

The Political Significance of Saliha Satyagraha

Kamalakanta Roul*

Abstract

The idea of freedom was not only to make India free from British colonialism but also to uplift toiling masses from poverty and miseries. Indian freedom fighters simultaneously led freedom movement along with the fight against poverty. The Saliha Satyagraha (1930) in Nuapada district of Odisha exemplifies this. It was a popular movement against the oppressive colonial policies and exploitative feudal rulers. Nuapada district, primarily dominated by tribals, played significant role in India's freedom movement from 1857 to 1947. Alas, Nuapada remains as "extremely poor and underdeveloped district" which has eroded the essence of Saliha Satyagraha. The continuity of colonial-feudal power structure, accumulation of resources by a tiny section, and failure of land distribution are major contributing causes of poverty in Nuapada. These causes have disrupted the functioning of participatory democracy, distributed development and decentralised governance. The paper primarily examines the significance of Saliha Satyagraha in present day Nuapada. It argues that ending poverty in Nuapada will dismantle the exploitative nature of colonial-feudal power structure and will certainly promote freedom and democracy in the district. The study is, primarily, qualitative in nature. The hypothesis is in the nature of an exploratory one. Both primary and secondary sources of data have been used here especially primary data has been extensively used.

Keywords: Saliha, Freedom, Poverty, Colonialism, Feudalism

Introduction: Struggle for Poor People's Swaraj

The idea of freedom was not only to make India free from British colonialism but also to uplift toiling masses from poverty and miseries. Issues of poverty and freedom were deeply reflected over India's anti-colonial struggle. Indian freedom fighters simultaneously led freedom movement along with the fight against poverty. The Saliha Satyagraha (1930) in Nuapada district of Odisha exemplifies this. It was a popular movement against oppressive colonial policies and exploitative feudal

* Dr. Kamalakanta Roul teaches Political Science in Kamala Nehru College, University of Delhi.

ruler. Nuapada district, primarily dominated by tribals, played significant role in India's freedom movement from 1857 to 1947. Alas, Nuapada remains as "extremely poor and underdeveloped district" which has eroded the essence of Saliha Satyagraha. Amid huge natural resources (Sabar, 2015), poverty is unabated, labour trafficking and migration are regular in the district. The continuity of colonial-feudal power structure, accumulation of resources by a tiny section, and failure of land distribution (Deo, 2011) are major contributing causes of poverty in Nuapada. These three causes have disrupted the functioning of participatory democracy, distributed development and decentralised governance. Consequently, a large section of disadvantaged people has been denied basic rights, fair treatment and equal opportunity.

The paper primarily examines the significance of Saliha Satyagraha in present day Nuapada. It argues that ending poverty in Nuapada will dismantle the exploitative nature of colonial-feudal power structure and will certainly promote freedom and democracy in the district. In this context, two major political questions have been raised: What has made Nuapada's tribes enslaved? Despite having several constitutional provisions, policies and vast natural resources, why Nuapada is battling with poverty and deprivation? The study is, primarily, qualitative in nature. The hypothesis is in the nature of an exploratory one. Both primary and secondary sources of data have been used here especially primary data has been extensively used.

India's Freedom Movement and Combating Poverty

From 1778 to 1948, Indian tribals fought more than seventy anti-colonial movements. These movements were mainly two types: first, movement against rajas, zamindars, thekedars, British officials, traders, and moneylenders and second, movement in association with the national freedom movement. Gandhi was aware of tribal exploitation by colonialist-feudalist combine. In South Africa, Gandhi had worked with Zulu tribes. It was Thakkar Bapa who brought Gandhi closer to Indian tribes especially Bhil tribes in Gujarat who were exploited by colonial rule. Gandhi said that tribals were "part of rural communities who were exploited by the powerful class of people; thus, they required welfare measures. Welfare measures should be taken up on the basis of

understanding their society and culture” (Chakrabarty, 2019). Gandhi emphasised over providing all kinds of services in tribal areas and asserted that “who can deny that all such service is not merely humanitarian but solidly national, and it brings us nearer to true independence?” (Gandhi, 1941: 24). In his constructive programme, Gandhi emphasised that “service of adivasis is also a part of” the Swaraj movement (Gandhi, 1941: 23).

Gandhi’s Swaraj movement against British colonialism was not only to achieve political freedom but also to protect social and economic rights of depressed people. Gandhi said, “Swaraj is the poor man’s Swaraj” (Gandhi, 1947: 6). In Belgaum Congress session Gandhi said, ‘it will be Swaraj for starving and poor people if we can provide food to them’ (Roul, 2021: 222). Gandhi’s idea of Swaraj was not separate from poverty and inequality. Gandhi blamed exploitative policies of British government for miserable living conditions of Indian people. Gandhi said, “real Swaraj will not be the acquisition of authority by a few but the acquisition of the capacity of all to resist authority when it is abused” (Prabhu, 1961:4-5). Further, he said, “I shall work for an India, in which the poorest shall feel that it is their country in whose making they have an effective voice...” (Gandhi, 1947: 9). Civil liberty, for Gandhi, “...is the breath of political and social life...the foundation of freedom ... the water of life” (Harijan, June 24, 1939).

