

The Role of R.N. Singh Deo in the State Politics of Odisha in the Pre and Post-Independent Political Scenario : A Critical Study

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Abstract:

This article has been divided into two parts. In the first part of the article a detail description has been given about the administration of ex-Princely State of Patna under the dynamic leadership of Maharaja R.N. Singh Deo and the second part deals with the work and achievement of Sri R.N. Singh Deo as a Chief Minister of Odisha during the period of 1967-71.

Late Rajendra Narayan Singh Deo, the last Maharaja and Ruling Chief of Patna State of Bolangir, Odisha, was one of the best known personalities of the state for many years prior to our independence. Since then, he has dominated the state politics for many years and made rich contribution to the socio-economic and cultural development. Though born in a royal family, he identified himself with the mass and made great sacrifices for the cause of nation. He came in contact with the top leaders of the freedom movement including, Mahatma Gandhiji, Jawaharlal Nehru and Sardar Patel. All the Gandhian principles like “Simple Living and High Thinking”, “Patience and Tolerance” were found in him. He was a firm believer in democratic set up and secularism and maintained the principle of equality. As a ruler of Patna State, he used to visit the poor and downtrodden family of his empire to know the real plight of his subjects.



This great personality was a genius. He was a great scholar, a sportsman who played football, great patron of art and culture and above all, an exponent of the world famous Sareikella Chau dance.¹ He was an efficient politician and able parliamentarian, an outstanding Chief Minister

having great popularity and was an exceptional prominent leader of Odisha. In his capacity, he had to play an important role as a Ruler of Patna State, as the Chief Minister of Odisha and also as the leader of Opposition Party in different periods of time.²

Birth and Background of R.N. Singh Deo:

Rajendra Narayan Singh Deo was born on 31st March, 1912 at the royal family of the princely state of Sareikela as the second son of Raja Aditya Pratap Singh Deo on the sacred day of Mahavir Jayanti.³ He was adopted as son by the sonless king of Patna State Late Maharaja Prithviraj Singh Deo. Rajendra Narayan Singh Deo was recognised as heir at the age of 12 by the British Government after the death of Maharaja Prithviraj Singh Deo in 1924.⁴ But as R.N. Singh Deo was minor, the Patna State was placed under court of ward till 1933 till he attained maturity and assumed the full charge of the Ruler of Patna.⁵

Singh Deo had his education in Intermediate Science. He studied at St. Columbia's College, Hazaribagh and then at Mayo College, Ajmer.⁶ He was a very brilliant student who stood first class in all the examinations he appeared throughout his life. In the All India level Diploma examination he stood first in the country and received gold medal from the then Governor General Lord Irwin. At the age of twenty he married Kailash Kumari Devi of Patiala.

Political History of Patna (Ex-Princely State):

Patna State or Patna Estate was one of the premier states of the Eastern Agency. It was located in the Mahanadi Valley of Sambalpur area and occupied a part of the modern Bolangir District of the State of Odisha. It was surrounded

on the north by Sambalpur District and the Sonepur State; on the east by the Sonepur State, the Boud State and the Kalahandi State and on the west by the Sambalpur District. The state had an area of 2530 sq. miles according to the Census of 1941 and it had a population of 6,32,220.⁷ Bolangir was the headquarters of Patna State.⁸

In the past, Patna State was identified with the ancient Dakshina Kosala. It was a very powerful kingdom which was ruled by Kusha, the second son of King Ramachandra. It had a glorious past. The modern history of Patna state began from the reign of Ramai Deo who founded the Chauhan dynasty of Patna in the year 1159 A.D. During the early period of Chauhan rule, it was a very powerful kingdom and had as many as 72 states under its control; until the growth of British Supremacy in these parts, the state of Patna was the fountain head of a cluster of confederacy of states known as Athara Gadajats (18 forts).⁹ In the time of Moghul emperors as well as during the ascendancy of the Maharattas, Patna State enjoyed its independence and sovereignty. The territory of Odisha was captured by the Britishers from the Maratha in 1803 and Sambalpur and Patna State came under the control of the British India. Then, the British authority had exercised full control over the State of Patna and they regarded Patna as their feudatory state. The State of Patna, from the time of Ramai Deo, had as many as 33 rulers and the last ruler was Maharaja Rajendra Narayana Singh Deo.¹⁰

The Role of R.N. Singh Deo as a Ruler of Patna State:

Even under the British rule, Maharaja Rajendra Narayana Singh Deo could establish a popular government in his princely state of Patna.

A complete democratic set up was found in the Patna State. The three organs like, legislative, executive and judiciary were working in the State. Various administrative machineries like the cabinet, High Court, Secretariat, Civil Service, Local self-government were constituted to provide good governance to the people of Patna State. The various function of the government was divided among different departments which remained under the charge of ministers. The entire state was divided into different divisions to provide better administration. Maharaja R.N. Singh Deo himself supervised all the work of the state.

