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Life and Struggle of Satyakinkar Mahato: As a Freedom Fighter of Manbhum

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Abstract:

In 1956, Manbhum district, which was part of Bihar, was split off to form Purulia district, which was included in West Bengal. This district still bears witness to many significant historical events. People from different communities in this region made important contributions to the Chuar Rebellion, Ganganarayan's Rebellion, and the Great Revolt (sepoy mutiny), as well as the freedom movement led by Gandhi. Satyakinkar Mahato was a significant leader in the freedom struggle in Manbhum, present-day Purulia. He became involved in politics due to the political situation in the country at the time and many local issues. He actively participated in the long-term anti-British struggle, from the Civil Disobedience Movement of 1930-34 to the Quit India Movement of 1942. For this, he had to serve prison sentences several times. He played an important role in strengthening the Congress Party through public meetings and processions in various places in the district. He was entrusted with various important positions, including that of president of the Manbazar Block Congress Committee, and he always strove to fulfil those responsibilities.

Keywords:

Manbhum, Manbazar, Purulia, Satyakinkar, Metyala, Kurmi, Freedom, Movement, August, Chuar, Rebellion, Majhihira, Mahato, Satyagraha, etc.

Introduction:

Nowadays, there is a widespread interest in the study of regional history. As a result, much unknown historical information is being revealed to readers. In this context, interest grows in learning about the history of Purulia district in India's freedom struggle. Consequently, the Ganga Narayan uprising, the Junglemahal district was dismantled in 1833 to create the Manbhum district,[1] with its headquarters initially established at Manbazar,[2] and later relocated to Purulia.[3] Among the local inhabitants, it was the simple, independent-minded Aboriginal people who constituted the majority here. Among these, notable groups included the Kurmi, Santal, Bhumij, Munda, Sabar Kheria, and Mahli, etc.[4]

From the beginning of British rule in India, the inhabitants here became widely rebellious. It is worth noting that in 1905, when Governor General Lord Curzon announced the decision to partition Bengal, the whole of Bengal erupted in protest.[5] Although the British government eventually annulled the partition of Bengal in the wake of the intense "Swadeshi" and "Boycott" movements in Bengal, the region was not fully reunited. Manbhum district was separated from Bengal and incorporated into the province of Bihar and Orissa, which was formed in 1912.[6] After independence, Manbhum district was abolished in 1956, excluding some parts of the Sadar subdivision, and the remaining part was added to West Bengal under the name Purulia district.[7] When the independence movement began in India, it had a profound impact on Purulia, as in other places. This movement

gave birth to many leaders from urban to rural levels across the country. Many such important leaders and activists emerged in Purulia too.

Research Methodology:

In Manbhum, i.e., in Purulia district, many leaders emerged who dedicated themselves to the freedom struggle of Purulia. One such leader was Satyakinkar Mahato, who made an important contribution to this struggle. Therefore, this research article has tried to shed light on his life and his contribution to the freedom movement of Purulia. Primary and secondary sources have been used for this study. Based on all this information, the article describes and analyses various events.

Discussion:

Among the leaders from Manbhum, i.e. Purulia, who joined the freedom struggle, the name of Satyakinkar Mahato is particularly noteworthy. Satyakinkar Mahato was born in 1905 in the village of Metyala under the Manbazar police station of the then Manbhum district. His father's name was Jagannath Mahato, and his mother's name was Nidhibala Mahato.[8] He was born into a lower-middle-class farming family. They were four brothers. Satyakinkar Mahato was the eldest. His other brothers were Gaurishankar, Dhrubapada, and Kushodhwaj Mahato, respectively. Besides, his wife's name was Kamini Mahato. They have two sons. The elder son's name is Neel Kamal Mahato, and the younger son's name is Shatdal Mahato. He received his primary education from the village school. He was a bright and talented student from childhood. However, his studies did not progress much further.[9]

