

ROLE OF WOMEN IN THE FREEDOM STRUGGLE OF ODISHA DURING BRITISH RULE

Dr. Gautam Budha Sitaram

Former Professor
Rukmni Devi Institute of Advanced Studies
GGSIP University
New Delhi, India

Abstract

Odisha Freedom Struggle was one of its own kinds. Never we have seen millions of people refraining themselves from violence and following the path of non-violence by the call of half-naked Fakir, never thousands of people have died under British tyranny, never women have surged ahead for freedom in the then conservative milieu. The participation and sacrifice of women like Kasturba Gandhi, Sarojini Naidu, Kamala Nehru, Indira Gandhi (as a child) in the freedom struggle and national awakening is simply incredible and praiseworthy. Their participation infused fresh blood into the movement and undoubtedly their will-power stood like granite before the merciless British colonial power. Ultimately, injustice had to succumb and yield place for justice and freedom in India. The province of Orissa witnessed many glorious chapters of the participation of women in Indian freedom struggle. The luminaries are Rama Devi, Sarala Devi, Shailabaia Das, Kuntala Kumari Sabat and Malati Choudhury, In the early part of the twentieth century, Odisha was not a separate State and the Oriyas were a poor, suffering, backward and demoralised lot. The condition of women was absolutely miserable. The superstition-ridden society did not allow the women to receive education. In short, women were almost treated as born slaves. The women leaders and volunteers of Odisha emerged from this all-encompassing darkness and help other women and men arise as well as awake.

Keywords-participation, struggle, freedom, movement, women, non-violence, colonial, Independence

Introduction

The women made their contributions to the freedom struggle. Struggle for freedom in Odisha is not an isolated affair. It is a part of the national struggle. Whenever something has happened in any part of India, it has deeply affected the course of events in Odisha. During the first half of the twentieth century, Oriya movement and the National Congress movement were the two most remarkable events of the political history of Odisha, which cast a deeper impact on the women of Odisha. In fact, by their involvement in the Oriya movement, they made a significant

contribution to the society. Further, it was this experience in the Oriya movement that made it easier for them to associate themselves with the freedom struggle. The women belonging to the aristocratic section and educated middle class became members of the 'Utkal Sabha' and National Association to fight for the cause of the Oriyas. These associations were the very first manifestation of the political consciousness of the Oriyas. Activities and personality of Mr Madhusudan Das greatly influenced his adopted daughters Smt. Shailabala Das and Smt. Sudhansubala Hazra. These two ladies of Orissa along with Smt. Reba Roy, Padma Bai and many others joined the Oriya Movement wholeheartedly and assumed the leadership in the deliberation of Utkal Union Conference (Utkal Sammelan), held under the auspices of Utkal Sabha. The members of the Utkal Union Conference organized constitutional agitation to fight against the injustice done to Orissa by holding meetings, submitting memoranda to the government authorities and similar bodies. Shailabala Das and many of whom came from the royal households, such as the queens of Kanika, Dharakote, Khalikote, Baramba, Sukinda, Dhenkanal, etc. took initiative for the spread of Oriya nationalism, women's education, their rights, their social. The Editor of 'The Star of Utkal' remarks, "Ladies' association was formed at Berhampur and Mrs. W.B. Lying presided at the inaugural meeting." The interaction of aristocratic Oriya women with British officials proved useful for the development of the society. From a report of 'Utkal Dipika' it is clear that Mrs. Shailabala Das encouraged the students to form an association. Subsequently the Young Utkal Association was formed at Cuttack with a hundred students as its members. The objectives of this association were to organise the youth to give them proper guidance and direction for a better future for themselves, to guide them to become worthy children of their motherland, so that when the necessity comes they would unhesitatingly come forward to sacrifice their own personal interest for the sake of their motherland. These political activities started in Orissa quite some time before the freedom movement of the country. This made it fairly easy on the part of the Oriyas to join in the national struggle when the time came. The nationalist women like Shailabala Das, Mrs. Reba Roy, Mrs. Kar, Mrs. Ghosh laid the foundation of the constitution struggle of the people against the British authorities and generated national consciousness in the mass mind. They were influenced by the creed of the Indian National Congress organization. They not only worked for social development but also for individual freedom, national unity, solidarity and the democratization of all social institutions.. Rama Devi was the first women freedom fighter of Odisha. She was born in 1899 in the small village of Satyabhamapur near Cuttack. She did not get proper education and was married off at the age of 15 to Gopabandhu Chowdhury. She and her husband joined the Indian independence movement in 1921. She was highly influenced by Mahatma Gandhi and used to go from village to village to encourage women to join the independence movement. Others who had an influence on her were Jai Prakash Narayan, Vinoba Bhave and her uncle Madhusudan Das. In 1921, she met Gandhiji and with her husband joined the Non-Cooperation Movement. The same year they joined the Indian National Congress and started wearing khadi. In the year 1930, she took active part in the Salt Satyagraha movement in Odisha. She and her colleagues were arrested in November 1930 and put in different jails by the British. She was arrested several times with other women freedom fighters like Sarala Devi and Malati Choudhury and sent to jail. She got herself actively involved in the Harijan welfare. During Quit India Movement of 1942, the entire family of Rama Devi including her husband G Laxmi Panda, one of the youngest members of Netaji Subash Chandra Bose's India National

