CHAPTER V

POPULAR UPRISINGS AND MERGER

The nature of popular unrest in the State, agitation of 1838-40, the Khadpur Meli of 1873-76, agitation of 1884-86, the unrest of 1928, the Prajamandal movement of 1938, Congress policy towards the State, Impact of Indian Freedom Struggle and the agitation of 1942, Pre-merger unrest and the accession of the State to the Union of India.
CHAPTER - V

POPULAR UPRISINGS AND MERGER.

The British authorities maintained two standards of administration in India. In the territories under their direct rule, that is in British India, the system of administration was a comparatively better one; it was gradually being modernised by periodic doses of liberal reforms; the people there enjoyed certain political rights, civil liberties, rule of law and other privileges of a civilised life. But in the territories ruled by the princes, i.e., in the feudatory states the system of administration was much inferior in standard to that of British India; it was autocratic, feudal and oppressive; there was no rule of law, the people in the princely states were subjected to large-scale exploitation by their rulers as well as the officers. While British India was rapidly moving towards democracy and liberalism the native states not only remained backward but also stagnant and out-dated politically and economically. That is why the history of the feudatory states is so full of instances of the people's struggles against authority either for the redressal of their grievances - social, political and economic - or for liberation from the clutches of a system or institutions they intensely disliked.
The people of Orissa Garjat have generally been spoken of as a passive and docile mass, bogged down in the quagmire of superstition and fatalism; but this is not actually so. The unassuming ryots expressed their sensitivity and courage through vigorous protests and struggles on several occasions against their authorities. The people of the Nilgiri State who were also subjected to the same crude form of autocratic misrule, apathy and exploitation raised their voice against their rulers in the form of protests and remonstrances when all limits of endurance were exhausted. To get their grievances redressed they took resort to varying methods at different periods of time, such as no-rent campaign, fervent appeals to the British authorities for help, large-scale exodus, peaceful satyagraha and finally widespread non-violent agitation. Contemporary literature and public records testify to the occurrence of few such uprisings in Nilgiri in 1838-40, 1873-76, 1884-86, 1928 and 1938.

All the popular uprisings that took place in Nilgiri can be grouped under two broad categories. The four earlier movements, such as those of 1838-40, 1873-76, 1884-86 and 1928 come under the first category; They principally originated from widespread agrarian discontent, and were marked by certain common features.
Though agrarian discontent pervaded in equal degree all parts of the State and all classes of people were distressed by the Durbar's exacting revenue demands, resistance never assumed a general character, in the first instance. Secondly, none of these movements was ever tinged with any caste or class or communal colour; they were secular in character. As the society was essentially an agricultural one and was subjected to the same political and economic system, the grievances of all castes of people were almost identical. Under the prevailing circumstances their reaction to particular situations was bound to be similar. A third feature was the absence of any charismatic leader, a definite programme and organisation; they were spontaneous and sporadic outbursts of a disgruntled peasantry. Finally, none of the earlier movements ever culminated in a full-fledged rebellion or violent revolution designed to introduce sweeping changes in government or society; they were markedly non-political, anti-feudal, but not anti-imperialistic. The agitating ryots always looked to the British authorities for the solution of their problems; they never intended to overthrow a Raja, their main concern being the correction of certain economic abuses. None of these uprisings was linked with nationalist consciousness, and most of them ended without much success.
Under the second category comes the successful agitation of 1938 which was well-organised, ably led by capable leaders, had a definite programme, and was politically motivated. It was linked with the nationalist movement in British India, and was largely influenced by it.


The first eruption of popular discontent in Nilgiri was reported in 1838-40 against the oppression and misrule of Rani Chitra Dei and her brother, Sheeb Charan Patnaik, who happened to be the Dewan of the State. The dowager Rani was incharge of the administration of the State since 1833 owing to the minority of her son after the death of Gobindachandra Mardraj Harichandan. She was, however, completely under the spell of her brother, the Dewan who was disliked by the people for his tyrannical conduct. In 1835 one Hari Baboo with assistance from the Kaptipada Zamindar had invaded the State with the purpose of capturing power from the hands of the Rani. He, however, failed in his attempt and was captured and punished by the British authorities. The people of Khadpur Chakla had offered a gallant resistance while

1. Judicial to; No.14 of 6th September 1836.
trying to defend the killa against the insurgents under Hari Baboo. The grateful Rani promised to remit to them some portion of the revenue as a reward for their loyalty. But under the evil influence of her notorious brother she not only failed to fulfill her promise of abating the revenue, but also tried to create a cleavage among the ryots by promising to grant the benefit to nine villages only instead of all the twenty-eight villages which constituted the Khadpur Chakla. But her scheme did not work. The disgruntled people stopped payment of revenue and disobeyed the orders of the Rani who failed to exercise her authority over the region. The British Government held the Dewan responsible for the disturbances. Consequently, Sheeb Charan was removed from office and was banished from the State. But this could not stop the occurrence of further disturbances between the Rani and her ryots. Complete anarchy prevailed in the countryside where the Rani's authority was absolutely non-existent. The Rani made frequent petitions to the British authorities against assault, tyranny and plundering by the ryots. The situation further deteriorated when the new Dewan, Gobardhan Das, resigned his office. As a temporary measure to preserve peace in the State and conduct the

1. BJ(Cr)P No.40 of 3rd March 1840, Mills to Government, 22nd February, 1840.
administration Henry Ricketts, the Superintendent of the Tributary Mahals, deputed an Amin with a party of Palks to the State. The Rani was asked to reside at Balasore until some arrangement for carrying on the affairs of the killa could be made.

The Rani was then persuaded to appoint another Dewan and to remit annually 25 per cent of the revenue year by year for five consecutive years ending in 1843 to the concerned ryots. She, however, did not have the intention of abiding by the agreement. She started a machination against the new Dewan and put up all kinds of hindrances in order to prevent him from discharging his duties. Meanwhile, as the uprising took a violent form the British authorities finally decided to take drastic action. The State was temporarily attached to Government, the Rani was deprived of her power, and the Collector of Balasore assumed direct charge of the administration. The ryots were granted the remission promised to them.

B. THE KHADPUR MELI OF 1873-76.

The second civil unrest in the State started in the year 1873-74 when Fakir Mohan Senapati was acting

1. Judicial to; No.26 of 21st July, 1840.
as the Dewan of the State. Fakir Mohan in his autobiography has attributed the uprising to two important factors: the imposition of a cess on rent-free land for collecting funds with a view to establishing a Sanskrit tol, and the enhancement of royalty on the stone-quarry works of Khadpur.¹ His analysis holds good so far as the immediate cause of the outbreak is concerned. It does not, however, explain the whole truth behind the resistance movement of 1873-76. There were a host of deep-seated grievances, mainly agrarian and economic, behind the outbreak. The storm of protest occurred in late 1873, but the clouds of discontent had been intermittently gathering long before the actual outburst.

The Khadpur Meli of 1873-76 originated out of a combination of such factors as economic deprivation, agricultural sluggishness, unscrupulous feudal exactions and the Raja's callousness. The first settlement of land revenue in the State which was completed in 1853 introduced certain difficulties for the people. Previously, the systems of land measurement and revenue assessment were very simple. The Rulers were content merely with assessing entire villages to revenue and leaving it to Sarbarakars to make the detailed distribution of rent among the ryots. As there was no

