



Some Forgotten Martyrs of Odisha

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Of the innumerable sons and daughters of India who had laid down their lives at the altar of India's freedom movement, a very few names have been unearthed and the rest who might have found glorious places in the annals of our freedom movement have been slowly but surely disappearing into oblivion.

MADHO SINGH AND HIS SONS

One such little known or almost unknown martyr is Raja Madho Singh of the erstwhile Zamindari of Ghens in the district of Sambalpur. Madho Singh and his three illustrious sons had made great sacrifices in the cause of freedom during the Great Revolt of 1857. In the Revolt of 1858 at Sambalpur under the valiant leadership of Vir Surendra Sai, Shri Madho Singh created a lot of troubles for the invading British forces in his area and successfully blocked their way from Sambalpur to Eastern India. The Singhora hillpass which was the only passage to the east was well-fortified by the armed men of Madho Singh with himself in the command so that a large number of British soldiers lost their lives in the encounter. The vanity of the proud Britishers having thus been wounded again and again at the hand of an obscure Zamindar of a small principality like Ghens they attacked Madho Singh with renewed strength many a time. But every time they were defeated.

In one such battle the great English captain Mr. Wood Bridge was slain by the guerrilla band of Madho Singh after which the Britishers virtually gave up their attempt to subdue him and his men. However, after the Great Mutiny was suppressed in other parts of the country to some extent the foreign invaders could muster enough strength to wage an all out battle against Madho Singh and ultimately this great hero of 1857 was captured and executed. Madho Singh's astute leadership, his skilful swordsmanship, his proficiency in guerrilla warfare, exemplary courage, indomitable valour and undaunting love for country's freedom had struck awe in the hearts of the enemies. After the martyrdom of Madho Singh the mantle of the freedom struggle fell on the shoulders of his three illustrious Sons namely Hathi Singh, Kunjal Singh and Bairee Singh who were groomed by their great father for the great cause. These three Singh brothers fought against the Britishers under the leadership of Vir Surendra Sai, for two long years. Their sense of patriotism, acts of heroism, chivalry and the spirit of dedication have made them legends. After a protracted battle with the British army they were caught one by one. Hathi Singh was transported to the Andamans where he breathed his last along with his thousands of compatriots and became the only Odia to die in the Andamans in the cause of country's freedom



in the great revolt of 1857. Kunjal and Bairee offered their lives in the gallows bringing to an end the last of the male progeny of Madho Singh's family.

BASU BISUNI

If the struggle launched by Mahatma Gandhi is considered to be the major deciding factor for attainment of our freedom, then the martyrdom of two freedom fighters can never be lost sight of by our historians. They are Basu Sethi and Bisuni Madhual the first two Martyrs of the Gandhian Movement in Orissa. They hailed from two obscure villages named Tentulikoli and Bartani situated in Kanika, an erstwhile Zamindari in the district of Cuttack which was made the first testing ground for Non-co-operation Movement in Orissa by the Congress Committee in the year 1922. When the non-co-operation movement was inaugurated in Odisha and Congress was launched by Gopabandhu, Kanika was selected as the first battle front. Kanika, one of the permanent-settled states comprising of a vast area of Cuttack and Balasore districts and measuring some four hundred and forty one square miles was ruled by R.N. Bhanja Deo in medieval style under the direct patronage of the Britishers. He was a great ally of the empire and was knighted as a token of English gratitude. His administration was almost synonymous with British rule. Kanika state was famous throughout Bihar and Orissa for its maladministration, over taxation, forced labour and all types of oppression and exploitation. The discontentment among the tenants was brewing at the time when the message of non-co-operation reached there. Almost all the front-rank leaders of the State Congress camped at Rajkanika to enroll Congress members and for collecting donation for Tilak Swaraj Fund and spreading the message of Charkha. It is now gathered that out of the total twenty thousand

Congress members enrolled throughout Orissa in the year 1922, more than six thousand were enrolled in Kanika alone. Within a few months, the agitation gathered momentum which resulted in no-tax campaign and boycott of Raja's court and Educational institutions managed by him. The agitation took a violent turn when the tenants snatched away from the custody of the police some persons arrested in connection with a land revenue dispute. An armed police contingent arrived at Rajkanika to help the Raja in suppressing the rebellion. On the 23rd April 1922 some five thousand armed tenants of Kanika came face to face with combined gang of armed police and hired goondas on the outskirts of a village named Meghapur. The police opened fire and fell to its bullet, Basu and Bisuni the two peasant leaders who were leading the people. Thus they became the first martyrs of the Gandhian movement in Orissa.

THE BAL BROTHERS

Last but not the least are two illustrious Sons of Orissa known as Bal Brothers General Lokanath Bal and his younger brother Harihar Bal. They were the heroes of the historic "Chittaganja Armoury Raid" and the epic battle of Jalalbad, which is otherwise known as Armed youth uprising of Eastern India in 1930 – a glorious landmark in the history of India's Revolutionary movement. On 18th April 1930 a few armed youths including Lokanath under the leadership of Masterda Surya Sen stormed one of the biggest police Armouries located at Chittaganja now in Bangladesh. By their surprise attack they killed the sentries and looted the choicest arms and ammunition. The entire army was caught unaware and fled to a ship which anchored in the Bay of Bengal. The rest were thrown at the mercy of the rebel youths. Chittaganja was declared independence and the local British administration



was virtually crippled. But reinforcement having reached from Calcutta the Government tried to capture the rebels. They made several attack on their hideouts. One such hideout was located on the top of the Jalalbad hill situated in the vicinity of Chittaganja. Here was waged an epic battle between a band of Indian youth and a strong contingent of Goorkha Regiment under British captains. The battle of Jalalbad was epic in the sense that here was the mighty British power defeated several times at the hands of the revolutionary Indian youths. But it is all the more memorable for the Odias because the battle was commanded by General Loknath Bal at the behest of Masterda, the supreme commander of the Revolutionary Republican Army and as if this was not enough the crown of becoming the first martyr in the battlefield was adorned by Loknath's fourteen-year old young brother Harihar Bal nicknamed 'Tera' perhaps indicating his pair of squint eyes. Loknath was latter captured and transported to the Andamans along with Ganesh Ghosh, Ananta Singh and others. After his return from the Andamans Loknath died a soldier's death at Calcutta. One need not raise his eyebrows to hear that these two top ranking national heroes,

Lokanath and Harihar are none other than the sons of Odisha. Considering that 'Bal' surname and 'Tera' nickname are exclusively of Odia, origin there is nothing to disbelieve that they hailed from Orissa. Their forefathers might have migrated to East Bengal like thousand other Odias who were making a beeline to Bengal in search of employment in those days.

From Madho Singh to the Bal Bothers from 1857 to 1940s a scores of such Orissa Martyrs died unwept, unsung, unhonoured and even unidentified and unclaimed and were consequently totally forgotten even by our post independent historians.

Independence Day Anniversary is the fittest moment to remember with gratitude, these forgotten heroes whose contribution to the freedom movement in general and Revolutionary movement in particular is second to none and which any nation can rightly be proud of.

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