Army (INA), fought for the freedom of the country. Laxmi's parents were killed in a British air raid in 1943, following which, she and her younger brother were orphaned. She was determined to avenge the death of her parents and joined the INA. She, perhaps, is the only Odia woman to have been enlisted with the INA and joined its camp in what was then Burma. Bose personally gave her the new name of Indira, to avoid confusing her with the far more famous (Captain) Lakshmi Sehgal at that time. Sarala Devi joined the non-cooperation movement during the Indian freedom struggle in 1921. She was inspired by Mahatma Gandhi and strived hard to reform social evils and uplift the status of women. She was also the first Odia woman to be selected as the delegate in the Indian National Congress. In the independent India, she was the first woman to become a member of the Odisha Legislative Assembly. She was also the first female speaker of the Legislative Assembly.

Objectives of Study

- To explore the knowledge of women participation in the freedom struggle of Odisha
- To give emphasis on the contributions of eminent female freedom fighters for nation building.
- To find out the leadership ideas generated by women during freedom struggle in Odisha
- To find out the contributions of women freedom fighters in Non-Cooperation and Civil Disobedient Movement in India with special reference to Odisha.

Research Methodology

Research Methodology is very indispensable to explore the research about the freedom struggle of India as a special reference to Odisha. I have collected only secondary data to illustrate the detailed contributions of the women freedom fighters in Odisha. It is very useful information which I have used to give a new dimension in the field of historical research.

Participation in the freedom struggle

Rama Devi had heard Gandhiji on 23 March 1921. On the same night Mahatma Gandhi addressed a meeting organized by the ladies at Binod Bihari at Cuttack. Rama Devi attended this meeting and presented Mahatma Gandhi her hand-spun thread and contributed all her ornaments to the Tilak Swaraj Fund. She also took a vow not to wear ornaments and to wear khaddar saree through her life. She was determined to forgo all the luxuries of her life and to devote her body, mind and soul for the freedom struggle.

Alakashram and Rama Devi

Alakashram played a vital role in the freedom struggle in India. The National school started there. As an insider, Rama Devi cooked tiffin's and meals for the inmates of the Ashram. In 1923-24, cholera spread in Jagatsinghpur. Rama Devi with other workers moved from village to village and advised the people to take preventive injection and take boiled water. For the eradication of malaria in that area, she advised to use quinine. She also advised people not to use intoxicants. She also taught spinning and preparation of clothes to the people who came for training to Alakashram.

Gandhiji's Padayatra, Berboi Conference and Rama Devi

On 9 March 1934 started Harijan Padayatra in Odisha. Rama Devi participated in that and she was advised by Gandhiji to start Congress organization vigorously in Bhadrak and Rama Devi did it. Similarly, Rama Devi worked a lot in the Berboi conference near Delang in the puri district held on 26 March 1937. It was attended by Gandhiji Kasturba, Maulan Azad, Rajendra Prasad Patel and others who appreciated the self-less service of Rama Devi.