¹ F.M. Senapati, op.cit., P-52.
scientific method of measurement, the Sarbarakars mostly depended on 'nazarkat,' or eye-estimation, that is, making a guess-work of the extent of a plot of land, and on the seed capacity of the field, i.e., forming a rough idea of how much seed could be sown on any given area if it was to produce a maximum return for the quantity sown. Such a method, though primitive and defective, was ordinarily helpful to the ryots, because the Sarbarakar who himself was the assessor of rent, made use of his local knowledge of the ability of each ryot to pay, and he generally did this with a lenient disposition. The basic philosophy under such a system seemed to be that the ryot should pay whatever was not too burdensome without any real relation to the area or quality of land held by him. But under the new settlement the Sarbarakars did not have anything to do with the measurement of land and the assessment of rent. All this was done by the State with the help of British officers; the Sarbarakar was simply required to collect the revenue from the ryots. Consequently, rents were arbitrarily forced upon the ryots. In the absence of any previous records the settlement officer who came on deputation for the purpose from the Bengal Government simply applied certain rates without following any reasonable principle. While

fixing the rents local conditions were not taken into consideration.\textsuperscript{1} The new rates were unusually heavy, the highest being Rs. 20/- per acre,\textsuperscript{2} which was really exorbitant as per the cost of living, prevalent in those days. In the years following the settlement the ryots regularly fell into arrears. The increasing number of civil suits, particularly the ones for recovery of arrears of rent and debt, frequent reports of dispossession of ryots from the land for their failure to pay the arrears of rent, and the habitual dismissal of Sarbarakars for their inability to clear up their dues for their respective villages were clear indications of the hardship that the new settlement had ushered in. It was this inability of the people to shoulder their increasing burdens which prompted the officers to comment that the ryots of the State were "notoriously bad payers of rent".\textsuperscript{3}

The ryots somehow bore the burden of taxes either with stoic indifference or with fatalistic resignation. But after the great famine of 1866-67 it became impossible for them to bear the burden any longer due to their progressive impoverishment. The agricultural depression of 1870 made the position of farmers still worse, and led to an alarming growth of indebtedness among them.\textsuperscript{4} The average ryot was never rich by any

\begin{itemize}
\item[1.] Final Report, Para-60, Page-24.
\item[2.] Ibid, Para-61.
\item[3.] Ibid, Para-53, Page-23.
\item[4.] AR-1868-69, 1869-70.
\end{itemize}
standards. He generally lived from hand to mouth and depended heavily either on the produce of his land or labour. When a large number of them were already involved in debt from which they found it hard to get out, they mentally prepared themselves to resist any further extortion by the State. Naturally their resistance to the Dewan Fakir Mohan's new impositions quickly assumed the form of a mass uprising.

At this stage the conduct of the Raja Krushnachandra Mardaraj Harichandan who behaved like an unscrupulous and exacting landlord became a cause of anxiety for the people. He had very little sympathy for the suffering of his people, his only concern being to increase his revenue by any method that could be conceived by human ingenuity.\(^1\) When T.E. Ravenshaw, the Superintendent of the Tributary Mahals, repeatedly advised the Raja to open schools for the spread of education in his State, the latter levied a new cess on education, which the people vehemently resisted.\(^2\) This was the tax which Fakir Mohan had referred to as one of the causes of the unrest.\(^*\)

1. Index- Nilgiri Adoption, PP-39, 199.
2. BJ(P)P No.24 of July 1876; Ravenshaw to Government, No.64A of 9th June 1876.
* Fakir Mohan mentioned in his autobiography that the cess was intended to be utilised for opening Sanskrit tols, but Ravenshaw in his annual report to the Government of Bengal mentioned it as a general education cess. Vide, AR- 1875-76, Para-47.
The other imposition which the ryots resisted was the increased royalty on stone-quarries at Khadpur. The stone-quarry work was a principal source of income of the ryots of Khadpur. Most of the peasant families there functioned as typical workshops for producing mugni-stone articles. Finished goods worth about Rs. 50,000/- were exported annually to different centres of trade in India. The State leased out the quarries to the highest bidders annually and received on an average a royalty of Rs. 2,500/-. These lessees were known as Mahaldars. They paid a lump sum amount as bid money to the State and permitted the stone-cutters to quarry stones only on payment of a fee to them. The difference between what they paid to the State and what they collected from the authorised quarry-workers who were known as Patadars, was their (Mahaldar) income. In 1872 one Kahnel Mishra held the Mahaldari on payment of a record amount of Rs. 4,000/-. He had, of course, promised not to raise the fees that he would collect, in turn, from the Patadars or the authorised stone-cutters; he sought to adjust the surplus money by collecting fees from those who were cutting stone without permission.\footnote{Senapati, op.cit., PP- 53-54.} Previously, the practice was that when one individual got a Patadari permission to cut stones, the other male members of his
family used to accompany him with their chisels and mallets to cut stone even without a Pata or permission for themselves. Kahnei Mishra strictly prohibited this practice. He allowed only the permit-holders to cut stone from the mines with their own implements, and denied entry to unauthorised cutters by the application of force. The Patadars who incurred loss as a result of the new restriction resented Kahnei Mishra's oppression and petitioned for his dismissal. But the Dewan rejected the people's demand on the consideration that the cancellation of the lease would result in loss of revenue to the State. The disappointed people then took resort to agitation. They stopped payment of all revenue due to the State. The unrest became more acute when the other ryots, including the Lakhrajdars who opposed the education cess, joined the movement with the tacit support from some influential persons at the State headquarters.

The agitators held the palace under seige, forcibly cut stone at the quarries, intimidated people who did not join their Meli, and tried to coerce the Raja. The situation took a serious turn when some influential Patadars and Sarbarakars colluded with the

2. Ibid.
3. BJ(P)P No. 19 of July 1875; Ravenshaw to Government, No. 101, 11th June, 1875.
Kaptipada Zamindar and endeavoured to secure a lease from him, declaring the quarry to be in Mayurbhanj.\(^1\)

Anticipating further trouble, the Superintendent, Ravenshaw, immediately despatched his Assistant, the Collector of Balasore, to the spot, and himself went next. After a prolonged enquiry adjustments were brought about and the terms for working the quarries apparently settled between the Raja and the people. Several leaders of the Meli were taken prisoners to keep the peace.\(^2\)

The settlement of the problem proved too short-lived. The stone-quarry difficulty broke out again the next year notwithstanding the fact that the ringleaders had been taken into custody. The people held a series of riotous meetings and began to plunder, abuse and coerce all who did not join their party. The Raja displayed great weakness in dealing with the situation and appeared quite unable to maintain his authority.\(^3\) The Superintendent promptly intervened to prevent further escalation of the disturbance. He went to the disputed quarries and the adjoining villages. A series of complaints were taken up and enquired into judicially. But as usually happens in such cases, the official inquiries did not favour the people. The authorities considered the cases from the standpoint of

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1. BJ(P)P No. 4 of October 1875; Ravenshaw to Government, No. 57A of 22nd June 1875.
2. AR- 1874-75, Para-114.
3. Ibid., 1875-76, Para-42.
legal propriety and showed no sympathy for the socio-economic grievances of the people. The Melias were branded as offenders against law and were convicted and punished by the Assistant Superintendent at Balasore.\(^1\)

Though the situation quieted down, the people's dissatisfaction persisted as their problems were not sympathetically dealt with. The succeeding Superintendents reported to the Government of Bengal of the continuing hitch between the people of Khadpur and the Raja.\(^2\) The Government of Bengal was very much aware of the explosive situation in the State,\(^3\) but it did very little towards effecting a long-term solution.

C. THE AGITATION OF 1884-86.

The situation in the State remained quiescent for the next couple of years following the suppression of the Khadpur Mell. Meanwhile, certain things happened which further embittered the ryots and alienated them from the Raja. In 1877 the two illegitimate sons of Raja Krushnachandra and his nephew, Chakradhar, got married. The Raja demanded a magan to defray the expenses incurred in these ceremonies. The unwilling ryots petitioned to the Superintendent in great numbers against the Raja's decision to collect the magan.\(^4\)

1. BJ(P)P No.24 of July, 1876; Ravenshaw to Government, 9th July 1876.
2. Ibid, No.42 of July 1877; John Beames to Government, No.106 of 8th June 1877.
3. Ibid., Political Resolution of the Lt. Governor of Bengal; No.2675 of 23rd July 1877, Para-7; Letter from C. Macaulay to the Superintendent.
4. Index-Nilgiri Adoption, P-104.
Ravenshaw instructed the Raja not to levy *maqan* on the aforesaid occasion. The *maqan* was not collected on this occasion, but the Raja did not officially withdraw his order for the collection of the levy. The rates were allowed to remain outstanding against each *ryot's* name and were computed as arrears of revenue which, the *ryots* apprehended, could be collected any moment the Raja liked. To add to the existing fear of burden the Raja again demanded the *maqan* on the marriage of his daughter and the funeral ceremony of the senior *Rani* in 1882. The frequent incidence of this most hated feudal due was a major cause of the discontent of the people in 1883-84.