Nuapada’s Poverty Issue

Nuapada is well known for its glorious past, great adivasi civilisation and the Nature’s bounty. It’s rich natural beauty is engirdled with candid green hills and dense forest. Once, Nuapada was known as the “home of teak”. The melodious sounds of streams and waterfalls along with luxuriant wild vegetation creates natural scenic beauty. Nuapada is situated in the southern part of Odisha. It constitutes with 668 villages, 109 gram panchayats, 5 Blocks, and 3 NACs. (DCHN, Part XII-B, p 12). In 1993, Nuapada was made a separate district. According to the Census 2011, Nuapada has total 6, 10, 382 population, out of which Hindus 6,01,092, and Muslims 4,952 (DSHN, 2018: 9). The male and female ratio in the district is 1000: 1020 which is higher than the state level ratio (ODGN, p. 68). In sex ratio, the district has been ranked 5th in state level (DCHN, Part XII-B, p.14). Nuapada is a tribal dominated district

which is 33.8 per cent of the total population. Komna block has highest number of tribes. Major tribal groups in the district are “Gond, Bhunjia, Saora/Sabar, Banjara, Binjhal, Dal, Kandha, Mirdha, Munda, Paruja and Bhattoda”. However, Nuapada has 13.46 per cent SC population and Khariar block has highest number of SCs. Main SC groups are “Dom, Ganda, Chamar, Ghasi, Dhoba, Keuta, Mehra, Beldar and Panika” (ODGN, p. 69). During the colonial period, Hindu castes like Brahmin and Karan migrated to Nuapada from coastal Odisha and were mainly settled in urban and semi-urban areas. These two castes are well-established and most dominant groups in society, government jobs and business. In 1991, literacy rate of Nuapada was 27.52 per cent and in 2011, it was increased to 57.3 per cent. However, in comparison to state literacy rate, Nuapada district is far behind of it. The 2011 Census indicates that ST literacy rate in Nuapada is 51.09 per cent whereas SC literacy rate is 60.02 per cent (ODGN, p. 71). In fact, the ST literacy rate of Nuapada is not only lower than the literacy rate of SC but also lower than the district and state level literacy rate. As far as primary education is concerned, Nuapada had 571 primary schools and every school had 2 teachers in 2017-18. In the same year, 23, 533 students were enrolled in primary schools and teacher-student ratio was 1: 17 (DSHN, 2018: 59, 60, 61). Remarkably, in 2015-18, more girls and ST students were enrolled in schools.

Nuapada produced miserable performance in development indicators. In 2006, the Panchayati Raj Ministry of India stated that Nuapada is “country’s 250 most backward districts out of total 640 districts”. It is the 19th district of Odisha which comes under the coverage of Backward Regions Grant Fund Programme. Nuapada has 83 per cent BPL families whose annual income is only Rs. 15,000. Moreover, 50 per cent BPL families belong to “very poor” category with an annual income of only Rs. 6000 (DSHN, 2018). In contrary, Odisha government claims, Nuapada’s “per capita supply of agricultural land was the highest among all the districts in the state”. Moreover, 68.2 per cent agricultural families were owner cultivators in the district and only 2.4 per cent agricultural tenants live in rural areas. Official data shows, “Nuapada produces surplus paddy” (OES, 2004-10). In 2009-10, the district produces 228.64 MT paddy and 155.48 MT rice. On an average, from 2004 to 2010, the district produces 218.2 MT paddy and 148.48 MT rice.

Ill health is a major issue in Nuapada. Malaria and Tuberculosis are considered as fatal in the district and most of the households succumb to these diseases. In 2011-12, infant mortality rate was 52 per cent and in 2012-13, it was 49 per cent (OES 2014-15). In 2017, infant mortality rate was reduced to 24.29 per cent. In Nuapada, every block has one community health centre and only Komna block has two community health centres. Similarly, each block has three primary health care centres and 14 to 24 health sub-centres (DSHN, 2018: 69). But only 55 doctors, 41 staff nurses and 575 beds and 989 Asha workers have been employed in the district. Each block has 4-5 doctors, 2-3 nurses and 40-45 beds (ibid: 70). In regard to the drinking water facilities, the district has 10, 018 working tube wells and 126 piped water projects.