Rama Devi and the Quit India Movement

On 9 August 1942, began the quit India Movement. Rama Devi actively participated in the Movement. She was arrested with Gopabandhu Choudhury, Malati Devi, Manmohan Choudhury, Annapurna Maharana and Sharat Chandra Maharana. Rama Devi was imprisoned in the Cuttack jail. Even inside the jail, she preached about nationalism. In 1944, she was released from the jail. Returning to Bari Ashram, she was again engaged in Gandhian constructive works.

Sarala Devi - was also the famous freedom fighter of Odisha and her contributions to the freedom struggle are unforgettable. She had joined the freedom movement by the inspiration of her husband. Being inspired by thought of Mahatma Gandhi, Sarala Devi became instrumental in popularizing the Indian National Congress in Odisha. She was imprisoned during the Civil Disobedience Movement. She devoted herself for the uplift of the Harijans. By her literary creations, she enriched Odia literature. She was the president of the Utkal Sahitya Samaj, the leading literary forum of Odisha. She contributed her articles to Asha, Nabina, Nababharati, Utkal Sahitya etc. based on the problems of women. She breathed her last on 4th, October 1886. Sarala Devi played an important role in the Civil Disobedience Movement in Odisha. She went to Inchudi and helped the women there for the preparation of salt. By her influence, many people of Lakshimpur, Pallibandha and Huma joined the salt satyagraha in Gunjam. Being inspired by her speech, Kulalata Devi of GHUMSUR contributed her ornaments to the national fund. While preaching against the British Government. She was arrested by the police and produced before Chhatrapur court and got six months imprisonment. She was the first lady to go to jail by the order of the court. The Udyog Mandi which was established at Berhampur to train the Satyagraha, got impetus by her presence. After her release from the jail she was welcomed by people at Cuttack railway Station and a meeting was organized under the leadership of Binapani Devi to felicitate her. In that meeting, the Union Jack was burnt. Thousands of people had attended that meeting.

Gandhiji had selected Sarala Devi as the women leader to start the Quit India Movement in Odisha. While delivering her speech against the British, She was imprisoned and sent to the jail. She remained inside the jail for three years. During that period, she gave birth to a son. She also chalked out programme inside the jail with other prisoners how to quit the English from India. This shows her love for the motherland. Sarala Devi popularized the GANDHIAN CONSTRUCTIVE WORKS like woman education uplift of woman, eradication of untouchability, adoption of swadeshi, prohibition etc. in Odisha. She had given proposal to the Odisha Government to provide education to Harijans and give them jobs. She had advised the Government to open agricultural bank and land mortgage bank for protecting the Harijans from the Clutches of moneylenders. By her efforts, the Government had built hostel at Cuttack for the

stay of the Harijans. Sarala Devi was very sympathetic for the development of social life. She could know about the peasants during the Kanika rebellion of 1921-22. In 1937, she delivered a talk at Delang. There she spoke against Bethi (forced labour). This speech was directed against the Zamindar System of Delang. During that period, if a farmer failed to pay revenue to the Zamindar, She advised the government in many meetings to take steps against the Zamindars and also to look after the peasants by helping them to increase their property. Sarala Devi was the member of the Provincial Assembly from 1937 to 1944. She was imprisoned during that time and had warned the Government regarding the misbehaviour of the jail staff towards the political prisoners. On 28 February 1939, she argued in favour of co-education and demanded to grant more money for the development of women education. She also introduced the Dowry Eradication Bill in the Assembly in 1939 which was passed and accepted by the government. In the same year, she also introduced Property Right of Hindu Women Bill which was also passed. She also put pressure for women franchise. In these ways, she proved herself as a great politician by presenting the problems of the people before the government. In fact, Sarala Devi was an ideal woman. She played an important role in popularizing the ideas of Mahatma Gandhi in Odisha. Her works for Harijans, peasants, women and common people were praiseworthy.

Malati Devi - Malati Sengupta, Malati Choudhury, Malati Devi is one of the much talked freedom fighters of Odisha. Although she was Bangalee, but after married Nabakrishna Choudhury, she devoted her body, mind and soul for the freedom struggle in Odisha. Her role in the Prajamandal movement and work for the farmers keep her alive in the memory of the Odisha. Malati Devi took active part in the salt satyagraha at Inchudi of Balasore district. She had worked there with Rama Devi Kiranbala Sen and others. By her influence many women joined in the Civil Disobedience movement of Inchudi and prepared salt. She also encouraged the women at Srijang to participate in the movement. She also encouraged the women at Kujang who joined the movement with their Queen Bhagyabati Patamahedei. Her fiery speech dragged the women from the four walls of the house who actively participated in the Salt Satyagraha.

