Freedom Movement in Bhubaneswar

P.C. Tripathy

Bhubaneswar, the capital city of Orissa and an emerging cosmopolitan set up, is one of the best heritage cities of Asia and is proud for its splendid history in terms of art, architecture, Buddhist monuments and sites. Her widened road with spacious chauks adorned with several effigies of eminent leaders, poets, social reformers as also freedom fighters and has evolved as the pioneering centre for educational and technological studies in these recent years. In these developments the city has forgotten the contributions of freedom fighters of Bhubaneswar in shaping the independence of India as also the State as a separate province.

Several small localities like Naharakanta (Nurkantiah), Balianta (Balunta), etc. located in the outskirt of the present day city of Bhubaneswar were under the Mughals who were ruling over these areas from Chudangagada, near Bhubaneswar which were later on converted into Zamindarises under the British Raj. At Bhingarpur, Brahmin Zaindars were managing the revenue, social justice etc. and were shareholders of only 5 anna and 4 paise from Kothdesh Estate and later on purchased several adjoining Zamindarises like Sailo, Saibiri and Lembai (Kapileswar-Brahmagiri area) and thereby made an extensive Zamindari. Besides, Bhingarpur, there were also other small Zamindarises like Malipada (Mallapada), Jagamara, Gramadiha, Panchgaon, Bhamaragada Chanahat etc. Mukkaddams were appointed by the Mughuls to collect revenue as also to maintain law and order and Balakati, located near Bhubaneswar was a Mukkaddam Mahal and was a big administrative unit controlling a vast stretch of land. These Mukkaddams and Zamindars were like rulers and were independent in taking decisions. They were also very loyal to the British Raj and were suppressive in nature. Stories of such torture and oppressive rule are still heard among the people of the native region. The present writer, during his childhood, also experienced such oppression and also heard about it from his father, Late Gopabandhu Tripathy who was also a freedom fighter at Dhamilo. Such tyrannical rule by the British were also protested and resented by the people under the banner of Gandhiji's Swaraj Movement.

But despite all such developments, some Mukkaddams were also supportive to the freedom fighters. For example, the Mukkaddam of Balakati Satyapriya Mohanty, son of Madhavananda Mohanty supported the freedom movement despite his position as a British Officer. He supported the freedom movement organized by Dasarathi Mohanty of Bhubaneswar by lending money which matter was confined to a limited people to avoid British suspicion. After
independence these facts came to lime light and was drawn the attention of leaders like H.K. Mahatab, Navakrishna Choudhury. Satyapriya Mohanty were also an Advocate and practiced under Utkal Gourav Madhusudan Das and later on became member of the Legislative Assembly of Orissa, Minister and Speaker from time to time.

During pre-independence and early phase of 1950s, Balianta was an important market place and several big boats plied through the river Kuakhai and Daya for trade and transaction and was directly connected with the Old Jagannath Road. Due to its location as a junction, people from all nearby areas like Cuttack and Bhubaneswar used to gather. Because of this reason, the British Government deployed extra troops to have close watch on the movement of the freedom fighters. Even freedom fighters used to gather information on the spread and motive of the freedom movement due to admixture population belonging to different localities. After independence and declaration of Bhubaneswar as the capital city of Orissa, the importance of Balianta market reduced to a considerable extent.

The valorous and daring statements of Padmanava Chhotray of Badagada "the hands of an Oriya is always folded in front of Lord Jagannath and the Gajapati but never before the British or foreigners (Mlechhas)" still echoes in our mind. This courageous avowal was directed against Major General Campbell who is known in history as a cruel suppressor of local uprisings under the British Raj. Chhotray organized guerilla warfare against the British troops stationed at Balianta, on the other side of river Kuakhai which made the British afraid of crossing the river. In the year 1819 the British caught Chhotray tactfully and after a short trial at Balianta he was changed until death at a place called Patharakot. The tree in which Chhotray was hanged has been destroyed by the Super Cyclone of 1999. The present-day State Museum Building is located just on the fort and his funeral ground has been converted into residential quarters by the Bhubaneswar Development Authority during the year 1978.

Yet another martyr, Pindika Bahubalendra of Daruthenga village near Bhubaneswar also remembered for his bravery in waging guerilla warfare from the Sikharchandi hillock near Patia, Located now within the city limits of Bhubaneswar. He continued his protracted struggle and resentment against the British Raj for a long span of time. At last he was also caught due to a treacherous act played by the Zamindar of Malipada (Mallapada) and ultimately he lost his life. The historicity of the great hero is yet to be established.

To fight against the British there must be a social and moral uplift among the general people otherwise it would be difficult to deal with the advanced and strong British. The Brahmins must act as path finders of the people and must not indulge selfishness and treacherous acts. The golden words were uttered by Ramachandra Das, a social reformer, thinker and educationist, born at Bhingarpur near Bhubaneswar and later shifted to Puri. To change the social spectrum he established Suniti Primary School and Minor Schools at his native village Bhingarpur which survive till today. But people have forgotten him and his contributions for a strong society by education and social reformation. The young mass of the local area remember this great man and plan to establish a memorial but due to obstacles from a few handful and powerful influential people this dream remains stagnant.

Dasarathi Mohanty of Benupur under Balianta P.S. (a teacher by profession and later on left the job because of his participation in the
freedom movement), popularly known as Baliana Gandhi, took the leading role against the British Raj. He was not at all afraid of the British as also of the Zamindars and was protesting with the help of Birabara Lenka and Jayakrushna Sahu. Because of his anti-Government movements he was imprisoned during the Quit India Movement of 1942. Jayakrishna Sahu rejoined his old profession as a teacher and breathed his last in the year 2006.

Mahadeva Mohanty of Dhamilo, near Baliana is remembered for his participation in freedom movement. He came in contact with Mahatma Gandhi and Saint Vinoba Bhave and stayed some days at Wardha and Sabarmati. He was also a follower of Pandit Gopabandhu Das and published an eight-page poem about the Flood Relief Fund of the Utkalmani which was sold at 2 paisa each. He was imprisoned during the Quit India Movement of 1942.

Besides the above leaders, several others also participated in the freedom movement. Padma Charan Senapati of Garedi Panchana of Balipatana also contributed to the freedom by participating in the Quit India Movement. He was also the Vice-President and President of Puri Local Board. Another freedom fighter Bhagavati Panigrahi of Biswanathpur (near Balipatana) was also a great communist leader after independence. Two brothers, Bichitranaanda Das, an Advocate by profession and Bhubanandana Das, an engineer by profession also contributed immensely to the freedom movement by supporting the movement members financially. Krishna Chandra Ray of Bhanwargarh from which village the noted freedom fighter Rabi Ray hails, was also a freedom fighter and was also a Member of the Puri District and General Boards. Raghunath Mohapatra and Sridhara Garabadu of Old Bhubaneswar and Bhagavan Mohanty of Baliana also participated in the Quit India Movement of 1942.

The contribution of Bhubaneswar locality to the freedom movement is immense but due to lack of research several facets of the freedom struggle is still in obscurity. Further investigation and research in this matter would no doubt yield plethora of information regarding the origin, growth, participation and spread of popular uprising against the British which ultimately led us to independence.

P.C. Tripathy lives at Plot No.1181, Devraj Vidyapeeth Road Govind Prasad, Rasulgarh, Bhubaneswar-751010.