Nuapada's economy is primarily based on agriculture and forest. The district has different types of trees, wild grasses and bamboos in forest. It has 48.02 per cent forest of the geographical areas (DCHN, Part XII-A, 2011:5). The district records 1286.4 mm as normal rainfall. In 2008 and 2009, actual rainfall was higher than the normal. The district avails huge natural resources but has scarce mineral sources. Resources have miserably failed to provide employment to the people due to several natural factors as well as man-made factors. The Economic Survey 1954-55 shows that "about 98.2 per cent of the adivasi families were dependent on forest and agriculture for their livelihood". In 1965, Bijakhama forest provided food to the nearby villagers during the starvation deaths in tribal dominated Komna block. Bijakhama had huge Bija tuber plants and the tubers were collected by people to survive the drought (Sunani, 2021). Tribal people mainly depend over the non-timber forest products such as "Mahua flower, Char, Harida and Bahada, Tol" for consumption and selling. Nuapada's forest provides occupation to the poor people for about four to five months in an year. Distress sale of forest and agricultural produces has made poor lives miserable.

The Census 2011, identified 85.47 per cent people belong to agricultural classes, and out of the total non-agricultural families 20 per cent are labourers (ODGN, p. 204-206). Nuapada has 9779 landless households and it has 33861.02 acres available land for the purpose of agriculture (SR, UNDP, 2008: 66). The district also has 1505.37 acres of

undistributed Bhudaan land (SR, UNDP, 2008: 67). “Less than two per cent of the households occupy almost 95 per cent of Bahal or low land or in other words 98 per cent of the population own 5 per cent of the lowland or the best land” (ODGN, p. 217). The socio-economic assessment of Odisha government in Nuapada states that a household can manage to live a normal life with available of 8 to 12 acres of non-irrigated land in active possession during abnormal monsoon year. A family cannot live below 8 acres of active cultivable possession of land and the family has to supplement the income from other sources. Households having less than 5 acres of land cannot live normal life in Nuapada district (ODGN, p. 217). However, in Nuapada, best lands are under the possession of feudal elites like gountia, sahuakar, zamindar, Brahmins, and Karanas. These classes enjoy control over land in the name of homestead, orchards, and Debottar lands. Moreover, their conjunction with the government officers also helps them to hold on to their control. The district has implemented land ceiling acts and also distributed ceiling surplus land among adivasis and dalits but real land possession has not been given to them. It gives opportunities to landlords to ignore the ceiling rules and enjoy the dominance over lands. The settlement has also failed to reach out to the landless poor. Furthermore, restrictions have been imposed over tribals accessibility to forest, NTFP collections have been denied, collection of fire woods are refused and wildlife sanctuaries have been made nearby tribal habitations. Many villages in Sunabedha plateau come under the area of wildlife sanctuary. In this region, tribals have been facing continuous threat of displacement. Demands for land and forest rights have been continuously ignored by the district administration. Tribals and peasants have also been agitating for “forest rights, implementation of Forest Dwellers Act, proper support price for food grains, irrigation to their land, and compensation for displaced families”. In 2020, villagers decided that “no forest official would be allowed in their villages unless their community rights under the FRA are settled in accordance with the 2019 agreement. The officials are, however, allowed entry into Nuaguda as that village had received its community forest rights certificate. Posters saying no entry of forest department can be seen in several villages” (Sunani, 2015). Jami Jangal Mukti Andolan is the frontrunner struggle of tribals and forest dwellers in Nuapada. In 1990, the Paharia community started their movement to get back ST status.

Despite large tracts of natural resources, Nuapada is “industrially most backward” district of Odisha. There is not a single large-scale industry and also no medium scale industries existing in public or public sectors (BIPN, 2019-20: 8). “Only 32 kms of broad-gauge single railway line passages through the district, providing 3 railway stations” (ibid: 20). Government jobs are only alternative opportunities. Jobs in private sectors mainly confined to flour-mills, hullers and saw-mills. Consequently, Nuapada has turned to be a district of massive human migration from post-harvest to early monsoon. In some villages, total tribals and dalits population migrate to neighbouring cities leaving their respective villages empty (Panigrahi, The Sambad). Villages like Tileimala, Kandamupta, Sharadhapur of Sinapali block are known as “daadana gaaon” (migrant village). According to the Nuapada District Gazetteer, every year as soon as harvesting season gets over, more than 20,000 households migrate to neighbouring states in search of employment. These labourers face serious life threats and health hazards in working sites like exploitation, unrest, sexual harassment, trafficking, murder, death, and fatal illness. The Nuapada district administration does not keep record of these migrant labourers and never bother about their security. Personal debts and loans compel labourer class to take advance money from contractors before the commencement of Nuakhai festival. Shortage of food in families during the celebration of cultural functions like Nuakhai and Chherchhera are very common in Nuapada. In fact, Odisha government has implemented several development policies like “20-Point Economic Programme, MGNREGA, BIJUKBK, WODC, and Long-Term Action Plan”.