Like the *maqan* another tax, the vexatious marriage fee, added to the people's burden and aggravated their discontent. The Raja often used force and excessive oppression to collect this fee which was generally detested. The crushing burden of these unending feudal exactions was bitterly felt by the people and paved the ground for the uprising.

While the Raja continued to impose one tax after another, the suffering of the people was becoming

1. BJ(P)P No. 4 of March 1888; Metcalfe to Government, Ravenshaw's Roobkaree of 25th March 1878.
2. Ibid, No. 15 of December 1886; W.R. Ricketts, Manager of Nilgiri State to Superintendent, No. 33 of 12th June, 1886; Statement No. 1.
3. Ibid., Ricketts' Statement No. 2.
all the more acute at this point of time because of the economic difficulties of the 1880's, which were widely felt in Bengal and its neighbourhood. The price of foodgrains was rising rapidly. In 1882-83 paddy was available in the State at 60 seers per rupee, but the next year it became unimaginably costlier and could be had at the rate of 40 seers per rupee. The scarcity hit the ryots so hard that most of them were unable to pay their rents and other dues to the State in time. They naturally fell into arrears. The Sarbarakars who had the responsibility for the entire revenue of their respective villages also failed to pay. The following table would establish how the collection of land revenue was adversely affected throughout the State in the two years just preceding the occurrence of the uprising in 1884.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total Demand</th>
<th>Collection Made</th>
<th>Balance Outstanding</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(a) 1882-83</td>
<td>Rs.44,269-12-1</td>
<td>Rs.26,731-15-1</td>
<td>Rs.17,537-13-0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(b) 1883-84</td>
<td>Rs.49,057-5-7</td>
<td>Rs.22,665-5-2</td>
<td>Rs.26,392-0-5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The defaulting ryots were threatened with the loss of land through ejection. Evictions were made with such alacrity by the Raja that countless petitions

1. AR. Desai, Peasant Struggles in India, P-50.
2. AR- 1883-84, Para-55.
3. (a) AR- 1882-83, Para-410.
   (b) Ibid, 1883-84, Para-367
started pouring in from the ryots to the Superintendent's office. A. Smith, the Superintendent, thus informed the Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal in 1883: "Complaints against dispossession of land by the native ruler (Nilgiri), in which the parties complain of injustice or oppressive action by the Chief or of their complaints not being heard, are frequent from Nilgiri. The interference of the Chief with the rights of the people on the lands they occupy is a frequent source of complaint in Nilgiri".¹

Neither the Raja nor the British authorities did take any appreciable step to bring relief to the people. In the absence of any possibility of a remission of rent or other palliative measures the only hope of escape for the people was rebellion. It so happened that thousands of them firmly refused to pay the rent, and disobeyed the dictates of authority. In this task they were also assisted by the Sarbarakars.²

The agitation became widespread in the Khadpur Chakla, its vicinity, and at the headquarters of the State.³ The people of Khadpur in particular nursed in the innermost corner of their hearts an inextinguishable fire of hatred for the Raja for the

¹. BJ(P)P No. 19 of December 1883; Smith to Government, No. 894 of 20th June 1883.
². Ibid., No. 15 of December 1886; W.R. Ricketts to Superintendent, 12th June 1886.
failure of their earlier struggles. They did not let go any opportunity to put the Raja into trouble by their defiant mood. In the 1880's they readily jumped into such a course of action when Raja Krushnachandra Mardraj Harichandran found himself in an awkward position because of his involvement in the adoption imbroglio. The adoption case provided the immediate cause of the outbreak of the unrest in 1884.

In 1878 Raja Krushnachandra Mardraj Harichandran adopted the second son of the Maharaja of Mayurbhanj, and brought the minor boy, Shyamchandra, to Nilgiri in 1883 upon the death of the Maharaja and his wife. This shattered the hopes of the Raja's younger brother, Harihar, who had imagined that as per the Garjat rule of succession he himself or his son, Chakradhar as the Raja's nephew would succeed to the guddee after Krushnachandra's death. Harihar, therefore, put forth the story of an alleged previous adoption of his son by the Raja. He received the support of the Patrani during her life-time. The Raja and his younger brother had life-long enmity. Harihar's enmity became more intense because of disappointment. With a few relatives and retainers of the Raja who were dissatisfied with the Raja's action, he played a leading role in

1. BJ(P)P No.6 of November 1881; Smith to Government, 10th September 1881.
inciting the people at the State headquarters and at Khadpur who were known for their anti-Raja stance to rebel.¹

Very soon a great number of the ryots was in a state of rebellion against the Raja's authority. They stopped payment of their rents and steadily refused to pay the magan, the marriage fees and other dues outstanding against them. The defaulting Sarbarakars as well as the stone-quarry Patadars joined in the fray and hardly paid anything to the State.²

There was complete non-cooperation with the authorities. The no-rent movement did not remain peaceful for long. Presently the agitators turned violent. They not only defied the Raja's authority, but also oppressed the loyalists. They plundered the property of those who did not join them in their struggle against the Raja.³ The enraged ryots assaulted the State employees and the police and rescued their agitating friends who were taken prisoners by the Durbar. They resisted by force the execution of all decrees of the government. Several other cases of violence were reported.⁴ Some powerful Sarbarakars of Khadpur even induced the people to secede from the authority of the Raja.⁵

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¹ Index-Nilgiri Adoption, P-198, Larminie to Government, No.1105 of 18th July 1883.
² BJ(P)P No.15 of 1886; Ricketts to Superintendent, 12th June 1886.
³ Ibid, Nos.164, 165 of 29th December, 1884.
⁴ Ibid,, No.18 of November 1886; Metcalfe to Government No.354 of 3rd March 1886.
⁵ AR- 1885-86, Para-19.
chaos prevailed in the State. Raja Krushnachandra was evidently unable to cope with the difficulties of the situation and professed his inability to keep the people in order.¹

The British authorities took stern measures to put down the uprising. Dewan Bholanath Das was removed from office as he failed to bring the situation under control.² In his place was appointed a European officer of Government, named W.R. Ricketts, who suppressed the people with an iron hand. A punitive police was stationed at Khadpur and a police outpost was established at Isharpur to ensure peace in the locality. The defaulting Sarbarakars who were the leaders of the agitation were dismissed. Some of them absconded into the Muohalbandi, but most of them were eventually arrested along with other leading ryots, and were tried by the Assistant Superintendent at Balasore. They were sentenced to rigorous imprisonment of various terms.³

As regards the collection of rent and other dues, Ricketts' measures were no less harsh. He attached both movable and immovable properties of the ryots, sold the movable property to realise the arrears

¹. AR-1885-86, Resolution (Political) of the Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal, No. 2007P of 5th November, 1886.
². Index-Nilgiri Adoption, P-202, F.B. Peacock, CS to GOB, to Raja Krushnachandra of Nilgiri, No. 1247P-D of 2nd October, 1883.
³. BJ(P)P No. 15 of December, 1886; Ricketts to Superintendent, 12th June, 1886.
of rent, kept their houses and lands under attachment for a whole year and when nothing was voluntarily paid he sold them and realised the largest portion of the arrears. In place of the dismissed Sarbarakars a tahsildar was appointed to collect the rents of the villages as well as the stone-quarries. Instead of leasing out the quarries to the highest bidders as was the practice previously, the Manager introduced the system of direct collection from the Patadars through the said tahsildar. As regards the adoption case, the Superintendent, C.T. Metcalfe, began a judicial enquiry into the matter. Thus came to an end the most serious resistance movement of the nineteenth century in Nilgiri.

D. THE UNREST OF 1928.

Like all other previous uprisings the agitation of 1928, though launched in a novel way, was a spontaneous outburst against agrarian distress and feudal exactions. The courage and heroism with which the ryots raised the standard of struggle against heavy odds at a time when political consciousness was at the rudimentary stage in the State testify to the reality and enormity of

1. BJ(P)P No. 15 of December 1886, Ricketts to Superintendent, 12th June 1886.
their grievances. When these grievances were aggravated to unbearable proportions they hit back with tremendous fury.

