CHAPTER - III

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Orissa became a separate province in 1936. Before the creation of a separate province, it was mainly parts of Madras, Bihar-Bengal and Central Provinces. Towards the end of the 19th century, the movement for amalgamation of separate Oriya speaking tracts gained momentum. Ganjam which was a part of Madras Presidency, played a leading role in the movement. People of Ganjam for the first time deplored the introduction of Telugu language and monopoly of Telugu language in their region. The feeling for the creation of separate province for the entire Oriya speaking tracts was strongest in this region.

Being an inhabitant of the Ganjam district, Sri Biswanath Das was one among those prominent leaders who entered into politics, mainly to serve this end. 'Earlier, he had carried legal practice at Berhampur; but the plight of Oriyas under the pressure of alien language and culture made him suffocated. The personality of Pandit Gopabandhu Das inspired him to involve himself in the struggle for the amalgamation of Orissa as also the preservation and improvement
of Oriya language and culture.\textsuperscript{1} He joined the Indian National Congress in 1919, when he had just started practicing as a lawyer. He became the Vice President of the Taluk Board, Ganjam in the then Madras in 1919. During this period, Sri Biswanath Das tried to revitalise and the morale of the Oriyas of Ganjam District, who were dominated by the Telugu speaking people led by Mr. Venkata Krishnaya. He also organised the peasants against the exploitation by zamindars and middlemen in the district. This gave him the unique credit of organising India's first peasant movement in 1918. He formed a Ryot's Union in the northern district of Madras Presidency and became its President with Mr. V. V. Giri as secretary.\textsuperscript{2}

Sri Biswanath Das hailed from a conservative Brahmin family having a sound agricultural base. As per Orissan standard he was a big Zamindar, but according to the prevailing practice in the then Madras Presidency he was only a 'royat' having more than ten acres of land'. In the eastwhile Madras Presidency the land holders known as Zamindars constituted a separate class by themselves.

From 1921 to 1931, Sri Biswanath Das represented the Ganjam District (then a part of the Madras Presidency) in the Madras Legislative Council.\textsuperscript{1}

\textsuperscript{1} Who's Who of Freedom Workers in Orissa, Ganjam District, Cuttack, 1969, p-1.
Council. He was elected to the Council in the first election under the Act of 1919. As a Councillor, Sri Biswanath Das raised the issues of the inhabitants of the Oriya speaking tracts under Madras Presidency, and lent a powerful voice against the exploitation of the peasants by the Zamindars. During this time he came in contact with other eminent councillors and national celebrities, namely, A. Ramaswami Muduliar, Subramaniam Aiyar, Sibaswami Aiyar, Sammakhan Chetti, Rama Chandra Reddy, A. Satyamurthi and C.Rajgopalachari. This influence equipped him to play a bigger role in the national political scene. It is pertinent here to assess the role of Sri Biswanath Das as a Councillor of Madras Legislative Council and a representative of Ganjam district, which is now a part of Orissa State. Hence, an attempt is made here to point out his role in the following matters, when he was the Councillor of Madras Legislative Council.

**Non - Cooperation Movement:**

From the Madras Legislative Council Proceedings it is evident that Sri Das as a Member in the Madras Legislative Council fought for the rights of the leaders of the Non-co-operation Movement. Sri Das was a great supporter of Mahatma Gandhi. The Non-Co-operation movement, which was gaining momentum at that time at the call of Gandhiji, against British authorities, was totally banned in the Madras
Presidency. The Government resorted to repressive measures to ban public meetings, exhibition of patriotic films on Khaddar and any other type of Non-Co-operation by the leaders. In Madras Presidency, leaders like C. Rajgopalachari, E. V. Ramaswari Naicker of Madras Presidency, who later formed 'Dravid Khazagam' were imprisoned. The Government also arrested the masses whereover they showed any sign of resistance. Hundreds of men and women were thrown in to jail. In this connection on September, 2, 1922, on the floor of Madras Council, an important Resolution was moved relating to Non Co-operation Movement. This Resolution stated that 'all the papers related to the proceedings in cases of conviction of Non-Co-operators including those who were in jail from October 1st, 1921, be referred to a bench of two judges of the High Court for revision.'

Speaking on these Resolution, in the Council, Sri Biswanath Das said that since the non-co-operators normally did not defend themselves in the law courts, their trials were based on evidences given by officials including the policemen and quite often such trials were unjust and inhuman. He showed instances of Punjab, the United Provinces, Bihar and Orissa, and suggested that such cases should be tried in the local High Court. Thus Sri Das tried his best to give full

justice to those non-co-operators, by making the hearings in a judicious procedure.

