



## A Brief Study on “Sahid Laxman Nayak-Gandhi of Malkangiri At A Glance of South Odisha

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Date of Submission: 03-09-2023

Date of Acceptance: 13-09-2023

### ABSTRACT

This paper will focus on the well known freedom warrior during the quit India Movement who in spite of his Tribal background and lacking of modern education had contributed his quota being inspired by the clarion call given by M.K. Gandhi – Do or Die. He raised his voice against British imperialism & Championed the cause of Truth, Justice & Non-violence to do away with the Oppressive rule of the British Raj. Laxman was a steadfast protector of human rights of the poor, the downtrodden and the under privileged. He was a champion for the cause of the suppressed, oppressed, depressed and the exploited his straightforward and sincere approach and endeared him to the tribal people but distanced him from the British Raj.

**KEY WORDS:-** Gallows, Bethi, Goti, Beggar, Godom, Zaberdest, Lathis etc....

### I. Lakshman Naik

A popular Tribal Freedom fighter, Lakshman Naik had fought gallantly during the Quit India Movement & became a martyr under the shadow of his tribal birth. Inspired by the “Do or Die” clarion call given by Gandhi, he joined the national freedom movement fighting for truth Non-violence & justice against the British Government.

#### ➤ Early Life

Laxman Naik hailed from the Bhuyan Tribe of Tentuligumma village in the suburbs of Kolab near Mathili Police station of erstwhile Koraput District, Odisha. Padlam Naik & Sambaru were his father & mother belonging to the Nature gifted land of Tribal Odisha.

Laxman’s father Padlam Naik put this boy at the age of 12 under the care of his teachers studying letter writing & reading. Laxman spent most of his youthful time playing with friends like Gobinda Pujari, Bhalu Dombo & Banasing Bhuyan. Having a solid build personality, tall & herbed

physique, he loved nature & invoked in singing songs while he disliked casticism prevails in society.

His father was the Mustadar of 4 tribal villages, viz., Tentuligam, Amlaguda, Lakiguda and Bejuniguda. His primary duty was to collect land revenue from the tenants and pay the same to the Maharaja of Jeypore through revenue officials. Besides he was a representing of the king, through him the king communicated to his subjects. He was further required to render assistance to other officials of the British and the king.

Groomed in the Tribal society Laxman Nayak could learn the art of witchcraft, Animal Hunting & the procedure of herbal treatment by the application of herbal medicines and he cured the deceased that generated love and sympathy among the tribes for him. When he was 19 years of old Lakshman married a tribal damsel manguli daughter of Ghari Bhumia of Sanagumma. They led a happy conjugal life for some time. Manguli gave birth to a son who was named Raghunath and a daughter named Kausalya.

The suffering of the innocent & uneducated masses under the British rule shocked him terribly and Laxman Naik desired to fight against the oppressive foreign rule thereby to protect the oppressed masses. From his childhood Lakshman was straight forward upright and obstinate. He could not bear with the ignominy caused to his fellow brethren by the government staff who treated the subjects as slaves. the practiced of bethi, beggar, godom etc. was very much rampant. People were forced to pay hatapanu (Market Tax).Jungle panu (forest Tax), langala panu (plough tax) etc. the officers of the British government as well as the local king enjoyed free service from the people. people were forced to work for days together and months without any remuneration or compensation. Roads were carved, ponds were dug and buildings were constructed with free forced labour. Whenever any petty official of the administration visited any village he could order any innocent villager to be



