



Freedom Struggle in Odisha

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Soon after the British occupation of Odisha in 1803 freedom struggle began in different parts of the Province in the form of armed resistance, protest and rebellion against the alien authorities. In 1804, the first agitation was witnessed in Khurda during the tenure of minor king Mukunda Deva II. Jayee Rajaguru, the indomitable minister of the Raja was hanged in 1805 for abetting the rebellion and became the first martyr of Odisha.

The defective land revenue system and administrative vagaries of the British rulers continued to cause discontent among the people and as a result, there broke out an armed rebellion by the Paiks that took place in 1817 under the leadership of Buxi Jagabandhu Bidyadhar Mohapatra Bhramarabara Ray or Buxi Jagabandhu, the military Commander of the Raja of Khurda. The rebellion was not confined to Khurda alone. It spread like wild fire and touched the borders of Pipili, Harisapur, Kujang and Pattamundai. Later on, vigorous military measures were taken by the British to restore order and recover the lost places. Mukundadev-II was captured by the British and the rebellion was suppressed with proclamation of Martial Law. Buxi Jagabandhu breathed his last on 24 January 1829 at Cuttack. The underground fight which Buxi carried on with the British Government immortalized his name as a patriot in the mind of

the millions of people of Odisha. Even today, the name of Buxi Jagabandhu is taken with a sense of pride by everyone in this State.

After ten years of Paik Rebellion, in 1827 the people of Tapangagarh under the leadership of Samanta Madhaba Chandra Samantaray, their Dalbehera rebelled against the oppressive rule of the British. At the instigation of Madhabachandra, the people refused to pay rent to the British. The British authorities took a strong view of the situation and Lieutenant Colonel Harcourt sent an ultimatum to the Dalbehera of Tapang to clear the arrear rent immediately and surrender himself in the court at Khurda. But Dalbehera Madhab Chandra paid little heed to the ultimatum and prepared himself for a confrontation with the British. Col. Harcourt marched to Tapang with a contingent of British force in June 1827 and met the rebels in the battlefield of Khandagoda near Tapang. After a protracted fight the rebels were repelled and the revolt was finally subdued. Dalbehera subsequently surrendered to the British and was pardoned for his nobility and bravery.

In 1835 a rebellion broke out in Ghumsur under the leadership of the Kondh leader Kamal Lochan Dora Bisoyee who joined the rebellion in support of Dhanarjay Bhanja for restoration of Bhanja family to power. A vigorous military



operation was undertaken by the British to suppress the Kondh insurgents and most of them were either shot dead or hung upon the trees. Dora Bisoyee was captured in 1837 and was made a state prisoner in Ooty near Madras. There he breathed his last in 1846 leaving behind a glorious legacy of brave and resolute struggle against the British. After his sad demise, his nephew Chakra Bisoyee continued the rebellion in Ghumsur for two decades from 1837 to 1856. All attempts to capture him failed. This valiant Kondh chief never surrendered to the British in spite of the British offer of pardon. After all the Ghumsur rebellion provided the proper background to the rising of the subsequent freedom movements in and around Odisha.

The great rising of 1857 known as Sepoy Mutiny or the First War of Independence which broke out at Meerut on the 10th May had its shadow cast in different parts of India including Odisha. Of those great patriots who actively participated in it, special mention may be made of Ramakrushna Samanta Singhara, Chakhi Khuntia, Surendra Sai, Madho Singh, Hati Singh and a few others.

Ramakrushna Samanta Singhara was the ex-Zamindar of Balia under Jajpur Police Station of the then Cuttack district. On account of the 'Sunset Law' introduced by Lord Cornwallis, he alongwith many Zamindars was deprived of the Zamindari. So in August 1857, he organized the Khandayats under his banner to rise against the British. Ramakrushna alongwith his two main followers Dinabandhu Mohapatra and Upendra Jena were arrested and sentenced to 5 years rigorous imprisonment. After the declaration of amnesty by the British Govt. in Nov, 1858 Ramakrushna and his associates were released.

Chakhi Khuntia, also called as Chandan Hajuri, a Sepoy Panda of Puri by profession was

another popular leader who played a significant role in the sensational drama of the Great Revolt of 1857 in Orissa. As a Panda he used to visit up-country- military station to induce the Sepoys to visit the sacred shrine. Accidentally he became the Family Priest of Jhansirani Laxmibai, the great leader of the Rising of 1857 and took active part in anti-British activities. He also established regular contact with the Sepoys of the 13th Bengal Native Infantry (B.N.I.) which revolted at Lucknow. On account of this, he was arrested on suspicion in Bihar but as there was no proof of his involvement in the revolt, he was released on 15th November, 1858. Chakhi Khuntia, however, has become a great patriot of Odisha.

In Sambalpur, the sprit of rebellion was most fierce under the leadership of Surendra Sai, the Chauhan Prince of Sambalpur. It was 30 years before the Great Rising of 1857 that Surendra Sai launched a resistance movement against the British over a succession issue. He could not be captured and kept the flame of revolt aglow till 1864 while the Great Revolt collapsed in 1858. At last he was captured in 1864 and was detained in Asirgarh fort, where he breathed his last on February 28, 1884.