R. Srinivas Iyengar who was also a member of Madras Legislative Council supported this resolution saying that he had personally interviewed 176 non co-operation prisoners in the North Arcot jails and he was convinced that most of them were improperly tried.\textsuperscript{5}

A. Ranganath Mudaliar said that the law members of the Governor's Council should call for papers relating to the trial of the non-co-operators and get right the inquisitions perpetuated by the lower Magistrates in the name of law. On the basis of the above arguments, the resolution was defeated with 53 voting against it and 24 for it.\textsuperscript{6}

**Demand For Equal Rights of Oriyas:**

As a Councillor, Sri Biswanath Das raised issues of the inhabitants of the Oriya speaking tracts under Madras Presidency. He was very much annoyed with the discriminating attitude of the Telugu speaking people towards the Oriyas under Madras Presidency, and dominance of Telugu culture over Oriya culture. The Oriyas under Madras Presidency, were unequally treated particularly in the government and

\textsuperscript{5} Ibid, p-157.
\textsuperscript{6} Ibid, p-159.
semi-government offices. Sri Biswanath Das tried to organise the Oriyas with a view to give them their rights and privileges. As a Legislator in the Madras Legislative Council he got this opportunity to serve the interest of the Oriyas. He was in favour of unification of the fragmented parts of Orissa on linguistic basis, as per Government of India Act 1920. 7

**Conduct of the Legislators:**

Sri Biswanath Das was a legislator who always stood for value and ideals in the conduct of legislative business. He despised money-based and power seeking politics. As a true Gandhian he expected legislators to serve the people as social workers. This attitude of Sri Das has been clearly reflected in his statements that he delivered as a Councillor. Participating on 'The Deputy President's Salary Bill of 1921' Sri Das suggested that "...since no special work is assigned for Deputy President, we should fix his salary to one rupee only." 8 Thus he wanted this post to be served on honorary basis.

**Local Self Government:**

On the question of revenue assignment to the District Boards,
which according to Sri Biswanath Das were local bodies, or agents of the Government, he advocated for assigning one eighth of the share of Excise revenue to these local bodies. But at the same time, he also wanted the local bodies to be self sufficient and to be able to take up all welfare activities like establishing schools in villages, and spending money on various other welfare funds like education, maternity relief, medical facilities, rural sanitation facilities, and construction of roads. Further, he argued for the grant of new subsidy by the Government to the local bodies for ensuring water supply in rural areas and sanitation facilities etc. He also appealed on the floor of the Madras Legislative Council, that the Revenue authorities should take sympathetic attitude concerning these matters. This shows that Sri Biswanath Das was not only a democrat and liberal in his attitude, he was also very sympathetic to the cause of rural and local people whom he was representing in the Madras Legislative Council.

Budget Discussion:

Sri Biswanath Das also participated in the legislative discussions like the budget discussion, where the legislators were called upon to vote for grants. In these discussions, Sri Biswanath Das on the one hand thanked the British Government for having conferred the right
to participate to the people of India and on the other hand, he criticised the feudal attitude of British imperialism. But commenting on the sympathetic attitude of the British Government towards the people of India, Sri Biswanath Das said that the faith that Britain would keep up her pledges of August 20th, 1917 was restored by the ruling of the Speaker in the House of Commons regarding the Right of the Indian Legislature and also the nomination of Lala Harkrishan Lal to the Ministry in Punjab. The proposed 11 percent custom duty was another test to the true intents of Britain as to the giving of fiscal autonomy in India.9

In the same budget discussion, Sri Biswanath Das highlighted the importance of irrigation facilities in the Madras Province as well as Ganjam district. He pointed out that it was necessary for the government to provide enough irrigation sources and adequate famine fund to combat with the havoc of the stress and famines. In this context, on 30th March, 1921, he had said, "I find that there are many districts in Madras notably Ganjam, which are often attacked by famines. To counteract this tendency, we will soon have to incorporate the policy of extended irrigation sources. If we are to do that we will have to contract loans and we have to go on extending canals and such other irrigation sources which are generally productive and protective."10

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This shows that Sri Biswanath Das as a true legislator could gauge the demands of the people and could articulate those demands by putting forth them on the floor of the House.