The last settlement operations in the State which came to completion in 1922 caused great irritation to the ryots. Without introducing any change either in the status or the privileges of the ryots, it raised the rates of rent on each category of cultivable land to a considerable extent. The previously existing rates were already high. Only a few years before the commencement of the settlement in 1917 the Political Agent of Orissa Feudatory States had observed in his letter to the Government that "the rents for cultivated lands here (in Nilgiri) are higher than in most States... There is not likely to be much room for any considerable enhancement". Yet the new rates showed an increase of more than 29 per cent for the ryoti holdings and 35 per cent in case of the Thakur Mahal. Along with the enhancement of the rates of rent on land there was also increase in the Parbani-kar or the religious cess and the Kathkar or the fuel cess, which was already much heavier. Every holder of land was required to pay these cesses at the increased rates. These additional burdens came to be bitterly felt:

1. BJ(P)P No.15 of April, 1908, Cobden-Ramsay, Political Agent, to Commissioner of Orissa Division, No. 1230 of 17th March 1908.
by every category of people, the ryots as well as the Lakhrajdars, under the prevailing circumstances, particularly during the late 1920's. The years following World War I were a period of great hardship for the poor peasants who suffered greatly as a consequence of the effects of the war. While the people were groaning under scarcity and rising costs of living and the impending depression, the Raja's policies and practices only added to their miseries.

Raja Kishorechandra's fondness for luxury, merry-making and other easier virtues of life manifested in the form of Kheda, shikar, theatre, band party, etc. But what was sport to the Raja was a suffering to the ryots. Kheda was a special operation for catching wild elephants, particularly during the winter which was the harvesting season. Droves of elephants used to come in search of grazing at that time. Their favourite food was the standing ripe paddy crops. The people did not have the right to kill elephants even if they ravaged their crops.¹ The Raja on the other hand utilised this opportunity for catching these animals by organising kheda. One such kheda operation was organised in the year 1927-28 when hundreds of people were forced under pain of severe punishment to accompany the Raja's party into the deep

jungles in connection with the *kheda*. They had to do different duties like beating drums to chase the elephants into the trap, carrying provisions and water to the jungle camp which was laid at great height to enable the *Raja* and his party to have a perfect view of the operation. These people had to work on *bethi*, that is, without wages. They had to brave the cold weather in the dense forests under the open sky, the inhospitable terrain at the cost of their own comfort and life for weeks together for no benefit of theirs. Some people lost their lives, being trampled by elephants and many were seriously wounded. The *Raja's* camp on the other hand was beaming with pleasure and perversion. To this camp were brought young women, including tribal girls, and young boys of tender age for the enjoyment of the *Raja* and his friends. Especially galling was the fact that the people had to work on *bethi* at a time when their ripe paddy crop was left standing in the field and could not be collected in due time. This was the last thing which a cultivator could tolerate. There is no wonder that the defiance to the *Raja's* authority came within months of this infamous *kheda* operation.

Like the kheda, shikar was equally deeply resented as it caused no less suffering to the people. Raja Kishorechandra who was proud of being a sharpshooter had a hobby of organising frequent shikar parties. As in the kheda, the people were compelled to give bethi or forced labour whenever shikar was organised. This not only caused maximum inconvenience to the ryots but also greatly interfered with the harvest.

The greatest single irritant that ignited the fire of discontent in 1928 was the maqan. This invidious feudal exaction had been the root cause of the earlier uprisings also, like the one in 1884-86; in 1904 there was a great stirring among the people because the then Ruler Shyamchandra Mardraj Harichandan had imposed a heavy maqan on the occasion of his own marriage. The State was then saved from an impending catastrophe only by the timely intervention of the Superintendent, K.G. Gupta. In the year 1928 maqan became so excessive and arbitrary that the people's endurance was exhausted and they decided to act.

On the occasion of the marriage of Basanta Manjari, the Raja's daughter, the people were asked to pay maqan at the rate of fifty per cent of the land rent.

1. S.Rout, op.cit., P. 54.
with the strong warning that any one objecting to it would be forced to pay at the rate of one hundred per cent of his rent on land. Maqan was usually paid along with land revenue and often in instalments, but it was categorically declared in 1928 that it had to be paid in full before the rents, and no arrears would be tolerated. While collecting it the Raja's officers let loose a reign of terror; maqan was exacted with an exemplary strictness and excessive oppression. Along with the maqan, Puncha and rassad were literally plundered from the people. Throughout the State there was suffering and sadness.

By this time British India was passing through a unique phase in her struggle for freedom from British rule. Mahatma Gandhi's strategy of Satyagraha and non-cooperation as techniques of redressal of grievances was rousing confidence in the peasants who then felt courageous enough to defy the authority to achieve their goal. As the State of Nilgiri was contiguous to the British district of Balasore, some of its inhabitants were already imbued with the Gandhian ideas and a sense of nationalism. Some of them had associated themselves with the Congress activities and joined in the Non-cooperation Movement.

1. S. Rout, op.cit. PP-55-56.
Under their leadership the agitation in 1928 assumed a new dimension.

The people's resentment against the Raja's oppression and exploitation took the shape of a non-violent struggle. They refused to pay the new impositions and started leaving the State in great numbers. Within a few weeks more than a thousand people collected at the Balasore Railway Station. They approached Harekrushna Mahtab, the most prominent Congress leader of the Balasore district. Mahtab took a keen interest in the Nilgiri affairs. He collected from the fugitives facts about the Raja's oppression and published an anonymous brochure entitled 'Nilgiri Atyachar' (oppression in Nilgiri) which greatly excited the people and intensified the agitation. He also appealed to Rev. C.F. Andrews, the Christian Missionary and philanthropist, to intervene in order to bring about a solution. Andrews came to Nilgiri in February 1928. He was as much shocked at the Raja's misrule as he was moved by the people's patience and peaceful protest.

A settlement was finally arrived at through the arbitration of Andrews and the intervention of the

3. Mahtab, Dassabarsar Orissa, P-70.
Political Agent. The people then withdrew the agitation and returned home. The Raja agreed to pay proper remuneration for services obtained from the people, to withdraw the marriage magan, to restrict the number of shikar parties and arrange them so as not to interfere with the harvest and to cause minimum inconvenience to ryots, to suspend kheda for five years, to pay compensation to those who had been wounded during kheda and shikar. The Political Agent advised the Raja not to persist with the outdated dues like the Sunia and Abhisek Bhetis and Sarbarakari fees, and other salamis from the people; the Raja was required to look into and report to the Political Agent on the alleged oppression of the people by his officers.  

E. THE PRAJAMANDAL MOVEMENT OF 1938.

The arbitration of Andrews staved off a major crisis, but the solution that was effected in 1928 was simply a patch-work. It only treated a few symptoms while the root of all problems, that is, the archaic system, continued unaffected. Several of the long-standing grievances of the people still remained

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outstanding. The ryots did not have any occupancy right on the land they cultivated; they could be ejected any time at the Raja's pleasure despite long possession and enjoyment for generations. Transfer of land was not allowed without sanction of the Durbar. Permission for transfer was given only on payment of a heavy salami and high mutation fees. Relief in the form of remission and suspension of rent in time of distress was never granted. A default in payment of rent meant the confiscation of land which was sold on auction without the balance, if any, over the arrears being refunded. There was no revenue law or any rules of procedure. There was not even the record of rights which existed in some other Orissa States. Naturally the peasants were subjected to great harassment by the Raja's amlahs. Orders dealing with revenue matters were passed and changed with bewildering rapidity, causing confusion to the ignorant ryots. The administration of land revenue was oppressive and disorderly.

The system of taxation was unjust and oppressive. The ordinary land revenue was much higher

2. Ibid., Para-12, Page-197; Para-30, Page-199.
than that in most other Orissa States and also in the neighbouring British territories. There was no fixity of revenue; it could be increased at any time. The principle that rent should not be enhanced before a fresh settlement was not accepted as binding. Besides the land revenue, the people had to pay a good number of other taxes, levies, cesses, salamis, monopolies, magan, rassad, bheti, etc., most of which were obsolete and immoral. Even articles of common use like salt, kerosene, coconut and betel came under the system of monopolies.