Malati Devi had played an important role to popularize the Gandhian constructive programme inside Odisha. On 30 April 1930 she delivered a fiery speech inspiring the people to boycott foreign clothes. She moved a resolution in the congress workers meeting at Sambalpur in 1946 regarding the steps to be undertaken for the uplift of Harijans which was unanimously passed. In 1927, she had taken step with her husband for the improvement of agriculture. She constructed Baji Rout Hostel at Angul and taught its inmates Gandhian constructive programmes. While returning after attending the Bombay session of the National Congress where the Quit Indian Resolution was passed. Malati Choudhury was arrested at CUTTACK RAILWAY STATION. She was sent to jail. She was released in 1945. In 1946, she travelled with Mahatma Gandhi in the Noakhali area of west Bengal to pacify the communal riots which had undertaken among the Hindus and Muslims. Malati Devi was inspired by Vinoba Bhave and actively participated in the Bhoodan movement in Odisha. She established Navajeevan Mandal at Angul where the meeting of All India Sarvodaya Sevasamgha was held. She preached about Bhoodan movement at Koraput in 1952. She also participated in Vinoba's padayatra in Odisha in 1955. The life of Malati Devi was dedicated one for the cause of the society. Although she had come from Bengal but she loved Odisha and worked for the people of Odisha. Her dedication will be ever remembered by the people of this land.

The women activists were busy in launching the Quit India Movement and courting imprisonment, the emergence of some women litterateurs was important. Among those ladies the name of Sita Devi Khadanga is worth mentioning. At that time, she produced a good number of provocative books which were meant to infuse nationalistic spirit among the masses. She mainly wrote on the theme of liberation propagating the message of Gandhi. Her important contributions in the field of Oriya literature are Nari, Posyaputra, Naistik, Nispatti, Prachinpanth'.¹⁵ In the Koraput district of South Orissa even the innocent hill tribes who had no idea of politics also joined the Quit India Movement. Among the tribals Bauri Sahu and his daughter Sani Sahu played an important role at Kajendni. Santi moved from place to place and gave important news to the revolutionaries secretly.¹⁶ At that time in Koraput the innocent tribal people were oppressed, beaten mercilessly and tortured in many ways by the police and other civil officials.¹⁷ Therefore, some brave women along with some male leaders rose to the occasion and took arms to fight against the British, the name of some brave women worth mentioning are Smt. Mesti Kastani, Subarna, Satank, Aryati, Kumari Jhara, Smt. Jamuna. Smt. Jani, Kumari Tandra and Kuari Draupadi. These ladies worked for the freedom of the country and dedicated their lives for the Congress movement.¹⁸ It is heartening to note here in this context that in the tribal areas of Ganjam and Koraput women had first raised their voice for freedom and had started a standard of rebellion against the foreign Government as early as the first part of the 19th century i.e., much before the Congress launched the freedom movement in India.

The chief of the Gumma division of the Parlakhemundi region (Ganjam district) Krishna Chandra Bisoyee and his wife Hiramani Bisoyee carried on war against the British for long 20 years. When Krishna Chandra died a martyr's death fighting against the British, the war was continued by his brave and intelligent wife Hiramani. She led the guerrilla war of another 10 years with greater determination. The Government had to mobilize all their resources to capture her. Though after a prolonged fight she lost her war, yet she won an honoured place in the annals of freedom history.¹⁹ Similarly, Bangara Devi, the Koya Princess of Malkangiri, in the Koraput district fought with the British troops in 1860. Khar Parvati, a Bonda woman in the same district carried on guerrilla warfare against the British. She kept the Government in constant trouble and tension for some time. But along with her son she was captured and killed by the English troops in 1916.²⁰ At the direction of Mahatma Gandhi the women of South Orissa not only participated in political activities and movements but also remained deeply involved in the constructive programme. Such works included eradication of untouchability, prohibition, social reforms, promotion of Khadi etc. The group of women who dedicated themselves to the constructive work in South Orissa were A. Laxmi Bai, Champa Devi, Kishorimani Devi etc. These ladies received preliminary training and education for constructive works in the Alaka Ashram and in Hindustan Seva Ashram. The Harijan movement of Gandhian constructive programme became very widespread and popular in South Orissa under the leadership of Champa Devi and Jayamangala Rath. Jayamangala Rath married a Harijan lady, who later on became active worker of Patitapaban Sangh. Champa Devi at her Ashram of Ichapur kept a number of Harijan ladies Through Vedic way of offering Mantra and Homa they were made touchables. She stayed there with Harijans and took care of them. She read Ramayana and Mahabharata and did Samkirtan with them at her residence.

