

Kameshwar Singh and Darbhanga House Relationship with leaders of Indian National Movement

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Kameshwar Singh was the son of Maharaja Sir Rameshwar Singh Gauda. He was the king of Darbhanga Raj. Kameshwar Singh was born on 28 November 1907 at Darbhanga in Maithil Brahmin family. He became the king of Darbhanga Raj in 1929. In 1930-31 he was a member of the team that visited London during the First & Second Round Table Conference. He was a member of the Council of State for years 1933-1946, member of the Constituent Assembly of India for years 1947-1952. He was elevated from C.I.E. and made a Knight Commander of the Most Eminent Order of the Indian Empire on 1 January 1933. After the Nepal Bihar earthquake in 1934 he started construction of a fort called Raj Quila. British Raj announced to confer the title of "Native Prince" to Maharaja Kameshwar Singh. The contract was given to a Calcutta-based firm and work was on in full swing in 1939-40. Three sides of the fort were constructed with all the protective measures.

Darbhanga town was situated on the bank of the little Bagmati river. The population of Darbhanga town was 1,03,106 according to the figure of 1961 census. At that time Darbhanga town was headquarters of the Darbhanga Raj lying between 25°26' North 85°44' East and extending over 880 square miles."

Kameshwar Singh and many Indians had been planning to form an all-India organisation of nationalist political workers. But the credit for giving the idea a concrete and final shape goes to A.O Hume, a retired English civil servant. He got in touch with prominent Indian leaders and organised with their cooperation the first session of the Indian National Congress at Bombay in December 1885. It was presided over by W.C Bannerjee and attended by 72 delegates.

The foundation of Indian National Congress in 1885 formed a landmark in the history of Indian.

Kameshwar Singh was a man of liberal ideas and he took an active part in the passage of the famous Bengal Tenancy Act of 1885. He was an ardent supporter of constitutional reform and since 1885 he gave financial help to the congress organisation. His brilliant speech on the sedition bill (sedition 124A of the Indian penal code) was thought remarkable coming from an important landholders.

The district got a new lease of life in the national movement after the Champaran Satyagrah of Mahatma Gandhi. Darbhanga was equally groaning under the heavy weight of the Bihar Planters Association and a bureaucratic administration.

The emergence of Mahatma Gandhi came as a relief to many. Sri Braj Kishore Prasad and Sri Dharnidhar Prasad of Darbhanga had joined Mahatma Gandhi in the Champaran struggle. When Gandhiji sponsored the Non-co-operation movement Darbhanga participated in it. A large number of people left their profession and made great sacrifice at the growing national movement, the All India Spinning Association started at Madhubani and a national school was started at Samastipur. In the wake of the important social reforms. Agitation for the abolition of the Parda System was started. A movement for the propagation of Khadi was also started. In 1922-28 the youth movement was started. The first organised civil disobedience movement was started in 1930-31 in which a large number of people in the district irrespective of caste, creed, religion and sex courted arrest. Prominent among them were Sri Satya Narayan Singh, Sri Dharnidhar Prasad, Janaki Raman Mishra, Anand Kishore Das, Sri Narain Das and others. The Majhulia Ashram was a main centre of their activities. The civil Disobedience movement further awakened the people of Darbhanga which contributed a major share in the national movement of Bihar. Freedom of speech and other civil rights were curtailed and the popular urge of the people was suppressed with acts of reprisal under the cloak of law and administration. After the situation calmed down, people concentrated on the constructive work and the Congress was spread to the remotest village in the district. The Congress continued to be the only political organisation in the country and the same was the case in the district.

For three months there was practically a negation of British administrative. There were also unfortunately some violent actions on the part of the freedom fighters. In most of the villages people took control of the administrative machinery and organised panchayat courts. All the important leaders Satya Narain Singh, Janaki Raman Mishra, Harishchandra Mishra, Harinath Mishra, Anand Kishore, Rameshwar Lal Das, Sri Narain Das, Surya Narain Singh, Anirudh Singh, Lakshman Jha, Kanak Jha and many were either arrested or had to remain absconding for

years. The House of Darbhanga gave shelter to a number of secret workers who organised conspiracy against the them regime as it laid on route to Nepal.