Then, from a young age, he became involved in various social service activities. Through his own initiative and keen intellect, he acquired profound knowledge of various religious scriptures, mathematics, and astrology. Through his involvement in social service, he soon came into contact with individuals such as Chunaram Mahato from Nathurdi village, Niranjan Mahato from Mayurbhanj, and Sagarchandra Mahato from Sindri village.[10] He was involved in village organization work by holding various public meetings in villages like Metyala and Bamni. Gradually, he came into contact with Shrish Chandra Banerjee and, inspired by Gandhian ideals, became interested in serving the nation. In this way, his political movement began through social service. As a result, he came into contact with many leaders and workers from the Manbazar and Barabazar police stations. With the help of Chunaram Mahato, Chandrashekhar Mahato, Parikshit Mahato and others, he organized workers in various villages within the Manbazar police station area.[11] Impressed by his tireless work, commitment, and patriotism, they advised Satyakinkar Mahato to attend various political rallies. Moreover, because of all these qualities, he soon became an important leader. From then on, the Congress movement in the Manbazar police station began to revolve around him.[12]

The year 1925 is a very significant year in the history of Manbhum. That year, Gandhiji came to Purulia from Bihar with the aim of developing the rural society. Gandhiji's arrival in Purulia created great enthusiasm among the leaders and activists here. Following this, many leaders and activists from the district joined the Congress movement.[13] Satyakinkar Mahato also joined the Congress movement. Thus, he was closely involved in every movement of the Congress from 1925 to 1942.[14]

Satyakinkar Mahato played an important role in the Civil Disobedience Movement of 1930-34. He attended the Hutumura conference (1931), accompanied by his workers and supporters. In mid-1932, when all the top Congress leaders were in prison, Satyakinkar and other leaders stepped forward to ensure the success of

the movement.[15] A meeting was convened in the village of Kadma (Manbazar) in 1934 to propagate the policies, programmes, and ideals of the Congress. Satyakinkar also delivered his valuable speech along with prominent leaders of the district in this meeting.[16] In April 1939, public meetings were convened in villages such as Sidhagara, Bhawanipur, Bamundiha, and Kaypara in Barabazar. Just like the other speakers, he presented his valuable remarks in these meetings. They urged the gathered crowd to support the Congress in the district board elections.[17] He made important contributions to the establishment and development of the "Jatiya Buniyadi Vidyalaya" (National Primary School) in the Bengali language in Majhihira village in Manbazar.[18]

In the meantime, the Individual Satyagraha movement started in 1940, which had a profound impact on Purulia. Satyagraha committees were formed in all police stations. Satyakinkar Mahato was entrusted with the responsibility of being the chief leader of the Satyagrahi group at Manbazar police station. After receiving the responsibility of leading the Satyagraha, he tried to carry it out with devotion. He himself participated in the individual satyagraha and served a prison sentence. Influenced by him, many people from various villages in the Manbazar police station area participated in the freedom movement. In February 1942, a meeting of satyagrahis who had not been arrested took place in the village of Jetan, in Bandwan. Satyakinkar was present at this meeting, which lasted for three days.[19]

When the August Movement of 1942 began, the local administration arrested many prominent leaders from Purulia. As a result, local leaders sought to materialise the movement. It should be noted that, starting in June 1942, when the government attempted to acquire farmers' fields, ponds, and other properties in Chharra, near the town of Purulia, for the construction of an aerodrome, the farmers, under the leadership of the Congress, launched a "satyagraha". When the August Movement began in Purulia, this satyagraha intensified. Satyagrahis from various police stations arrived at Chharra. The satyagrahis of Manbazar Police Station, led by Satyakinkar Mahato, also actively joined this movement. But this Satyagraha came to an end when the land issue was resolved.[20]

Then the leaders tried to meet in different secret meetings to consult among themselves about the direction and how the movement should be led. Satyakinkar Mahato travelled from Chharra to Palashkala to meet Chitta Bhushan Dasgupta. From there, they travelled by train to Chharra to meet with the workers. A meeting was called at night in Chharra to decide on the course of action for the movement. But the meeting was disrupted due to police action. Consequently, they decided to hold a meeting at Punura in Puncha. Accordingly, several activists, including Satyakinkar, attended the meeting.[21]