The peasant movement also made rapid progress in Ganjam and the adjoining areas under the leadership of Laxmi Bai (MLA) and Hemalata Samanta and T. Arahulu. They established

contacts with the Ganjam ryots and toured different areas, addressed big gatherings of ryots and collected lady members for the movement. Gradually a large number joined the movement and offered their membership. They included Uma Devi, Ahalya Devi, Manakya Dei, Bishnu Priya Devi, Sumana Devi, T Annapurna, Tarini Dei. Sulakhyana Devi, Padmavati Devi, Sita Devi and V. Kumudini Devi. Women played an important role not only in improving the condition of Harijans or peasants, but also made their best efforts for the uplift of their own community. For the all round development of women they set up several socio-cultural and educational institutes and societies at different places. One such association was the Utkal Women's Conference organized by the women of South Orissa. As has already been mentioned a couple of ladies including Rasamani Devi and Swarnalata Devi met at Swaraj Ashram, Berhampur and founded the Utkal Women's Conference which held its first session on 30th June 1924 presided over by Acharya Prafulla Chandra Ray of Bengal. The main aim of the conference was to discuss and deal with various problems related to women. Annapurna Devi moved from place to place and organized meetings for women's liberation. She organized a number of primary schools in villages for the development of female education.²⁴ She established at Nari Sadan Berhampur with the help of Parsuram Patro. On the whole, it is gratifying to note that women played a very significant role in the freedom movement of South Orissa. They participated in all aspects and phases of the nationalist movement including the constructive programme.

Western Part of Odisha - Since it was the participation of all sections of the society the movement was termed as 'mass movement' which could be possible only after the appearance of Mahatma Gandhi in the freedom movement. The clarion call of Mahatma Gandhi gave an impetus to the people in every nook and corner of India. People of Odisha also had significant role in the freedom movement. Although initially it was confined only to urban educated class, royal and educated families, but the Gandhi's inspiration worked like a magic wand that allured the people of the whole of India. At that time how could have women kept confined them inside the four walls of their home? They responded to Gandhiji's call in huge number by directly or indirectly participating and it was turned into a mass movement. West Odisha has its own contribution to this momentous struggle for independence. The western part of Odisha, extending from the Kalahandi district in the south to the Sundergarh district in the North West, comprised of nine districts, i.e., Balangir, Sambalpur, Jharsuguda, Sundergarh, Deogarh, Suvarnapur, Kalahandi, Nuapada, Bargarh and Athmallik subdivision of Angul district. Prior to 8th century A.D. the western part of Odisha was known as Dakshin Koshala. This region is a vast geographical area, exhibiting a vast degree of demography and life style. Cultural profile of South Koshal depicts its rich history and culture.¹ Women of western Odisha have played a significant role during the freedom movements. They have had an outstanding contribution demonstrating indomitable courage and unflinching patriotism, though rarely highlighted. Prior to Gandhiji's visit Krishna Devi, a Punjabi woman, came to Sambalpur with her husband who was a businessman. She had played a leading role to inspire the people of this area. Earlier she had taken part in Satyagraha at Raipur.