Sri Biswanath Das as a Councillor in the Madras Legislative Council, always gave priority to 'Education'. In the budget discussion he stressed on this aspect, without which he was convinced that the progress of the state was impossible. His discussion pointed out that the allotted amount of 158 Lakhs on this head was inadequate. He justified his statement, saying that, it would only be able to meet the salary of the Inspectors and the teaching staff. He also gave the evidence saying that out of the total educational expenditure, about 15.31 lakhs would go towards the expenses of the inspectorate that is about 9 1/2 percent of the total allotment towards education. He also suggested for the spread of education throughout the state. Stressing on this point he said, "The passing of Elementary Education will be meaningless, if education will be limited as is now to only 4.2 percent of the whole population of Madras."

Not only Sri Biswanath Das pressed for the need of expansion of education, he also strongly condemned the practice of discrimination in the method of education. He advocated for a single Education

12. Ibid.
13. Ibid.
Policy to be adopted for all children. There should be no discrimination in the method of imparting education, even to the European students, which had become a practice under British Imperialism. Speaking on this, Sri Biswanath Das highlighted that the average cost of education on an Indian student was about Rs. 5.13, while his European counterpart was getting education at the rate of Rs. 193.52 in a year. He further pointed out Anglo-Indian education has unfortunately been very costly. I must say here that from a close working out of the figures, I have found out that while Rs 13/- is spent per head on an Indian student, Rs 183/- is spent on an Anglo-Indian student. These distinctions do not speak good of a community, especially, when they are destined to live with us and to be educated alongwith us. In the interest of the Anglo-Indian community, it would be better for them to come to a bit to our level in the cost of education. Thus Sri Biswanath Das was against any sort of discrimination that were being perpetuated by the British Government and to this he strongly voiced his objection.

**Communal Representation:**

Sri Biswanath Das, was very critical of the Resolution that stood for 'Communal Representation', particularly in matters of appointment.
to the government posts. In this respect he had said, 

"... so far as Madras Oriyas are concerned, distinction should be between 'Telugus' and 'Oriyas' not between 'Brahmins' and 'Non-Brahmins'... This feeling of Brahmin and non-Brahmin is a concept alien to ourselves and we wish that should be alien in future too. For the less of this contagious concept spreads into the society, the better and happier would be it for us. I beg to the Government to see that no contagious of this disaffect enters into our community."\(^{15}\)

This shows that Sri Das could clearly visualize the evil consequences of British policy of 'Divide and Rule', As a true legislator, and son of Indian soil, he voiced his protest against this evil practice. Thus while condemning the division of Oriyas on the very objectionable basis of 'caste', he spoke in the Council.

"...I feel it is my duty to impress in the clearest terms that the interest of my community has long been neglected; our growth is not cared for and we are not allowed to be over-ridden by an intermediary community upon this house." He also advocated that each community should find its own place and find its interest better guarded and better looked after by proportional representation in all public services of the government. From all these arguments we can very well sum up that Sri Biswanath Das fought for the rights and justice of Oriya people in a democratic way in the Madras Legislative Council.

\(^{15}\) M.L.C. *Proceedings*, p-1578.
Oriya Movement:

On 27th November 1922, Sri Biswanath Das along with the members of 'Ganjam Oriya District Association', i.e. Sashi Bhusan Rath, Mandhata Gorachand Patnaik and L.N. Deo, met the Governor of Madras and urged him to recommend the constitution of a separate Oriya province. On behalf of the association, efforts were made to mobilise the Oriya people who were residing in separate province. Along with the leaders of the Utkal Union Conference the Congress Leaders of the districts like Biswanath Das, Sashibhusan Rath, Lingaraj Panigrahi, Madhusudhan Panigrahi, Harihara Panda started creating mass awareness in the district. Maharaja Krushna Chandra Gajapati of Utkal Union Congress obtained the support of these leaders in preparing a broad base report that would represent the cause of the proposed Orissa province. The Report was submitted to Phillip-Duff Committee, which was appointed to consider the problem of dismembered Oriyas. For this effort Sri Biswanath Das tried to make full use of the Madras legislature and create a climate favourable to the Oriyas. The committee, in its Report rightly observed "Our enquiry has shown that there is a genuine, long, standing and deep seated desire on the part of the educated Oriya classes of the Oriya speaking tracts of Madras for

amalgamation of these tracts with Orissa under one administration. The committee recommended that the whole of Ganjam (except Srikakulam and Narsenpota) and Jaypore estate should be merged with the proposed province.\(^{17}\)

