

## **Prajamandal Movement in Mayurbhanja** *A Subaltern Fight for Power*

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### **Abstract**

The present article is based on two fundamental arguments. First, revolts, rebellions, protests or any other nomenclature given to such phenomena during colonial period were mass movements and did not happen as isolated events. They reflected regional and national ethos despite their locality or community of occurrence through mass participation, interrelations and common spirit of freedom of the time from exploitation and subjugation. Second, the power against which the movements were directed adopted various means for perpetuation. The power was the power of governance in colonial system of administration and monarchical syndicate in princely or Garhjat states. Taking these two theoretical positions in to consideration, the article engages in the study of Prajamandal movement, a case of subaltern fight to share power, which erupted in the erstwhile Mayurbhanj princely state of Odisha (erstwhile Orissa) during first decades of twentieth century before independence.

**Keywords:** Prajamandal, Garhjat, Municipal Body, Sardari, Peasantry, Feudal Dues, Andolon

### **1.0 Introduction**

The purpose and intensity of a movement against monarchical syndicate or colonial rule for autonomy or participatory democracy are down played by attaching it to a community or social category or place. History records many such movements like the Rampa revolt, Santal *Hul*, Birsa Munda *andolon*, Paika *vidroh*, Sepoy mutiny, Bhuyian rebellion, or state specific uprisings like Nilgiri or Mayurbhanja Praja *andolon*. Though the movements apparently show the contours of a context, each of them had local, regional and national

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dimensions underlying the burning zeal of freedom from tyranny, exploitation, oppression, and subjugation. The purpose of the movement designated as a localised movement during colonial period was clear – achieving local autonomy at all levels and establishing a people’s government in place of colonial rule. The protest was essentially by the people on the other side of the power centre, and therefore, is simply designated as a subaltern movement in this article, in contrast to colonial administration and monarchical syndicate. The Prajamandal andolon, in this sense, is studied as a subaltern movement- the movement by the subjects belonging to different castes and occupations against the royalty and the court of the Mayurbhanja princely state, to establish participatory democracy or a people centric government to escape tyranny, exploitation, and oppression.

The Prajamandal Movement, in its generic sense, which mainly aimed at the removal of maladministration, economic grievances, and establishment of responsible government in princely states, may sound paradoxical to the majority of the Odia people in the context of Mayurbhanja, as they hold a very positive view about this erstwhile Garhjat (also spelt as Gadjat) state. Mayurbhanja, which was the largest of all the 26 Garhjats, enjoyed much better administration than any other Odishan Garhjat states, and the rulers of this state had built up a kind of ideal image for themselves in the public eyes of Odisha through their benevolent deeds and munificence. The successive rulers of Mayurbhanja right from the days of Maharaja Krushna Chandra Bhanja had made their debut felt in Odisha through patronisation of art, culture, education, science, and technology. They too had introduced ameliorative measures in every branch of administration for the welfare of the state and well-being of their subjects. Hence, a movement against the maladministration of an enlightened state very often betrays the truth. But like the darker side of a moon, the state’s administration had many more potholes which impelled the people to rise in an organised way against the durbar administration, which was pretended to be projected as a paternal form of Government.

The Prajamandal movement was a movement of the state’s people directed against autocratic and reactionary princes and their inefficient and oppressive administration. Prajamandal or people’s association was the forum to fight out this cause, and the units of Prajamandal were formed in different feudatory states of the then Odisha. A review of the works on the subject shows that the movement launched in every state was a kind of mass movement which aimed at redressal of economic grievances and establishment of responsible and constitutional government at that time also<sup>1</sup>. A wave of new political awakening swept the Garhjat states christened popularly as “Andhari Mulaka” or dark domain where civic liberty was a myth. The Prajamandal activists continued their crusade till the achievement of the desired goal which came in the wake of merger of these states with Odisha province in 1948-49. It is against this background that this article intends to vocalise the silences by highlighting the Prajamandal movement in an enlightened state like Mayurbhanja, which has escaped the attention of many historians.

Mayurbhanja the largest of all the erstwhile Garhjats of Odisha extending over an area of 4243 square miles was not only large in terms of its size and sources of revenue, but the successive ruling chiefs of this state right from the days of Maharaja Krushna Chandra Bhanja Dev had created for themselves a key place in the galaxy of Odishan

Rajas through their welfare activities and patronisation of Odia art, culture, and education. Raja Krushna Chandra Bhanj Dev (1867-1882) was declared a Maharaja in 1877 for his efficient administration of the state and for his public liberality. The most prominent instance of this was his donation of Rs.27,000/- towards raising the Cuttack High School to the status of a college (Cobden-Ramsay 1910:241), which, on his suggestion, came to be named Ravenshaw College to perpetuate the memory of the commissioner T.E. Ravenshaw.

