

The Unsung Freedom Fighters of Odisha

Dr. Braja Kishore Sahoo

Reader in English

P N College, Autonomous, Khordha, Odisha

sahobraja91@gmail.com

Mob. No.9437007852

Introduction

The author had once visited his grandparents in the summer vacation. His grandfather was a great narrator. He used to narrate various historical stories to his grandchildren. Once, he told me about the history of their village, 'Baladiabandha.' This escalated to a deep conversation. And they decided to go on for a trip exploring their village. The author was deeply touched with the folk tales connected with the history of the place.

Days later, grandfather passed away. The author then realized that he had deeply fallen in love with history - the modern history, from the decline of Mughals to the Independence of India. He then started reading a variety of books and discovered the stories of long-lost freedom fighters whose efforts weren't observed as those of others. With an effort to bring into limelight their struggle for independence, he wrote this article the 'Unsung Freedom Fighters of Odisha.'

So, after reading numerous books and collecting manuscripts, this composition was prepared focusing on the truth content. Distinctive efforts of the freedom fighters have been put into writing.

The Structure of the Article

I have divided this paper into four distinct parts. Part 1 is the introduction to the paper. It deals with a brief note of the subject matter under discussion.

Part 2 deals with those writings where the author visited his grandparents in the summer vacation, and his grandpa's telling him about the history of their village - "Baliabandha".

Part 3 of this paper speaks about the unsung heroes of the freedom fighters of Odisha. In addition, I cite exclusively the names of the unsung women freedom fighters from Odisha who have contributed a lot to the National Freedom Movement.

Part 4 presents the conclusion. In this part, I acknowledge the sacrifice of the said heroes and their immense role in making India a new nation.

Introduction

In this paper I intend to discuss about the Indian History of Freedom Movement in terms of the dynamics of socio-cultural formations rather than just a chronological narration of 'episodes', or the feats of a few great men - kings, warriors, or saints. My paper also gives an insight into the unsung heroes of ancient Indian History in terms of storytelling.

Part 1

Passion for History

It was a pleasant, sunny day in May and the clocks were striking eleven. Sipping from the glass of fresh cane juice, my grandfather casually continued talking about his childhood. In a loving tone of confidence, he said, "Back then we focused on three things. They are Aachar (conduct), Vichar (thoughts and ideas) and Vyavahaar (interaction and behaviour with others); all three linked to each other. But with this generation gap, the youth has forgotten their values and constantly dependent on technology." The discussion continued for a little longer until grandma called us for lunch. Aren't the grandmothers most worried about her grandc these children's welfare and most importantly their food? Haven't we all experienced these expressions, "Did you eat? Do you want more? What do you want me to cook?" We all have heard these loving expressions. A few days were left for the summer holidays to get over. "Aja (Grandfather in Odia), tell us something about the history of our village. How did it get such a name, 'Baladiabandha?'" I asked. With ancestral roots linked to the royal family, my grandfather was the most qualified person to answer this query of mine. The shine in his eyes showed how interested he was to answer. Nowadays children are only interested in technical stuff such as mobile phones, games, etc. I on the other hand loved to explore and know the history, to be precise the modern history of India. "We are travelling to Jatan Nagar Palace", he said excitedly.

Part 2 Visit to Historical Sites

It was a pleasant day, the sky filled with few puffy clouds. Ten kilometres down the national highway, we reached our first destination – The Dhenkanal Palace. It was the home to the last king of Dhenkanal, Shankar Pratap Mohindra Bahadur (1918-1947 AD). Over 18 kings ruled Dhenkanal. Dhenkanal was named after the Savara Chief named 'Dhenka', who ruled the land. Next, we moved to a place known as 'Jatan Nagar Palace.' It is an architectural marvel. The 100-room palace was built atop a hill in the early 20th century by Pattayet Nrushingha Pratap Singhdeo, the younger brother of the then king of Dhenkanal. Here, grandfather narrated the quite popular and widespread folk tale about the mysterious palace. "Do you know why the palace has no gate?" I was astounded, "No door?" With a grin he replied, "This palace was built with forced labour under the authority of a king with the British influence. Even elephants were forced to work and carry load and stones to the top of

the mountain. One day, because of the unbearable pain, an elephant cried in front of the Dhenkanal king.”

