

THE ROLE OF JAMBUBATI DEVI OF WESTERN ODISHA IN THE FREEDOM MOVEMENT

Rutuparna Mohanty, Ph. D.

Lecturer in History, Brajrajnagar College, Jharsuguda, Odisha 768216.

Abstract

Jambubati Devi was a front lined woman freedom fighter of Western Odisha. She joined the freedom movement being inspired by Mahatma Gandhi and Rama Devi. Ghandhiji's clarion call for women to participate in the Nationalist Movement echoed in her heart. She made up her mind to join the movement and served the motherland. She encouraged many men and women of Western Odisha to join the Satyagraha. Due to her encouragement and indomitable spirit people actively joined in the civil disobedience movement, Anti liquor movement, Harijan Padayatra etc. She was a great social activist. She served the poor, earthquake victims and so called untouchables in various ways. During The Quit India Movement, she led the procession of students of a training school in Bihar. Thus an Odia lady could lead the freedom movement in the neighboring state with great courage. She suffered imprisonment several times. At last she passed away there in Bihar on 17th July 1943.

*This paper intends to throw light on the role of **Jambubati Devi of Western Odisha** in the freedom movement. Her contributions and dedications for the motherland can never be relegated to background.*

Keywords – Jambubati Devi, freedom fighter, Western Odisha, Social Activist, Bhagirathi Pattnaik , Barpali, Prafulla Pattnaik, Rama Devi, Satyagrahi



Scholarly Research Journal's is licensed Based on a work at www.srjis.com

***“Yatra Naryestu Pujyante
Tatra Ramyante Sarva Debatah”***

This **Vedic** version indicates that women were highly honored and regarded as Goddess in ancient **Indian** culture. Women were also put in high esteem as “**Nari tu Narayani**”. In the holy land of **India**, women through ages have been looked upon as **Shakti Swaroopa**. She is the symbol of energy, vigour, power and strength. She is the inner current of every activity .So she is regarded as

Shakti; the primordial energy ever exists in womanhood .They enjoyed equal status, dignity and position along with the male counterparts. But that fortune and fair play towards women gradually declined .Patriarchal predominance shattered that unique practice of gender equity and equal opportunity In **Medieval Period** women started to be regarded as stuff of entertainment. They were fettered by social taboos and restrictions .Gradually that dark cloud of plight and predicament of Indian women dispelled with the arrival of the **Europeans** .The **British East India Company Governor Generals** like **Lord William Bentinck** and **Lord Dalhousie** abolished Sati practice and introduced women education respectively .Western education and modernization paved the path for the uplift of womanhood .In 19th century **Renaissance Raja Ramohan Ray,Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar,Swami Vivekananda** and **Dayananda Saraswati** also advocated for the emancipation of women .In early 20th century **Mahatma Gandhi** emerged as a leader of freedom struggle .He launched the **Non-Cooperation Movement** and called upon Indian mass including women to participate in the movement. His clarion call was responded by multitude of women across the country.

Gandhiji's call echoed in every nook and corner of the nation .**Gopabandhu Das** of **Odisha** aroused patriotism among the Odia people .The urge of patriotism among **Odia** women touched the highest water mark due to **Rama Devi, Malati Choudhury, Sarala Devi** and many others.In 1921 **Mahatma Gandhi** came to **Odisha** and entreated **Odia** women at **Vinod Vihari** in **Cuttack** to take active part in the national movement with heart and soul .Being encouraged by the words of **Mahatma Gandhi, Rama Devi, Malati Choudhury** visited different parts of **Odisha** to motivate **Odia** women to join the freedom movement. Hence, the women of **Western Odisha** did not lag behind to contribute to the sacred altar of freedom movement. In 1928 **Mahatma Gandhi** along with **Kasturba** and **Debadas Gandhi** visited **Sambalpur**. This visit also prompted women of **Western Odisha** to join the national movement.