The next ruler Sriram Chandra Bhanja Dev (1890-1912) whom Cobden-Ramsay (1910) describes as the most enlightened of the Garhjat chiefs, had the honour to grace the imperial Darbar held at Delhi on 1st January 1903 as the guest of the British Indian Government and the title of Maharaja was conferred on him as personal distinction on the same occasion. A Delhi Darbar Gold Medal was awarded to him, and a silver medal was awarded to one of his Sardars (Cobden-Ramsay 1910: 241). He also presided over the first session of the Utkala Union Conference held at Cuttack in December 1803 and had made donations to Cuttack Medical School.

### **1.1 The first democratic experiment**

A state council formed in the year 1892 by Maharaja Srirama Chandra was a milestone in the history of democratic experiments in feudatory states. It was basically the brain work of his tutor at Cuttack, Mr Mohini Mohan Dhar who later on became his chief advisor, Dewan, and Judicial Magistrate of Mayurbhanja (Sahu 1988:144). With the Maharaja as the president, the council included four top officers of the state: (1) the Dewan, (2) the state Judge, (3) the superintendent of police, and (4) the state chief engineer. Out of the two non-official gentlemen as members, one was to be a member of the royal family. All the legislative measures were passed by the council, and the budget was discussed. The decision of the council was adopted based on a majority vote, and this council even had the power to reconsider the decisions of the Maharaja. The opening of 33 miles long railway line connecting Baripada with Rupsa on the Bengal Nagpur Railway (BNR) in 1905, mining operation at Goru Mahishani to supply Iron ore to the Tata Steel Plant, establishment of Baripada High School and Evening School for adult education, Srirama Chandra Library, and publication of a monthly Odia Journal “Utkala Prava” added some colourful feathers to the cap of the King’s glory (Sahu 1988 and Cobden-Ramsay 1910).

The next ruler, Purna Chandra Bhanja Deo (1920-1928), followed in the footsteps of his father in the line of benevolence. Expansion of the railways and establishment of the Archaeological department were some of the commendable contributions of Maharaja Purna Chandra to the schemes of public welfare. The creation of a permanent fund with two lakh rupees donated by him for the development of agriculture bears evident testimony to his love for agriculture and the agriculturists. But his major contribution to the development of democratic traditions in the state was the introduction of electoral procedure to the Municipality of Baripada (ibid).

It is to be noted here that in line with the schemes of local self-government introduced by Lord Ripon, Maharaja Sriram Chandra established the Baripada Municipality in 1905, dividing the town into six wards. This Municipal body consisted of Chairman / Vice-chairman and 15 commissioners (councillors) all nominated by the chief. Out of these 15 councillors 06 were to be nominated from among the state officials and 09 non-officials representing various classes and community (Cobden-Ramsay 1910:256). But this municipality with nominated member did not function well upto the expectations and satisfaction of the people. Hence Maharaja Purna Chandra introduced electoral procedure in 1922. Hereafter, the municipal body came to be reconstituted with 08 elected members and 02 nominated members. But the chairman as before came to be nominated by the ruling chief (Prusty 2005: 8).

Maharaja Purnachandra died issueless on 21st April 1928 while at Bombay for attending the meeting of the Buttler Committee, and was succeeded by his brother Pratapa Chandra Bhanja Dev, who like his predecessors, has also been described as an enlightened ruler (ibid.).

## **1.2 Behind the curtain of benevolence**

Now arises the questions, if Mayurbhanja was a model state for other Garhjats either to envy or to emulate, if it sincerely endeavoured to project itself as a welfare state, what impelled the people to opt for an anti-Durbar programme and form Praja Mandal to fight out their cause. What were the odds behind the curtain of this benevolence that served as catalyst for a mass movement?

The truth was that the bulk of the population in the state of Mayurbhanja were aborigines, forming nearly 56.52% of the total population (Cobden-Ramsay 1910:242) who were mostly addicted to drinking habits. Taking advantage of the ignorance and simplicity of the people, the Durbar administration was exploiting them in various ways in the name of enlightened administration. Elaborate administrative machinery with a big secretariat and a large number of motorised vehicles and aeroplane proved to be a great burden on the people. The total income of the state was entirely wasted on the administrative machinery and the privy purse of the Raja and his family (AISPC n.d.: 109).

### ***1.2.1 The Sardari system and Hatua-Kalapitha Divide***

Apart from huge sources of income for the state from mining and forest resources, revenue from the people was another major source of income for the states. Resources were drawn from the people through an oppressive and autocratic system known as the Sardari System (Pradhan 1979:156). The population of the state in 1941 was nearing 10 lakh, and the annual income of the state was Rs. 28, 22675.00. Sardars, Tahsildars, and Lakhrajdar were agents or intermediaries vested with enormous powers in the local administration of the *praganas* or fiscal divisions. Most of the Sardars were imported from the coastal districts of Odisha like former Cuttack, Puri, and Balasore from among the literate and

semi-literate class. The local people termed these outsiders as Hatua or Diku, and themselves as Kalapithia (dark skinned), the sons of the soil<sup>2</sup> (Dhal 2007:212-213).

