

A Gallant Freedom Fighter Champa Devi

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“The impatience of some sisters to join the good fight is to me a healthy sign. In this non-violent warfare, contribution should be much greater than men’s. To call women, the weaker sex, is liable. If by strength is meant moral power, the women are immeasurably men’s superior.”

M.K.Gandhi

Emergence of M.K.Gandhi in Indian Politics ushered a new era in the history of India and with discovery of a new weapon like “non-violence” passive resistance gave new spirit to the freedom fighters. This weapon which could be easily handled by men and women, the rich and the poor, the learned and the ignorant, attracted large number of women to participate in the freedom struggle of India. Again the gallant leadership of Mrs Annie Besant gave strength, courage and inspiration to Indian Women. As a result of which a number of women’s organizations were established in different places of

Odisha such as Bharat Shri Mahamandal in 1910, Bengal Mahila Samiti in 1930, (established by Saroj Nalini Dutta) Women’s India association in 1917, Seva Sadana by Mrs Ramabati Ranade at Poone.

Like all other parts of India women in large number of Odisha also participated in national movement. Gandhiji visited Berhampur town in 1921 and addressed a massive rally at its barracks ground. A special and separate meeting for Odiya women were organized by the Congress leaders, in which M.K. Gandhi gave courage and inspiration to Odiya women to participate in National movement. It had been seen for the first time that Odiya women came out of the four walls of the house to attend a public meeting by breaking the age old tradition like “Asuryam Pashya” (indoor life). As a result in 1924 first Odiya women’s association was formed at Berhampur town, all Orissa women’s conference was organized at Cuttack and first women’s educational conference was organized by Sailabala Das at Cuttack in 1928.

In Odisha a hundred and thousands of women played important roles as orators, picketeers, and leaders. They gladly accepted all type of challenges and hardships on the way of freedom struggle in 1930

during civil disobedience movement. Salt Satyagrahis like Sarala Devi and Malati Devi paid an extensive visit to the remote villages of Ganjam district. The main purpose was to raise funds and increase the number of Satyagrahis. Being inspired by these activities one Odiya woman known as Champa Devi joined the National movement.

Early Life:

On 23rd March 1903 Champa Devi was born at Ambapua near Berhampur. Her father was Yudhisthir Padhy and mother was Apariti Devi. She was given marriage to Krushna Mohana Padhy of Dura near Gopalpur of Ganjam district. But they used to stay at Manjusha, as her father in law Harihara Padhy was a priest of the Jagannath temple of Manjusha. To her misfortune her husband faced a prematured death and she became widow at the age of nineteen.

Participation in Freedom Struggle:

In course of time she came under the influence of Jayamangala Ratha, Rama Devi, Sarala Devi and Kuntala Kumari Sabat and left home by breaking all restrictions of a orthodox Brahmin family with her only female child (daughter) Sakuntala to join the freedom struggle. First she went to Baleswar and stayed there for some years. During Civil

Disobedience Movement she participated in salt satyagraha. There she established an orphanage. But due to some management disturbances the orphanage was closed within a very short period. In the meanwhile she gave her daughter marriage at Puri. Then she returned to Berhampur and continued her activities of social service.

In 1942, the last phase of freedom struggle launched by Indian National Congress after adoption of the resolution of the Quit India Movement on 07.08.1942 in Bombay Session. The British Government declared all the Congress organizations illegal. All frontline leaders were arrested and put behind the bar. In many regions of Odisha local leaders took the leadership of Quit India Movement and spearheaded it. Champa Devi was one of them who continued the movement at Berhampur and its peripheries under her able leadership. At last she came to the range of the sight of British Government and was arrested. She was behind the bar of Bhanjanagar jail for eight months in the year 1945.

Period of Social Work :

After her release from Bhanjanagara Jail, she stayed at Badadhoba street and established an orphanage there. But it was also closed like Baleswar orphanage due to management disturbance. In

1957 she established her third orphanage at Babajitata street of Berhampur, later on it was shifted to the place of present Geeta Bhabana which was inaugurated by H.K. Mahatab. In her last life she selected tribal dominated district Phulbani as a suitable place for social work. She entered into Phulbani town in 1964 with her two grand sons (Binaya and Bijaya) and one grand daughter (Geetanjali). For some days she paid a visit to Purunakatak of present Boudh District to render social service to the local people. But after some months she returned back to Phulbani town. She stayed for the first time at Contractorpada, then shifted to Amalapada and at last spent her rest of the life at Forest Colony in a rented house. At Kendupadara near Phulbani she established an orphanage which was inaugurated by the then RDC V.S. Mathews with the presence of Kailash Mishra the then Collector (1972-74). Later on it was undertaken by the government and named as Gapabandhu Balashram. Presently it is under the control of DSW, Phulbani. On 15th August 1972 she was invited to New Delhi on the eve of the Silver Jubilee celebration of Independence Day, and was rewarded as a freedom fighter by Mrs. Indira Gandhi, the then Prime Minister.

Last Days :

During Civil Disobedience Movement she donated some of her gold and Silver

ornaments to Orissa Congress Committee and rest of the ornaments were sold and spent for the orphans stayed in the orphanage of Kendupadara, near Phulbani. So in her last life she was in economic hardship. To her misfortune she was suffering from mouth cancer and shifted to Cutack medical for treatment. There, she was under treatment for seven to eight months. As there was no symptom of any improvement of her health she returned back to Phulbani. Lastly on 3rd March 1977 she passed away from this world leaving behind some memorable footprints in the history of Freedom struggle.

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5. Personal discussion with Raghunath Ratha (Prabandhika and Gabesaka, BALiguda)
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7. Personal discussion with Mahadev Sahoo, Ex-journalist, Phulbani.

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