The irrigation facility in the district is inadequate and insufficient too. “Out of 1,89,170 hectares of cultivable land only 33623 (17.77 per cent) hectares have irrigation facilities”. However, only 45, 000 acres of lands are irrigated by Upper Jonk, Sunder dam, Saipala and Lower Indra Irrigation projects (ODGN, p. 205). “So far ground water development in the district has been meagre. The overall Stage of Groundwater development of the district is 19.12%” (GWIBND, 2013: 10). As a result, the district still persists with severe problems of drought which leads to poverty related problems like child selling, starvation deaths, farmer suicides and massive migration. The famine of 1965-66 is the root of all

these problems which made people poor and landless. The situation was mishandled by administration and it was resulted in massive starvation deaths. During this famine, “people started mortgaging their land, properties, themselves and selling their animals even their children”. The famine of 1965-66 made moneyed class and big land-owning class more wealthy, affluent and powerful in the district. It disadvantaged the poor tribals, landless, labourers, small and marginal farmers who sold or mortgaged their lands to survive the starvation deaths. The moneyed class got “cheap labour, easy terms for saheji or leasing out of land, kar or annual lease with fixed share, also enjoyed the benefit through distress sale of labour, crops and even land”. Moreover, in 1985, Nuapada was gravely affected by food scarcity which led to malnutrition, child selling, and starvation death.

In Independent India’s Nuapada district, several colonial-feudal rules have been legally abolished. The Orissa Estate Abolition Act, 1952 abolished zamindari system from the district. Likewise, Bethi-Begari system in 1923 and Bahabandha Pratha in 1928 were also abolished to improve the living standard of people. In contrary, the colonial-feudal structure continues unabated in the district. Royal families have maintained their dominance over the political power structure and electoral politics. Various progressive laws such as abolition of zamindari system, and land ceiling acts have not been able to dismantle the colonial-feudal-caste structures in the district. Feudal groups such as zamindars, gountias, and moneyed class have been exercising their unchallenged authorities over villages. “They remained arbiter of agriculture wages for long in the rural area of Nuapada district”. Consequently, the Maoist extremism emerges and governance deficit espouses their growth in the region. Several areas are under the control of red rebels especially Sunabedha plateau is one of such areas. “Since 2004, more than 63 Gram Panchayats of Nuapada district have been affected by Left Wing Extremism (LWE). The Odisha Government is trying to approach and solve the LWE problem through four-flung

approaches: public perception, development, administration and security” (ODGN, p.61).

Nature of Colonial Oppression in Nuapada

In 1817, the British East India Company got the possession of Nuapada’s Khariar Rajya from the Raja of Nagpur. The Khariar King made an alliance with the Company to remain loyal to the British government. The Bengal model of Zamindari System was adopted in Khariar region “equating the local Raja with Bengali Zamindar”. In 1863, the King of Khariar was reduced to merely a revenue collecting zamindar. The adivasis were subjected to the Bengal pattern of revenue collection and administration which ignored the structure of agrarian relation in tribal dominated Khariar state. Tenants had no occupancy right on land and they were asked to pay regular Bheti. Tribal gountias (village headmen) were forced to collect more revenue from their fellow adivasis. The Zamindar of Khariar arbitrarily imposed tax on land while counting numbers of “ploughs and hoe and seed-capacity of the land”. There were two types of tax system in Nuapada during colonial period: “Ryotwari” and “Mustajari”. However, “Jirayati” lands were “administered partly on Ryotwari system and partly on Mustajari”. The Mustajari system of rent collection was widely prevailing in most of the villages of Nuapada. In this system, agents of zamindar used to collect rent from tenants. In contrary, under the Ryotwari land tenure system, the landlord was directly involved in rent collection from Ryots (tenants) through his officials. Under the Ryotwari system, rights of Ryots were recognised. But in the Mustajari system, there was no legal recognition of Ryot’s rights over land and it was more oppressive in comparison to Ryotwari system.

In 1869, more complicated revenue policies were implemented in Nuapada. The Thekedari System (auction of villages) was introduced by replacing Khudkatti (first clearer of forest right). Large amount of Salami (presents) was collected by thekedars from new settlers and bethi-beggari (free labour) was extracted from peasants. The tribal gountias failed to compete with thekedars in collecting Salami and lost their influence over tribal society. As a result, the new administrative system advantaged the moneyed class by replacing tribal dominance. Tribals

and peasants were severely harassed and humiliated by thekedars when they failed to pay Salami and their lands were also forcibly grabbed. Moreover, Nazrana system (tax collection by Zamindar at the time of theka renewal) was introduced in Nuapada between 1869 and 1891. Tribals failed again to compete with non-tribals in paying Nazrana. In the meantime, erratic weather caused drought and crop failures from 1877 to 1886 and was finally struck by the great famine of 1899. The price of food grains was highly increased and the great famine resulted in massive starvation deaths. To survive from the famine, people mortgaged or sold their lands and also migrated to other places. But the landlord of Khariar remained loyal to the British government and the colonial-feudal axis continued to exploit tribals and peasants.

