



Pandit Sundarlal Sharma's Social Reform Work And Contribution To The National Movement

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Abstract : This research paper presents an analysis of the multifaceted contributions of freedom fighter and social reformer Pandit Sundarlal Sharma. His role is evaluated in the context of the national movement, political awakening in Chhattisgarh, the spread of social consciousness, and Dalit emancipation. The study highlights the historical context in which the Chhattisgarh region was grappling with social inequalities, caste divisions, and colonial exploitation.

The research employs a historical-analytical methodology, including Pandit Sharma's biography and literary works as primary sources, and a comparative study of government reports, speeches, and contemporary political activities as secondary sources.

Conclusively, the study reveals that Pandit Sundarlal Sharma not only accelerated social reforms but also politically awakened the public consciousness in the freedom movement. His programs, such as the eradication of untouchability, peasant movements, and the spread of education, organized rural society and paved the way for the renaissance of Chhattisgarh, providing strong support to the national movement.

Keywords: Social Reform, Pandit Sundarlal Sharma, Chhattisgarh, Rajim , dalit ,Chhattisgarh ,danlila.dularwa. mahandi

Literature Review

• Shukla's (2023) research paper analyzes Pandit Sundarlal Sharma's social and national contributions. This research highlights his leading role in the "Kandel Canal Satyagraha," as well as in farmers' movements, the prohibition campaign, and tribal struggles.

• Mishra's (2014) book, "Nishkam Karmayogi Pandit Sundarlal," provides a comprehensive documentation of his biography, literary works, and social reform activities. This work highlights his multifaceted contributions based on extensive research.

• Singh and Chakraborty's (2018) Independence Day special article, "Independence Day Special: Chhattisgarh's Water Satyagraha," presents the historical context of the Kandel Water Satyagraha. According to the article, Pandit Sundarlal Sharma, along with Narayan Rao Meghawale and Babu Chhotelal Srivastava, waged a five-month struggle against the British tax system. This satyagraha resulted in Mahatma Gandhi's arrival in Raipur, which provided national impetus to the movement.

• Drolia (2013), in his report published in the Times of India, described Pandit Sundarlal Sharma as "Gandhi of Chhattisgarh," highlighting his anti-untouchability movements and deep patriotism.

Research Gaps : Research to date has primarily focused on Pandit Sundarlal Sharma's political and literary aspects, rather than his multifaceted contributions. However, a comprehensive study of his contributions to spreading social consciousness through his writings, plays, and edited magazines is still lacking. The current research will present a comprehensive analysis focusing on this neglected aspect.

Objectives: 1. To analyze Pandit Sundarlal Sharma's contribution to awakening political consciousness in the Chhattisgarh region.

2. To evaluate Pandit Sundarlal Sharma's work related to social reform and Dalit emancipation, especially in the context of anti-casteism and social consciousness.

Introduction

Born in a remote rural area of Chhattisgarh, Pandit Sundarlal Sharma was a great figure of his era. He was a fearless, revolutionary, and humanitarian. He began raising his voice against British rule early. At that time, many wealthy classes and princely states in Chhattisgarh had surrendered to British rule, and the common people lacked the courage to speak out against it. In this context, Pandit Sundarlal Sharma raised the banner of the national movement in this region and played a crucial role in awakening social consciousness. He actively participated in the national movement throughout his life.

When Bengal was divided under the British rule's policy of "divide and rule," widespread protests erupted across India. This region of Central Province and Chhattisgarh was also not untouched by this movement. Various regions of Chhattisgarh, especially the Raipur-Dhamtari region, where Pandit Sundarlal Sharma represented Chhattisgarh, participated actively in the movements.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, this part of Chhattisgarh was not particularly active in the national movement. Pandit Sundarlal Sharma's contribution to establishing the Congress in this region and bringing the national movement to the masses is of particular significance. He played a leading role in connecting the local population with national issues and awakening political consciousness.

Biography Of Pandit Sundarlal Sharma

Pandit Sundarlal Sharma was born on December 21, 1881, in Chamsur village, near Rajim, on the banks of the Mahanadi River in Chhattisgarh. His father, Jailal Tiwari, worked in the Kanker State. Sundarlal Sharma's family was a wealthy, educated, and progressive family. His father was a renowned poet and had a keen interest in music.

Pandit Sundarlal Sharma was a brilliant student from an early age. He was a polyglot, proficient in Hindi, Chhattisgarhi, English, Bengali, Oriya, and Marathi. From an early age, he was exposed to national magazines like "Maratha," which developed his ability to think on a national scale.