A considerable part of the income of the State went to fill the Raja's private purse whereas the State budget regularly made an inexplicably disproportionate allocation of funds for the personal expenses of the Raja and his family with utter neglect of more important items like education, public works, health, communication, etc.

There was no fundamental right of citizenship, no civil liberty, no rule of law, no independent judiciary, no provision for the protection of life and property of the people, no security of tenure of public service, no popular participation in the government, no freedom of speech and association. The State even interfered in the social and religious life of the people and exercised

4. Ibid., PP-10-12.
wide powers of control over them through caste *panchayats* and ecclesiastical courts, which served only to impede the march of progress and as agencies of oppression.¹

There was no end to exploitation of the common man: exploitation by the *Raja* in the form of *magan*, *bethi* and *rassad*; exploitation by the officers in the shape of forced supply of rations; exploitation by the privileged classes like the *sarbarakars* and *Lakhraidars*; and finally, by the money-lenders.²

Such a demoralising and degrading system was tolerated in an age of extreme underdevelopment and ignorance. But with the march of time when the people’s ideas were fast changing, it came to be viewed with increasing detestation and disapproval by the masses who were finally bent upon a large-scale over-hauling of the system that would grant and guarantee them an honourable and dignified existence. Two factors were principally responsible for such a change in the people’s outlook. One was the impact of reforms in the neighbouring territories of British India, and the other was the increasing political consciousness of the people of the State.

The twentieth century had ushered in great social and political reforms in British India. There were remarkable developments in the field of education, public health, transport, land and social reforms. Liberal values were translated into

practice with the introduction of electoral and political reforms and self-government. While such far-reaching developments were taking place just on the other side of the border, Nilgiri remained an antiquated relic of feudalism and exhibited a remarkable backwardness in social, political and economic structure. Raj Nilgiri, the headquarters of the State, was only 15 miles away from the Balasore town, the headquarters of the British district of Balasore; but the State people did not enjoy the benefits of the twentieth century civilised life available to their counterparts in the British territories. The people of the State who maintained close contact with the British territory could not remain cut off from the mainstream of development there, and aspired for those benefits, denied to them. Measures in British India, particularly elective principles and notions of popular government began to be taken as concomitants of modernity by the people of the State. But neither the Raja nor the Political Department of the Government of India did show the slightest interest in introducing any political or constitutional reforms in the state. When reforms did not come from above the people finally came to the conviction that they must come from below. The Orissa States' Enquiry Committee observed in 1939, "The inability of the States' authorities to provide popular and enlightened administration in the area under their charge and the misrule and oppression which widely
Almost from the beginning of the Gandhian movement in British India some persons from Nilgiri had come under the influence of the Indian National Congress and its policies and practices. Khirodananda Devagoshwami, Lakshmihar Mishra, Pranabandhu Agasti associated themselves with the Congress activities during the Non-cooperation Movement in the early 'twenties. In course of time more and more people from the State were getting imbued with political consciousness. They fought simultaneously against the Raja's oppression and also took part in the nationalist movement. It was in Nilgiri, of all the Orissa States, that the Gandhian method of Satyagraha was first applied by the people for the redressal of their grievances in 1928.

In 1930 a number of people from the State took active part in the Civil Disobedience Movement against the British Raj; Bipra Charan Mahapatra, Daityari Prasad Rath, Gajendra Nath De, Golak Nath De, Hadibandhu Sa, Jagannath Rana, Kali Charan Parida, Kasinath Mahapatra, Maheswar Pradhan, Nimai Charan Chowdhury, Pranabandhu Agasti, and Pranabandhu Parida participated in the Salt Satyagraha which took place in the sea-shore of Balasore. Some of these people later on

2. Who's who of Freedom Workers in Orissa, Mayurbhanj, Keonjhar and Balasore Districts.
4. Who's who of Freedom Workers in Orissa, Mayurbhanj, Keonjhar and Balasore Districts.
took the leadership in the first political movement in the State organised by the Prajamandal in the late 1930's. These circumstances establish that the people of Nilgiri were politically more articulate than their counterparts in other Orissa States. They made the State conducive for agitation.

Some prominent Congress leaders of Orissa played a significant role in shaping and influencing the events in Nilgiri. Harekrushna Mahtab was interested in the Nilgiri affairs from the beginning of the Gandhian movement. Some Congress Socialist leaders and a few educated and articulate men from the States evinced keen interest in relieving the people from the burdens of their crushing yoke. They realised that the oppressed people in the Orissa States could not achieve their liberty by crying in wilderness. They ought to be united under a common forum, and their legitimate demands had to be put forth in an organised manner. The long accumulated resentment of the people in all the princely states of Orissa had to be channelised into one organisation. Unless vehement popular pressure was exerted on the authorities, they were not going to yield. With this objective in view was organised in 1931 the Praja Sammilani, also known as the Orissa States' People's Conference, under the guidance of Sarangadhar Das of

1. JOH, Vol-V, No.1, P-27.
Dhenkanal, Radhanath Rath of Athgarh, Madhusudan Patnaik of Tigiria, Gangadhar Mishra of Ranpur. They received the guidance of the All India State's Peoples' Conference, and also help from principal Congress leaders. The first session of the Conference was held at Cuttack on 20 June 1931 under the Presidentship of Bhubananand Das, an eminent legislator of Orissa. It aimed at establishing welfare-oriented representative governments in the States with the help of the rulers and appealed to the rulers for their active cooperation which, of course, did not come.

The Conference remained dormant for the next few years until it was revived and rejuvenated in 1937 when its second session was held at Cuttack on 23 June under the Presidentship of Dr. Pattabhi Sitaramayya. It drew the attention of the Rulers to the widespread distress among their subjects caused by the evil practices of existing rassad, magan and bethi; it strongly urged upon them the total abolition of these. It also appealed to them to confer on their subjects forthwith the right of occupancy on their holdings and fundamental rights of citizenship.

3. Prajatantra, 29th June 1931.
5. JNMML, AISPC File No. 127, P-365.
This conference constituted a Committee consisting of Satish Chandra Bose, Balwant Ray Mehta, Braja Sundar Das, along with Sarangadhar Das acting as convenor, to investigate and report on the prevailing illegalities and repressions in the States. The conference also authorised its delegates to form People's Associations in their respective states.¹

On 6 June 1938 the Working Committee of the States' People's Conference reconstituted the Enquiry Committee which was formed a year ago at the second session of the conference. The new Committee was headed by Harekrushna Mahtab and had two other members, Lalmohan Patnaik and B.R. Mehta. It began its work from June 1938. In great number of the States people came forward to give evidence before the Enquiry Committee. In a sitting of the Committee on 22 June 1938 the people of Nilgiri made detailed revelation of the lamentable situation therein, their genuine agrarian grievances, the exploitation and oppression of the Raja and his minions.² The Rulers on the other hand assumed an inimical attitude towards the Committee and adopted repressive measures towards those who deposed before the Committee.