Singh Deo as a Ruler of Patna State took a number of welfare measures for the improvement of socio-economic and educational status of the people. He established a network of Cooperative Banks and Cooperative Societies to make credit facilities available to his peasants for their agricultural operation. Patna Transport Corporation was also created to provide Bus services to the people. He also initiated the enactment of land reforms and adopted brilliant policies of collection of revenues for the larger interest of his peasants. A number of Ayurvedic Dispensaries were also set up in the remote villages at government cost to improve the health of the people. The public health department consisted of five branches—medical, leprosy, vaccination, sanitation and child welfare. X-Ray and Electro Therapy Institute and maternity relief facilities were also provided to the women. A separate ward was created in the hospital for TB and leprosy patients for their treatment and proper attention. A Veterinary hospital was also in existence at Bolangir for the treatment of inoculated cattle.¹¹

To promote art and culture in the Patna State he constructed “Koshal Kalamandal” where

different types of dance and drama were performed by different artistes. He also established the “Dalaganjan Press” where different literary works and “Patna Dipika” and “Patna State Gazetteer” were published. The Kalinga Historical Research Journal was also published from the Patna State and eminent historians of that time Sri Purna Chandra Ratha, Dr. Satya Narayan Rajguru, Balamukund Hota, Sri Manabodh Sahu and other writers from outside Odisha contributed their valuable articles to this journal.¹²

Singh Deo had taken a number of steps for the spread of education in the Patna State. The government constructed school building to provide primary, secondary and higher education to his people. The High School as well as almost all rural schools had got library facilities for students. The students were also given financial assistance to pursue technical education. Singh Deo had also established George Sanskrit Tol to provide Sanskrit education. It imparted knowledge in Sanskrit literature (Sahitya), Vyakarana (Sanskrit Grammar), Karmakanda and Dharma Shastra (Scripture). A wing for teaching of Jyotish (Astrology) was also introduced in the Tol in 1940.¹³ With a view to provide higher education in Patna State, Singh Deo had established an institution named “Rajendra College” in 1944. At that time, it was affiliated to Utkal University and the first session of the college was started from 3rd July, 1944. This college has been elevated to the state of an autonomous college by the Department of Higher Education, Government of Odisha and it has become a post-graduate college having the subjects of science, commerce and arts.

In order to facilitate Hindi education one Hindi Middle English School at Bolangir and one Hindi School at Titilagarh were established. A

Guru (Teachers') Training School was established in Patna State to impart training to the teachers to make teachers competent in the teaching profession. It was abolished in 1937, with effect from the 1st January as majority of the teachers had been trained. An Industrial School was also opened in the state in 1938 to impart vocational education in different branches such as weaving, tanning and taxidermy. Regular Scout training was given to the High School students and a Girls' Guild movement was also in progress in different schools. Thus, R.N. Singh Deo had made a significant contribution in spreading primary and higher education in the Patna State to eradicate illiteracy from the society.¹⁴

The formation of a cabinet and Legislative Assembly in the Patna State was a rare example which proves that Maharaja R.N. Singh Deo was a true democrat and a firm believer in the Parliamentary Democracy. The Patna State Legislative Assembly consisted of 28 members and a President. The president was not one among these members. Out of these 28 members, 14 were to be elected out of the special constituencies named in the Patna State Legislative Assembly Act of 1943 and the other 14 were to be nominated by the Maharaja, the Ruler. Thus, the Assembly consisted of equal number of elected members and nominated members. The Chief Minister was the ex-officio President of the Assembly and could participate in the business of the Assembly like any other members. The tenure of the Assembly was three years. The Assembly was very powerful and could discuss matters relating to day to day administration and formulated laws relating to the larger interest of the people of the Patna State. The Council of Ministers consisted of two ministers and one of them was a representative elected by the

legislature and the other one was nominated by the Maharaja himself.¹⁵

During the reign of Maharaja R.N. Singh Deo in Patna State the system of Village Panchayat and Gram Sabha was introduced with a view to decentralising the power from the grass root level. He also made adequate arrangements for storing of food grains in granaries for future needs and during emergencies. During his reign, Vana Mahotsav Day (forest festival) was observed and emphasis was given on plantation and afforestation in the Patna State.¹⁶ From the very beginning, being a member of a royal family, Shri Singh Deo was against the social evil of untouchability and enacted certain laws to allow the Harijan communities to enter into the temples and other important public places. Maharaja himself visited so many Harijans and Advasi houses to cure the snake bite people. This noble quality of Maharaja R.N. Singh Deo made him most popular ruler of that time. The people were also inspired tremendously and accepted untouchability as a social evil. This activities clearly reflected Shri Singh Deo's distinct vision and Gandhian philosophy.

