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Website: www.allindiaaseca.org

E-mail: contact@allindiaaseca.org

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BHANJ VEER GOMKE SUNARAM SOREN CENTENARY CELEBRATION 2017-18

The final day of Bhanj Veer Sunaram Soren's Birth Centenary Year is nearing. On February 4, 2018 final Sunaram Soren Centenary Celebration (SSCC) is proposed to be organized in Baripada involving everybody, entity, formation. Initial celebration was organized in Baripada on February 4, 2017 albeit in a limited scale just to declare the beginning of the celebration. On consultation with various stakeholders, it emerged that a life size statue of Sunaram Soren should be installed. As nobody was coming forward to organize this occasion, All India ASECA took this responsibility upon itself to do something. As there was a great expectation and demand for a statue, it was decided to install the statue at Had Hadi, adjacent to the life size bronze statue of Pandit Raghunath Murmu which has been installed by All India ASECA during the centenary celebration in the year 2005. All India ASECA was, however, requested to change its decision and consider replacing the bust size statue of Sunaram Soren at Bhanjpur Chhak, Baripada with a life size bronze statue. The proposal was discussed and agreed to by the members of All India ASECA and it was made public soon after the SSCC on February 04, 2017.

A letter dated March 8, 2017 was sent to Collector and District Magistrate requesting for approval/clearance of the venue i.e. Bhanjpur Chhak for installation of the said statue. As reply was not forthcoming, another letter was again sent on July 17, 2017 requesting for the same approval/clearance. The same position of no-reply continued. In the mean time All India ASECA has already ordered for the life size bronze statue, which is at an advanced stage of

fabrication. As time is running out, a meeting was convened on October 21, 2017 at Guru Garam, Had Hadi inviting associations, intellectuals, individuals to take stock of the same. In the said meeting a committee was formed with the individuals present to pursue the matter with the administration and obtain approval/clearance of the site. Apart from that the plot needs to be identified as well as transformer has to be replaced from that spot by North Odisha Electricity Supply Company Ltd. (NESCO). These necessitated quick and focused approach and initiatives.

A delegation of 3 persons from the Committee visited the Collector on October 23, 2017 and informed that the earlier letters sent to the Collector were not traceable and another fresh letter should be sent. Again on October 23, 2017, a fresh letter was sent to the Collector. On October 24, 2017, one member of the Committee informed that the said delegates have elaborately discussed with District Magistrate (DM), and DM has assured them that a life size bronze statue would be installed by the Mayurbhanj administration. He even emphasized that the matter has already been flagged in the Chief Minister's Office (CMO) and it has been okayed by CMO. However, Additional District Magistrate (ADM) forwarded the letter of All India ASECA dated October 23, 2017 to Baripada Municipality and NESCO on October 27, 2017 seeking report from these two offices in order to facilitate installation of the statue being sponsored by All India ASECA. However, it was again reported by the same gentleman that due to limited time available, it will not be possible on the part of the Administration to make the statue as

earlier promised and statue that is being currently fabricated should be installed.

Executive Officer, Baripada Municipality issued a letter dated November 06, 2017 to ADM with a copy to All India ASECA which is as follows:

“Sub: Installation of life size statue of Bhanj Veer Gomke Sunaram Soren at Bhanjpur Chhak Baripada.

Sir,

In enclosing herewith the enquiry report in connection with available space for installation of Life size 8” Bronze Statue of Bhanj Veer Gomke Sunaram Soren at Bhanjpur Chhak. The proposed site is over Plot No. 161/372 , Khata No. 74 recorded in the name of Baripada Municipality.

Also alternate site for relocation of transformer at Bhanjpur chhak which is at the site of proposed installation has also been identified and submitted for your kind perusal. The same is illustrated in the Map annexed over Khata No. 74, Plot No. 370, Kisam-Nayanjori (Road side) in the name of Baripada Municipality.

Further, the Municipal Council in its meeting held on dt.-08-11-2017 have resolved that the transformer nearby the proposed site will be shifted before installation by the concerned Association in consultation with the NESCO Authority.

The said Association will initiate steps for beautification of its surroundings at their own responsibility.

The detailed enquiry report along with the trace map is annexed for your ready reference and necessary action.”