dispossessed his property which the visitor coveted. Exploitation by the police, revenue, police, and forest and excise officials was the order of the day. People had to bear all humiliation which humbleness. Officials and their weighty luggage's were carried by the innocent people on their shoulders or on their back in biting cold, torrential rain or scorching heat. Lakshman did not like such kinds of inhuman treatment. He registered his strong protest. He raised his voice. He persuaded the people to resist such barbarism. He tried to unite the people and arouse in them a sense of self respect. He took up the cudgel against human rights violation. He was a steadfast protector of human rights of the poor, the downtrodden and the under privileged. He was a champion for the cause of the suppressed, oppressed, depressed and the exploited. His straight forward and sincere approach endeared him to the tribal people but distanced him from the administration. It was his innocence, his simplicity, his sincerity and innate truthfulness that made him a messiah of the suffering humanity. He was frank and forth right to the point at times of embarrassment. His openhearted sincerity and the inability to conform docilely to the accepted norms was that gave him a vital dimension to his personality. After the demise of his father, Lakshman succeeded as the Mustadar. He would have led a cushy life. But when the mother land is in chains how he could lead a life of comfort? As a rule he disliked a cushy and comfortable life and swore not to rest in peace till the subjugators were thrown out of the country. Since he was unable to compromise his mission with his profession he was diverted of his assignment by the Maharaja of Jeypore.

During the period the country was passing through a great turmoil. Alluri Seetaram Raju, a strong Koya leader, had with his aggressive guerrilla warfare made the British bleed. The rebellion revoked by Sitaram Raju had profound by influenced the tribal region of Laxman Nayak where people's response was vital what Laxman had noticed Never the less. The Koya tribes of Mathili region responded highly to the call of Raju while the practices of Bethi, Begari and the feudal based forest laws chiefly gained popularity for Raju in Malkangiri. In this regard the steps initiated by the Maharaja of Jeypore to suppress the rebellion by making grants & providing transporting materials had evoked great response among the general public of this region to boost up the rebellion.

Once Lakshman chanced to meet one Ramachandra Kutia, a Koya youth, of Kakurukonda village Ramachandra had participated in the

Rompakonda riots. although Rompakonda riots had died down the ember in his heart was lying low awaiting for an opportunity to ignite. Lakshman's meeting with Chandra rekindled in him the spirit of nationalism. After learning the art of using a Gun Ramachandra had joined the Futuri going on in the country side while understanding the problems of common masses that mobilized people's voice in favour of them. His understanding of Astrology & Medicines locally called as Desari Traits reflects his vision that following the footprints of Sitaram Raju he could strike the root of the problem involving public interest in the Malkangiri hill tracts under the manner of Sitaram Raju's style of functioning. It is presumed that Laxman was influenced by the earlier uprisings before two decades of his own Rebellion in the year 1942.

Under the able leadership of M.K Gandhi the congress acquired a new vision and galvanized the whole country from Kashmir to Cape Comerin. The people irrespective of their caste, creed, religion and place of birth longed for freedom. They threw themselves in the Indian war of independence. Lakshman's firm belief was that by following non-violent methods only Swaraj could best be attained for which he joined the training camps of Nuaput village where after listening to the Congress leaders he learned the art of spinning and adopted Gandhian way of daily life style. He joined the Indian National Congress in 1935.

As the news papers flashed out these illegal happenings, it aroused deep reaction among the masses. The government has compelled to grant compensation to the effected people against their losses. After this incident Laxman Nayak got popularity among the savage gentry who now come forward & discussed their problems openly before Laxman who effected solutions as far as possible, that earned for him the name as a brave tribal leading head.

Laxman was engaged in physical work in the joint land like his Kirsman till he got involved in politics. His act as a mustajar can never be denied as he served as a link between his relatives to equate the share of production among them extracting it as surplus surrendering a major portion to the state earlier. In Laxman's case these cases may have been solved or suppressed due to kinship ties while no information is available to sight his adherence to goti or bethi - begari.

As late as 1940's there was a close relationship prevailing between the Mustajars & the tribal peasants in Malkangiri which remained close & confined to kinship links in many cases. As in the case of the plains, the mustajars exploitation was



prevalent & in the case of Malkangiri the rift of interest between the peasants & Kustajars was often sharp, but suppressed by kinshipties except the case of one Keshab Patro, a mustajar of Badhigar who was opposed during the course of revolt in Mathili.

