

# **BrajaKishorDhall: A Pioneer of DhenkanalGarjat Movement**

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## **ABSTRACT**

At the beginning of the twentieth century, the National movement against the British Government Organised by the Congress party gained momentum in British India. But its impact on the Garjat States of Odisha feeble at the initial state. This movement was due to an iron-curtain put by the oppressive rulers' conditions and the ruthless efforts to stop the infiltration of the Congress movement's idea. In due course, it had its profound effect in the Garjat movement when there was the growth of consciousness among the state's people. The people of the state, being inspired by nationalism, fought against their respective ruler's oppressive rule. The people in these states fought by forming the association of the people.

BrajaKishorDhall was born a leader of men whose lifetime contribution for Dhenkanal during the pre and post-independent years left an indelible mark in people's memory. He was one among such leaders who have dedicated their lives in a relentless struggle against the oppressive and injustice of the ruling chiefs of the Garjat states. This study aims to highlight the contribution of BrajaKishorDhall in the DhenkanalGarjat movement. This paper highlights the miserable condition of women. To establish the theory, primary and secondary sources may be consulted and interpreted judiciously.

**KEYWORDS:** *DhenkanalGarjat state, Dhenkanal High School, BrajaKishor, Dhenkanal misrule, Miserable status of the women, "ChhaDesaLalBahini".*

**Introduction:** The present district Dhenkanal, the centrally located district of Odisha, is its name to the headquarter town of Dhenkanal. It was formed as a separate district after the princely states' merger on 1<sup>st</sup> January 1948 AD. The district consisted of six ex-feudatory states viz-Dhenkanal, Hindol, Athamalik, Angul, Talcher, and Pallahara. It was surrounded by Jajpur sub-division and Athagarh sub-division of Cuttack district, Nayagarh sub-division of Puri district, Boud sub-division of the district of Boud-Kandhamal a few parts of Sonepur sub-division of Bolangir district, Banei sub-division of Sundargarh district on the north and Keonjhar sub-division and Champa sub-division of Keonjhar district in the east. Dhenkanal is full of mountain peaks. The dense jungle of the state adds to its beauty.

Dhenkanal was a state headed by the Raja. His name was Shankar Pratap Singh Deo Mahindra Bahadur. The Raja was the center of all sources of power. The ruler had disliked his subjects. Monopolies were introduced to the daily necessities of life. There were forced extraction of revenue from the people in the shape of bethi (to work without wage), Begari (to carry the luggage of the Raja or his office without payments) Magana (Forcible payment of gift in weddings and other functions in the palace), Rasad (to supply free ration to the camps of the Raja or his officials), Bheti (to offer a gift on sunia) were collected from the people both physical and capital punishment. With the condition of flood, famine, and epidemic, the poor peasants were crushed under these intolerable taxes and extractions.

Dhenkanal High School was the first to be inflamed by the nationalistic ideas. On every Saturday, meetings were organized among the students where discussions were carried on against the activities of the Dhenkanal administration. The tension among the students also increased for the oppression of Dhenkanal Raj-Sarkar.

BrajaKishorDhall had dedicated his lives to the people against the inhuman king of DhenkanalGarjat state. He even sacrificed a police officer's alluring profession and jumped into the popular Prajamandal movement to protest innocent subjects' exploitation by the state machinery. During the Prajamandal campaign, he played a crucial role in organizing volunteer crops to accelerate public opinion prices. After independence, he did not retire from public life. Instead, he played a vital role in the overall development of the Dhenkanal district involving him with various organizations.

**CONTEXT:** Odisha is a state, preferably in size today. But in ancient time, it was a vast territory which extended from Ganga in the north to the Godavari in the south. From Bay of Bengal in the East to the plateau Amarkantak in

Madhya Pradesh in the west. However, according to the ruling dynasties' changing fortunes like Somavamshis, Gangas, Mughals, Marathas, and Britishers, the territory's size often changed. In the modern period, many events happened in Orissa and India during British rule. Two types of movement occurred in Orissa, such as nationalist and the other was regional movement.

The movement in the Garjat states of Odisha should not be judged as an isolated incident away from the National movement. The Indian freedom struggle had its positive repercussions on these tiny principalities.<sup>1</sup> The states Garjat movement awakened national consciousness among the people of states. It also spared a new consciousness of unity all over India.<sup>2</sup> During the British Rule, the Garjat states of Orissa enjoyed sovereign power. The kings of these areas became repressive, and exploitation became a characteristic feature of all Garjat states.<sup>3</sup> There were 26 Garjat states in Orissa. Although the British Government imposed several restrictions by 'Sands' and 'Treaty of Engagements,' they did not interface in the internal administration of such states in practice. They were satisfied with the tributes and the loyalty of the states. So, the rulers of the states became all-powerful and oppressive.<sup>4</sup>

Dhenkanal was a state headed by Raja that was the center of all sources of power. The post of the Raja was one who committed no errors and that he was regarded as the moving God.<sup>6</sup> The reign of Raja Shankar Pratap Singh Deo Mahindra Bahadur's gross misrule and oppressions, barbarous cruelties, systematically practiced on men and women, the perversity of the ruler and some of his brothers.<sup>7</sup> The people of Dhenkanal were exploited through taxation like Bethi, Begari, Rasad, and Magan. Finally, when the people's exploitation became unbearable, they were captivated by a burning desire to revolt. Their accumulated hatred and anger against the ruling princes were manifested in Garjat movement.<sup>8</sup>