The Political Character of Saliha Satyagraha

The colonial misrule aroused discontentment among tribals, dalits and peasants against the local representatives of colonial rulers and also against the colonial-feudal tax system such as “revenue tax, forest tax, thekedari, nazrana, salami, bethi-beggari”. Nuapada had two major anti-colonial movements: first, tribal upsurge in support of the great revolt of 1857 and, second, mass participation in Gandhi’s national freedom movement (1920-1947). In both the movements, Nuapada’s tribals, dalits and peasants bravely fought against British despotism and provided strong leadership against the colonial oppression.

While supporting the revolt of 1857, Veer Surendra Sai strongly fought against the British East India Company in Sambalpur. His powerful opposition to British rule was initially supported by the King of Khariar. Similarly, tribals, dalits and peasants also extended their active support to the anti-colonial fight of Surendra Sai in Nuapada. Narayan Sah, a tribal chief of Sunakhan took the leadership in the fight against colonial ruler. He provided shelter to Surendra Sai and other rebels in his region. Narayan Sah was hanged and his son Gobinda Sah was arrested by the British Company in 1857. The Company announced rewards and warned local rulers to immediately arrest the rebels. Despite, Gond tribal chief of Tanwat, Lal Sah and his associate Chait Sah extended support to the

anti-colonial movement in Maraguda Valley and gave shelter to Surendra Sai.

In May 1860, British General Cockburn along with armed military force marched towards Maraguda valley to arrest Lal Sah and other rebels. Lal Sah's guerrilla warfare and stiff resistance from local tribes with bows and arrows forced British army to retreat from Maraguda Valley. Lal Sah was a great warrior and a strategist of guerrilla warfare who led 50 guerrilla groups at a time in the valley. His warfare technique, war related arrangements, organisational skill and mobilizational ability surprised British commander and military troops (ODGN, p. 46). General Cockburn failed to move further towards the valley and did not capture a single rebel. In August, General Cockburn wrote a letter from Maraguda to the Deputy Commissioner by stating that Manikgarh-Maraguda valley was fully under the control of Lal Sah. The repeated failures of British army in arresting Lal Sah compelled British officers to declare Maraguda Valley as "Rebel Valley". Lal Sah was declared as "Badmas" by the British government (NAI, File No. 35-37, p.173-189, Feb.,1864). Frustrated British army, brutally harassed villagers to put pressure over Lal Sah. They captured the cattle of local tribals and brought to the British camp at Pihapara. Three tribal villages in Maraguda valley were also burnt by British army. In order to save the villagers from the British harassment and torture, Lal Sah and Chait Sah surrendered before the Khariar King on November 22, 1860. The King handed over them to the British Commander Vallanse (ODGN, p.47). The contribution of Lal Sah and Chait Sah to the revolt of 1857 was very significant and inspiring. Despite adversities and scarce resources, they fought an armed resistance for seven months against the powerful British force.

The Saliha Satyagraha, 1930

Gandhi's Salt Satyagraha (1930) deeply influenced Indian masses and freedom fighters. The forest satyagraha in Raipur district paralysed the British administrative machineries. During this time, peasants revolted against the Darbar rule in Kalahandi which had supported Kulta immigration from Sambalpur and patronised Kulta for their agricultural growth in the region (Roul, 2021: 227). The people of Nuapada were inspired by these protests and they came out in large number against

the tyrannical rule of Khariar feudatory state. The King arbitrarily imposed taxes on tenants without looking at their socio-economic conditions. It compelled the of people of Khariar feudatory to organise a satyagraha against the taxation (MPDG: Raipur, 1973: 81) in Saliha village which is known as Saliha Satyagraha.

The Saliha Satyagraha was a forest satyagraha organised by tribals, dalits, peasants and women of Nuapada against the oppressive colonial-feudal rule. It had inspired and set an example for both the masses and classes to follow later on in the district. Saliha is a village where the people of Khariar estate assembled in large number on September 30, 1930 and protested against the arbitrary taxation on tenants. The place is popularly called as "Salihagarh". A pillar of freedom fighters has been constructed to remember the satyagrahis and their sacrifices for the Independence of India. Archaeologists urge that Saliha village "seems to be an ancient settlement, because two pieces of sculpture arts are found on the bank of the tank. One is a rectangular Sakti. At present, Konabhaira deity is worshipped as presiding deity by the villagers of Saliha which was once a site of Shiva-Sakti worship" (quoted in Yamin, 2010: 53). Saliha village is located in Jonk Tehsil of Nuapada district. It is surrounded by dense forest and Rocky Mountains. According to the Census 2011, "the total geographical area of the village is 467 hectares". Saliha has total 266 households and 1,006 population. Male and female ratio of the village is 502:504. It has become a Gram Panchayat now. Saliha village is only 8 km away from the Nuapada district headquarter.

