

NATIONAL AWAKENING AND FREEDOM STRUGGLE BY RAIPUR DISTRICT COUNCIL UNDER PANDIT SHUKLA'S PRESIDENCY

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ABSTRACT

The paper deals with how the presidency of Raipur district council when given to Pandit Ravishankar Shukla, provided him with an opportunity and authority to induce the national sentiments in the students and teachers of schools administered by the council and also the role of press which led to an effective awakening of patriotism through national songs, national flag, events and freedom movement.

1. INTRODUCTION

Pandit Shukla had become a member of the Raipur District Council in 1921. He believed that through these local bodies the freedom struggle could best be fought. Alongside this he wanted to propagate education and an awakening for freedom among the masses.

In 1922 the State Government handed over the management of schools to the District Council. Pandit Shukla established contacts with the teachers of these schools and to induce nationalism in them he organised teachers' conferences. There were 310 schools under the district council, and 900 teachers in these schools. Every year about 30,000 students were studying in these schools. These conventions of teachers worked to improve teaching methods, health, cleanliness, and patriotism.

Pandit Shukla remained the president of Raipur District Council from 1927 to 1937. Following which, here is given the brief summary of the prominent works and the atmosphere created for National Awakening & Freedom Struggle taken up by the District Council under the presidency of Pandit Shukla:

- ❖ The District Council decided to conduct all its proceedings & business in Hindi. The District Collector would return all the proceedings of the District Council sent to him in Hindi and wrote that all proceedings be sent to him in English only. To this Pandit Shukla replied to the Collector that you have got a translator with you, please get it translated in English yourself. Despite all the difficulties created by the District Authorities the District Council

continued its work in Hindi under Pandit Shukla.

- ❖ The District Council made it a rule that in all the schools before beginning of the study session or other important events the students will necessarily unfurl the National Flag and sing "Vandemataram". The District Collector objected to this. Pandit Shukla wrote back to him that even your Governor Mr. Gavan stands up when "Vandematram" is sung, so why should you object to this.
- ❖ As president of the District Council Pandit Shukla had asked all teachers to actively participate in the freedom movement. The District Collector and the State Government strongly objected to this and demanded an explanation from the District Council. To this Pandit Shukla sent a very courageous reply saying that to participate in the national freedom movement is duty of every citizen of this country.
- ❖ When Congress in its Lahore session decided that the country's national aim is to obtain complete freedom and to celebrate 26 January 1930 as the day of Independence, the Raipur District Council decided to celebrate this national day of freedom in all schools and accordingly all headmasters were advised to organise the Independence Day. On objections raised by district authorities Pandit Shukla wrote back to them that unfurling of our National Flag and singing of National Anthem is not a crime.

Here is copy of one of the several letters written by Pandit Shukla to Dy. Commissioner Raipur Mr. Y. N. Sukhthankar ICS: 23 February 1930 :

"I am in receipt of your D. O. letter dated the 14th inst. regarding the greeting of revenue officers by school boys with the National Flag and national songs. I feel sure you must be realising that National Flag is an embodiment of the most patriotic sentiments of the nation, whether dependent or independent or whether within British Empire or outside it. A flag is said to be the necessity for all nations. It is a dire necessity for India, where we have to cultivate in our children the same sentiments towards our National Flag which the infurling of the Union Jack evokes in the English breasts. When even the honourable ministers of the Crown and along with highly placed European revenue officers have received such greetings and have in true English spirit stood up in all reverence when the national song was sung, it is too late in the day for you and any one else to object to such greetings by National Flag and by national song. As administrative head of the District Council I have issued instructions to greet all visitors, official or non-official with National Flag and national song. Revenue officers are not the only persons to be greeted. There is no resolution of the district Council but if you require one I shall place the

matter before the District Council and send you a copy of the resolution.

- ❖ All the schools under the District Council mounted Pictures of the Leaders on the walls in school premises. Instructions were issued to school authorities to safeguard these pictures. Several attempts were made by district officials to destroy these pictures but the school staff did not allow them to touch these pictures.
- ❖ The District Council established a press. Besides work of District Council the press was also undertaking outside jobs including the posters etc. of the Congress for distribution in public. The District Authorities were quite unhappy with this but the press continued its work.
- ❖ The District Council established post-offices in all rural schools where only teachers worked as post-masters. The information on national movement printed in the Council press were taken up for distribution right up to the villages through these post offices.
- ❖ Annual education conferences were organised by the District Council where chosen educationists and intellectuals participated. A magazine "Utthaan" was published monthly where "History of Ireland" appeared as a serial.

To propagate education and patriotism the Raipur District Council had done exceptional work under its President Pandit Shukla. The former state home-member and

Governor Mr. Raghvendra Rao wrote, "For inducing high patriotism and to educate the masses a systematic method and public morale have to be entwined together -- This belief has been very enthusiastically implemented under the devoted guidance of District Council President Pandit Shukla---I hope other districts will follow this example. "Angry at the patriotic stance of the Raipur District Council the then Local Self Minister of the State Government, Shri Ramrao Deshmukh on 12 June 1930 dissolved the Raipur District Council and asked the District Collector to manage the Council. This special officer on taking over the District Council banned the singing of "Vandemataram" and unfurling of the National Flag. Several teachers were arrested for participating in the freedom movement.

CONCLUSION

Despite these atrocities the Raipur District Council's patriotism did not change. Because of his work Pandit Shukla had become so popular that even while being in jail he was re-elected as president of the District Council. When Pandit Shukla was released from the jail his first work was to reinstate all those teachers who were victimised for their participation in freedom struggle or for their nationalistic views.

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