There were yet a few other veteran leaders of Sambalpur region whose significant role in the Indian Mutiny of 1857 can not be ignored. Madha Singh, the Zamindar of Ghens located in Sambalpur region and his three sons namely Kunjal Singh, Hati Singh and Bairi Singh took active part in fighting against British rule. One of the British Commander named Woodbridge was killed in a battle. Their attack was so formidable that after the suppression of the revolt in other parts of India, they concentrated their efforts and subdued them. Madha Singh was captured and hanged to death in 1858. In 1865, the three brothers were arrested. Of them Hati Singh was



sentenced to transportation for life and died in the Jail. Kunjal Singh was sentenced to death and Bairi Singh died at Sambalpur. The rebellion in Sambalpur was suppressed ruthlessly. Although the Mutiny in India collapsed in 1858, fighting in Sambalpur continued up to 1862 and this was perhaps the last district in India in which the embers of disturbances of 1857 were finally stamped out.

It was during the last part of the 19th century that the Bhuyans of Keonjhar raised a revolt against the despotic rule of Raja Dhanurjaya Bhanja. When he forced the Bhuyans to work for excavating a canal from the river Machhkandana to Kendujhargarh through hills and forests, it was strongly repulsed by Dharanidhar who instigated the Bhuyans and other tribals like Bathudi, Kolha and Saunti to rise against the tyrannical rule of the Raja. The Bhuyans looted the granaries and procured guns and cannons to wage war. The revolt of the Bhuyans took a violent turn. Later the British Government arrested Dharanidhar by hatching a conspiracy. Dharanidhar was detained in Cuttack for seven years. Later on he was released in 1897 and led the life of a saint. The last part of the 19th century witnessed a mass uprising in Sundergarh under the leadership of Birsha Munda. He raised his voice against the British Government to convert the Adivasis into Christians. Later on he was charged of sedition and was imprisoned many a time till he was poisoned to death in June 1900 at the age of 25 in Ranchi Jail. Odisha shall ever remember the sacrifice of this great Adivasi Leader.

The formation of the Indian National Congress in December, 1885 by Allan Octavian Hume, a retired Civil Servant of the British Government helped a lot in the growth of national consciousness among the Indians. Leaders like

Madhusudan Das and Nanda Kishore Bal, Gopal Chandra Praharaj, Biswanath Kar, Madhusudan Rao, Gokulananda Choudhury promoted Congress ideologies and programmes and popularized its principles.

The Swadeshi Movement which the Bengalis started in protest against the partition of Bengal on 16 October, 1905 had considerable impact on the intelligentsia of Odisha. In response to the Swadeshi Movement protest meetings were held in Cuttack, Puri, Balasore, Sambalpur and other places to express sympathy with the movement in Bengal. People from all walks of life joined the movement with great enthusiasm and were very much inspired to use indigenous goods and boycott foreign goods.

With the entry of Mahatma Gandhi into the political mainstream of India in 1919, a new phase began in the history of India's freedom struggle. His first war cry against the British was made after the passage of the 'Rowlatt Act' and the Jallianawala Bagh Massacre of 13 April, 1919. Gandhiji's Non-Cooperation Movement reverberated throughout India and its echoes were felt in Odisha too. In 1921 the Utkal Pradesh Congress Committee was formed with Pandit Gopabandhu Das as President. He was the organizer of the Satyagraha Movement in Odisha. Gandhiji visited Orissa for the first time in March 1921. His visit gave a tremendous impetus to the Non-Co-Operation Movement in Odisha. Gandhiji addressed a public meeting at Cuttack on the sandy bed of the river Kathajori. Besides Cuttack, he visited Bhadrak, Satyabadi, Puri and Berhampur. In the wake of the Non-Co-Operation Movement, College students such as Harekrushna Mahatab, Nityananda Kanungo, Nanda Kishore Das, Raj Krishna Bose and others left the Govt. Zilla School. Lawyers such as Bhagirathi Mohapatra and Jagabandhu Singh



gave up their legal practice. Gopabandhu Choudhury resigned from the post of Deputy Collector to join the movement. National schools were established in the districts of Cuttack, Puri and Sambalpur. Satyabadi Grove School was converted to a national school. Under the leadership of Godabarish Mishra, the Chakradharpur High School was converted to a national school. The boycott of foreign cloth received support of the people. In Puri, the offering of foreign cloth to Lord Jagannath was discouraged. To train the Congress workers and volunteers and guide their work, seven centres were opened at Cuttack, Jagatsinghpur, Puri, Sakhigopal, Balasore, Bhadrak and Soro. The Swaraj Ashram of Cuttack was concerned with the distribution of spinning wheels, promotion of spinning and training the workers for the propagation of Congress programme.