From 1920-47, Nuapada's people actively participated in Indian National Movement led by Mahatma Gandhi. Leaders of Odisha Congress and Praja Mandal supported the movement against the misrule of the Khariar feudatory. Besides, Congress workers were engaged in the "Gandhian constructive work like construction and repair of village roads, digging of village ponds, spread of education, campaign against liquor and untouchability". On March 16, 1921, Gandhian leader Ganesh Prasad Mahapatra led a protest march to the Darbar Hall of Khariar feudatory with some demands like "exemption of land revenue, abolition of plough and festival tax, exemption of grazing tax and to stop eviction of farmer in case of failure of payment of tax" (ODGN, p. 58). In January, 1922, a demonstration was organised where police opened

blank fire at the protestors which provoked people to intensify the freedom movement. Nehru hoisted the tricolour flag on the banks of river Ravi and demanded Purna Swaraj on December 31, 1929. In the similar spirit, the tricolour flag was hoisted in several schools by students and teachers on January 26, 1930 in Nuapada. Teachers who participated in this ceremony were strongly punished and many of them were also imprisoned by colonial authority.

Nuapada participated in the Civil Disobedience movement on March 12, 1930. On the same day, a large number of people came out against the oppressive colonial rule. The protestors criticised the “extraction of forest cess, pandri (octroi), restriction on forest rights, collection of salami, Chari (grazing tax) and use of bethi-beggari system”. Series of meetings were organised in villages to create awareness. It received wide response from the general public. Looking at the unprecedented public support to the anti-colonial movement, it was finally decided to hold a protest meeting on September 30, 1930 at Saliha village. People peacefully came out in large number from more than 20 villages. It is said that more than seven hundred people assembled at Saliha “to protest against arbitrary extraction of taxes, exploitation of the authority and to demand Purna Swaraj” (ODGN, p. 56). The zamindar of Khariar feudatory secretly informed the police. Heavily armed police force marched to Saliha. At the time, a peaceful meeting was going on under the presidentship of Keju Das Baba who belonged to Chuhuri village. “A resolution was passed in the meeting not to give taxes and to revolt against imposition of taxes” (Yamin, 2010: 54). Suddenly, police gheraoed the meeting venue and ordered the gathering to stop the meeting. Arbitrary disruption of a peaceful meeting by police annoyed the protestors. They started giving slogans against British government and also against their local agents. Police indiscriminately charged lathi over the august gathering. The peaceful ambience turned violent. Angry people retaliated and burnt police lathis. When a police sergeant was injured, police indiscriminately fire over the crowd. In the firing, Keju Das Baba and tribal leader Kartik Sabar of Saliha village received bullet injuries. Indiscriminate firing over the crowd at Saliha brought physical injuries to many Satyagrahis but, fortunately no one was killed in the incident. Injured Keju Das Baba and Kartik Sabar were carried to the Saliha village by satyagrahis. In this agitation, more than 50 Satyagrahis

were arrested including leaders like Ramlal Debangon (Parkod village), Ramu (Saliguda village), Kundu (Chanbera Kundri village), Ganda Rai (Saliha village) and Laxman Das (Khariar Road). Kartik Sabar was a key leader of anti-colonial meeting in Saliha. His daughter Demathi Dei Sabar remembers the incident and said that she was working in the paddy field along with other women. A young girl informed her that the British force was “attacking the village, they have assaulted your father. They are torching our homes”. Demathi Dei Sabar raced back to Saliha with 40 other young women and saw her father Kartik was “lying on the ground bleeding. He had a bullet in his leg”. She lost her “temper and attacked that officer with the gun. As she attacked the officer, the 40 other women with her turned their lathis on the rest of the raiding force”. Demathi Dei Sabar is known as “Salihan” in Nuapada district (Sainath, 2015).

In spite of police repression and arrests, Satyagrahis continued protest against the British misrule in Saliha. It forced British police to withdraw from Saliha but next day i.e., on October 1, 1930, police returned to Saliha with more armed forces. They arrested two injured leaders-Keju Das Baba and Kartik Sabar- and took them to Raipur. Saliha Satyagraha rapidly spread to other villages-Choulsara, Patparpali, Khuteru and Ranadabri. Despite the absence of their leaders, people continued the Saliha Satyagraha in the form of “picketing before liquor shops and burning foreign goods” in Nuapada. Meanwhile, Gandhian leader Jagadish Prasad Joshi of Karangamal village took the leadership of anti-colonial movement in the district. In 1930, he was also arrested along with other leaders and was kept in Raipur jail for more than one year.

Conclusion: Saliha Satyagraha espoused the idea of Participatory Democracy, Distributed Development and Decentralised Governance

The Saliha Satyagraha was a strong public discontentment against the oppressive colonial rule and its exploitative feudal agents in Nuapada. It was a Gandhian Forest Satyagraha against arbitrary taxation and for the cause of land and forest rights. It was primarily led by most oppressed communities-tribals, dalits, peasants, women and poor-to liberate tribal society from colonial domination. Saliha Satyagraha aimed for democratic freedom which encompasses the rights pertaining to

individual's emancipation in society, participation in politics, and entitlement of resources.