It was evening and was dark while we were returning. All the people were dozing off. My mother reminded grandfather to answer my last question, how the village was named ‘Baladiabandha’. “We are at the right place. On the bandha (bridge) after which the village was named. “Another folk tale?” I exclaimed in joy. “The bridge couldn’t be completely constructed for a reason. There was a wood bridge, just for the sake of crossing the canal. One day, a bullock cart driver was passing on the bridge. As it got dark, he decided to rest there. Some people did kill him as a sacrifice to the god for the continuation of construction. And it was named Balidiabandha which meant ‘the bridge where the sacrifice was made’, and over time the village was named Baladiabandha.” I was overjoyed to know so many folk tales. “An elderly man is like a treasure, even internet won’t have such information”, Aja (grandfather) said excitedly. Summer vacation was over, and we returned home. I brought one thing along with me, their blessings. On the journey back home, I pondered over all the wisdom he had given me.

Months passed by. Little did I know that it was the last time I would see him. It was September when grandpa passed away. The atmosphere at village was gloomy. I tried putting myself all together in the time of sorrow. Rituals were continuing in the damp weather. Grandpa had left us a treasure chest of evergreen memories. He had buried in me the passion for History - the modern History - kings, empires, national movement, a treasure trove. Life moved on. I got more engrossed in folk tales about national movement. I found this golden opportunity by Indian Government of ‘Mentoring Yuva’ to share various folk tales and contribution of the unsung heroes of the National Movement of Odisha.

Part 3

Unsung Freedom Fighters of Odisha

Everyone must be aware of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose. Born and brought up in Cuttack district in Odisha, he was deeply inspired by socialist ideas and rapid pace of industrial growth witnessed in Soviet Union. He strongly supported the objective of complete independence; however, he was open to use of violent/military means, i.e., including armed struggle to overthrow the British. “Give me blood, and I shall give you freedom “, he was the founder of Indian National Army. His ideologies were unlike Gandhi’s. Despite the differences, both were tall leaders of the Indian Freedom Struggle who advocated the cause of complete Independence. Moreover, there was considerable degree of respect between the two as Gandhi referred Bose as ‘Netaji’ and ‘Prince amongst Patriots’ whereas Bose referred to Gandhi as the ‘Father of the Nation.’

Jayee Rajguru

There is a great sutra from Chanakya’s *Arthashastra*. ‘Rulership can be successfully carried out (only) with the help of associates. One wheel alone does not turn. Therefore, he

should appoint ministers and listen to their opinions.’ The great revolutionary leader Jayee Rajguru knew that with great power came great responsibility. His ancestors served hereditarily in the court of the king of Khurda as Rajguru. He was appointed as the Rajguru at the age of 41 during the reign of Dibyasingha Deva II.

With the continuous victories of British, they forever wanted to expand their territory. In 1803, Col. Harcourt signed the ‘Treaty of Deogan’ with the Maratha transferring possession of few places from Marathas to the British. He even sent an agreement to the king, of an assured amount of 1 lakh rupee, four pargans, and superintendentship of Jagannath Temple in Puri to provide land for passage between Ganjam (south) and Balasore (north).

But the British violated the terms. As a result, the hostilities fattened. The Great Paik rebellion broke out. Even though they weren’t as militarily and technically modern as the British, they fought boldly. In the end, the great Paikas were defeated. However, the king escaped. Later, he as well as Jayee Rajguru was captured.

After the arrest, the king pleaded that he had no powers during the period of Rajguru. Moreover, during his trial, Jayee Rajguru boldly confessed, “The king was a child. He was sentenced to death.” Do you know, what’s the most saddening part? He was killed brutally by tying his both hands to the hanging roots of banyan tree, which tore his body apart.

