

## **Veer Surendra Sai**

Almost 40 years before the historic Sepoy mutiny, the Paikas in Odisha had united together in 1817, which came to be known as 'Paika Vidroha'. The brave and courageous Paikas had raised their swords to uproot the British rule from the Odisha soil Movement. The Chief of "PAIKA" Vidroha Karunakar Sardar was imprisoned, Narayan Paramguru of Kujang and Bamdeva Pattajoshi of Kanika had been banished and the valiant leader Jayee Rajguru was hanged and killed brutally. The great revolutionary Buxi Jagabandhu Bidyadhar became a prey of betrayal and had to face death. At last Mukund Deva was imprisoned and the burning flame of the Paika Vidroha was doused. In 1827 in Western Odisha, Veer Surendra Sai rekindled the doused flames of revolution against the British. He had taken a pledge to throw out the British rule from the Sambalpur soil. From 1827 to January 23<sup>rd</sup> 1864 this great leader of the freedom struggle had relentlessly struggled to spread the burning flames of revolt against the ruthless and mighty British Government.

In the 1<sup>st</sup> phase from 1827-1840 his struggle was somewhat intermittent and limited. But it gained tempo and was strengthened in the second phase. Surendra Sai's guerilla war, skilled warfare, tactics will power, great patience and courage made the Britishers stoop down. This eminent son of the soil, the revolutionary leader Veer Surendra Sai will indeed remain inscribed in golden letters as a saga in the annals Odisha history.

The Valiant leader Surendra Sai was born on January 23<sup>rd</sup> 1809 in the Northern Sambalpur about 21 miles away in Baragaon or Khinda village into the Chauhan Royal family. Surendra Sai was married to the daughter of Hatibari Jamindar of Gangpur kingdom and had one son and a daughter. His son's name was Mitrabhanu Sai.

In 1827 the Sambalpur king Maharaja Sai died without an heir. Hence, the Britishers took over the task of deciding the ascendant to the throne. They disregarded many claimants to the throne and crowned Rani Mohan Kumari who

was a widow. Because of this reason many tribal Jamindars revolted and Balaram Sai and Surendra Sai took the leadership of this revolt. The Britishers were assured that the Rani Mohan Kumari was not a good administrator. Hence, they were certain that she was a pawn to their ploy. As a matter of fact Surendra Sai was at the time the true heir of Sambalpur Royal dynasty to ascend the throne but of his stoic personality and rebel attitude towards British Govt. the latter had chosen Rani Mohan Kumari who was a complete misfit for the administration. Hence the wildfire of resentment was widespread and gradually it gained tempo in the Sambalpur region.

Veer Surendra Sais remarkable war tactics, great courage had triggered fear amongst the Britishers. His comrades with their bow and arrow fought a tremendous guerilla war which the British army could not withstand. Later another army reached Sambalpur with the instruction of the captain of Hazaribagh, Wilkinson. Though they became successful to some extent in dousing the flames of rebellion. They were unable to suppress the revolt completely. The Britishers were compelled to dethrone Rani Mohan Kumari and replace Narayan Singh, a far relation of the Royal family. However he was incompetent. As a result, revolt broke out again. In 1837 when in the midnight of Rahas Purnima Surendra Sai, Udhyant Sai, Balaram Singh and the Jamindar of Lochanpur Balabhadra Deo gathered at Debrigarh and were chalking out future action plan, the Britishers suddenly arrived there and killed Balabhadra Deo. Luckily Surendra Sai was able to escape along with his brothers. In 1840 A.D. the then English agent of south western border Col. Owsley became successful in arresting Surendra Sai, Udhyant Sai and Balaram Singh and the trio were punished with life imprisonment in Hazaribag Jail. The 1<sup>st</sup> phase of Surendra Sai's valiant struggle against the British rule came to an abrupt end here.

In 1849 A.D. at the time of Narayan Singh's death Surendra Sai was serving his imprisonment at Hazaribag. In 1857 the Indian sepoy's began the first Independence struggle against the British Govt. In that year on July 30<sup>th</sup> the Indian

sepoys forcibly entered the Hazaribag Jail and released Surendra Sai alongwith 32 other prisoners. The moment he was set free this great son of the soil Surendra Sai returned to Sambalpur and united the people there for another new struggle for freedom Debrigarh became his centre of activity. Tactfully he began to cut off the external communication ties of the English from Sambalpur region. He tried to obstruct the pathways with great rock boulders with creepers. As a result the British had to face many a difficulty while travelling. The comrades of Surendra Sai hid in these forests and carried on the guerilla wars. They had taken to guerilla war because they know that weapons of Sambalpur people i.e. their bows arrows, swords, etc. could not withstand the modern weapons of the mighty British army.

In 1861 major Imphe was appointed as the new Deputy Commissioner of Sambalpur. He adopted peace rather than war. Major Imphe declared end of war against Surendra Sai. It was decided to pardon the revolutionaries who had surrendered and allow them to get back their confiscated properties. After this, Surendra Sai's brother and son Surrendered. Major Imphe allowed them with dignity to take shelter in the Khinda Village. Later on May 16<sup>th</sup> 1862 Imphe Saheb met Surendra Sai in the dense forest and Surendra Sai surrendered. When Major Imphe died on 1863 the political condition of Sambalpur changed drastically. Captain Comberledge was appointed in place of Major Imphe. Comberledge along with a senior police officer Captain Stewart and Mr. Beryl arrested Surendra Sai and his family while they were asleep at night in January 23<sup>rd</sup> 1864 and sent them to jail. In that night they were taken to Raipur, later to Nagpur jail and after being announced life-term banishment were sent to Asirgarh fort in 1866. This great freedom fighter breathed his last on February 28<sup>th</sup> 1884 have at Asirgarh fort.

This gallant hero of Sambalpur history was able to fight a powerful war against the British rule uniting the brave and courageous Odias with his skilful training tactics of discipline. Veer Surendra Sai will forever shine like a golden star

in the horizon for the entire Odia race and will be remembered as a valiant leader for his courage, sacrifices and his ideologies.