Laxman Naik's fight was single handed with utmost courage & rare passion with innumerable followers & supporters at his back while all his rebellious moves were brilliantly planned. He fought for truth & for his mother land & his brevity stood like a great rock which never soak before the foreign usurping invaders.

With the upsurge of national movement of the Congress, in the Koraput region, Laxman Nayak was attracted by it & became an active member of it by enrolling as Charanna Member of the INC. He was educated in national integration as well in physical education & mobilized the tribes to fight against the inhuman old practices such as bethi & bonded labour. His role was formidable in popularizing congress ideas & programmes in Koraput.

The tribes of Koraput Tentulipada & Malkangiri region obeyed him as their leader for the cause of India's freedom. He popularized Khadi & promoted congress plans. He inculcated the theory of Unity among the people to achieve freedom. The Theory of subaltern sharing the peoples movement found its real expression here. It was more real in the case of illiterate villagers against the urban dwellers. The participation of tribal masses in the congress movement formed a new dimension after the Congress ministry was formed in 1937. They were charged by new courage and vitality occasionally leading to minor riots and violent incident of mob upsurges like where one sub-inspector was killed as he removed the congress flag.

An interesting feature of the Congress Movement in Koraput is the large-scale participation of tribes. Under the able leadership Lakshman Naik many tribes of malkangiri joined the Congress and participated in the National Movement, By 1942, 200 tribes were enrolled as subscribing members of congress in Maithili alone.

The August Revolution of 1942 took a very remarkable form in Koraput Congress volunteers went in to interiors of the district and inspired the tribal people to rise against the British. The Message of August Revolution on 'Do or Die' was circulated in tribal language. It spread like wild fire.

#### ➤ **Lakshman Naik's Revolt**

Laxman Naik attended the Congress meeting of *Karmees* at Jeypore on 31.07.1942 where it was decided to depute Biswarsroi to All India Congress session at Bombay. On 1<sup>st</sup> Aug. 1942 the AICC the famous quit India resolution under Gandhiji's leadership. Many Congress leaders were arrested including Gandhi on 9<sup>th</sup> August. The reacting people started Satyagraha even in the villages where they attacked the police stations, post offices, Tahasil offices to non-function the govt. agency thereby compelling the British to Quit India. The British never expected such mass movement & restored to action like Lathi charge or firing etc. The Congress organization in Koraput was declared illegal where upon Laxman on 9<sup>th</sup> August 1942 mobilized about two hundred men along with Balaram Pujari armed with saplings lathis & Congress flags moved through dense forests to villages spreading the message of Swarj.

Laxman Nayak took the change of Congress primary committee at Mathili as President in 1942 & mobilized the tribes demanding for developmental works. He urged the villagers to refrain from paying taxes to Govt. he veiled against oppression & exploitation. During the quit India movement of 1942, Laxman was nominated to represent Mathili Suberbs. His ideology was non-violence for freedom & People called him "Gandhi of Malkangiri"

At Badhigari on 16<sup>th</sup> Aug 1942 the Congress man threatened to loot the opium vender of Sadasiva Choudhury unless he surrendered his stock. The crowd of Tribal & Non-tribals coming from Mathili & Padwa armed with lathis & congress flags entered in to the opium Godam of Sadasiva Choudhury when the later surrendered 10 tolas of opium, which were distributed among the mob expressing that the Govt. should abstain from collecting revenue from such popular means of relaxing of mind.

Charged with success, the angry mob went to mustajar Kesab patra who had earned defame for his forcible collection of taxes called due on him to the estate. Sadasib was absent & had gone to Govinda Palley & so the mob went to Khogan where the liquor shop of Padam Bisoi was forced to close up, then to Badhigar hat (Rural market) which was raided & then the future course of action was decided there.

In the village Nuagaon, under the Mathili Police station A 'Congress Crowd' of about two hundred threatened to bombard the house of Gangadhar Guru unless food was provided to them. Guru's petition that the mob after being fed took



clothes & valuable worth of Rs. 200 cash from his, proved false by police investigation.