When Federal Government asked the Bihar, Orissa and Madras Government to give their views on Phillip-Duff Committee Report the former reported in 1927, that there was remote feasibility of creating a separate province for the Oriyas as it would not be financially viable. The Madras Government on the other hand stated that Oriya speaking tracts constituted a deficit region of the province and the government should be given a compensation of Rs 16 lakhs if it was going to be separated from Madras.\(^{18}\) The All party conference held at Lucknow adopted a similar resolution. It said that the formation of the new province should be considered if there were no financial hurdle in the way.\(^{19}\) After preparing an estimate of the financial resources for the Orissa Division, the Bihar and Orissa Government sent one of their officers, U.M. Sen to Madras to prepare a similar report for Ganjam and Jeypore. The deficit for the Orissa Division in 1926 was calculated at Rs 17.75 lakhs, which was

\(^{17}\) \textit{Jat Mohan Patnaik, 1941, Op. cit., p - 39.}
\(^{18}\) \textit{Report of Phillip-Duff Committee, NMML, & New Delhi.}
\(^{19}\) \textit{Report of All Party Conference (Lucknow) 1927.}
however challenged by Congress and Utkal Union Conference leaders.20

Biswanath Das, who was then a Member of Madras Council, started collecting useful financial data for Ganjam through interpellations and challenged the contention both of Madras Government and U.M.Sen, that it was a deficit region of the province. On the basis of the figures of the governments, the Administrative Reports, and the statistics obtained from the department, he tried to assert that it was not justified to consider the Oriya speaking tracts of Madras as deficit region. The reports prepared by Sri Das proved that on the basis of available statistics the average revenue receipts of Ganjam per year during the period 1923-24 to 1925-26 was higher then the figure compiled by U.M. Sen. He also prepared a statement of annual average expenditure for the district during the period to disprove their contention that it was a deficit region of the province.21

The financial prospects of the Oriya speaking tracts as assessed by Biswanath Das strengthened the hands of Maharaja Krushna Chandra Gajapati, who had attended the First Round Table

Conference in 1931, with the report showing self sufficiency of the proposed province.22

Thus Sri Das contributed in many way to amalgamate Oriyas under a separate administration when he was a Councillor in Madras Legislative Council.

Thus, during his legislative career in Madras Legislative Council from 1921 to 1931, Sri Das represented the interests of Oriya people in the Council. He had participated in a number of discussions relating to the amalgamation of Oriya people on the basis of language, for the creation of a separate province. He was very democratic in outlook, while suggesting for representation of Oriya people on the basis of proportional representation. He had fought against the imperial policy of discrimination among Indian and Anglo-Indian and among Oriyas on the basis of caste by the British Government. Though, the negligible presence of the Oriyas in the Madras Council made most of his demands unheard, but the presentation of demands certainly had put an impact upon the Oriya people in arousing a confidence among themselves. This could mobilise the Oriyas living under different Presidencies and Provinces, to unite for their rights, under separate administration. Through

this period, the experience, which Sri Das gained helped him played an effective role as a Legislator effectively in the later period.

Summary:

In this Chapter, an attempt has been made to discuss the role of Sri Biswanath Das as a legislator during the pre-independence period. His Legislative performance during his career as a legislator of Madras Legislative Council has been analysed. It is evident from the above discussion that as a Member of Madras Legislative Council, he had left an image behind Madras even after Orissa was separated from it.

Sri Biswanath Das hailed from a conservative Brahmin family having a sound agricultural base. Though he was a Zamindar according to Orissan standard, but as per the prevailing practice of Madras Presidency, he was only a 'Ryot', who were exploited in many ways by the Zamindars. He became the representative of this oppressed class of Ryots, and fought for their rights in the Madras Council. He was out and out a leader of peasants and a revolutionary.

Sri Biswanath Das began his career as a member of the Madras Legislative Concil. He was elected from 'Ganjam' district as a
Councillor of Madras Legislative Council, and Ganjam was then a part of Madras Presidency.

During his tenure as a legislator in the Madras Legislative Council, he argued for the unification of Oriya speaking people and amalgamation of Oriya speaking tracts in order to create a separate Oriya Province.

In a number of Legislative debates, he spoke for the decentralization of power to local bodies, who would be empowered to take welfare activities like education medical facilities, roads construction and other infrastructural facilities to rural areas. He was very much aware of the most important problems of Ganjam district where there was the shortage of water and spoke for the irrigation facilities to be provided in these areas.

The negligible presence of Oriyas in the Madras Legislative Assembly made difficult in passing most of the demands of Sri Biswanath Das in a smooth way. But, nevertheless, the powerful arguments and discussions on various matters concerning the interests of Oriyas proved the legislative intelligence of Sri Biswanath Das and left a deep impact upon the House, and before the British authority for consideration.