The emergence of Oriya women in the struggle for India's freedom struggle is a sensational chapter. Their fiery patriotism, supreme valor and gifted organizational abilities are written in letter of gold in the annals of the Indian freedom movement.

Labanya Devi, the wife of advocate Loknath Bahadur of Puri founded a Women's Association at Puri called Mahila Bandhu Samiti. It had the primary membership of a few prominent ladies from the elite classes. Involved exclusively in the literacy activities of women this association gave recognition to women's talent and creativity. In March 1921, Mahatma Gandhi addressed various public meetings in Orissa. He also addressed a small gathering of women at Vinod Vihari, Cuttack. Towards the end of 1921 Sarada Devi, with her husband visited Kanika where the tenants were agitating against their pro British Jamindar as well as the British authorities. Rama Devi (wife of Gopabandhu Choudhury) Hiramani Devi attend Gaya session of the Indian National Congress held in the 1922. Calcutta session of the National Congress held in December, 1928 was attended by Rama Devi, Sarala Devi, Sarojini Choudhury (daughter of Fakir Mohan Senapati), Janhavi Devi and Kokila Devi.

The famous salt Satyagraha in the year 1930 involved hundreds of women activists like Sarala Devi, Kishorimani Devi, Malati Devi who came out from the seclusion of their homes to join Congress demonstration for manufacturing salt. A few weeks after the Dandi March began, Gandhiji said, "the impatience of some sisters to join the good fight is to me a healthy sign. In this nonviolent warfare, their contribution should be much greater than man's. To call women, the weaker sex is libel. If by strength is meant moral power, then women is immeasurably man's superior" The effect was miraculous. The awakening of women redoubled the energy and activities of the Satyagrahis. As soon as the Satyagraha started at Inchudi, Rama Devi, accompanied by Malati Devi, Annapurna Devi and Kiran Bala Sen reached the Satyagraha camp at Balasore. Hundreds of women camped under the spell of their amazing enthusiasm and leadership. On 20 April, 1930 they led a long procession of women to the Satyagraha center and violated the Salt Law. It infused new life and lustre to the mass upsurge. Rama Devi, Annapurna Devi, Malati Devi and other women volunteers visited Srijang and encouraged the women folk of that area for violating Salt Law. Many Oriya ladies also took active part in preparing salt at different centers like Tundra, Boita, Inchudi, Kuanpur, Keligaon, Rasulpur and Kasha. Huge
quantity of salt manufactured at different centers were brought to Balasore for sale.

The involvement of Rani Bhagyabati Patamahadei of Kujanga in the Salt Satyagraha drew special attention. Thwarting the vigilance of a magistrate and the police party, Rani Patamahadei, Rama Devi and many other volunteers crossed to Kaliapata in a boat in the cover of the night. Hundreds of women following the ideal of their patriotic Rani came forward to prepare contraband salt. Sarala Devi and Malati Devi made extensive tours and drilled ideals of Satyagraha into the minds of the women folk throughout Ganjam area. About one-fourth of the participants were women who willingly joined the struggle.

Through women's participation in Salt Satyagraha, Gandhiji continued to exhort women to channel their political energies into constructive work. Sarala Devi, Rama Devi and Malati Chowdhury were the first among hundreds of women arrested along with the male leaders. During their term in Kuntala Kumari Sabat, a patriotic poetess infused revolutionary spirit into hearts of the people through her writings like Ahwana (calling) and Sphulinga (particles of fire).

Gandhiji's Padayatra in May, 1934 had a profound impact on the women of Orissa for they were called upon to fight the evils of liquor, boycott foreign clothes and discard untouchability. Inspired by Gandhiji's teachings, Rama Devi and her associates participated in the development of Khadi and village industries. They organized besetting of foreign clothes and picketing before liquor shops, while Malati Devi carried on the Congress Socialist movement with her husband. Sarala Devi became a member of the First Legislative Assembly of Orissa from 1937 to 1944. In 1946 Malati Devi was elected to the Constituent Assembly of India.

The political activities of the Oriya women reached its zenith during the period of Quit India Moment. On the 8th August, 1942 the All India Congress Committee at the Bombay Session resolved to launch the Quit India Movement to cast a final blow against British Imperialists. Many Congress workers including Malati Chowdhury represented Orissa. The next day all the Congress leaders from various part of India who had assembled at Bombay were arrested. Malati Choudhury along with Surendranath Dwivedy escaped the police dragnet and went into hiding in order to keep up the moment active and energetic.

On the same day in Cuttack and some other places of Orissa 24 leaders including Rama Devi were arrested. The Government through Notifications Nos.137 and 147 dated 9 August, 1947 declared all Congress institutions in Orissa as illegal. With much difficulties Malati Chowdhury arrived in Cuttack on 12 August, 1942 and laid the foundation of the August Revolution in Orissa. On account of the revolutionary activities and tireless efforts of women the August Revolution became very popular and energetic. Eminent women like Malati Choudhury, Rama Devi, Sarala Devi, Annapurna Maharana, Mangala Devi, Suryamani Devi, Gunamani Devi, Champa Devi, Pravabati Devi, A. Laxmibai and many others contributed immensely in making the Quit India Movement a grand success.

After the attainment of Independence on 15 August, 1947 women like Rama Devi, Malati Devi, Sunamani Devi, Annapurna Moharana joined the Sarvodaya Movement started by Vinoba Bhave. The contributions of Rama Devi as a social worker and Malati Devi as a saviour of the tribal masses is very rare in history.

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