His sacrifice proved him a true son of his motherland. Even though the *Paiks* weren’t as technologically and militarily advanced against the white, their courage and wit proved to be very fatal. The credit of first war of India’s Independence goes to the ‘Sepoy Mutiny of 1857’. Much earlier to this great event India had witnessed in the soil of Orissa the freedom struggle of Jayee Rajguru in the Kingdom of Khurda with a viewing to wipe out the rule of the mighty British in the years from 1803 to 1805. The history of India’s war of independence was written mainly based on the documents prepared by the British authority. The reality of the facts was intentionally overlooked and deliberately avoided. They characterized the great war of India’s struggle as ‘Sepoy Mutiny of 1857’. In the similar way the British termed the rising of Khurda Paiks during Mukunda Dev II under the leadership of Jayee Rajguru as ‘Paika Bidroh’..... (magazines.odisha.gov.in)

Apart from them, there are several other unsung national freedom fighters. The Chandra Sekhar Behera, Buxi Jagabandhu, The Jewel of Utkal, Utkalmani Pandit Gopabandhu Das, Veer Surendra Sai, Amar Saheed Baji Rout, Gajapati Maharaja Krushna Chandra Dev, Utkal Gourav Madhusudan Das are among them.

Lifelong Freedom Fighter Jadumani Mangaraj

Jadumani Mangaraj was born in Kendrapada district in the year 1894. He was a very cunning, amusing, and courageous. He was a prevailing freedom fighter. With his

considerable oratory skills, he used to encourage people to fight for freedom. From his very childhood, he was absorbed for serving the motherland.

Being born in an agrarian family, he resisted making further studies. But he found a way out and eventually moved to Ravenshaw College, Cuttack to pursue further studies. At that time, a Britisher was in charge of that college. With the initiation of ‘Non-Cooperation Movement’, he addressed the students the demerits of supporting the movement. In response to his talk, Jadumani courageously yelled out a phrase talking against the in charge. This was his first participation in National Freedom Struggle.

1921 ‘Non-cooperation Movement’ was a huge success. Utkalmani Gopandhu Das spread the word and idea of non-cooperation movement in Orissa. With Gandhiji’s call, the students left the college. Jadumani Mangaraj was the very first person to be taken in for supporting the movement.

He gave a head start to the movement in his motherland - Kendrapada. His father-in-law was Peskar in the court of Kendrapada. He, thus, gathered a few people supporting the cause. And blocked his way to the court. This was his initial struggle.

In 1924, he contested for Kendrapada Local Board councillor and emerged victorious. He took the responsibility of freedom struggle in his district.

During *salt satygraha*, he was debarred from public speech at that moment. He was arrested for violating the conditions.

He was again arrested for protesting the ‘Jallianwalabagh Massacre.’ After 1931 ‘Gandhi-Irwin Pact’, he was released.

He had a very profound involvement in the freedom struggle. Besides, he had struggled fighting for Orissa as a separate linguistic state. His contributions are commendable and invaluable.

Amar Shaheed Baji Rout

Youth is the very period when a child grows up with toughness, stimulation, curiosity and a gush of heroism flowing through blood. Amar Saheed Baji Rout is the youngest Indian Freedom fighter and martyr. Patriotism ran through his veins. Remember the Jatan Nagar Palace that I had mentioned earlier? With the British in support of the king, they sent troops to oppress the rising rebellion in the village.

Baji Rout was a boatman. As a young member of the Banar Sena of Prajamandal, his duty was to keep an eye on the river. That night with suspicion of British troops crossing the river, Baji was given the task to guard the river and alarm the people of any suspicious

activity. When the British arrived, courageous Baji denied crossing them across the river. As a consequence, the British opened fire and Baji was shot. This brave son of Oriya didn't surrender to the white. With a youth generation wholly different from today's, Baji set an example of courage, patriotism and heroism for the generations to come.

Major Bajelgate was responsible for Baji's death. On January 8, 1931, the raged people took revenge of his death by attacking and killing the major with their sticks.

Saheed Basu-Bishuni

Tribal revolts and movements had a significant role in shaping the freedom struggle. Basu Sethi and Bisuni Mandual are Kanika's two brave children. With their sacrifices, one with pride can say Kanika's brave sons martyred themselves against the British for their motherland.

Basu Sethi was an untouchable. Even with the prevalence of untouchability at that time, he was adored very much. On the other hand, Bisuni Sethi was Khandayat in caste. In spite of being from different caste, it was the love of motherland that united them. Uneducated but courageous, they both united people with their words and provoked people against the king and British.

