

Tirot Singh : A great patriot of national movement

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29.3.1985

A moment, a day, a month, a year, a decade and a century may pass away without being noticed. They have passed away in the same cycle from the beginning of time - through the ages to join eternity. There have been millions and millions of persons who have been born under the surface of the earth, but only few names have been recorded in History and in human memory - all the other names have sunk into oblivion. But there are moments and days which cannot be forgotten. Such moments have been regarded as landmarks in history. Why is it so ? The answer is that such landmarks are associated with the names of persons who have played their indomitable role to contribute in absolute terms. Some values towards the advancement of mankind and towards the achievement of the ideal and the goal of human relationship between man and man and between man and the Creator Himself.

There are such moments in history that any community or nation find itself in a position to feel proud and to find new soul to strive for the attainment of the highest ideal. Such moment or day is always associated with the name of person or persons who have lived of life to live, struggle and strive for the highest ideals of mankind.

Today is such an important date which is associated with the life of a great man - His name was Tirot Sing Syiem. Both the date and the name of a person have been written in gold letters in the eternal cycle of eternity and in the history of the Khasi people. His name symbolises equal rights of human beings, freedom from domination, steadfastness in righteousness, courage in action to fight for the right things, and that death be preferred to a life of a slave. This may not be the complete commentary on his life. They only reflect a summary statement for what he lived and strived for.

Much have been written about the life and works of Tirot Singh, but there has been very little attempts to assess his role as a patriot both at the local context and the National context. Where shall we place him among the patriots of the country ? At the present juncture, I am afraid, there will be no single historian or political scientist who would have the courage to use his yardstick to measure the stature and eminence of such a great genius like Tirot Singh.

Born and brought up among the beautiful hills and majestic forest amidst the freedom of nature, Tirot Singh had always been imbibed with the spirit of real manhood, with the love of freedom and with a high sense of fearlessness and lofty patriotism. His struggle against the British might symbolises his earnest desire to protect the sacred land and the people from the domination of foreign rulers. This is patriotism of a very high order. Some partial observer may argue that his

patriotism can be described as mere insular patriotism. His struggle against the British might be described as merely an expression of sub-nationalism. Perhaps what he really fought was merely for the cause of the protection of the State of Nongkhlaw and its people. But a real patriot must always start his real love of the land and people from his hearth and home, then it spreads out to a larger world. In this respect, Tirot Singh appeared to have started his struggle only for his own State. But this is not really so. It was he who was responsible to form a confederacy of the Khasi States in order to serve the larger interest of the Khasi people. The preservation of the ~~distinct~~ distinct identity of the Khasi race with all its distinct language and culture was dearest to his heart. His patriotism was not merely confined to the Khasi land alone, but it pervaded beyond the confines of the lovely blue hills. He called upon the people of the plains to do away with the British yoke. Alas ! the plains were already under full control of the British and were under a keen observation when the fire of patriotism flared up to action in the Khasi land. Definitely, the Assamese gave their moral support and Raja Chandrakanta sent a big shield to Tirot Singh as a mark of his goodwill and ~~his~~ blessings since he was not in a position to lend any material support. Amongst the Assamese leaders who acted as secret allies of the Khasis were Peole Phukan and Maniram Dewan. This type of expansive and ever widening

spirit of patriotism can be described in social sciences a Proto-nationalism. Had he been able to continue his struggle without being capture, he would have extended his high sense of patriotism to the other parts of India as well. This is patriotism in the national context. Therefore, his name must remain as one of the brightest stars in the firmament of the Indian Freedom Struggle.

Indian historians must bear in mind that while the Indian struggle for Independence started in a large scale from 1857, the spark of the fire of patriotism and struggle for independence was lit in the Khasi land way back in 1827. Hence the flame of India's independence was first started in the Khasi land with Tirot Singh as the torch-bearer.

Tirot Singh was a patriot of undying and indomitable spirit. He knew that he would be richly rewarded by the British had he accepted the allurements of money and power offered to him. But such power and status did not suit the true belief of a patriots. Many of his men fell prey to the offer of money, even his mother indirectly betrayed him, some Khasi Syiems tried to take side with the British; but Tirot Singh was never daunted by such acts of mischiefs. His real spirit was expressed in his refusal to be reinstated as Syiem of Nongkhlaw and to be a mere protege of the British. His bold reply was: "I prefer the death of a free man to the life of a slave King". This.

reply has become a noble message which has eternally rung through the corridors of time in the heart of all freedom lovers, all men of dignity and honesty and all men of courage who have live a life with "a head held high and with a mind without fear". If Tirot Singh cannot be considered as a real patriot in the true sense of the word, I wonder, how many persons in the annals of mankind can be considered such a one.

One hundred and fifty one years have passed, but the name of Tirot Singh has become greater and greater. On what date did he die ? Nobody can have the courage to tell. We know only the year and the week. All the records of the Dacca Jail was destroyed during the 1971 Bangladesh war of liberation. Only the silent walls of the dungeon of Dacca Jail can bear testimony to the life of a patriot who was always fighting for the ideal.

This great man whom the British described as a half-naked barbarian has immortalised his ideas and ideals so that the future generation should live. This man whom the British described in the most derogatory term and who had sought equal term with the British passed away in 1834. One hundred years later another great leader whom Churchill described as a man with merely a loin cloth round his waist sought equal terms with the British monarch. He was destined to lead India to freedom. Therefore the flame of freedom which rose from the east which was carried by Tirot Singh, the achievement of freedom was fulfilled by the flame from the Western Coast which was carried by Mahatma Gandhi, the father of the nation.