1. Indian Annual Register, 1937, Vol-I, P-358.
At this point of time the Ruler of Nilgiri created a tense situation in his State by imposing heavy fines on people for the alleged offence of interdining on a social occasion. Some enlightened young men of Nilgiri being inspired by the message of the Indian National Congress had formed an association called Yuvak Sakha Samiti (Young Friends' Association) in the village of Ayodhya in 1932. At that time it was a non-political organisation, its main purpose being to cultivate and propagate Gandhian ideas like spinning, contributing labour for socially constructive activities, and removing untouchability. The Ruler, however, took exception to this. On receiving information of the meeting the Inspector of Police with a posse of constables and Chowkidars came to the village, rounded up several members of the association, and ordered a summary punishment. Two of its leaders, Pranabandhu Agasti and Balaram Raj, were subjected to inhuman torture, so that the people would not dare to organise themselves and agitate. But the youth of that village continued to hold their meeting every year on 2 May to commemorate the anniversary of the incident. In 1937 on the same day was arranged an intercaste dinner which elicited angry reaction from the Durbar. The organisers of the meeting

were accused of infringement of caste rules, having
dined in the same row with the untouchables. Cases
were instituted against them and they were meted out
punishment in the form of fines.¹

Punishment could not dampen the spirit of
the youth. The next year on the same date, i.e., on
2 May 1938, they again assembled at the village and
denounced the vindictive attitude of the Ruler. The
Durbar, thereupon, passed two regulations asking for
the registration of the association, and making
mandatory permission for holding public meetings. Few
days after the proclamation of these regulations three
leaders - Pranabandhu Agasti, Giridhari Panda, and
Chaitanya Mishra - addressed a meeting without taking
prior permission of the State authorities, and were
quickly arrested at Dantur.² Apprehending further
trouble from the people the Ruler promptly passed another
regulation on 21 May 1938 prohibiting demonstration of
any type in the State. But in defiance two non-violent
processions were organised on 27 and 29 May. The
processionists were lathi-charged, their leaders were
arrested and tried for violating prohibitory orders.
The Yuvak Sakha Samiti was declared unlawful and the
Congress Socialist newspaper, 'Krushak', was banned
in the State.³

¹ States' Report, P-90.
² S. Rout, op.cit., P-69.
³ Ibid., PP-70-72.
The situation in Nilgiri took a new turn in June 1938 when, with the object of carrying on the struggle for the redressal of economic grievances and the attainment of elementary civil and political rights, the Yuvak Sakha Samiti formed the State Prajamandal at the initiative of Harekrushna Mahtab and Sarangadhar Das. Kailash Chandra Mohanty, a lawyer, and Bamanlal Das were elected its first President and Secretary, respectively.1 It received the patronage of the Congress and Socialist leaders who sympathised with the cause of the State's people. Sarangadhar Das, the Secretary of the Orissa States' People's Conference, organised a party of volunteers to carry on propaganda in the State.2 Due to the harassment by the Durbar the Prajamandal leaders of Nilgiri found it difficult to maintain their headquarters within the State. They made a village of the adjoining Balasore district on the border of the State, named Gadiamal, their headquarters. A training centre was opened there under the guidance of Gour Chandra Das, a Congress Socialist, and trained volunteers were sent to Nilgiri from that village.3

The Prajamandal activists prepared a charter of thirty-one demands and submitted it to the State authorities. They made it clear to the Ruler that peaceful Satyagraha.

public meetings and processions would go on until and unless their demands were met. The Ruler failed to realise the gravity of the situation. He considered the impending struggle as a passing storm, and imagined that he could easily face it by following a strong-arm method. The State machinery was therefore geared up to action to meet the people's challenge.

Defying prohibitory orders thousands of people spontaneously came forward and held meetings and processions demanding the redressal of grievances and protesting against the repressive policy of the Durbar. Early in July 1938 on the day of the Car Festival the Prajamandal organised a large public meeting criticising the State administration, led a procession demanding liberal agrarian legislation, abolition of feudal dues and the introduction of responsible government. The Durbar reacted violently and took resort to strong repressive measures. On 5 July 1938 the peaceful processionists were mercilessly lathi-charged, 116 of them were arrested, most of them were packed into the small jail of the State. When the jail overflowed with satyagrahis the only Middle English school at the State headquarters was requisitioned into service. Extremely heavy fines were imposed on the participants of the movement; many were sentenced to several terms of

imprisonment. The condition of those who were taken into custody was very much deplorable. They were beaten in public by the police force as well as hired goondas inside the jail and the impoverished lock-up in the M.E. school house. Quite a large number of them suffered bleeding wounds, some fainted, some having been beaten mercilessly were thrown into unfrequented roadsides or the forest at the dead of the night. The diet supplied in the lock-up was abominable.¹ Despite all these repression and provocations the satyagrahis strictly adhered to non-violence.

The movement took a new turn when the State authorities tried to collect the fines by attaching the properties of the agitators. Popular involvement in the struggle became so intense that the Durbar found it difficult to collect the fines, because if any one's property was to be confiscated thousands of people surrounded his house, and the police could not dare to remove any of his property. One such incident took place in the village of Machhuapatna. When the State police led by its Superintendent reached the village to attach the properties of two leaders - Kshetra Mohan Behera, and Krushna Behera - thousands of people assembled there and squatted around the houses of their affected colleagues.² Both the parties, the police

2. S. Rout, op.cit., PP-75-76.
force headed by Superintendent Ganganarayan and the satyagrahis led by Banamali Das and Brundaban Sarengi, camped in the village for about a week.

Unable to exercise his authority effectively with the help of his own police force, the Raja asked the Government of Orissa for police help. At that time Orissa was governed by a popular Congress ministry headed by Biswanath Das. The Provincial Government was convinced of the Raja's evil intentions and did not want to be an indirect instrument of oppression. So, it refused to give any police help to the Raja for the suppression of the popular movement. Thereafter, upon the Raja's request the Political Agent, Major R.L. Bazelgette, visited Nilgiri and brought with him police from the neighbouring State of Mayurbhanj.

The Political Agent accompanied by the Raja visited the village of Machhuapatna. Bazelgette was highly impressed by the peaceful and disciplined behaviour of the agitators. Persuaded by the Political Agent, the Prajamandal agreed to a negotiation which started between the Dewan of Nilgiri and the Political Agent on one side, and the President and Secretary of

the State Prajamandal, on the other. Kailash Chandra Mohanty, the President of the Prajamandal, demanded the release of all political prisoners, remission of all fines, and the restoration of normalcy as a precondition to a peaceful settlement. While the negotiation was going on, the Political Agent left for his headquarters at Sambalpur, and the Raja turned down the demands of the Prajamandal. Thus the first attempt for a compromise ended in failure because of the Raja's intransigence.\(^1\)

The situation then quickly turned for the worse when on 3 August 1938 the Secretary of the Prajamandal, Banamali Das, a popular young leader, was arrested under section 124A for sedition.\(^2\) This was followed by further intensification of the struggle, and more frequent demonstrations. On 10 August a procession was taken out in contravention of the State's regulations. The police opened fire on it, one person was killed and a great number was injured. Over ninety people had been tried on charges of leading unlawful procession and sentenced mostly to six months' imprisonment and very heavy fines.\(^3\) Two days later the police made lathi charge and opened fire on another batch of satyagrahis. This resulted in one death and injuries to several others.\(^4\)

\(^1\) Diary of Political Events, op. cit., P-19.
\(^2\) Indian Annual Register, 1938, Vol-II, P-297.
\(^3\) Ibid.
\(^4\) Ibid.
The enraged people boycotted the Raja, his family members, the officers and government offices. The struggle reached its climax when about ten thousand people assembled under the leadership of Kailash Chandra Mohanty to launch civil disobedience movement against the Durbar. Further deterioration of the situation was prevented by the timely intervention of Mahtab. The Political Agent, Major Bazelgette, the Collector of Balasore, Solomon, and Mahtab tried to restore normalcy in the State. After much discussion among K.C. Mohanty, the Dewan of the State and Mahtab a settlement was finally arrived at. The Raja then released all political prisoners, granted full amnesty and repealed all special laws and regulations. The Prajamandal withdrew the excommunication of the Raja and his family. On 29 August 1938 the agitation was suspended.

The people gained certain concessions following the settlement. They were granted civil liberty and the right to put forth their grievances before the Durbar in a constitutional manner. The Prajamandal was recognised as the representative body of the people. The people got the right to hold meetings and organise processions. This was a remarkable achievement because by the year 1938 none of the Orissa States, except Nilgiri and Mayurbhanj,

granted civil liberties like freedom of speech and association to their people. Similarly, nowhere were the Prajamandals given recognition by that time except in Nilgiri.\textsuperscript{1} Out of a total of thirty-one demands put forth by the Prajamandal, the Durbar conceded eighteen. Bethi, magan, and rassad were abolished; stringent forest laws were relaxed; several inconvenient taxes were abolished; State interference on social matters was to cease, and codification of State laws to be taken up.\textsuperscript{2} The Raja, however, did not concede the important political demands of the Prajamandal for the formation of representative assembly and popular control over the State budget.\textsuperscript{3} Even without them the settlement was acclaimed as a triumph of the people; this added to the stature of the Prajamandal.

THE CONGRESS POLICY TOWARDS THE STATES.