Judiciary was also one of the important organs of the government in the Patna State. Prior to 1934, in the Patna State there were various kinds of courts like, The Court of Maharaja, Court of the Dewan, Court of the Civil Office, Magistrate of First Class, Magistrate of Second Class, and Magistrate of Third Class having different jurisdiction. In the year, 1940, a High Court was established by the Maharaja for the better administration of justice in the state. There were three judges in the Patna High Court who were appointed by the Maharaja. The prime task of the Court was to interpret the laws and to inflict punishment on the culprits. Maharaja codified

the laws regulating the lives of his people of Patna State. The Maharaja had the power to grant pardon.¹⁷

After the independence of India, when the Government of Odisha moved for the merger of the feudal states with Odisha, Maharaja R.N. Singh Deo, the ruler of the State of Patna signed the document of merger on 14th December, 1947 in the presence of Sardar Vallabh Bhai Patel, the then Home Minister of India and with that the princely state of Patna lost its identity and became a part of the Indian Union and a part of Odisha province. R.N. Singh Deo carved out a place of honour for himself as the first ruler to sign the instrument of merger in the entire Republic of India. Rulers of all other feudal states followed the footsteps of Singh Deo. To that extent, the State of Patna and Bolangir occupies a position of glory in the history of Modern India. The State of Patna merged in the province of Odisha with effect from 1st January, 1948 and a new district named Bolangir-Patna was constituted by amalgamating the ex-states of Bolangir, Kalahandi and Sonapur. But, on 1st November, 1949, the ex-states of Patna and Sonapur were separated from Kalahandi, and a new district named Bolangir was formed by combining the ex-states of Patna and Sonapur.¹⁸ Again Sonapur was also declared as a separate district from Bolangir on 01.04.1993.

At the time of merger R.N. Singh Deo transferred very humbly the assets and liabilities of Patna State to Odisha Government. These included:

- i) Claims of Provident Fund deposit by the officers and staff share with interest Rs.358785-12 Anna 9 paisa.
- ii) Civil Deposits etc. Rs. 198618 -14 Anna 11 paisa.

- iii) Trust Funds Deposited in the State Treasury Rs.156779- 11 Ana 8 paisa.
- iv) Devottar Property Rs. 5888-9 Ana 8 paisa.
- v) Arrears of Pay Bills of Officers since 1.1.1947, Rs.720133-Ana, 4 paisa.¹⁹

All-round development of Patna State was possible because of Shri Singh Deo's able leadership, efficient administration and dynamic personality. The British Government, therefore, honoured him with the title of Knight Commander of the Indian Empire (K.C.I.E). Thereby he became His Highness Maharaja Sir Rajendra Narayana Singh Deo of Patna. Patna State was a "Salute State" and Maharaja Saheb was honoured with 9 gun salute.

Role of R.N. Singh Deo as the Chief Minister of Odisha:

Since the merger of Patna State with Odisha till 1975, Bolangir with its ex-ruler Maharaja Rajendra Narayan Singh Deo remained an important focal point in Odisha Politics. After independence, he was the only one, who from being a Ruler of a princely state could become the Chief Minister of Odisha. Singh Deo formed a regional political party named Ganatantra Parishad and remained president of this party till 1962. This party merged with the Swatantra Party in 1962 and again Mr. Singh Deo was unanimously elected as the president of the Odisha Unit of this newly formed Party.²⁰ He was an efficient politician and able parliamentarian having an outstanding political career. In 1951, Singh Deo was elected to the first Lok Sabha from Kalahandi-Bolangir Constituency as a candidate from Ganatantra Parishad. In 1957, he was elected to the Odisha Legislative Assembly from Titilagarh constituency and became the Leader of the Opposition in the Odisha Legislative

Assembly. After the fall of the minority Congress Government, the Ganatantra Parishad formed a coalition government with the Congress on 22nd May, 1959 under the leadership of Dr. H.K. Mahtab. Rajendra Narayana Singh Deo became the minister of Finance, Industry and Law in this government. The coalition government collapsed on 21st February, 1961 and President Rule was enforced. In the mid-term poll of 1961, he was re-elected to the Odisha Legislative Assembly from Kantabanji constituency and became the Leader of the Opposition Party once again. In 1967, he was re-elected to the Odisha Legislative Assembly from Bolangir Assembly Constituency and became the Chief Minister of Odisha on 8th March, 1967 and continued this office till 11th January, 1971. During this period, he led a coalition government formed by the Swatantra Party and the Orissa Jana Congress of Hare Krishna Mahtab. Mr. Singh Deo also served as a Cabinet Minister having the portfolios of Political Service (excluding River Valley), Industry, Home, Public Relations and Tourism during the multi-balanced coalition government headed by Sri Biswanath Das from 3rd April, 1971 to 9th June, 1972. Thus, Mr. Singh Deo, had a long remarkable political career in both Parliamentary and Assembly Politics.²¹