He began writing poetry at an early age. He was elected a member of the Congress Party, and his works were published in a magazine called 'Rasik Mitra'. Pandit Sundarlal Sharma was a connoisseur of various literary genres. He expressed his ideas through drama, novels, and poetry. He was also an accomplished painter and sculptor. Indeed, he was a multifaceted personality. Pandit Sundarlal Sharma passed away on December 28, 1940. Thus, he lived a meaningful life of 59 years, leaving an indelible mark on the social, cultural, and political life of Chhattisgarh.

Contribution in Freedom Fighter Movement:

After the Partition of Bengal Movement, the Raipur Congress was established in 1906, and Pandit Sundarlal Sharma was appointed its first president. In 1907, the Surat session of the Congress was held, where many leaders from the region, including Sundarlal Sharma and Narayan Rao Meghawale, participated. At this conference, the Congress split into two factions—the extremist group and the moderate group. Pandit Sundarlal Sharma and most of the Chhattisgarh leadership sided with the extremist group.

Swadeshi Movement

During the Swadeshi Movement, Pandit Sundarlal Sharma widely promoted the movement in Raipur. To this end, he established a committee in 1906. Pandit Sundarlal Sharma faced immense hardship in maintaining this movement, resulting in significant financial losses. He even had to sell his land to compensate.

Due to Pandit Sundarlal Sharma's tireless efforts, a farmers' movement was organized in Raipur in 1915, chaired by renowned Congress leader Vishnu Dutt Shukla. In 1918, he established a political council in Dhamtari.

Pandit Sundarlal Sharma always advocated for farmers' rights. In 1919, when the administration in the Rajim region oppressed farmers and refused to provide water from the canal, he led a powerful protest against it. This gave a new direction and momentum to the national movement.

Gokhale's Arrival in Raipur

Gopal Krishna Gokhale arrived in Raipur in 1918. He organized a conference at the residence of Vaman Rao Lakhe, attended by prominent activists such as Laxman Rao Lakhe from Raipur, Thakur Pyarelal Singh from Rajnandgaon, and Pandit Sundarlal Sharma from Rajim. Pandit Sharma played a key role in spreading and propagating the slogan "Swaraj is our birthright" across villages.

Chhattisgarh's Role in the Non-Cooperation Movement

On December 26, 1920, the regular session of the Congress was held in Nagpur, where a resolution was passed to launch the Non-Cooperation Movement. All the prominent leaders of Chhattisgarh actively participated in this movement. Pandit Sundarlal Sharma from the Raipur region played a special role.

To further energize and accelerate the movement in 1921, a Satyagraha Ashram was established on February 7, 1921, under the supervision of Pandit Sundarlal Sharma, to train local youth. Inspired by Sharma's powerful speeches, 53 students from Raipur's Normal School abandoned their English education and joined the ashram, where they received training for about a month. After this training, these young men spread the word of the non-cooperation movement to the masses.

Kandel Satyagraha (1920)

A powerful Satyagraha took place in Kandel village, Dhamtari, in 1920. The movement was triggered by the forced distribution of canal water to farmers and the imposition of taxes and fines. The villagers protested and organized a meeting with local leaders. Pandit Sundarlal Sharma, Narayan Rao Meghawale, and Chhotelal Srivastava actively participated in this meeting.

The government's atrocities continued to escalate, and the movement continued for several months. Ultimately, under the leadership of Pandit Sundarlal Sharma, it was decided to entrust the movement to Gandhiji. For this purpose, Pandit Sundarlal Sharma went to Kolkata to meet Gandhiji. Hearing the news of this incident, the administration panicked and conceded to all the people's demands. Thus, the movement ended.

Accepting the invitation, Gandhiji arrived in Raipur on December 20 and 21, 1920. The next day, on December 21, 1920, in Dhamtari, he congratulated the people and leaders of the area for the successful conduct of the Satyagraha. Dhamtari landlord Kriparam Singh donated 501 rupees to the Swaraj Tilak Fund.

The Sihawa Nagari Forest Satyagraha (1922)

The Sihawa Nagari forest, located in Dhamtari tehsil, was a forested area. In January 1922, a movement was started here in violation of forest laws. The administration tried to suppress it harshly, imprisoning 33 people and imposing fines on many others.

At that time, almost all the leaders of this area were attending the Ahmedabad session of the Congress. After returning from the convention, the public withdrew the movement after being persuaded by Pandit Sundarlal Sharma and Narayan Rao Meghawale. However, the administration later issued notices and arrested both leaders, and Pandit Sundarlal Sharma was sentenced to one year's imprisonment.

In February 1922, Pandit Sundarlal Sharma and Narayan Rao Meghawale were arrested under Section 108 of the Indian Penal Code for propagating Congress activities.

During his imprisonment, Pandit Sundarlal Sharma began publishing a handwritten newspaper called "Krishna Janmabhoomi." This magazine vividly depicted prison life at that time.