Though the agrarian social structure in the State was conducive to an insurrectionary movement and the people of the State were the real actors in the Prajamandal movement, the success of the agitation of 1938 was to a great extent due to the Congress Party's active support and guidance. Till 1937 the Congress policy towards the States had been one of neutrality and

2. States' Report, P-54.
non-interference, Gandhi expressed his helplessness to support the States' people and simply hoped that good sense will guide the princes to introduce reforms.  

Though the leftist elements in the Congress, including Jawaharlal Nehru, advocated a positive policy towards the States and criticised Gandhi's trusteeship theory, most other prominent leaders were not in a mood to carry on simultaneous struggle against the British and the princely Rulers. They were of the view that agitation for democratic institutions in the States should sprout from the soil itself and not be transplanted from outside. At the Haripura session in 1938 the Congress expressed moral support and sympathy to the people's struggles in the states, but decided against launching direct action in the States in the name and under the auspices of the Congress. It however permitted individual Congressmen to render assistance to the States' people's movement in their personal capacities.

The months following the Haripura Congress witnessed unprecedented awakening in a number of princely states, including Nilgiri, and the greater involvement of individual Congress leaders as well as the Congress Party

In such movements. Because of its proximity to the centre of Congress activity in the Balasore district Nilgiri became an ideal ground for the experimentation of Congress principles and practices.

The changed situation after the Government of India Act of 1935 came into operation was mainly responsible for the intensification of the people's movements in the princely states and the increasing involvement of the Congress in the States' affairs. The federal scheme of the Government of India Act 1935 gave greater weightage and right of nomination to the princes. Though the population of the States constituted one-fourth of the total population of India, in the Upper House of the federal legislature, i.e., Council of State, the States had been provided 104 seats out of a total of 260 seats (40% of the total number of seats), and in its Lower House, i.e., the House of the Assembly the States had been provided 125 seats out of a total of 375 (33.3% of the total number of seats). While the representatives of British India were to be elected by the people, those of the princely states were to be nominated by the rulers. The princes were left free to decide whether they would join the federation or not. Federation was to be formed only if a sufficient number of princes opted for it. The people of the princely states were denied the right of representation and enjoyment of civil liberties in the
Act of 1935. By the middle of 1937 popular ministries had been formed in the provinces of British India under the Act of 1935; but the States' people were still groaning under autocratic governments. Under these circumstances the leaders of the States' people launched their movements for the establishment of responsible governments and guarantee of civil liberties in the States.

So far as the Congress was concerned, it criticised the federation scheme because of undue and undemocratic weightage given to the princes, which sealed the Party's prospect of sending representatives to the federal legislature from the States. The Congress, therefore, vigorously supported the agitation of the states' people's associations which were known as the Prajamandals and were springing up like mushrooms practically all over princely India under the Congress inspiration. During 1936 and 1937 there was deeper interaction between the National Congress and the States' people's movements. And by the end of 1938 the Prajamandal movement had in fact been inextricably linked with the nationalist movement of the Mughalbandi part of Orissa; under its pressure the British Raj was fast losing its legitimacy. This largely accounted for the success of the agitation of 1938 in Nilgiri.

1. *India Tomorrow*, 30 April, 1939.
Though the Prajamandal agitations of the Orissa States were basically the movements of the States' people against their autocratic rulers, yet the prominent Congress leaders of Orissa such as H.K. Mahtab, Nabakrushna Choudhury and Malati Choudhury took keen interest in those movements. The Nilgiri agitation was orchestrated from British India; the State Prajamandal had its headquarters in the Balasore district; it received necessary guidance, training and technique of satyagraha from the Congress leaders. Some of its prominent leaders themselves were also Congressmen. Congressmen and their sympathisers operated chiefly through this mask organisation, called the Prajamandal. Workers trained in special camps went into the State to preach the gospel of the Congress and educate the people in the art of satyagraha. When the agitation was at its peak and the Ruler was in a disadvantageous position the refusal of the Congress Ministry of Orissa to supply police help to the Raja and to introduce the Indian States' Protection Act, better known as the Princes' Protection Act, within the Province of Orissa served only to strengthen the morale of the agitators. The Congress Working Committee at the national level did a great service to the cause of the struggle by adopting a resolution at its

2. Lalmohan Patnaik, Resurrected Orissa, P-85.
Wardha meeting on 23 July 1938, expressing their sympathy for the people of Nilgiri. Finally, the settlement that terminated the struggle could be possible through the efforts and influence of Harekrushna Mahtab.

AGITATION OF 1942.

After 1938 events in Nilgiri almost followed the pattern of the policy and practices of the Indian National Congress. Following the Congress decision, the State Prajamandal branded World War II as an imperialistic war and endorsed the Congress Party's demand for freedom on the outbreak of the War in September 1939. Some Prajamandal Workers actively participated in the Individual Civil Disobedience Movement. Kailash Chandra Mohanty was arrested for making an anti-war speech at Ambodiha and was sentenced to six months' rigorous imprisonment. Other participants in the Individual Civil Disobedience Movement were Bhagaban Puhan and Chintamani Naik.

Notwithstanding the British Government's efforts to strengthen the grip of the Rulers on their people.

2. Balasore Records, 1940-42; OSA, Accn. No. 60, VMCC, BCSCD, Move File of 1940, Letter No. 698/C dated 16 December 1940, From the Collector of Balasore to the Chief Secretary of Orissa.
subjects by arming them with stringent regulations under the Defence of India Rules, the impact of the Quit India Movement of 1942 on the people of Nilgiri was phenomenal. Influenced by Gandhi's call of 'do-or-die', the people started boycotting the bazaars and the public servants, burning the dresses of policemen and Chowkidars, and organizing mass demonstrations, singing revolutionary songs and shouting nationalist slogans. For this they suffered terrible repression by the Durbar. While participating in the Tudigadia mob uprising in September 1942, some people of Nilgiri lost their lives in the police firing.

At the State headquarters the situation was more tense. Processionists from different parts of the State used to merge daily at Raj Nilgiri. There was no end to the people's urge to fight though a good number of them was regularly taken into custody. When the situation threatened to get out of control, the Political Agent, D.H. Biscoe, came over to the State and studied the situation. On his advice eleven arrested leaders were released on the understanding that they would persuade the people to withdraw the boycott, but instead of doing that they excited the people further, and escaped beyond...

2. Balasore Records, OSA, Accn. No. 57, WWCC, Confidential Letter from the Collector of Balasore to the Chief Secretary of Orissa.
the State borders and kept on directing the people to continue the struggle from there. As the situation was worsening daily, the assistance of the Joint Armed Police Force of the Eastern States Agency was requisitioned. Collective fines amounting to Rs. 78,154/- were imposed by the Ruler. The amount was reduced to Rs. 35,123/- later on.1

While collecting these punitive fines untold miseries were inflicted on the general public. Merciless beating was adopted as the common mode of operation; firing was occasionally resorted to. Properties were looted on the pretext of collecting fines, men were subjected to inhuman torture and humiliation; honour and dignity of women were crushed, and the religious sensitivity of the people was treated with scant regard by these brutal mercenaries.2 Literally the Durbar was able to 'plunder' Rs. 32,425-3-0 as collective fines. Three men lost their lives as a result of firing from military planes.3 The situation was finally brought under control towards the end of September 1942.4

The events of August-September 1942 even moved the Political Department of the Government of India. On the basis of the report of the Military

3. Ibid., P-123.
Intelligence Branch Raja Kishorechandra Mardraj

Harichandran was divested of his administrative powers on 1 November 1942 for his inability to provide good administration to the State. He remained in exile at Ranchi for four years.

PRE-MERGER UNREST, 1947.

The British Government was well aware of Raja Kishorechandra's unpopularity and the fact that he would have to face agitation from Congressmen and State agitators in Orissa and in his State, which he would be unable to control. Yet the Raja was restored to his power in July 1946 to enable him to join the Union of Orissa and Chhattisgarh States which was formed on the eve of the lapse of British Paramountcy in India.