These intermediaries were instruments of oppression and extortionists who, within a short period of their tenure, amassed huge movable and immovable properties by questionable methods and dubious practices. They had become so much oppressive that in the interior rural sectors the very name “Sardar” struck terror into the hearts of the rural people. These Sardars took the defaulting tenants to task when the latter failed to pay revenue in time. They imposed physical punishments like carrying stones, standing on one leg, etc. (Mahatab et al. 1939:22). The people too were asked to pay Nazrana, a kind of forced present on festive occasions like Holi and Dusserah (RAM n.d.:42- 47).

### ***1.2.2 Feudal Extractions and Pangs of Peasantry***

Though Mayurbhanja was considered an advanced state compared to other Garhjats, the people of this state were not immune from payment of feudal dues like *bethi* (forced labour), *bhet* (forced present), *magan* (forced contribution), *rasad* (forced requisition of provision), and *begari* (forced carrier of the luggage of the state officials during their tours and travels). The subjects of Mayurbhanja, like those of any other backward Garhjat state of Odisha, were not exempted from the age old practice of contributing their labour without any wage, more popularly known as *bethi*. They were also required to carry the luggages of the state officials from one destination to the other in the course of their official tour without any wage under *begari* system. (Pradhan 1979: 42).

On 25 July 1893, H.P.Wylly, the manager in-charge of the state when Raja Srirama Chandra Bhanja Dev was a minor, issued a circular abolishing *bethi* and *begari*. The circular was just in pen and paper, not in practice. Forced and free labours were more frequent in the Panchapidha (also spelt as Panchapir) sub-division of the state corresponding to the present Karanjia subdivision. Pradeep Sagar, a large reservoir at Karanjia was excavated entirely through *bethi*. (Prahraj 1988: 130). Evidently, forced and free labour were mandatory for a subject and it was normal practice on the part of a peasant to spend over one hundred days of the year in offering forced labour to the Durbar and its official (Chudgar 1929:71). A defaulter in providing forced labour and tax was declared “Palataka” or absconder, and his property was auctioned (Pradhan 1947: 16).

#### ***1.2.2.1 Rashad***

Apart from *bethi* and *begari*, the subjects, mainly the tenants, were duty bound to supply *rasad* or provisions to the ruler, his friends, guests, and all officials of the state in the course of their tour from villages to villages, be it official or pleasure trip. Such provisions included rice, ghee, chicken, egg, fish, vegetables, milk, fuel, utensils, or any other demand made by them.

### 1.2.2.2 *Maagan*

Apart from the hazards and indignities suffered by the people, they also had to present free and forced contributions both in cash and kind on the occasion of marriage, sacred thread and ear-piercing ceremonies, and funeral rites in the palace, which were called *maagan*. Even in the event of the purchase of motors or any other precious luxuries by the Raja or his family member, additional revenue called *maagan*, at the rate of one fourth of the land lent, was collected from the tenants (Pradhan 1979:42).

### 1.2.2.3 *Bheti or forced present*

Another contribution forcibly extracted from the peasants was *bheti* or forced presents. On the annual consecration ceremony of the ruler on Sunia day<sup>3</sup> the landholders had to pay Sunia *bheti*. This *bheti* was presented at the rate of six paise per one rupee of the *malguzari* (land revenue) to the *sarbarakar* (a middleman in charge of the collection of tax), who in his turn transferred the amount to the Raja. Similar presents were paid by the *pradhans* or village headman on festivals like Holi, Dusserah and Chhau festival. In the Jashipur area, a tax called Payeka Pancha was levied upon each family, the rate of which varied from one *paye* to four *paye* in kind (one *paye* being equal to 4 kg (Mohanta 1978: 2). The *sarbarakars* and other landed magnates too had to make compulsory present to the Raja during Dusserah.

### 1.2.2.4 *Stringent Forest Laws*

Though Mayurbhanja was rich in forest wealth, the *prajas* or the subjects had no freedom to enjoy the benefits. Even for making agricultural implements like plough and yoke they had to seek permission of the authorities. Almost all the jungles were placed under reserve category, and the reserve lines were extended upto the residential areas of the people, for which they had no right to cut trees of their own land. Nobody was allowed to collect wood from the jungle even for daily domestic or agricultural purposes (Mahatab et al. 1939:64).