Their earliest struggle was against the inappropriate and harsh agriculture laws. Unrevealed associations of farmers were formed. And eventually, the movement was called. The main objective was to protest against the rising taxes. Although Basu and Bisuni weren't large farmers, they both were successful in uniting farmers against the King. The agitation was unsuccessful. Despite failure, they decided not to pay further taxes. And they decided to fight for their rights.

Gandhiji gave a call for non-cooperation movement in 1920. He urged the people not to use British produced clothes, to leave educational institutions and leave offices. Ramdas Babaji brought the message to Kanika. In front of a huge crowd, he boldly delivered a speech at odds with the king.

Bisuni took the responsibility of awakening people of the movement operating from one village to another. Similarly, Basu Sethi got together the untouchables and abused people in Chamuka region. People got all together for the cause.

Non-cooperation kicked off. 20,000 people from all over Orissa engaged in it. Alone, 4000 people took part from the Kanika region. This was all due to the impact and endeavour of Basu and Bisuni. Every village adopted spinning wheels and boycotted British clothes.

With fear of rising, the king called for muscle power. Basu and Bisuni led the irritated people. Incompetent to the large force, the police saheb ordered to open fire. A bullet hit

Bisuni's stomach while he was struggling against the police with his stick. He died saying, "Jay Bajra Mahakali." With that sight people urged Basu to retreat. But he denied and kept on struggling. He too was shot twice from the back. He as well lost his life.

Basi and Bisuni were martyred for their motherland on April 23, 1922. They are Kanika's pride. They were the first people to be martyred for non-cooperation movement. Their death gave a strong feeling of patriotism among the people. People now were more courageous against the British. Their contributions will be remembered for ages.

Amar Saheed Kushti Dakua

On August 8, 1942, the 'Quit India Movement' began. It spread like a wildfire. Kusti Dakua was born in the year 1897. He was healthy and a bold person. He used to be present at the village gatherings. Unlike his father, from his youth, Kusti Dakua used to hear to people's pleas, and gave people justice. His valiant and bold words were, "Dethrone the king, abolish slavery."

He used to attend the *gram sabhas* but was unable to speak expressively. Unhappy with that, he one day slept under the banyan tree, where 'Dalakhai Goddess' was worshipped. He acknowledged that he was blessed by the goddess. And true to his words, he spoke well in the later sessions.

He was uneducated. Yet, his words were strong and simple. In his fifth session, his words were, "Do or Die." His words brought out patriotism within the people.

On August 8, 1942, he headed his biggest assembly. That day, he made the people aware of the great accomplishments of the martyred. They decided to take the 'Rajbati' into their hands, dethrone the king and burn down government offices, police stations on their way and cut the telephone wires. The movement was violent in character.

First, they burnt down the post office. At that time, the police sub inspector was Benudhar Pattnaik. Kusti Dakua's words were to do or die. He decided to burn down the police station and hoist the Indian Flag on the police station. While doing so, the brave son of motherland, Kusti was shot on his stomach. He fell down saying, "Trirangaki Jay." That day, Orissa lost her courageous son. He is the pride of the motherland. He will be in everyone's heart for ever.

Muhammad Hanif

Freedom struggle had harmoniously united people of divergent religions, castes, and creeds. Muhammad Hanif was a great freedom fighter of Orissa. He had a very bright childhood. He joined as an excise inspector to support his family. But he was not happy with that job, as, it included black marketing and smuggling of excise goods.

He left his job when Mahatma Gandhi gave the call for ‘Non-Cooperation Movement.’ Even though he was the only service holder from his family, he supported the cause of freedom rather than supporting his family. He was a Gandhian.

Hanif started a school to impart Gandhiji’s ideas to the people. Hanif became the master, and he was known as ‘Masterji.’ His thought was that only an educated society will free the people out from the British rule. Later, his school was shut down by the British. He was a man of dedication. He was thrown out of his family by his father for not being able to support his family. Subsequently he committed himself to aware people of Gandhiji’s ideologies. An ashram was constructed in Kuansia. With rising concern, the ashram was demolished.

People from both Muslim and Hindu communities admired Hanif. “Everyone is the children of one motherland. Let one be Hindu or Muslim, one has to serve their motherland”, these were his words.

He was a prominent leader in the Bhadrak district. His primary ideology was that every person is one, ‘Allah and Ishwar’ is same. He was against the British policies of favouring different communities of the section individually.