Soon after this development, it has been informed that the same gentleman as office bearer of a Club has submitted a letter to DM requesting that the statue be installed by the Administration. The submission of this Club is followed by submission of a memorandum by another Association to DM requesting him for completion of the life size statue. On the basis of current developments, let us consider that

these entities genuinely want the Government of Odisha to act and do something on the occasion of SSCC. They may be raising a genuine demand that when Government of Odisha is celebrating many anniversaries and centenary, why not SSCC. This in fact would force the Government to respond in the near future. Apart from this, it is evident that people have started giving importance to Sunaram Soren as thus far he has been limited to 8 inch size. Demanding a life size statue which is 8 feet is a new realization and expectation. The demand to the Government has come albeit lately but should be welcomed. Of course doubt has been raised about the time and intention of these two entities. When the said Club was given an opportunity to work as a partner for the SSCC but they have their own understanding and approach with which they took a separate stand. The demand to install a statue by these entities when a statue is already in the making makes one wonder about the intention. Why focus is on statue only. There could have been other demands to the Administration for the SSCC. Some even have raised their concern on the development, as they fear it as a ploy to derail the present initiative by creating an avoidable controversy of Government of Odisha versus All India ASECA. In all fairness, let us think that their demand is genuine and they have rightly questioned the step motherly attitude of the Government of Odisha along with contemporary peoples’ representatives. The time has come for the Administration to clearly specify its action plans to face the challenges and manage the herculean task.

Earlier it was taken lightly and question was not asked why Government is not taking any initiatives. Rather focus was that if Government is not doing let us do ourselves. As the members of All India ASECA are based in far of places, it was considered only to do whatever can be done.

Let’s have positive energy and the patience to overcome the odds that are being inflicted on us as these types of aberrations are always there whenever major social initiatives are taken up.

THE SITUATION OF ODISHA DURING THE TIME OF SUNARAM SOREN

*Purna Chandra Hembram,
New Delhi.*

One would be surprised to know that Odisha as we see it in its present geographic, cultural, administrative reality was not the same during the pre-independence time. Sunaram Soren period of 70 years i.e. from 04.02.1918 to 19.07.1988 can be termed as very important and vital as various activities and movements were taking place primarily for the independence. Sunaram Soren was the eldest son of Shri Champai Soren and Smt. Durgi Soren out of seven sons and four daughters of village Hensla, presently under Jamda Block of Mayurbhanj District.

The formation of then Orissa State which has now been renamed as Odisha in 2011 has a significant background. To start with, a territory was earmarked and known as the British Orissa province by the British rulers. One part was under the direct control and command of the British Rule and other parts are the Princely States of different sizes. The Government of India (Constitution of Orissa) Order 1936 formed a State based on the socio-cultural considerations mainly linguistic consideration that is to integrate Oriya speaking people with effect from 1st April 1936 demarcating some areas from Bihar Province, Orissa Province, Madras Presidency and Central Province. The areas were kept under the personal rule of the Governor till March 1937. An Advisory Council consisting of 20 persons was formed to advise the Governor. First pre-independence Assembly election was held in 1937 under the Government of India Act 1935 and second Assembly which is link Assembly in 1946. Prime Minister used to be the head of the Government.

There were 26 princely States namely 1. Athagarh, 2. Athamallik, 3. Bamra, 4. Badama, 5. Baudh, 6. Daspalla, 7. Dhenkanal, 8. Hindol, 9. Keonjhar, 10. Khandpara, 11. Mayurbhnaj, 12. Narsingpur, 13. Nayagarh, 14. Nilgiri, 15. Pal lahara, 16. Redhakhoh, 17. Ranpur, 18. Sonapur, 19. Talcher, 20. Tigiria, 21. Bonai, 22. Gangpur, 23. Kharswan, 24. Saraikela, 25. Sambalpur, 26. Kalahandi with the King at the top ruling the respective States.

As the formation of the British Orissa was primarily based on the linguistic consideration that is the Odia language, people started to think to be united on linguistic lines. For realizing this objective,

they believed that only a Greater Odisha could give them the solution. Therefore, a new seed of mass movement was germinated and spread all across the territories with sizable Odia speaking population. These territories fall under the control of the Kings, which are called as "Gadajat". Thus Praja Mandal Movement was born with an objective for a united Odisha or Greater Odisha comprising of the areas of British Odisha and Gadajat Odisha in the Gadajat States, which is basically led by peasants. This Praja Mandal Movement in the Gadajat States was in parallel with the National Movement for Independence. This Movement has the motto of liberation from the clutches of the Kings and to form a vibrant and viable modern State to promote and protect the socio, linguistic, cultural and economic interests of the people.