Permission to collect materials from the forest was available on payment of a stipulated amount of fees. The durbar administration of Mayurbhanja had leased out the collection of and trade in non-timber products like mahua (*Madhuca Longifolia*) flower, sal (*Shoirea robusta*) seeds, and honey to Calcutta based merchants who exploited the tribals by buying these things cheaply and selling at high rate. For example, in 1929-30 the rate of lac per *seer/ser*<sup>4</sup> was rupees three in Bihar, whereas the rate of collection was barely 0.75 paise at Panchpir (in Karnjia). The state had provisions to impose fines for trespassing of domestic animals through a reserve forest at the rate of: buffalo – two rupees; bull or cow – one rupee; calf, ass, pig, ram, sheep, or goat fifty paise each (MSA 1947).

Against this background, the Prajamandal Movement had its beginning in Mayurbhanja towards October 1938. By this time, the fire of the “state people’s movement” had started conflagrating in states like Dhenkanal, Gangpur, Ranapur, Nayagarh, and Khandapada.

### **1.3 The Spark of Simla - the first step towards Prajamandal**

Before the formation of the regular Prajamandal organisation in Mayurbhanja, public meetings were organised at different places in the state to sensitise the people about the wrongs of the durbar administration. The stringent Circular No.3 of 27th April 1925 had deprived the common people of their basic rights, like freedom of speech, formation of associations, and holding of public meetings. This infringement of human rights in the state was first challenged by one Bansidhara Behera of village Dhadangir in the police station of Bangriposhi, who convened a public meeting at Simla, a small village in that area (the postal pin code of the village Simla is 757032). Subsequently, he organised a series of meetings at Jashipur, Gadishahi, and Raruan. He vehemently attacked the arbitrary nature of the durbar administration and demanded the withdrawal of this undemocratic circular. This was the first step towards the formation of Prajamandal organisation in Mayurbhanja (Dash 1979).

#### ***1.3.1 Praja Sabha vis-a-vis Prajamandal***

Taking note of the wind of change blowing in the country as a whole, and in other feudatory states of Odisha in particular, Pratap Chandra Bhanjdeo, the Maharaja of Mayurbhanja, withdrew the prohibitory circular of 27 April 1925. To stem the tide of Prajamandal movement gradually entering into his state, he issued an order on 25 November 1938 proclaiming the establishment of five Praja Sabha, one for each of the four sub-divisions, i.e., Sadar, Bamanghaty, Kaptipada, Panchapir, and the fifth one for the state capital, Baripada. This was done with the objective of associating the people with the administration of the state. (RAM n.d.:36). These representative bodies were formed to focus local opinion in all matters and to disassociate the people from anti-durbar activities and to neutralise their hostile attitude. Bidyadhara Mohaptra, S.D.O. Sadar, Sirish Ch. Bose, M.A.B.L, Prafulla Ku. Das M.A., Mr Bholanath Panda, B. L., and Gopinath Dhal, B.L. were respectively appointed as the chairperson of Baripada, Bamanghaty, Kaptipada, Sadar, and Panchapir Praja Sabha. It is to be seen that none of the above people really represented the peasants and were drawn from upper echelons (Chhatia 2010: 87).

The Praja Sabhas in this way were eyewash to befool the people, and these systems did not transfer any real power from the ruler to the people. It is a usual strategy adopted by the centre of power to fight against an opposing institution or movement by launching a parallel of it and creating confusion among the masses.

The failure of the Praja Sabha experiment emboldened the people to opt for more radical organisation. In the meantime, the growing upsurge of mass movement in response to the call of the Indian National Congress inspired the people in feudatory states to demand the liquidation of the feudal social order and representative governments in the state. The messages of Nilagiri, Ranapur and Dhenkanal Prajamandal had reached Mayurbhanja. They felt inclined to have a similar organisation in their state.

The first man to hit the first stroke of hammer on the iceberg was the said Bansidhara Behera of Dhadangiri Kuliana. The withdrawal of prohibitory circular of 1925 in November 1938 facilitated the formation of political association and holding public meetings. With the help of like-minded persons like Krunna Ch. Mrugraj of Jashipur, Kantharam Das of Karanja, and Shyamasingh Tipiria of Raruan, he organised public meetings at different places to form people's association against the durbar (Dash 1979).

#### **1.4 Visit of the Orissa (now spelt Odisha) state enquiry committee**

With the constitution of the Odisha state enquiry committee under the chairmanship of Mr H.K. Mahatab in 1938, positive steps were taken to record the grievances of the people living in the Garhjats (Mahatab 1972:189-200). The committee consisting of Mahatab, Balbartray Mehta, and Lalmohan Patnaik visited Balasore to assess the condition of the people of Nilgiri and Mayurbhanja. They were surprised to find that a large number of people from Mayurbhanja had volunteered to travel a distance of three-day journey to reach Balasore to ventilate their grievances before the committee (Mahatab et al.1939:218-220). The people alleged that they were forced to pay the following fees apart from *bethi*, *bheti*, and *rasad*.