Mahatma Gandhi started ‘the Salt Satyagraha.’ Muhammad Hanif took the responsibility to make people aware of the satyagraha in his region. He united people of all communities to spread the word. With rising chaos, the police lathi charged the people. Even though the people were physically hurt, they remained mentally bold.

Quit India Movement started. The people burnt down the police stations. The people of ‘Dhusuri’ declared themselves independent. Many people were martyred in the ‘Lunia shootout.’ ‘Eram shootout’ was too cruel. It is considered as the Jallianwalabagh of Odisha. Arising revolts angered the British and Hanif was arrested. Yet, he continued his noble work in the prison, educating the people.

After his release from jail, he joined Congress. Moreover, he built a volunteer community to gather information from every corner of the area.

He had a critical role in guiding the people of Bhadrak in the freedom struggle. He passed away on October 6, 1967. He set an example of how secularism was power. His memories will forever be engraved.

The history of Indian Freedom Struggle would be partial without talking about the women who participated in it. They fought with true spirit and courage to gain us freedom. Many women freedom fighters like Sarojini Naidu, Annie Besant, and Indira Gandhi have immense popularity. But there are many others who are not as celebrated as them.

Maa Ramadevi

Born in 1899, Maa Ramadevi had played a major role in organising freedom struggle in Odisha. An interesting thing about her childhood is that she and her sister were given pens to keep. The one who lost it last would win. And when Ramadevi used to lose, she would cry. Her father has a fascinating way, and told her if she cried, he would eat a good thing, and if she didn't cry, then she would eat it. This way he groomed her to be strong.

Her very first leap towards fighting for freedom was when she attended Utkalmani Gopabandhu Das's speech when he returned from Nagpur session of Congress – 1. Leave Government Degree 2. Leave Government schools and colleges 3. Leave Provincial Councils and Central Assembly 4. Leave advocating and Government jobs 5. Stop using foreign garments. This was the beginning of Non-Cooperation Movement. Many people including Ramadevi were moved by Utkalmani Gopabandhu Das's words.

She was greatly active during the salt satyagraha. Even when the government didn't give permission for meeting, she urged people to come to her house where she announced the places where salt would be produced. She gathered 1000 women from Srijung village for the same. She used to aware women moving from village to village. The most common questions she faced were, What does Congress do? What will be their profit if they joined? How she being an women would be allowed to go out of her house?, What will be the benefits for women after independence? She would gracefully reply to these queries.

In 1932, she was arrested for reading out the 'Swaraj Resolution' in a public place and was sent to Hajaribagh jail. There she learnt about Gandhiji's fast against Harijans being called untouchables. After she was released from jail, she heard about Harijan Seva in Cuttack. Untouchability Prohibition Society was formed. Later, it was renamed to 'Harijan Seva Sangha.' She used to say, 'since people were engaged in scavenging, they were called untouchables. But a mother cleans her child, that doesn't mean she is untouchable.'

She was then again arrested during 1942 Quit India movement. In 1944, she heard about the death of Kasturba. After her release from jail, she started to work for the memorials of Kasturba. Gandhiji gave her the responsibility of the representative of 'Odisha Kasturba Truster.'

Even after independence she continued her noble work. She became a member of Odisha Khadi association on August 21, 1947. In 1950, she established an Adivasi help centre. Apart from her involvement in the National Independence Movement, during the India-China war in 1962, she joined the peace keeping army in Assam. She continued serving the nation and her people. She helped people during floods and droughts, formed numerous village committees, supported student unions for various causes, served patients and refugees.

Sarala Devi

During the British Raj in India, there was women's awakening in England. There were series of campaigns by women for equal opportunities as men, such as equal pay, equal rights, voting privileges etc. Its impact was seen within the women in India. The educated women under the inspiration of Gandhiji participated in huge numbers in the Indian Freedom Struggle. Among them the most prominent were Sarojini Naidu, Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay, Aruna Asaf Ali, Sucheta Kripalani and Kamala Nehru. Furthermore, women of Odisha were awakened by their patriotism.