The Saliha Satyagraha sends out five strong messages which have made it more relevant in present day politics and development of Nuapada. First, Saliha Satyagraha was a popular movement against colonialism and feudalism which were tentacles of poverty and exploitation in British India. Second, Saliha Satyagraha was not only a movement for political independence but also for socio-economic independence of downtrodden people. It probes that poverty undermines freedom and democracy and it leaves people vulnerable to domination and oppression. In fact, Philip Pettit argues that promoting freedom as non-domination will require promoting the socio-economic independence of citizens. Third, Saliha Satyagraha firmly stood for participatory democracy, distributed development and decentralised governance. Fourth, Saliha Satyagraha was a collective fight of tribals, dalits, peasants and women for freedom from domination and oppression. Finally, Saliha Satyagraha illustrates that the idea of freedom was not separate from the poverty issue and the Indian freedom movement linked and led both the issues together.

Since the freedom movement days, poverty has been a significant political issue in India. For the first time, Naoroji estimated India's poverty and wrote a paper titled "Poverty in India" (1877). Naoroji linked poverty issue with India's freedom struggle. Gandhi's Sarvodaya and Deen Dayal Upadhyaya's Antyodaya founded a strong political vision to combat poverty. Similarly, Dr. Ambedkar challenged the socio-economic power structure of rural India and demanded for the abolition of Mahar Watan and eradication of Khoti system.

Independent India was born primarily with three significant political missions like "securing national unity, bringing dignity and justice to those at the bottom of the social order, and eliminating mass poverty". Rajendra Prasad rightly said that the government's aim is "to end poverty...to abolish distinction and exploitation". Likewise, Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan urged "for the removal of all social disabilities...of man-made inequalities and injustices and to provide for all equality of opportunity". In the similar spirit, the post-colonial Indian state adopted

several measures to fight against poverty. Millions of people have been lifted out of poverty since Independence to till day. Thousands of policies and schemes have already been enacted but still there is no succor for the poor. A large section has been the victim of a kind of 'permanent poverty' and a tiny section is beneficiary of all benefits. Meanwhile, tribal poverty emerges as a challenge to the democratic stability and constitutional authority of India. Poverty rate among rural tribes is 47 per cent and 30 per cent among urban tribes. Each second tribal family lives in extreme food insecurity with low calorie and protein consumption. Consequently, the Left-Wing Extremist groups take advantage of tribal's vulnerability to poverty and marginalisation.

As fastest growing economy, India has also been able to set an impressive annual growth rate. But the solution to the problem of India's poverty lies with two significant factors: redistributive role of the Indian state and democratising rural India. Higher rate of economic growth alone cannot achieve the target in the fight against poverty. The Indian state has to strongly intervene in reconciling growth with distribution. The redistributive role of the Indian state can be defined with the policies relating to land reforms, inclusion of small farmers in economic growth and the landless people must be given proper wages and employment. Democratising rural India will facilitate the redistributive role of the Indian state. Even after 75 years of freedom, rural India has been persisting with inequality, continuity of colonial-feudal power structures, and governance deficit. A tiny section of the propertied class has accumulated land, grabbed power and benefited from state policies. The unholy nexus between propertied class, political regime and local bureaucracy has not only strengthened the undemocratic and dominant power structures but it has also helped in accentuating rural poverty in tribal India. The nexus has also 'neglected and unimplemented the redistributive policies of the Indian state'.

Tribals in Nuapada thought that freedom from colonial feudalism will provide an opportunity to protect and promote their socio-economic rights. Alas, Nuapada district continues with the same exploitative colonial-feudal power structure in Independent India in a little revision. The local power structure has deep rooted socio-economic fusion with colonial-feudal order like zamindar-thekadar-gountia-sahukar and

bureaucracy. However, Nuapada's poverty, and food insecurity is the effect of this undemocratic local level structural power relationship between various types of landholder class and also daily transaction between the landholders and landless communities. Bob Currie argues that the reason behind the extreme undernourishment of people is 'substantial extractive powers' upheld by the local dominant economic class even after decades of independence. He argues that poverty of the Nuapada is very much linked to the stiff increase of land revenue, land alienation and labour bondage system. Land, forest, agriculture, irrigation, and distribution are under the control of this unholy power structure with the support of district administration. On the other hand, poor people of Nuapada are forced to live as pennilessness which compels them for distress sale of crops, land, and labour. Huge migration and hunger are unabated. People are averting starvation deaths by selling their children. Sadly, even after seven decades of successful democracy millions of tribal people consume toxic mango kernels and tamarind seeds as the primary source of food security to satiate their hunger.