This is a difference of opinion that the crowd at Badhigar had attacked liquor shops, but never consumed it, rather had thrown it, led by Laxman Naik, on 17.08.1942 the Band led by Laxman composed of the Tribals & non-tribal Gundas reached Kuntipalli shorting slogans with lathis & Congress flags in their hands. Where the fermented pots of Mohwa were destroyed amounting to 500 rupees, later reported as Rs. 100 only.

On 18<sup>th</sup> Aug 1942 Laxman destroyed the Sindhabeda liquor shop & send one Padlam Naiko of Kaliaguda to raid the opium shop at Salimi. Where the police got panic to face the fierce war like tribal mob led by Laxman & his followers.

The appointed day came. It was the 21<sup>st</sup> day of August, 1942, a lunar Friday in the month of Sravan. Unending streams of humanity were seen moving towards Matili. The call of Laxman Naik mesmerized them. Drawn by his magic, people unquestionably followed their respective leaders. Each group, flaunting a Congress flag and chanting Ramdhun, marched ahead. Occasionally they would burst out into the slogan 'Victory to Mahatma Gandhi' (Mahatma Gandhi ki jay). It had been previously decided that all should gather at mathili market place. The market site was an open place and big enough to accommodate such a large crowd. Being a Friday, it was a market day. The place teemed with Congress activities and their sympathisers in addition to the usual market crowd. There was hardly any empty space in the sky. It appeared as if a second Jallianwalabagh meeting was going to be held. Lakshman Naik addressed the people and briefed the people about Ute agenda of the day. From there they would proceed to mathili Police station. The Congress flag would be hoisted atop the police station. They would squat until they were arrested. Everything must be done in a non-violent manner. Thereafter the people marched in files towards Matili Police Station.

Mathili Police station was then under the charges of Sub-inspector Jagannaikulu Dora. The agitation to meet the situation earlier measures had already been initiated. The police personnel of other police stations and other local government staff were called to tackle the situation. The Matili police station was half mile away from the market place. Lakshman Naik and others reached there in half-an-hour's time. On seeing them approaching. The divisional inspector of Police. B.S Nanda with his party intercepted them on the road running for about two hundred yards towards the East of the station.

There followed an exchange of hot words between the two sides for a long time. Lakshman Naik and his followers' were unable to decide their next course of action and returned to the market. A meeting was again held presided over by Lakshman Naik.

Laxman Naik along with his revolting mob were once again positioned to blockade the police station of Mathili. They all advanced to enter the compound. The police resorted to lathi charge without prior warning.

Even though mercilessly beaten by the police. The Satyagrahis did not hit back. Lakshman Naik was brutally beaten. So he lay unconscious. The angry mob tried to force their way into the police station by breaking the bamboo fence running around it. The policeman and peons who tried to obstruct them were pushed down in the scuffle that ensued. This incident probably injured the pride of the self-conceited police man. Enraged, sudden firing was started upon the innocent armless people. According to Government report, five persons were killed and seventeen injured in the police firing. But undoubtedly the death toll was much higher than is admitted in the Government report. All the demonstrators were more or less injured. A sense of terror gripped matili in the wake of the police firing. The panic-stricken people closed the market and field. The people did not even light their hearths, let alone stir out. There prey ailed a tense situation all round.

On the eve of the August movement & on its wake murder, rape & molastations in the nature bound hills of Koraput were closed along with firing shots. The agitators & the traitors pulled against one another creating a surprising village cores. The peaceful people. The opium shop of Chandrasekhar Patnaik of Sindhabeda was destroyed by the mob & this time Laxman Naiks fame had spread to the nook & corners of Malkangiri where people dreamt him as their future king.