1. Four annas per family per month as fuel fee<sup>5</sup>
2. Two annas per head per each cow as grazing tax
3. Fine of four annas per head at the time of selling their cows
4. Four annas per yoke of oxen for obtaining *sal wood* (*Shorea Rabusta*) for making agricultural implements
5. Marriage tax ranging from four annas to eight annas
6. Road cess at the rate of one anna per rupee of land rent
7. A cess of twelve annas for *tussar* (silk worm) cultivation

The people further alleged that they were not allowed to take their cart on the main roads allegedly meant for motor cars. The members of the committee expressed their deep concern at the callous attitude of the state administration in improving the lot of the common men and heavy burden of taxation.

#### **1.5 Birth of Pragna Samiti**

Inspired by all these development, Mr. Sarat Chandra Das, a native of village Ambajoda near Betanoti, a pleader by profession, and a member of Utkal Sammilani and Vice-President of Balasore District Congress Committee for 5 years (1920-1925), convened a meeting on 24 March 1939 at his village to form an association to fight against the injustice of the state's administration. This meeting was attended by students, teachers and other responsible persons like Jagannatha Kamila, Girish Ch. Ray, Goura Mohan Pradhan, Gajendra Nath Patnaik, Hrudananda Das, Hadibandhu Rout, Gobinda Ch. Nayak, Laxmidhar Tripathy, Ramachandra Patnaik, Laxman Ch. Prida, Dhruva Ch. Rout, Krushna Ch. Swain, Ramachandra Mohapatra, Adityanath Lal, Laxmidhar Pradhan, Madan Mohan



Panda, Madan Mohan Mishra, Aprati Biswal, Ramanath Patra, Biswambhara Maharana, Kailash Ch. Nayak and tribal leaders like Sakila Soren. A political association named Pragana Samiti was born in this conference. Gradually branches of this Pragana Samiti were set up at Satilo, Rahanda, Manitri Kuradhia, Akhuaseni, Saikali, and Kaisari. Public meetings were held at various places of Kaptipada, Panchpir and Bamanghaty Sub-division (Dash 1997:16-17).

To coordinate the works of various branches, a central Pragana Samiti was formed on 21 January 1940 with Sarat Ch. Das as President, Jagannatha Kamila as Secretary, and Laximdhara Tripathy as Treasurer. Representatives to the central committee were elected by the members and members of the executive committee were chosen by the President. Ambajoda the village of Sarat Ch. Das was made the head quarter of the Pragana Samiti (Chhatia 2010:88).

### ***1.5.1 From Pragana Samiti to Prajamandal***

Being a Gandhian, Sarat Das, popularly known as Sarat Gandhi, introduced various village-based constructive programmes like prohibition and the opening of national schools, which made Pragana Samiti extremely popular in the state. For the good work done by Pragana Samiti, S. J. Sarat Das received the appreciation of nationalist leaders like Jawaharlal Nehru. Pragana Samiti politically educated the village folks and made them conscious of both civil and political rights. Due to the growing popularity of the Pragana Samiti, its membership began to swell (see Dash 1997a).

Inspired by this rising trend, Sarat Chandra craved to convert it into a regular branch of the All India Organisation. With this objective a meeting of the Pragana Samiti was convened on 18 December 1940 at Ambajoda. It was in this meeting that Pragana Samiti was rechristened as Mayurbhanja State Prajamandal. Sarat Ch. Das and S. J. Goura Mohan Pradhan were respectively elected as the President and General Secretary. Startled at the emergence of Prajamandal, the durbar reacted sharply and initiated malicious propaganda against its President Sarat Ch. Das. He was branded as a crook and compared with Hitler. But without caring a fig for these clandestine propagandas against him and Prajamandal, Das made triumphant marches from Sadar to Panchpir Sub-division, establishing new branches of the Prajamandal at places like Raruan and Rairangpur. He found five trusted lieutenants to carry forward the programmes in Panchpir. They were Bhaktabandhu Mohanta, Umesh Ch. Panigrahi, Mangal Singh Tipiria, Shiva Prasad Mohanta and Goura Chanran Mohanta. Series of mass meetings were organised all over the state. In each meeting the Prajamandal reiterated the demand for abolition of Sardari system (The Samaj 1940). Steps were initiated to involve women in the movement. The first meeting for women was held at Nalkara near Betnoti. Women attended the Prajamandal meeting held at Pratimadeipur and Madhudanda (Dash 1997:6).

### ***1.5.2 Three-Day session at Tentel***

To make the Prajamandal activist feel that they are part of an All-India Organisation, it was decided to hold a three-day session of Prajamandal at Tentel on the bank of Budhabalang under Khurdhiha Pragana in Badasahi Police Station. This session was

graced by Sarangdhar Das, the General Secretary of the All India State People's Conference, more popularly known as "Garhjat Gandhi".