The hero of the August revolution, Sri Jaya Prakash Narayan and his comrades also spent a few days in this country during the revolution of 1942 Pandit Ayodhyanath as the chairman of the reception committee of Allahabad session of the congress in 1880 declared that the officialdom of the NWP had put so many obstacles that but for help of maharaja of Darbhanga it would have been impossible for him to provide a venue for the congress. The August Revolution of 1942 Shook the distinct and here again Darbhanga gave a good account of itself. The maharaja purchased the Lowther castle and made it available for the use of the congress session at Allahabad. In 1894 when the tenth session of the congress was held at Madras its resolution No. xxii started that a Deputation of the congress should wait upon Lord Elgin and that in it Bengal, Bihar should be represented by "H.H the Maharaja of Darbhanga of Darbhanga, Sir Ramesh Chandra Mitra and W.C. Bannerjee. This shows that there was no attempt to keep secret the close association of the maharaja with the congress.

In 1899 Lord George Hamilton, the then secretary of state for Indian, asked the government of India to find out the names of those zamindars and noblemen who financed the congress. For it, he appointed I.C.S C.S Bayley. In course of his report dated the 18th June 1899 he mentions, " we have nothing to prove that the late maharaja Darbhanga contributed Rs. 10,000 a year but it is certain that he did give away very large pecuniary assistance. The Maharaja of Darbhanga gave financial help of Rs.2,000 to W.C Banerjee Rs.2,000 to Babu Surendranath Banerjee Rs.15,000 to the permanent fund of the congress and Rs. 8,000 to the special Fund for India. The maharaja also gave Rs.10,000 to A.O Hume. The Maharaja played a very important role as member of the legislative council of the Governor General.

He was appointed to it in 1883 and took his seat for the first time on the 12th March, 1883. The only other Indian members of the council present on that day were syed Ahmad Khan, Raja Shiva Prasad, Durga Charan and Kristodas Pal. On the 25th January 1884 the young Maharaja of Darbhanga also moved an amendment in the Albert Bill.

Kameshwar Singh of Darbhanga made a vigorous protest against the proposal of Tariff Duty Bill of 10th March, 1894. He expressed his solicitude for the interest of the Swadeshi cloth eleven years, before the rise of the Swadeshi Movement of the wake of partition of Bengal he also condemned the imposition of duty on Kerosine oil on the ground that its incidence would fall heavily on the poor.

There was an out break of communal riots in many parts of India in 1893-94. The Government of India, therefore, proposed to levy a punitive tax on certain sections of people in affected areas in their bill to amend the police Act in 1895. The maharaja object to such a policy. One of the most significant contribution of the Maharaj to the development of nationalism in India was his speech in the Legislative council of the Government General in 1894 on the Amendment of Indian penal code regarding sedition.

Pt Anand Charlu, who was the president of the Indian National Congress at Nagpur in 1891 and was a member of the Supreme Legislative Council strongly supported the amendment moved by the Maharaja.

The Maharaja was a member of the council of the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal for four terms – 1880, 1893, 1895 and 1897. His illustrious son maharaja Sir, Kameshwas Singh was a great sympathiser of National Movement. People who were intimate with Netajee Subhash Chandra Basu say that he contributed large amounts to Netajee through secret emissaries who visited him from time to time.

So in my view I can say only in conclusion that like some of the other districts of Bihar, Darbhanga House or the people of Darbhanga also played a very important role in the Indian National Movement. Although the maharajas of Darbhanga were expected to be very conservative in the matter of social reform. But again the Maharajas of Darbhanga tried to help the cause of Nationalism not only in the economic and political fronts but also in the social front. So the last three maharajas as of Darbhanga were the natural leaders of the Hindu community of Mithila.

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