Illustrations were prominently featured. Through this, Pandit Sundarlal Sharma worked to boost the morale and encourage the people from prison.

Kakinada Session (1923)

In December 1923, the regular session of the Congress was held in Kakinada, Andhra Pradesh. A large number of people from Raipur and Dhamtari prepared to attend this session. A group of about 25 workers, led by Narayan Rao Meghawale of Dhamtari, crossed the difficult forest area and set out for Kakinada. Pandit Sundarlal Sharma from the Raipur region played a leading role in this campaign.

All along the way, the group continued its journey, appealing to the tribals living in the forests for support in national awakening and connecting the people with the national movement, and finally successfully reached Kakinada.

Dalit Emancipation Work

The Kakinada Conference had a profound and direct impact on Pandit Sundarlal Sharma. After returning from Kakinada, Pandit Sundarlal Sharma began the work of Dalit upliftment in his area. Even before this, he had always been working for the upliftment of the exploited. He wanted to bring the marginalized into the mainstream, and the Kakinada conference infused new enthusiasm in his work.

Ghanshyam Singh, Chhaviram Choubey, and Thakur Pyarelal Singh supported him in this endeavor. At a time when casteism was rampant in society, Sharma's work was a revolutionary step against casteism. Sharma would visit the homes of Dalits in the area and eat meals with them. Furthermore, he allowed Dalits to wear the sacred thread and enter the temple in Rajim, a unique event of its kind in the entire region at that time.

It was through his efforts that the Satnami Ashram, Harijan Putra Hostel, and a hostel were established in Raipur Sahib. Pandit Sundarlal Sharma's Dalit upliftment program was strongly condemned and criticized by conservatives of the time. On the other hand, during his second visit to Chhattisgarh, Gandhiji strongly praised Pandit Sharma's work for Dalit upliftment. He explicitly honored Pandit Sundarlal Sharma as his elder and guru in this matter. The "Satnami Bhajan Mala" written by Pandit Sundarlal Sharma is particularly noteworthy in this context.

He also launched a purification movement for expelled Hindus. At the same time, Mahant Nayan Das Ji, the religious guru of the Rohidas community, declared that no Rohidas would indulge in alcohol or immoral conduct. These collective efforts promoted social harmony in the region, which also strengthened the freedom movement.

A Multifaceted Talent: Pandit Sundarlal Sharma

Pandit Sundarlal Sharma was a multifaceted personality. He possessed a deep knowledge of several languages and had been writing poetry since childhood. He played the roles of a revolutionary, social reformer, and literary figure in a comprehensive manner.

Pandit Sundarlal Sharma advocated for the Chhattisgarhi dialect to be given respectable language status. By writing in the Chhattisgarhi language, he brought Chhattisgarh's culture and political consciousness to the masses. He made creative contributions to almost all genres of literature—stories, plays, poems, and novels. Through these literary works, he raised public awareness about contemporary national conditions, social movements, and Dalit upliftment.

Among Pandit Sundarlal Sharma's major works, 'Satnami Bhajan Mala', 'Kans Vadh', and 'Samman Pratap' were particularly notable, playing a significant role in the region's public awakening. He was also a skilled painter and sculptor. The rarity of such a versatile personality in the region makes his extraordinary personality even more distinctive.

Pandit Sundarlal Sharma had presented a clear concept of 'Chhattisgarh' even before the formal formation of the state of Chhattisgarh. He specifically defined the geographical boundaries of the state, noting that the region stretches from the Vindhya mountain range and the Narmada River in the north to the Indravati and Brahmani rivers in the south. This eastern region, located in the heart of the Gangetic plains, is home to villages called "Garh," where Narasimha (clay idols) are made, women's clothing and attire are nearly uniform, and where paddy is the main agricultural crop—this entire region is "Chhattisgarh."

He was a strong advocate for the Chhattisgarhi dialect to be given the status of a language. His Chhattisgarhi writings gave a strong identity to Chhattisgarh's culture, political consciousness, and social awakening.

Conclusion

This research makes clear that Pandit Sundarlal Sharma, besides playing a prominent role in the national movement in Chhattisgarh, also made incomparable contributions to social awareness and Dalit upliftment. His various literary works played a significant role in establishing the Chhattisgarhi language and culture at the national level. He is known as the pioneer of the Chhattisgarh Renaissance. Pandit Sundarlal Sharma was also a pioneer of social justice. He was one of the leading figures in attacking casteism and untouchability prevalent in the Chhattisgarh region. His efforts resulted in increased brotherhood among all sections of society in this region, which also became a source of inspiration for the national movement.

In recognition of his contributions, the Chhattisgarh government established the Pandit Sundarlal Sharma Open University.

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