In 1928 for the first time Gandhiji and Kasturba came to this region. Under the leadership of Krishna Devi the women of Sambalpur assembled at a special meeting held in the honour of Mahatma Gandhi and Kasturba. She played significant role in bringing forth the message of Gandhi and inspiring the women of this region. She was arrested and sent to Sambalpur jail

while addressing a mammoth peasant conference at Budharaja in March 1931. After release from jail she went to visit Bargarh. The women of Bargarh organised a grand meeting in honour of Krishna Devi. Fakira Behera donated his residence to open the Congress Office at Bargarh, which was later on named as Krishnasram. Many women were inspired by Krishna Devi and participated in the freedom movement. Mention may be made of Jambubati Devi, wife of the famous freedom fighter Bhagirathi Pattanaik, Gandharvi Devi (daughter-in-law of Fakira Behera), Iiâ Meher (the wife of Kunja Bihari of Tukurla), Shreeyabati Devi (wife of senior freedom fighter Ghanashyam Panigrahi of Manpur, Bheden) and many more. In March 1931 Krishna Devi presided over the Dândi Divas at Gandhi Ghat in Sambalpur.² Among the women of Western Odisha Jambubati Devi has been acknowledged as the first women freedom fighter. She was born on 9th November 1886 at Binka. After getting married to Bhagirathi Pattnaik of Barpali, a frontline freedom fighter, Jambubati Devi also entered into the freedom movement. By that time she had little knowledge on the movement. Bhagirathi Pattanaik was fighting for the cause of Swaraj. When Jambubati Devi came to know about the freedom movement she brought out a piece of gold and gave it to her husband, the last piece of property with her. In the early morning of 1931 the entire family left home and set out their journey, toured villages to propagate the Gandhian principles. She established Ashrams at Balitikira, Tukurlâ (Bargarh), Budharaja (Sambalpur) and also at Jharsuguda. By taking this step, she strengthened the Congress Organisation and produced female leaders for the movement. They went to Kumbhari, Remunda, Mânpur, Bargarh and Tukurlâ. On the way they propagated Gandhian principles and brought forth messages of Gandhiji. After their arrival at Sambalpur they stayed in the house of one Kuldhar in the Kolh Para near Budharaja. Subsequently the house was turned into an Ashram that happened to be the first Congress Ashram of Sambalpur.

Following the Gandhi-Irwin pact there was a lull in the rest part of the country, but the town of Sambalpur was active in organising people for the cause of Freedom Movement. Despite the suppressive measures taken by the British Government, Prafulla, the son of Bhagirathi Pattanaik, continued to organise meetings at Jharsuguda with the help her mother Jambubati Devi and Tulsi Devi, the mother of Bihari Ram.⁵ On 8th July 1932 second phase of Satyagraha began at Bargarh. All the Satyagrahis were sent to Patna jail except Jambubati who was put in Sambalpur jail. Gandhi decided to suspend Civil Disobedience Movement, although individual Satyagraha continued to be launched in different parts of the country. In August 1933, while launching individual Satyagraha Jambubati Devi picketed before the foreign liquor shop and foreign cloth shop at Marwadi Pada in Sambalpur and the liquor shop in Bargarh for which reason she got rigorous imprisonment of four months. On 18th September 1933 Bhagirathi Pattnaik, husband of Jambubati Pattnaik apprised of the District Magistrate of Sambalpur that they were going to adopt individual Civil Disobedience Movement on 22nd December, 1933. Their appeal was rejected and they got arrested. Bhagirathi and his son Prafulla were sent to Patna Central jail and Jambubati Devi was sent to Bhagalpur Central Jail having rigorous imprisonment. After the completion of their term in jail Bhagirathi, Jambubati and Prafulla joined as volunteers to serve the destitute of earthquake. They joined the camps at Madhopur and Basudevpur. There, they met Jawaharlal Nehru who had come to visit the relief camp. On 3rd April 1934 they had the honour to spend a night with Mahatma Gandhi, Mirabehn, Bhagabati Devi, the elder sister of Rajendra Prasad and Jamunalal Bajaj. After paying his visit to earthquake area Mahatma Gandhi resumed his Harijan tour.

On 4th May 1934 Gandhi reached Jharsuguda by train. Congress workers received him with a warm welcome. Tulsi Devi, mother of Bihari Ram garlanded Gandhi with marigold flower. Gandhi uttered, 'O Harijan Mother' and put the same garland around the neck of Tulsi Devi. For two days both Jambubati and Tulsi Devi attended Gandhi avidly. On December 1935, the National Congress was observing the 50th year of its service to the nation. The entire nation observed in pomp and ceremony. In Barpali thousands of men and women took out procession under the leadership of Jambubati Devi. During Quit India Movement thousands of men and women took out processions countrywide.