Braja Kishor was born in the village Ganjeidihi of Dhenkanal district on 4<sup>th</sup> April 1912. He belonged to a rich farmer's family. His father was Bholeswar Dhall, and his Mother's name was Janha Devi.<sup>9</sup> Braja Kishor started education at the village school. He was admitted into Dhenkanal high school after completing his study at the village school.<sup>10</sup> In those days, the headmaster of Dhenkanal High School was Rajendra Lal Dutta. He was an ideal teacher of west Bengal. Besides him, Harihar Mohapatra and Basudev Mohapatra was doing teachership there Braja Kishor, and other students were inspired by the Nationalistic feelings inculcated by these teachers.<sup>11</sup>

While reading in matriculation, Braja Kishor's study came to an end in 1929. It has two reasons. Firstly, his father wanted that he would help him in his work by returning home. Secondly, the king's torture and immorality created revolt in his mind. That's why he was looking for a chance to assemble people against him being free from education. Braja Kishor gave his hundred percent service to the people after returning to the village.<sup>12</sup> In 1930, Braja Kishor got married to Indumati, the daughter of Dinabandhu Mangaraj, the noted landlord as well as the honorary magistrate of Banki.<sup>13</sup>

In 1933, Braja Kishor entered the police service of the Dhenkanal state. He was unwillingly appointed as a sub-inspector in the Sadar police station. He continued this job for two years.<sup>14</sup> The reign of Shankar Pratap brought misery to the people. The people felt breathless by his administration. He behaved like a dictator being involved in different types of justice, torture, exploitation bethi, begari, arson, collection of illegal taxes, etc. Besides this, rape, imprisonment in false cases, and humiliation for people in the state and outsider increased in this time. Braja Kishor had witnessed much-untold torture and inhuman activities while he was in the Sadar police station.<sup>15</sup> It was an incident of 1933; Labanya was a young woman belonging to a gentleman's family of Ganjeidihi village. While going to her friend's house through the Dhenkanal town one day, she was dragged to the royal palace by the king's faithful followers. Although her family members got this news, they remained silent in fear of punishment. After that, Labanya became a thing of enjoyment.<sup>16</sup>

Braja Kishor could not satisfy his job. During his two years of service, he witnessed many unjustified and harsh punishments given to the people, even for minor offenses. Therefore, he decided to quit the job. After he left the job, he set his foot on the path of sacrifice and protest.<sup>17</sup>

The most crucial aspect of Braja Kishor was the formation of a strong group of volunteers to conduct the Prajamandal movement smoothly. At first, they said a group had been formed gathering forty young men of his village. They had been trained adequately with a drill, and they had taken Oath for sacrificing their own lives. The volunteers had been given the training of music relating songs of national feelings in order to create inspiration and eagerness for the movement. They used lathi in their hands by wearing white half pants and half shirts. In the course of time, they had been taught different skills for Satyagraha's conduct. They had been known as "Chhadesh Red army" in Dhenkanal and nearby Garjat states.<sup>18</sup>

The Prajamandal movement during the king's rule had brought a golden chance for Braja Kishor. At first, he called for a meeting in his own village Ganjeidihi. It was the day of Gamhapunima more than 500 people of Ganjeidihi and Jhumpudia gathered there. It was decided to make Prajamandal stronger than before. Braja Kishor's village and 80 other villages of the nearby area were known as "Chhadesh." It was the most important meeting. The

people advised him to oppose the torture of the king strongly without any fear. BrajaKishor became the president for Prajamandal in the Chhadesa area; GhanashyamParida and Gourahari Panda were elected as joint secretary. Thereafter another meeting was held near Paschimeswar Temple under the presidentship of Braja Kishor; more than ten thousand people of Chhadesh, Athagarh, and Tigiria gathered there.<sup>19</sup>

BrajaKishor became a target of the Raja for his Prajamandal activities. Family members who also suffered from police atrocities constant raids on their house forced them to leave their village to shelter their relatives.<sup>20</sup> He was arrested on 08.11.1938 from Gholpur camp of Banki under an extradition warrant. The Raja of Dhenkanal had been issuing such warrants with false charges to punish the innocent leaders. A police officer named Rabi Ghosh arrested him and sent him to Banki jail. He stayed in the Banki jail till 13.11.1938.<sup>21</sup>

BrajaKishorDhall and other leaders' dreams came true when the Dhenkanal state merged with Orissa's province. A bigger Orissa came into being with the amalgamation of all Garjat states. Now the people got relief from feudal oppression.<sup>22</sup> The constructive activities of BrajaKishorDhall continued even after independence. He became a member of the state council. He occupied the first chairman's glorious position, and his wife Indumati Devi was elected as the only women member of ZillaParishad of undividedDhenkanal. While holding this critical position, BrajaKishortried to bring about the overall development of Dhenkanal in general and "Chhadesh" in particular. He founded schools, provided irrigation facilities in this area. He tried his best to introduce regular bus services, electric supply, and construct roads.<sup>23</sup>

As a writer, BrajaKishor became famous when his autobiography was published in 1980. This book, "BhulibuNahi" in Oriya, created a sensation. It was a historical record of the inhuman activities of the Dhenkanal Raja and the heroic sage of the freedom fighter of Dhenkanal state. For this outstanding work, he was awarded by the Orissa Sahitya Academy in 1980, by the JadumaniSahityaSansada in 1981, and also by the District writer's federation of Dhenkanal in 1983.<sup>24</sup>

**Conclusion:** The great heroes of the freedom struggle have started to disappear one by one, some of them recognized, and some never discovered. The last chapter of BrajaKishor's life closed on 17<sup>th</sup> June 2001 in his village Ganjeidihi; Dhenkanal lost an eminent son for her soil, a multi-faceted personality. His contribution to the freedom struggle is yet to be remembered. He was a freedom fighter and social worker and literary genius, an excellent speaker, a good organizer. He was an epitome of courage, sacrifice, and a man of spiritual taste, who preached and practiced the principle of simple living and high thinking. He was a rare personality, the son of the Dhenkanal state, and the son of Odisha.

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