One can imagine the challenges that were there for consolidating the boundary of the State of Odisha. After attaining independence, a relentless endeavor was undertaken to see merger of independent royal states with the adjoining States in order to bring in a cohesiveness and consolidation. Attempt was made to abolish the presence of royalty to ensure eradication of serfdom to usher in a new era of individual freedom under a common democratic, socialistic, constitutional framework.

Nilgiri was the first Princely State whose administration was taken over by the British Administration on 14th November 1947 but through signing of agreement by the Kings of the Princely States with the Government of India, 25 Princely States merged with Odisha territory w.e.f. 1st January 1948 whereas Mayurbhanj was the last one to be merged w.e.f. 1st January 1949. However, Saraikela and Kharswan merged with the Bihar State w.e.f. 18 May 1948.

During this tumultuous period, a boy from a very remote place gained knowledge and sagacity to see things in its proper perspective. There was two different kind of culture, administrative set up in the British ruled territory under the authority of a Governor and another under the control of Kings. One part was having a Prime Minister through the process of election and another part is controlled by a

King as head of the State with all associated paraphernalia. One can imagine the diversity developed in the respective areas due to different administrative and other arrangements. The assimilation process was not easy to achieve and there must be extra-ordinary efforts by many patriotic and determined people who aspired to see a formidable formation of Odisha and a vibrant democratic independent India at large. The achievement has been inspired and realized by the zeal and zest of every individual of India who sensed the virtues of independence and benefits of creation of a modern India which promises them equality, justice, democracy etc.

It is heartening to observe that during the period people realized the virtues in the transformational clarion call of national and provincial towering personalities and leaders.

The education system in the Princely States or Gadjats were being introduced by the Maharajas whereas in other part there was a formal education system in place. The primacy of the institution of Abadhan (private teacher) was in vogue before a child is introduced to the formal education system. The education system was kept beyond the reach of common and weaker section of the society due to the prevalence of Caste system an associated practice of untouchability. The fortunate few who could manage to have the access were primarily the sons of the employees of royal administration. The teachers used to teach them but without touching their slates or only by seeing the letters written on the sand base. The challenge was not just the practice and process but at the same time who would labour hard to acquire knowledge. Gaining knowledge is also a hard task as it follows a particular discipline, regime and way of life. When life is easy going, it is hard to expect people to pursue a tough learning process and practice. Schools of different levels were there but at selected locations the access of which was only

possible through travelling a long distance. Due to this hardship apart from social inter mingling limitations, education level in the society in general was abysmally low.

Utkal University was the first University in Odisha to be founded on 27th November 1943. Cuttack Medical College started functioning from 1944 and later renamed as Sri Ram Chandra Bhanj Medical College on October 20, 1949. For the benefit of the students belonging to Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribe many residential (Ashram) educational institutions were established from the year 1951.

The first election after the consolidation of Odisha State was held in 1952 and upto 1990, the 10th election was held for the Odisha Legislative Assembly. Sunaram Soren was elected four times from Bahalda constituency during the year 1952-57 – first election, 1961-67-third election, 1967-71-fourth election and 1977-80- seventh election. The educational achievement can be chronicled as follows: Lower Primary (Naujoda LP School): 1924-27, Middle English (Bahalda ME School): 1927-33, High School (Maharaja Krushna Chandra High School, Baripada): 1933-37, Bachelor of Arts (Ravenshaw College, Cuttack): 1937-42 and Bachelor of Law (Madhusudan Law College, Cuttack): 1942-44.

The intra community feeling, belongingness and practice of helping each other on various social as well as emotional occasions was also acting negatively in inspiring an individual to pursue learning. The life was simple, requirement was meager and fulfillment of basic needs was ensured. During the life time of Sunaram Soren one witnesses the existence of epitome of determination, exemplary drive, towering personality, popular leadership, concern for the society, visionary leaders, goal setters and trendsetters.

FROM:

If undelivered please return to:
ALL INDIA ASECA,
 SFS Flat No. 326, Pocket 10,
 Sector 11 (Extension), Rohini,
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