During the Quit India Movement when there was huge outcry in the entire country, the women of this area were also fighting against the oppressive rule of the British Government. At that time British Government imposed unscrupulous taxes. People using more than one chullah had to pay tax for each number of chullah. The women attacked the British police with wooden poles topped with iron cap at one end (paharun, used for thrashing corn) as weapon to defend them. The women of Bhela had shown their valour and self determination in protesting against the British power for their injustice towards the native people. History will resound with singing the songs of glory and devotion of those eminent women freedom fighters who have dedicated their life to the motherland. As a matter of fact, the women played significant and pivotal role in the freedom struggle in Odisha.

Conclusion

Throughout the period of war the women of Orissa continued their efforts along with their leaders to free themselves. In Simla Conference of June 1945, the Governor General Lord Wavell gave suggestion to end the administrative deadlock and for forming a national government but the Simla Conference was a failure, The Cabinet Mission brought recommendation for the future constitution for India, the proposal for a constituent Assembly and a plan for the interim Government. Elections were held and Smt. Malati Choudhury called upon the public to vote for congress and have faith on the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi. In the election, nine women members including Smt. Malati Choudhury, A. Laxmi Bai, Priyambada Devi, Mrs. Anne Catherine Munro, etc, were elected to various posts. The Cabinet Mission led to differences of opinion between Congress and Muslim League and resulted in serious riots between Hindu and Muslim. But Odisha did not experience any communal violence. Women leaders of Odisha toured extensively throughout the province calling upon the people to maintain communal harmony. Smt. Malati Choudhury went to Sambalpur on 9th October 1946 to appeal the people to promote communal harmony. She also went with Gandhiji to Noakhali to protest against the violence there. Smt. Rama Devi, Malati Devi, Sunamani Devi, Annapurna Maharana, etc. joined the Bhoodan Movement of Vinoba Bhave. Smt. Sarala Devi joined communal harmony, the upliftment of the tribals and the Harijans of Odisha is highly commendable the Cooperative movement. Smt. Malati Devi worked for the tribals in the inaccessible regions, sacrificing all comforts to which she had been born. Thus, their suffering and sacrifices will continue to inspire the women of Orissa to work for the good of the country.

References :

1. Puri, B.N., The Indian Freedom Struggle: A survey, pp. 84-85.
2. Personal Diary of G. Sivakanthamma (freedom fighter from Giri family).
3. Mohanty Nivedita, Oriya Nationalism, pp. 81-83.
4. Utkal Dipika. 12 July 1924.
5. Asha, 30 December 1926.
6. Das Maguni (ed) Ganjam Swadhinata Sangrami, Jiban Smaranika (Oriya) pp.40-45.
7. Home, Pol. Progs. File No.5- 12, 1932.
8. Asha, 7 April, 1930.
9. Samantra Trinath, Congress O Khallikote Mondal (1185- 1985)(Oriya), pp.76-77.
10. Pattnaik Banchanidhi, Mo Katha (Oriya), p.162.
11. Samaj, 25th November, 1990.
12. Nabeen, 19th December, 1940.
13. Das Maguni (ed) op.cit. p.40. 14. Ibid.
14. Bhuyan, K.C. Oriya Lekhak Parichay (Oriya), p.15.
15. en.wikipedia.org/wiki/westernodisha
16. Raghmani Naik, 'Women of Sambalpur in Pre - independent Era: An Analytical Outline', International Research Journal of Human Resources and Social Sciences (IRJHRSS) ejournal, September 2014, Volume-1, Issue-4, ISSN: 2349-4085, pp.135-145; www.aarf.asia
17. R.K. Gartia, Bhagirathi Pattnayak: The Freedom Fighter, Purnima Printers, Sambalpur, 1987, Pp.34-35
18. Karunakara Supakar (ed), Sambalpur Parichaya, Sambalpur, 2008, p.28.
19. Kumar Hassan, Sambalpur Swadhinata Sangram (Odia), Sambalpur, 2001.
20. Saroj Kumar Panda, 'Parvati Giri – The Outstanding Woman Freedom Fighter', Orissa Review, August 2005, pp. 33-35.