The state must promote participatory democracy at grass root level to challenge the dominant power structure which is responsible for abject poverty and inequality in the district. Community level participation must be ensured through Panchayat Raj system especially for the wider purpose of food, water, health, education, public services, and development processes. Indeed, the greater political participation of destitute tribal people in democratic process will empower them to challenge the oppressive dominant structure of Nuapada and will certainly pave the way for a progressive and egalitarian society. In June, 1990, Nelson Mandela said, "to deny people their human rights are to challenge their very humanity. To impose on them a wretched life of hunger and deprivation is to dehumanise them".

References

- Brief Industrial Profile of Nuapada (BIPN)*. (2019-20). Cuttack: MSME-Development Institute, Ministry of MSME, Government of India.
- Currie, B. (2000). *The Politics of Hunger in India: A Study of Democracy, Governance and Kalahandi's Poverty*. London: Macmillan.

- Constituent Assembly Debates (CAD). (1947). 5 (1).
- Chakrabarty, K. (2019). Tribe and Tribal Welfare in Gandhian Thoughts. *Journal of the Anthropological Survey of India*, 68 (2), 225-233.
- District Census Handbook- Nuapada (DCHN), Census of India 2011, Odisha, Series 22, Part-XII A*. Bhubaneswar: Directorate of Census Operations, Odisha.
- District Census Handbook- Nuapada (DCHN), Census of India 2011, Odisha, Series 22, Part-XII B*. Bhubaneswar: Directorate of Census Operations, Odisha.
- District Statistical Handbook Nuapada (DSHN), 2018*. Bhubaneswar: Directorate of Economics and Statistics, Odisha.
- Deo, F. (2011). Land Distribution Programmes in Odisha-A Social Audit in Nuapada. *Social Change*, 41 (2), 271-291.
- File No. 35-37, p.173-189, Gen. A, Feb.1864*. New Delhi: National Archives of India (NAI).
- Ground Water Information Booklet, Nuapada District (GWIBND), Orissa. (2013)*. Bhubaneswar: Ministry of Water Resources, Central Ground Water Board, SER, May.
- Gandhi, M.K. (1941). *Constructive Programme: Its Meaning and Place*. Ahmedabad: Navajivan Publishing House.
- Gandhi, M.K. (1947). *India of My Dreams*. Ahmedabad: Navajivan Publishing House.
- Harijan*, June 6, 1939.
- Kohli, A. (1987). *The State and Poverty in India: The Politics of Reform*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Madhya Pradesh District Gazetteers Raipur (MPDG). Rajendra Varma, (Ed). (1973)*. Bhopal: Department of District Gazetteers.
- Odisha District Gazetteers Nuapada (ODGN)*, edited by Taradatt, General Administration Department, Government of Odisha.
- Odisha Economic Survey, 2004-2010 (OES)*. Bhubaneswar: Planning and Convergence Department, Government of Odisha.
- Odisha Economic Survey 2014-15 (OES)*. Bhubaneswar: Planning and Convergence Department, Government of Odisha.

- Prabhu, R.K. (1961). *Compiler, Democracy: Real and Deceptive*. Ahmedabad: Navajivan Publishing House.
- Pettit, P. (1997). *Republicanism: A Theory of Freedom and Government*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Panigrahi, Dhruvacharan. Badaluni Nuapadara Bhokara Chitra, *The Sambad*.
- Radhakrishnan. (1956). *Occasional Speeches and Writings, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting*. New Delhi: Government of India.
- Roul, K.K. (2021). Decoding Gandhian Studies: The Odishan Sources of Gandhi's Ideas. In Terry Bietzel and Chandrakant Langare (Eds.), *Reflections on Mahatma Gandhi: The Global Perspectives* (pp. 215-230). New Delhi: Rawat Publications.
- Roul, K.K. (2021). Poverty, Deprivation and Tribal Rights in India: The Case of Dana Majhi's Kalahandi. In V. Srinivasa Rao (Ed.), *Tribal Integration in India: Northeast and Beyond* (pp. 213-237). New Delhi: Rawat Publications.
- Status Report. (2008). *Land Rights and Ownership in Orissa*. New Delhi: UNDP.
- Sabar, B. (2015). Hunger Amidst Plenty: Locating Vulnerability in a Resource-Rich Region in India. *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, 52 (5), 670-690.
- Sunani, Chinmaya. (2005). *For tribal communities of Nuapada in Odisha, it's a long road to community forest resource rights*. Retrieved December 3, 2021, from <https://en.gaonconnection.com/tribal-communities-nuapada-odisha-forest-rights-act-land-covid19-pandemic-hunger>.
- Sainath, P. (2015). *When Salihan took on the Raj*. Retrieved October 8, 2021, from <https://ruralindiaonline.org/en/articles/when-salihan-took-on-the-raj/>.
- Varshney, Ashutosh. (2013). *Battles Half Won: India's Improbable Democracy*. New Delhi: Penguin Viking.
- Yamin, Mohammed. (2010). Role of Khariar in the Freedom Struggle, *Orissa Review*. 50-55.