The success of this session held in the month of May 1940 and congratulation letter of Pt. Nehru to Sarat Ch. Das gave a moral boost to the Prajamandal movement in Mayurbhanja. The growing popularity of Prajamandal activities in Mayurbhanja is attested by the fact that by December 1941, the organisation had set up 119 schools providing educational facilities to 2908 students and adults, and the Prajamandal panchayat disposing 396 major civil and criminal cases. It popularised prohibition programme among the tribals and Prajamandal co-operatives granted paddy loan to the poor peasants (ibid.).

### ***1.5.3 Anti-Prajamandal measures of the administration***

To counteract the growing popularity of the Prajamandal, the durbar administration resorted to threats and intimidation. The frontline leaders of the Prajamandal were kept under police surveillance. Bhaktabandhu Mohanta the Prajamandal leader of Panchpir (Panchapidha) who was serving as a teacher in Karanjia M.E. School was placed under punishment transfer to Nalagaja in the Sadar sub-division (Mohanta 1978:12). A prohibitory order was issued against him when he was going to organise a meeting of the Prajamandal at Raruan. But nothing could stem the tide of Prajamandal movement in the state.

### ***1.5.4 Prajamandal vis-a-vis Prajamangal***

To do away with the emerging situation, the durbar administration resorted to a novel tactic. It sponsored a parallel organisation called "State Prajamandal" under the leadership of Harish Chandra Dash, the younger brother of Ramachandra Dash, the Superintendent of Police of the state. Its members were drawn from among the Sardars, Sahukars, Sarbarakars, and state officials, whose loyalty to the cause of durbar administration was unquestionable (Praharaj 1988: 140). Some of the leading members of the Prajamangal were Pattnaik brothers from Morada (Umakanta and Ratikanta Pattanaik), Pitambara Choudhury of Khunta, Rasabihari Das of Rajakata and one Braja Sundar Das, the Sardar of Balidiha. Their aim was to mislead the people, create disturbances in the public meeting of the Prajamandal, and harass the Prajamandal supporters in various ways. The durbar sponsored Prajamangal activists set hired hooligans to disturb constructive programmes of the Prajamandal. Allegations and counter allegations against each other figured in the newspapers, the state police often taking the side of the sponsored-Prajamangal (The Samaj1941). But despite these allegations and counter allegations, the durbar administration did not initiate any direct action against the Prajamandal and its leaders, as long as its activities were limited to constructive programmes and protest against corrupt officials and Sardars. But when Prajamandal demanded for establishment of responsible government, the administration adopted repressive measure (Dash 1997: 30).

### ***1.5.5 Spread of Prajamandal Movement***

The Prajamandal activities worked sincerely to spread the message of their organisation throughout every nook and corner of the state. The constructive programmes of the Prajamandal like construction and repair of the local roads, cleaning of the community well and tanks made it popular. Among these constructive programmes, the most popular one was the establishment of Grain Golas (often spelled as Green Golas)<sup>6</sup> in different villages, which advanced loans to poor peasants on easy terms, who were exploited by dishonest Mahajans. These unscrupulous money lenders often lent money or grain to the needy people at exorbitant rates of interest.

The popularity of the Prajamandal organisation shot high despite various repressively measures adopted by the durbar administration. The message of the Prajamandal soon spread from the Sadar division and Kaptipada division to Panchapir and Bamanghaty Sub-division. Dynamic youngmen like Bhaktabandhu Mohanta a teacher, Siba Prasad Mohanta, Baidanath Mohanta, Bhairava Mohanta, and Daithari Singh took up the leadership in Panchapir Sub-division.

From Panchapir, the movement soon spread to the nearby Bamanghaty Sub-division. At-Rairangpur, the headquarters of Bamanghaty Sub-division, a branch of Prajamandal was opened with Jit Mohan Mohanta as President. Another branch was opened at Bangiriposhi of the Bamanghaty Sub-division under the leadership of Purna Chandra Pani. Branches of Prajamandal were opened at places like Khunta, Amarda, and Rasagobindpur bordering Balasore district. Even in the state capital Baripada an office was opened due to the effort of one Braja Sundar Rath. (Dash 1997: 45).

### ***1.5.6 Prajamandal and Quit India***

Though there was no Congress organisation in Mayurbhanja, the Prajamandal extended unflinching support to the Quit India Movement of 1942. At the invitation of Pt. Neheru, Sarat Chandra Das, the President of Mayurbhanja Prajamandal and R.C. Mohapatra, a member of the working committee attended the Bombay(now Mumbai) session of the INC held during 6-8 August 1942. On their return from Bombay, Prajamandal organised agitation at various places like Betanoti, Amarda, Khunta protesting against the government's decision to outlaw Congress. On 25 August 1942, several thousand persons proceeded in a procession from Betanoti to Baripada shouting slogans against the colonial government to Quit India. However, they were prevented by the state police and official. Anticipating measures leading to violence, the said march was called off and the demonstrators withdrew from Ragdha which was a great blunder of the Prajamandal (Dash 1997: 46).