The first non-congress coalition government was installed in the state after the fourth General Elections in 1967 with the Swatantra-Jana Congress party and the leader of the Swatantra Party Shri Rajendra Narayana Singh Deo as the Chief Minister. The Swatantra-Jana Congress made an alliance on the basis of 21-Point common minimum programme to defeat the congress in the 1967 elections to the Odisha Assembly.²² The people of Odisha reposed their faith in this alliance and the Swatantra-Jana Congress alliance got the absolute majority of 75

seats and formed a coalition ministry with Swatantra leader Mr. R.N. Singh Deo as the Chief Minister and Jana Congress leader Pabitra Mohan Padhan as the Deputy Chief Minister. After election, the newly elected government worked hard to implement all the programmes as assured in their election manifesto. These programmes included matters like, abolition of land revenue, appointment of Lokpal and Lokayukta in line with the recommendation made by the Administrative Reforms Commission appointed by the Government of India. The government also appointed a commission of enquiry under Justice H.R. Khanna, a retired judge of Delhi High Court to probe into the allegations against three former Chief Ministers-Biju Pattnaik, Biren Mitra and Sadasiva Tripathy and fourteen other ministers. Singh Deo's Government had also appointed J.R. Mudholkar, a retired Judge of the Supreme Court to probe certain allegations and charges levelled by Sadasiva Tripathy, the Leader of the Opposition, against Dr. H.K. Mahtab, Nabakrishna Choudhury, Santanu Kumar Das and Shri R.N. Singh Deo.²³

R.N. Singh Deo tried his level best to provide good governance during his four and half year coalition ministry. He could provide a stable government. All the important decisions were taken unanimously in consultation with the coalition leaders. For nearly three years there was a cohesive unity in the coalition having no inside and outside threat. The government tried its best to implement the 21-Point Common Minimum Programmes. It discouraged political interference in the administration. The government always maintained its transparency and integrity in all spheres of activities; even Mudholkar Committee was instituted to probe the alleged allegations against the then Chief Minister Shri R.N. Singh Deo and his ministers. This bears the

evidence of his integrity, transparency and commitment to an immaculate administration and desire for good governance. He never resorted to horse trading to save his government.

During his tenure as the Chief Minister R.N. Singh Deo has undertaken a number of welfare measures such as prohibition, administrative and streamlining procedures and reforming the supply system for the benefit of the public. In order to curb corruption from the administration he was in favour of introduction of Lokpal in the State. Due to his pioneering effort Odisha became the first state in the country to abolish land revenue for encouragement of the farmers. His government also initiated model steps in respect of water supply, water cess, relief and rehabilitation work during flood and drought. Several measures were adopted to strengthen the financial status of Odisha. He ensured law and order in the State and boldly suppressed the student agitation at Cuttack in 1968 and streamlined an effective police administration in the State. His government further brought about reforms and modification in the industrial policy of the state for the development of small scale and large industries in Odisha.²⁴

Maharaja R.N. Singh Deo was an outstanding Chief Minister having great popularity and was an exceptional prominent leader of Odisha. He was a charismatic leader and his personality could inspire many young people to render public service. He had always taken appropriate action in right time to safeguard the interest of the people as a whole by honouring law. Even as the Leader of the Opposition in the Odisha Legislative Assembly, he stood as an unparalleled personality by providing constructive support to the ruling party which identified him as a liberal democratic leader of his time. He was a

man of great farsightedness and could adjust himself in different situations, even if he belonged to a royal family. As a true democrat, he would take down notes as Chief Minister and during the tenure of the Leader of the Opposition, and never left his seat during the sessions. He also never left the House to do the file works. He did everything inside the House. As the leader of the House, as the Head of the Government, he always used to reply to every point raised by the opposition.

R.N. Singh Deo will ever remain immortal in the memory of the people of Odisha for his significant contribution as the ruler of the state of Patna in general and as the Chief Minister of Odisha in particular. He will be ever remembered by the people of Odisha for his laudable achievements in the field of socio-political activities of the state. Analysing his achievement it is very often told that “R.N. Singh Deo was a man among the princes and a prince among men”

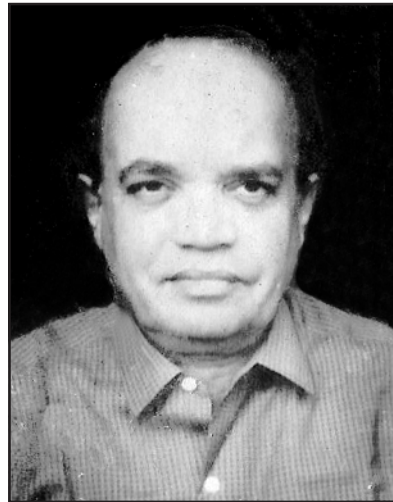
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