Similarly Gandhiji began his epoch-making march to Dandi at 6.30 am on 12 March 1930 accompanied by a group of 78 Satyagrahis from Sabarmati Ashram. On 6 April 1930 he broke the Salt Law by picking up a lump of natural salt from the shore of Dandi. This symbolic act signified the start of Salt Satyagraha which was the precursor of the massive Civil Disobedience Movement. On the same day the first batch of 21 Satyagrahis led by Gopabandhu Choudhury and Acharya Harihar Das started their march on foot to Inchudi from Swaraj Ashram at Cuttack. The Satyagrahis came to Inchudi batch by batch to break the Salt Law. One striking feature of the Satyagraha in Odisha was the emergence of Hindu women like Smt. Rama Devi and Smt. Malati Devi. On 20 April they led a long procession of women to the Satyagraha centre and violated the salt law by collecting salt earth under the very nose of police party stationed there. In June 1930, Rani Bhagyabati, the Patamaheshi of Kujanga alongwith 500 women satyagrahis violated the salt

law. In Puri district the Salt Satyagraha was led by Pandit Nilakantha Das. Congress leaders like Biswanath Das, Niranjana Patnaik, led the movement in Ganjam district. Thus, the civil Disobedience Movement in Odisha not only exposed the British rule in India, but also inspired the people to merge with the national mainstream to teach the British a lesson.

The Civil Disobedience Movement gave birth to a new national consciousness among the people of the Princely States. In Odisha Prajamandals (People's Association) were formed in the various Princely States to ventilate the grievances of the people before the rulers. The agitation first started in Nilgiri in July 1938 but the State authorities adopted repressive measures. In the Talcher State the movement against feudal exploitation made significant advance. The oppressive policy of the Raja became so unbearable that thousands of people left Talcher and took shelter in the Angul refugee camp. In Dhenkanal the ruler took stern measures to suppress the Prajamandal agitation. About 18 persons including a boatman boy, named Baji Rout were killed as a result of police firing. In the Ranpur state the situation was quite grave. In January 1939, Major Bazzelgette, the Political Agent of Odisha was killed by the mob at Ranpur. Thereafter a virtual reign of terror was let loose by the British administration. Prominent Prajamandal activists Raghu Mohanty and Dibakar Parida were falsely accused of murdering Bazzelgette and were put to gallows at the dawn of April 4, 1941 in Bhagalpur Jail, Bihar.

On 8 August, 1942 the Bombay Session of Indian National Congress adopted the Quit India resolution and gave a call for mass struggle under Gandhiji's leadership. The next day all the Congress leaders from various parts of India who had assembled at Bombay were arrested. In



Odisha all Congress bodies, their offices and other allied organizations were declared unlawful. Within two weeks important Congress leaders were arrested. It was on 15 August 1942 that about 200 students of Ravenshaw College set fire to the office room damaging the furniture and other equipments. Eminent leaders were Banamali Patnaik, Ashok Das, Birendra Mitra, Suraj Mal Saha, and Bibhudendu Mishra. After Police inquiry Bibhudendu Mishra and Suraj Mal Saha were arrested under the Defence of India Act and later confined in the Berhampur Central Jail. On 16 August 1942, people attacked the Bari Congress Ashram which had been taken over by the police. They also set fire to the properties which police had seized and burnt the uniform of Choukidars and Dafadars.

The Quit India Movement assumed the character of a formidable mass uprising in the district of Koraput mostly inhabited by the Adivasis or aborigines. The daring incident took place at Mathili Police Station in Koraput district when a mob under the leadership of Laxman Naik tried to capture the Police Station. But the mob was mercilessly beaten up. During the scuffle, a forest guard was killed and the Police opened fire killing five on spot. Laxman Naik was falsely accused of beating the guard to death. Later on, he was sentenced to death on 29 March 1943 in Berhampur Central Jail. Right up to his very last breath, he was found to have chanted "Mahatma Gandhi Ki Jai." An open field called Chandiaposi adjacent to the village Lunia witnessed a police firing on 22 September 1942 in which nine people died and five injured. At Tudigadia and Kahiradhia also two persons were killed and one was injured due to police firing. The most ghastly massacre that took place at Eram in the Balasore district is memorable event in the history of India's Freedom Struggle and it can be fittingly called the Jallianwala

Bagh tragedy in Odisha where 28 persons were killed and 56 persons were injured. It is true that nowhere in India where so many people killed in a single police action during the Quit India Movement for which Eram has been named as "Rakta Tirtha." At Cuttack, Surendra Nath Dwivedi started underground activities. He circulated revolutionary bulletins which surcharged the atmosphere with high patriotism. But he was spotted soon and was arrested. In Garjat States of Odisha the Quit India Movement had its deep impact. In Talchar, the people gave up non-violence and started guerilla fighting against the ruler's force. In Dhenkanal, the Satyagrahis started armed skirmishes with the police Jail, Police Station and Institutions were brunt. The people of Nayagarh, Athagarh and Mayurbhanj started agitations. These movements though followed violence, were more or less Gandhian in nature.

After the Quit India Movement the political situation of Odisha became quiet. General Elections were held to Indian Legislature in 1946 and in Odisha the Congress Party secured majority of seats in the Odisha Legislative Assembly and formed ministry under the Prime Ministership of Dr. Harekrushna Mahtab on 23 April 1946. The new ministry took initiatives for merger of the Princely States with Odisha. By January 1, 1949, all the Princely States merged with Odisha.

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