## **1.6 Movement against “Payeka Panch” and the Paik Unrest**

During Quit India Movement, the Panchpir branch of Prajamandal started an agitation against the collection of “Payeka Panch” in 1943 called the “Payeka agitation”. It was a tax levied upon each family, the rate of which varied from one paye to four paye in kind, one paye being equal to four kg. Prajamandal leaders from Sadar Sub-division like Prasanna Ku. Dash, Ramanchandra Mohapatra, Dakhin Majhi, Krushna Ch. Swain, and Harekrushna Sahu proceeded from the Sadar area to Jashipur to support the agitation. The Paik uprising in February 1947 (The Samaj 1947) under the leadership of Baikuntha Nath Sadual, an executive member of Mayurbhanja Prajamandal appeared to be the proverbial tip of the iceberg. This Paik unrest made the situation quite grave. The cause of this uprising was the confiscation of the Jagir Land (Dash 1997 & 1997a :53) held by Paiks. During pre-colonial days these Paiks or Khandayats performed various duties like watching borders, maintaining law and order and performing police duties, in lieu of which they enjoyed rent free Lakharji (rent free) Lands. But with the evolution of police service in the Garhjat administration, their services were no more required. They on the other hand were required for one month a year at the ruler’s palace for watch and ward duties and other manual works which they took as disgrace to their social dignity. As some of the influential Jagirdars of the Paik community had joined the Prajamandal organisation, the durbar administration planned to punish these leaders. In 1946, a meeting of the Paiks was organised under the Presidentship of Baikunthanath Sadual of village Deulia which was attended by other Paik leaders like Ramachandra Mohapatra of Sainkula, Chakradhara Mohapatra of Managovindpur and Baishnava Ch. Nayak of Chillme (Dash 1997: 36). It was resolved in the meeting not to report to duty in “Ruler’s Palace” or send someone on proxy and not to surrender the Jagirland. As a retaliatory measure the durbar administration in accordance with the provision of Mayurbhanja regulation 1908, confiscated the Jagir lands of Baikunthanath, the leader of the Paik Sammilani and ordered him to leave the state within 24-hours as a persona non grata (The Samaj1947).

As Baikunthanath defied this order, a warrant was issued to arrest him. Vaikunthanath was arrested and subjected to one year of rigorous imprisonment (Dash 1997: 53). The arrest of this Paik leader fanned the fire, and the Prajamandal organised a series of meeting at different places in support of the Paiks.

## **1.7 The Eastern State People Conference and Pratap Pur session of Prajamandal**

At this critical juncture, a regional council of the Eastern State People’s Conference was set up at Cuttack with Sarangdhar Das as President, Pabitra Mohan Pradhan as Vice-President, and Madan Mohan Pradhan as General Secretary. The members of Mayurbhanja Prajamandal were elected to the executive committee of this council (Prahraj 1988:144). This was a clear recognition of the matured leadership of Mayurbhanja Prajamandal.

It was against this background that the last meeting of the Mayurbhanja Prajamandal was held at Pratap Pur in July 1947 on the back of Budhabalang, under the

Barasahi police station. It was attended by delegates from all over the state. In Pratap Pur session it was resolved to organise a final showdown with the state administration. A call was given to lead a mammoth procession to Baripada on 15 August 1947. Prajamandal movement now assumed unprecedented character due to picketing, *hartal* and demonstration at different places of the Mayurbhanja state like Betanoti, Karanjia, Udala, and Rairangpur (ibid.).

In the meantime, Prajamandal had met a natural death, and in its place, a similar organisation named Praja Parishad had emerged as a rival organisation to Prajamandal. Loknath Patnaik, the President of Praja Parishad, complained before the All-India State's People Conference that Mayurbhanja Prajamandal has emerged as a destructive force exploiting the fair name of the Congress (AISPC n.d. 112). Thinking this to be a clandestine move of the Maharaja the Prajamandal leaders resigned from Mayurbhanja Kendra Parishad, which had been functioning since 1945 as a legislative body. At that time, the Prajamandal pressurised the Maharaja to accept the charter of demand, which was presented to him on 30 June 1947 for establishment of a responsible government by 16 September 1947, at the latest. Pressurised by the situation, Maharaja Pratap Chandra Bhanja opened negotiation through Radhagovind Das, the Chief Revenue Officer, for an amicable settlement. In the negotiation it emerged that the Prajamandal would furnish a list of members from the Praja Sabha and the defunct Kendra Parishad to function as an interim government until a responsible government was duly elected.