Kishorechandra seemed to have learnt nothing from experience during his four years' exile. He returned to his State with stern determination to suppress the Prajamandal Party and the movement sponsored by it to secure responsible government in the State. He instigated the aboriginals against the Prajamandal and successfully

convinced a section of the tribal people that it was the Prajamandal which was responsible for all their sufferings, their inferior position in the economic and social life of the State and also for all wrongs done to them in the past. These credulous Adibasis became tools in the Ruler's hand and created havoc in the villages. Besides this group of loyalist tribals, the Raja also recruited a number of Gurkha armed guards in his police force and obtained from the Eastern States Agency Joint Police Force two platoons of armed police, consisting of Punjabi Muslims.

The Prajamandal party, on the other hand, knowing that independence of India was imminent, began making preparations to launch a struggle for wresting power from the Ruler. Their immediate objective was to set up a provisional government on the border of the State, to capture thana officers and other State officials, to raid the State granaries, and resort to social boycott of State employees and picketting in order to paralyse the administration.

When both sides, the Durbar and the Prajamandal, were determined to achieve their ends by

2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
their own methods and preparations, a clash was inevitable. This clash became acute in the month of October 1947. While the Prajamandal was carrying on its activities for the capture of power from the Ruler, the band of tribals sponsored by the Durbar counteracted their activities by forcibly taking possession of lands belonging to the non-aboriginal people. Under the leadership of a convicted criminal, Sandhya Singh, who had been released on 15 August, 1947, the loyalist tribals moved about in batches in different parts of the State armed with bows and arrows, looting paddy from the fields. They announced that paddy lands belonged to them, and threatened to injure and kill anybody who would dare to resist them. On 29 October 1947 the Prajamandal workers brought two dead bodies to the Balasore town and hospitalised two persons who had been seriously wounded. A state of anarchy prevailed throughout the State since the end of October. The State police remained indifferent to the acts of terrorism and aggression by the loyalists.  

On 31 October 1947 when the District Magistrate of Balasore contacted the Ruler about the disturbances, the latter pleaded that he was unable to put down the disorder with the small force at his disposal. But this plea was unfounded. The Raja could have, if he sincerely

desired, successfully put down the lawlessness with the help of the Gurkha armed guards and the two platoons of armed police which he had recruited from the Eastern States Joint Police Force. But he did not do this deliberately as he had identified himself with the tribals against the local Prajamandal, his tendency clearly being to divide and rule as long as he could hold on. T. Satyanarayan, the Officer on Special Duty in the Eastern States Agency, informed the Government of India that "The Ruler who is himself the principal trouble-maker in setting up the Adibasis against the Prajamandal had some qualms of heart in acting against his own hirelings." 

The Raja's inactivity helped the situation further deteriorate. The whole administration completely collapsed; the three seniormost officers of the State - the Dewan, the Assistant Dewan and the Civil Officer - were absent on leave throughout this period, and the head of the State police, the Superintendent, was under notice of discharge. All sorts of communications - postal, telegraphic, and vehicular - broke down due to the prevailing lawlessness. No one's life and property

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2. Ibid., D.O. No. 2189 of 29 October 1947, T. Satyanarayan to C.C. Desai.
3. Ibid., D.O. No. 1017 of 15 November 1947, Satyanarayan to Desai.
except those of the Raja were safe.

The Prajamandal party in a meeting held on 1 November 1947 decided to serve an ultimatum on the Raja that unless he was able to put down the violent activities of the aborigines within thirty-six hours, the Prajamandal workers would take any action they deemed necessary to restore peace and order, and that the people would take steps to place the administration in the hands of their representatives. It also decided to form a free provisional government under the leadership of Kailash Chandra Mohanty with effect from 4 November 1947. Meanwhile the Eastern States Union, of which Nilgiri was a member, intervened. Two members of the Board of Rulers of the Union - the Rajas of Baud and Khairagarh - visited Nilgiri on 3 November and persuaded the Prajamandal to arrive at a solution through negotiation. Although the Prajamandal had earlier decided to form an independent government of its own, at the two Rajas' instance it resumed negotiation with the Ruler for the formation of a responsible government. The Raja seemed to be cooperative; by a public proclamation he undertook to grant popular government under Kailash Chandra Mohanty who was invited to form the ministry on 14 November.

The whole situation took a different turn on 12 November when there occurred a serious clash between

2. Ibid.
the tribal loyalists and the Communist Party workers in the State. The Communist Party in Nilgiri had been started as an underground organisation by Banamali Das, the first secretary of the State Prajamandal, in 1940, the year in which he was expelled from the Prajamandal for communistic ideas. Das was arrested in 1940 under sections 38 and 39 of the Defence of Indian Rules and remained in jail up to 1945. But the Communist Party started operating publicly since the lifting of the ban in 1942. The Communists played two important roles simultaneously: on the one hand they joined hands with the Prajamandal against the Raja, on the other hand, they championed the cause of the landless labourers, mainly the tribals against the exploitation of the privileged classes. Their role in the clash between the Prajamandal and the loyalist tribals further complicated the situation. Though they in no way supported the Raja, "ideologically they were sympathetic to the economic interests of the landless tribals many of whom supported the Raja." Unlike the Raja, the Communists were guided by no communal considerations, majority of their rank and file came from the tribal population. They were determined to face the loyalist tribals even by the use of arms. In one such

3. Ibid.
clash that took place between them on 12 November fire-arms were used and several persons were killed. On the same day the loyalist aboriginals plundered two villages and set fire to a number of houses.¹

By this time there were three distinct factions of the population, each caught up in the vortex of an ominous civil war; the Prajamandal which had in its cadre rich aboriginals was anti-Raja; secondly, the Communists whose followers were the poor aborigines, they were anti-Raja, anti-British and against exploitation by the upper classes; and finally, the loyalist tribals who supported the Raja and opposed the Prajamandal as well as the Communists.

The Raja tried to use the unsettled conditions in the State to further his own cause, and started fishing in troubled waters. On 13 November he changed his decision of installing a popular government, and informed Kailash Chandra Mohanty that instead of heading the responsible government as agreed upon earlier he would be one of the three ministers, and the other two ministers would be selected by the Raja. This resulted in the termination of negotiations with the Raja for a responsible government. Consequently, disturbances again started, and on the same day a large village, named Ayodhya, was completely gutted.²

The Government of Orissa was seriously concerned about the worsening situation in Nilgiri and was apprehensive that the tribal population in other areas might get affected by the violent activities of their counterparts in Nilgiri. It kept the Government of India informed of the developments in the State. The Government of India was equally apprehensive of the tribal outbreak in Nilgiri. A senior government functionary, V.P. Menon, who was at that time Secretary of the Ministry of States, observed later on:

"The greatest concern to the Government of India was the possibility that outbreaks among the aborigines might spread to those neighbouring areas in which they formed a considerable portion of the population. They are easily excited, and being accustomed to the use of bows and arrows, are difficult for the unarmed plainsmen to withstand. Troubles with the aborigines had often broken out in the past and had cost considerable effort and expense to put down. It appeared that the time had come to take firm and immediate action if chaos was to be prevented".1

After due consideration the Government of India authorised the Government of Orissa by a telegram on 8 November 1947 to take over the administration of Nilgiri.

1. V.P. Menon, Story of the Integration of the Indian States, P-147.
and restore law and order. The Government of Orissa, however, had deferred its intervention since it was hopeful of a settlement through the on-going negotiations between the Prajamandal Party and the Ruler. But the failure of the negotiations on 13 November and the prevailing chaotic condition finally compelled the Government of Orissa to intervene as directed by the Dominion Government. On 14 November the District Magistrate of Balasore proceeded to Raj Nilgiri with an adequate force to take over the administration of the State. The Raja voluntarily handed over the administration without any resistance and issued a proclamation expressing his gratitude to the Government of India for coming to his help, and asking all his subjects and State officials to extend their fullest support and cooperation to the new administration. The Raja ordered the Eastern States Union Force stationed at his headquarters to be disarmed and sent back to Calcutta. The Collector of Balasore promised to administer the State with strict impartiality and 'to deal out justice to all sections of the public and all citizens without fear or favour', and to give special attention to the grievances of the aborigines.

Nilgiri was administered as an occupied territory of the Orissa Government till 1 January 1948 when the occupation was legalised by the merger of all Orissa States with the Province.