ The visit of Mahatma Gandhi in March 1921 to Ganjam had a tremendous impact on the masses of Ganjam. Soon after that, the leading Congress members undertook picketing of government excise offices at Ichhapur, Berhampur and Balipadar.⁸⁶

⁷⁹. H.K. Mahatab, op. cit., p. 68.

⁸⁰. N.K. Sahu, op. cit., p. 71.

⁸¹. Biswamoy Pati, op. cit., p. 31.

⁸². Ibid., pp. 31-2.

⁸³. N.K. Sahu, and Sushil Chandra De,eds, *Who's Who Freedom Works in Orissa: Puri District*, Cuttack, 1970, pp. i – ii.

⁸⁴. Nilamani, Senapati, *Orissa District Gazetteers: Sambalpur District*, Cuttack, 1971, p. 79.

⁸⁵. Nilamani, Senapati, *Orissa District Gazetteers: Ganjam District*, Cuttack, 1971, p. 110.

⁸⁶. N.K. Sahu, and Sushil Chandra De,eds, *Who's Who Freedom Works in Orissa: Ganjam District*, Cuttack, 1969, pp. i – ii.

In Ganjam Zamindari, Pandit Biswanath Das, a leading Congress leader, who set up the Ryot Association mobilized 1000s of peasants under the banner of the Congress and started a no-rent campaign. Biswanath Das carried on the struggle against the obnoxious Mustadari system and Sanja laws that affected the tenants and deprived them of a major portion of their produce. Soon the movement encompassed the whole of Madras Presidency leading to the joining of N.G. Ranga with Biswanath Das in 1924.⁸⁷

In the princely states of Orissa the condition of the peasants was extremely poor. The peasants had no right over their land and the land was taxed heavily. Besides, there were different kinds of abwabs such as hospital cess, forest cess, road cess, sugar cane cess, income tax, bidi, tobacco, paan, coconut, coir, plough tax, salami (for permitting widow to adopt), bethi, beggar, rasad and magan. The peasants showed much enthusiasm during the Non-Cooperation Movement and implemented the 'no-tax campaign' against the rulers in the states.⁸⁸

In Dasapalla states Govinda Chandra Mishra who participated in the Dasapalla uprising of 1914 and was absconding till 1919 took a leading part during the Non-Cooperation Movement in Cuttack and Puri district. He held a number of meetings and started protest demonstrations, picketing and hartals in these districts. He was arrested in 1921 and fined upto Rs. 50 for insulting a police person at Khurda railway station. After his release he continued with the movement till 1923.⁸⁹

A public meeting was convened at Keonjhar in May 1921, against bethi and rasad. Accordingly, on 17 May 1921 a hartal was organized in Keonjhar. Estate authorities enforced Section 144 of Indian Penal Code when peasant mobs courted arrest.⁹⁰

Similarly, in Dhenkanal, at the end of the nineteenth-century, the Manager of the state planned to enhance rent under a new land revenue settlement. About one thousand people came and protested as a consequence of which the idea was stopped. But again in 1922 the management wanted to revise the settlement and enforced it again. Against these measures met with wide resentment and agitation. Some redress was affected but four of the leaders were charged conspiracy and were sentenced to imprisonment for three years. This gave a setback to the movement. But in this area the exploited people rose independently and Utkal Pradesh Congress Committee virtually remained out of the movement.⁹¹ Although, the Non-Cooperation Movement came to an end in 1922, the peasant unrest in Kanika continued despite the repressive policy of the British Government as well as the estate authority. Chakradhar Behera led the peasants in their fight against the Raja till 1924 as there continued oppression on peasants.⁹²

After the suspension of Non-Cooperation Movement, Congress leaders in Orissa were divided into two groups known as pro-changers and no-changers. The pro-changers desired to enter the legislature under the Government of India Act 1919 and the No-Changers wanted to undertake the Gandhian constructive programme. The following pro-changer Congressmen were elected from Orissa to the Bihar and Orissa Legislative Council and to the Central Legislative Assembly: Godavarish Mishra, Jagabandhu Singh

⁸⁷. Ashok Kumar Pattnaik, *Biswanath Das and Peasant Movement in Orissa in Reflection on the National Movement in Orissa*, Cuttack, 1997, pp. 148-9.

⁸⁸. N.C., Behuria, *Orissa District Gazetteers*, Government Press, Cuttack, 1996, pp. 113-5.

⁸⁹. History of Freedom Movement in Orissa, File No 59/3, 1920-47, NAI, New Delhi.

⁹⁰. Biswamoy Pati, op. cit., pp. 32-3.

⁹¹. M.N. Das, ed. *Sidelights on History and Culture of Oriss*, Vidyapuri, Cuttack, 1977, pp. 284-5.

⁹². N.K. Sahu, and Sushil Chandra De, eds, *Who's Who Freedom Works in Orissa: Cuttack and Puri District*, Cuttack, 1970, p. vi.

and Radha Ranjan Das, elected to the Bihar and Orissa Legislative Council and Nilakantha Das was elected to the Central Legislative Assembly.⁹³

On 28 and 29 June 1929 the first All Orissa Provincial Congress Conference was held at Cuttack under the leadership of Acharya Prafulla Chandra Ray. The conference resolved to work out the constructive programme of the Congress. Gopabandhu Das and Bhagirathi Mohapatra attended the conference immediately after being released from the jail. Gopabandhu Das laid particular stress on promotion of Khadar. In 1925 and 1926 he set up spinning centers in Puri. Hare Krushna Mahatab too started constructive programme of the Congress in Balasore district.

In December 1927 Mahatma Gandhi visited Orissa for the third time. He visited various khaddar production centers. He advised the people to give up fear, promote khaddar movement remove untouchability and not to be slaves of intoxicants.⁹⁴ Gopabandhu Das made arrangements for observing of the 'All India Bardoli Day' on 12 June, 1928. But when the day was being celebrated at Puri, he could not attend it due to high fever. He eventually died of that fever on 17 June 1928 and his death came as a great blow to the national aspirations of Orissa.⁹⁵



⁹³. A.C. Pradhan, *Orissa During the Non – Cooperation Movement: Gandhiji in Orissa*, *Orissa Review*, vol. XLVI, no. I, 1989, p. 94.

⁹⁴. *Ibid.*, p. 94.

⁹⁵. Nilamani Senapati, and Durga Charan Kunar, *Orissa District Gazetteers: Puri District*, Cuttack, 1977, p. 108.