The Maharaja while conceding the demand to establish a responsible government in the state as an Independent Unit of the Indian Union agreed to function as a constitutional monarch. (MSA 1947).

On 9 December 1947, the Maharaja nominated Sarat Ch. Das, Bidyadhara Mohapatra, and Mahesvara Naik to constitute a threemember cabinet, which was popularly known as the Ka, Kha, Ga<sup>7</sup> ministry from the first letter of their caste.(MSA 1947). Mayurbhanja in this way was the first Garhjat in Odisha where the Prajamandal formed a popular government after Independence. Such a great task was achieved peacefully by Sarat Chandra Das and his devoted band of Prajamandal activists. This three member cabinet held the following posts.

1. Sarat Ch. Das- Premier, Home, Finance, Audit, Planning and Reconstruction
2. Bidyadhara Mohapatra- Revenue, Law, Health and Local Government
3. Maheswar Naik-Development, Education, Supply, Transport, Commerce & Labour

Steps were initiated to set up a Constituent Assembly to frame a constitution, within the ambit of which Mayurbhanja state as a new unit of the Indian Union would function (Prahara 1988: 146). The 10<sup>th</sup> day of December 1947 was declared as a public holiday in the state of Mayurbhanja to celebrate the transfer of power to the people. In this way, the long cherished desire of the Prajamandal was finally achieved. The Government of India was informed about the transfer of power. Sarat Chandra Das, more popularly known as Sarat Gandhi, as the premier of a Garhjat State, received letters of felicitations from Dr. Rajendra Prasad and Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru (MSA 1947).

Mayurbhanja was the only Garhjat of Odisha to have this rare distinction. The victory of the Prajamandal was a victory of the people in their protracted struggle against feudal social order and defective Durbar administration.

### 1.8 Conclusion

The andolon started against the monarchical syndicate was the result of various oppressive measures adopted by the court despite the apparent benevolence of the king. The subjects, who belonged to the subaltern category, were exploited and subjugated. But the andolon in the name of Mayurbhanj Praja Andolon is a narrow presentation of a wider context. The protesters were in contact with such movements happening in Odisha and the freedom movement of the country. They were from different social structure, and the cause of fight was for the benefit of the mass.

The spirit of freedom against oppression and exploitation by the subaltern people necessarily has a general context and expresses itself in different forms. It was the establishment of participatory democracy in Mayurbhanja or in the country by uprooting the syndicate and colonial governance of tyranny. When power is challenged, different strategies are adopted to control it and restore normalcy. This is what the court of Mayurbhanja did, even by creating parallel organisations, and this holds that aggression, cunningness, the mindset of exploitation, etc., in the power feed on such instruments for perpetuation. The andolon has also proved another adage true, that all that glitters is not gold. Despite the brighter side of the ruler, there was also the darker side. The visible prosperity and enlightened nature of the kings stand on the foundation of subjects' misery and exploitation; the dichotomy reflects through protests and their intensity. The case of subaltern fight for rights is evident from the Prajamandal movement in Mayurbhanja.

### Notes

1. The author had the opportunity to study most of the works on Prajamandal Movement in Odisha in course of his teaching and research spanning over 40 years. The inference is made on the basis of such studies.
2. During a field study it was reported that the native people call themselves *Kalapithia*, literally meaning 'dark skinned back', to contrast with the outsiders as *Hatua*, meaning people who go to *hat* (market) to purchase merchandise and do not belong to it. These outsiders were considered so because they did not belong to Maurbhanj state and had interest in its resources. The author believes that the nomenclature *Kalapithia* might have been an exonym carrying a meaning of colour inferiority which have been internalised by the native people to present their identity to outsiders.
3. The day of Bamana Janma (the birth day of Lord Bamana - an incarnation of Lord Vishnu) which falls in the bright lunar fortnight of the month of Bhadrav (August-September) of Hindu calendar was observed as Sunia or Sunia Divas in feudatory states/zamindaris.
4. Seer/ser is a unit of measuring volume which is roughly equivalent to 1.25 kilogram; it is also equal to 80 *tola*, one *tola* being 10.88 gram. Now obsolete.
5. One *anna*, a unit of currency is equal to four paisa or to 1/16 of a rupee during colonial period; the rupee was 64 paisa during that time.

6. Grain gola is a traditional household grain storing facility in rural Odisha, now almost on decline. During early period of Independence and at the time of freedom movement village based store houses were created to advance grain loans, lend seeds and store grains to meet household shortages. In some villages these golas were linked with cooperative movement.
7. The members of the ministry belonged to three social divisions – two castes, Karan and Khandayat – and one tribe designated as Gond or Gand. *Ka, Kha and Ga* are initial letters of the divisions. *Ka* are initial letters from Karan, *Kha* from Khandayat and *Ga* from Gond.

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