Subsequently, Satyakinkar Mahato attended a meeting in Adra. At this meeting, plans were devised to seize the police station and carry out destructive acts, and it was decided that the next meeting would be held in Jitan. So, on September 23, 1942, a meeting was held in Jitan village, Bandwan. There, various leaders were tasked with carrying out destructive activities throughout the district on September 29 (13 Ashwin, according to the Bengali calendar). Satyakinkar took charge of Manbazar Police Station.[22] However, by mistake, Congress workers in the Boro area set fire to the Boro liquor distillery and the office of the tehsildar at Khariduara a day early.[23] Satyakinkar was angered by this incident. Meanwhile, from the evening of September 29, around 500 activists from the surrounding villages gathered at the Chepua field. On September 30, led by Satyakinkar, they marched towards the Manbazar police station. When the procession reached the police station, Chunaram and Gobinda Mahato were killed in police firing. Hemchandra, Bishnupada and Girish Mahato, among others, were

injured. After this tragic incident, Satyakinkar suspended the movement and arranged for the treatment and care of the injured.[24]

Then, widespread police brutality began in the Manbazar police station area. As Satya Kinkar went into hiding, the police brutality against the people increased further. The police went to Satyakinkar's house and harassed his wife, his mother, and everyone else there. When the police asked where Satyakinkar was, his wife replied that she did not know. When the police pretended to shoot him, he replied, "Did you let your wives know before coming here?" During this argument, Satyakinkar's mother also joined in. As a result, the police left the scene.[25] Satyakinkar then surrendered. He was sentenced to several years of rigorous imprisonment in the trial. He was transferred from Purulia to Bhagalpur Camp Jail.[26]

Not only did he engage in political activism, but he also worked on farming in his spare time. In times of urgent need, he would craft his own farming tools. He would always tell the members of his household that it was very important to have three trees in the garden. These are bamboo trees, moringa trees, and chilli plants. Because if the roof of the house suddenly breaks, it can be repaired using bamboo. If there are no vegetables at home, one can eat rice with chilli and moringa leaves.[27]

Satyakinkar was released from prison in 1945. Subsequently, a panchayat system was established in the district. Satyakinkar Mahato was also nominated to the 14-member advisory committee that was formed for this panchayat system. He was also the president of the Manbazar Thana Panchayat Committee.[28] After independence, in 1948, he assumed the position of chairman of the Local Board and dedicated himself to the promotion of rural education. When the Lok Sevak Sangh was formed, he was appointed as one of its chairman.[29] In the first election of independent India, held in 1952, he won from the Manbazar-Bandwan-Patamda Assembly constituency and became a member of the Bihar Legislative Assembly. Subsequently, following the integration of the Purulia district into West Bengal, he became the MLA for the Manbazar Assembly constituency (1957).[30] During his tenure as an MLA, he undertook numerous public welfare initiatives. He worked to improve education and healthcare, and played a significant role in the construction of the Kuda Primary Health Centre.[31] He finally died in 1971.[32]

In conclusion, it can be said that Satyakinkar Mahato's contribution to the history of the freedom movement of Manbhum, that is, Purulia, is immense. Everyone in the family fully supported his political activities. His uncompromising struggle and self-sacrifice to break the shackles of subjugation, alongside his efforts to establish the rights and dignity of the poor, have made him truly unforgettable. During the days of the district's freedom movement from 1925 to 1947, he was one of the heroic soldiers on the frontline. While fighting against the colonial powers, he had to spend a long time in prison and was subjected to brutal police torture. However, despite this, his patriotism did not wane; rather, it grew. However, he was known not only well as a shrewd politician, but also as an education and social reformer. The heroic story of this revolutionary may not have been widely publicised in the mainstream of all-India history, but he remains immortal in the history of Purulia as a leader who fought against oppression and exploitation.

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