The Mathili revolt was guided by one Lal Raja or of Motisingh, the Naiks of Tonguduga in the Malkangiri Police station, a formal member of the congress during 1940. Being a village Naiko he commanded great influence in the Jongaguda area Balarm Pujari & Laxman Naik met him at Damapulli Sunday market on 19 Aug 1942 & they deputed people to attack the liquor shop of Pushapally where Tribal & Non-Tribals raided the shop & its owner Dayanidhi has compelled to close his shop in favour of Swaraj & against the British raj as such sale would generate more taxes for the British Raj. A total of Rs. 60 was lost due to this raid where a direct physical comfort action between



the Lal Raja & Dayanidhi was inevitable, the former had evicted the later furtively.

The situation became tense as a huge meeting was organized at Mathili on 21<sup>st</sup> Aug 1942 which was earlier apprehended by Mathili police in the form of a raid by the mob. Infact Mathili was the centre of all revolutionary activities in & near by Jeypore Taluk. Specially at Ambagua & Udoyogiri. The prosecution paraded a gang of witnesses which, inter alia, included the police who performed the death dance and made gory slaughter of innocent people. It included the evidence of the Magistrate who had ordered the lathi charge and the firing and enacting another Jalianawalabag at Mathili, From among the outsiders the list included NarasinghPujari, the contractor of the weekly market, contractor hyder being; two moneylenders Abdul peer Khan and Madhab Balaram. They orchestrated parrot like the story taught by the prosecution. Obviously the result was ominous. On 13<sup>th</sup> Novmber 1942, the Hon'ble Judge made a mince meat of the law and pronounced a cryptic judgement . He convicted 50 people and inflicted death penalty on Laxman Nayak and sentenced others to transportation for life. Thus the trial was conducted in unholy haste.

Laxman Nayak was shifted to Berhampur jail on 16.11.1942 soon aftr the trial judgement was pronounced on 16.11.1942. A last ditch effort was made by the congress leaders languishing in Berhampur jail to save the life of the great son. An appeal was filed before the Patna high court through Sri Radha Charan Das, a Lawyer Berhampur. Reluctantly Laxman signed the appeal. The appeal, however, was disallowed by their lordships justice Peter H.R.brought and justice H.R Meredith of the Patna high court. Death sentence was confirmed on 13.01.1943.march 29, 1943 was fixed for hanging the champion of human rights.

The raising son of 29<sup>th</sup> March 1943 was badly victimized to see the dead body of the legendry tribal leader in the Berhampur Jails. Under the conspiracy of false charges the fell a victim & was sentenced to death & was hanged till death.

Calmly but hardly swelling the name of 'Ram' this Jewel of Odisha, a proud Son of Indian mother land breathed his last. Under false charges of the Death of the forest guard Rama ate olcie accused & trialed Laxman Nayak along with fifty three other persons against charges of murder, looting, arson and other acts of violence. All freedom fighters were charged u/s 302 IPC and 147 IPC for causing the death of G.Ramayya and u/s 5 of defence of India rules for causing treason. Attempting to burn mathili police station. The police arrested lakshman in his

village on 02 September 1942 along with other freedom fighters; the arrested persons were lodged in Koraput jail. The police also tried to implicate Raghuanth, Laxman's son. He was apprehended. However subsequently good sense prevailed upon the police and Raghunath was released when the police was paid a bribe of Rs.30 which Manguli arranged by disposing of her two adult goats.

The case was first heard by Sri Samantha Mishra, First class Magistrate –cum –deputy collector. After prima facie hearing case he committed the accused to sessions. The case was then tied by Sri V.Ramanathan, ICS, Additional session judge, Koraput. Rao Saheb A. Applaswamy Naidu, public prosecutor conducted the prosecution case. Since the accused persons could not afford to engage lawyer the court appointed R. Jagannath Rao, Advocate defend them. Consequently 50 out of 54 persons arrested were found guilty of the charges and convicted. Only four persons were acquitted. The case was tried in a tearing hurry. Instead of distilling truth, there was distortion of facts. The judgment was vitiated by bias and had been characterized by abysmal ignorance, gross prejudice and cynical politics. The police had resorted to Mephistophelean methods to ruin the freedom fighters.