Sarala Devi was significant within Odisha. She was born in 1904 at Jagatsinghpur district in Odisha. She was unlike other people. She was against all the societal stereotypes from childhood, setting an example for other people. She was in opposition to untouchability. People used to bathe when in contact with Dalits, but she didn't - she used not to believe in all these.

With widespread belief of widow non-marriage, untouchability, and unruly governance of the British government, she at a very young of 15, thought to reform the people and the country. She was the only female member of the rally marching against the 'Jallianwalabagh Massacre' from her village, only at the age of 15.

She attended the Nagpur session of Congress along with her husband. With Gandhiji's guidance, the 'Non-cooperation Movement' started in 1920. Gandhiji had come to Odisha in 1921, where he portrayed the principles of the movement. It was all because of Sarala Devi's efforts, many women participated in the session. She became a member of Congress at that time. To be a member, a person had to pay 25 paisa and to sign the agreement paper. Their signature would be used to prove that the person is for and supporting the cause of Independence, "I believe in Independence of Bharat in a peaceful and harmonious way."

She was the member of 'Alaka Ashram'. They had opened a national school to train people. Along with studies, people were taught to tailor their own cloth. She, along with her husband would participate in various events organised by the ashram such as helping patients in remotely located village.

She formed a women association, 'Utkal Women Association' to spread light on various issues faced by women through various sessions and education. After the huge success of the association, she continued helping and forming various other women associations and developing patriotism among women.

Salt Satyagraha was one movement which gloriously unified the people of India. Saraladevi too undertook the responsibility of uniting and making people aware. She formed 'Udbhog Mandir' at Brahmapur city in Ganjam district. The police got concerned when she declared to break the salt laws. One day, when she was travelling in Madras Mail, the train

was halted, and she was arrested. With fear of an uprising, they arrested her from an unknown place. She was sent to Sudur Vellore jail, where she was tortured severely. She was the first Odia lady to serve a jail sentence.

Odisha was declared as a separate state on 1 April 1938. She was the first female member of Orissa Legislative Assembly. During the reign of British, every session was being conducted in English. But when she became the Speaker for a day, she undertook all the sessions in Odia language. “What a brave lady!” She was also the first and most prominent lady who wanted to recognise Odia as the state language.

She had served for 9 years in the legislative assembly. She worked for glory and welfare of the state. She was chosen as the first satyagrahi by Gandhiji himself, during the World War II from Orissa. She again served 6 months of jail period for protesting against it. She left for her heavenly abode on 4 October 1986 at the age of 82. Orissa lost a pioneer of women movement for Independence, an eminent freedom fighter and writer.

Part 4 Conclusion

In addition to them, there are many other unsung heroes, namely, Sangrambira Krutibasa Patshnai, Andhari Mulakar Aloko Pabitra Mohan, Desaprana Pranath, Gandhibadi Nrusingha Guru, Sadasiva Tripathi, Desa Sevak Niranjana Pattnaik, Sangrami Sevak Nilamani Pradhan, Goranga Charana, Sangram Sevak Mohan Nayak, Biplabi Dwibedi, Nabautkala Anyatama Nirmata Chandrasekhar Behera, Swadesha Premi Dibakara Pattnaik, Sangrami Narayana Birabara, Desasebi Sura Pattnaik, Freedom Fighter Banka Bihari, Sridhar Das, Govind Chandra Mohanty, National Poet Bira Kishore, Riot King Somnath Singh, Tyagi Nanda Kishore Freedom Struggle Sarathi Banamali Pattnaik, whose parts aren't celebrated greatly. They had played a very influential role in their respective places all over Odisha. Their efforts will forever be engraved.

After 200 years of pain, struggle and fight, India gained freedom on 15 August 1947. Every person had been wishing for an independent nation with all people living in unity and integrity. People were tortured and exploited. People arose to fight for the people's rights. India, land of freedom fighters, words are impotent speaking of every individual's effort for the freedom of India. Many freedom fighters went after Gandhiji's non-violent method while some used violent means. Irrespective of caste, creed and religion, everyone jointly fought for the freedom of India. Nevertheless, everyone had one and the same objective - to free India from the British Rule.

Every freedom fighter should be remembered, for they are the people who gave us freedom. Their sacrifices must be honoured. Even today, they continue to inspire the people. We the Indians should live in peace and harmony.

=====