Jambubati Devi

Among the eminent freedom fighters of **Western Odisha** the names of **Bhagirathi Pattanaik** and his wife **Jambubati Devi** are to be at first enunciated. **Jambubati Devi** was the pioneer of women freedom fighters of **Western Odisha**. With great enthusiasm and indomitable spirit of patriotism she had joined the freedom movement. She sacrificed her personal comfort and happiness in the name of beloved motherland.

This worthy daughter of **Utkal Janani** was born on 9th November 1886. Nothing is known about her parentage and childhood. She got married and blessed with a son. When her son was 5 years the first marriage broke up. Under which circumstances her first husband forshook her is shrouded in oblivion. When she was in utter distress and dejected **Bhagirathi Pattanik** of **Barapali**, an ardent freedom fighter and congress worker stood at her back and extended all sorts of cooperation with heartfelt sympathy. Furthermore, surprisingly **Mr. Pattanik** married **Jambubati Devi** a widow with a son, defying all social taboos. **Bhagirathi Pattanik** was a true patriot and great social activist. He proved himself as a true **Gandhian** by rendering service to the helpless. Being the wife of such a towering personality **Jambubati Devi** proved herself to be the worthy and devoted better-half (**Ardhangini**) of **Bhagirathi Pattanik**.

At every stage of his life she stood as a perennial source of inspiration and encouragement for her husband. **Bhagirathi Pattanik** has mentioned in his diary “My wife borrows rice and money from the house of daughterly **Bama**”. Thus **Jambubati Devi** stood by her husband in every critical Juncture. Without caring household hardship like poverty, illness and humiliation. She was the embodiment of courage, confidence, consecration and service. In spite of their acute poverty **Bhagirathi Pattanik** could attend three sessions of **Indian National Congress** at **Gaya**, **Kakinada** and **Belgaon** in the year of 1922, 1923 and 1924 respectively.

With stopping the **Non Cooperation Movement** on 12th February 1922 **Mahatma Gandhi** called upon Congress workers to devote their time to constructive programs like popularising hand spinning, eradicating untouchability and campaigning against the consumption of foreign liquor etc. **Bhagirathi Pattanik** was profoundly inspired and set up **All Indian Spinner’s Association** 1925. Being inspired, her 11 year old son **Prafulla Pattanik** joined the movement. He followed his fighter father's foot print. On 6th February 1930 Prafulla the sons of **Jambubati Devi** addressed a public gathering at **Remenda**. On 9th February the same

year he addressed another gathering at **Barpali**. Both father and son propagated for the **Civil Disobedience Movement** in **Western Odisha**. A grand public demonstration of 5000 people was organised on the bank of river **Jeera** in **Bargarh**. Public awareness reached the peak. The current of Patriotism and nationalism turned high.

In 1931 **Rama Devi** and **Raghunath Mishra** visited **Sambalpur** to collect membership for the session of **Indian National Congress** scheduled to be organised at **Puri**. During their stay at **Sambalpur**, **Prafulla Pattanik** had the opportunity to associate with **Rama Devi** very closely. **Prafulla** narrated before his mother Jambubati Devi the infatuation, dedication and devotion of **Rama Devi** towards **Mother India**.

Thus the story of **Rama Devi** inflamed the spirit of patriotism and nationalism in **Jambubati Devi**. She made up her mind to join freedom movement. Ignoring all conservatism and orthodoxy of the then **Karan** family she defied all social taboos and addressed a public gathering at **Barpali**. On 26 January 1931 she hoisted the tricolor and delivered a fiery speech. People were highly impressed by her simple deliberation. Never did she look back and became the forerunner of women freedom fighters of **Western Odisha**. She encouraged women to join the freedom movement, collected funds for Satyagrahis, and gave slogans in rallies, led demonstrations and picketing programs. She was arrested and courted imprisonment several times. During the **Civil Disobedience Movement** along with **Krishna Devi** a Punjabi lady and **Tulsi Devi**. **Jambubati Devi** worked hard arousing patriotism and nationalism among the people. **Jambubati Devi** was highly inspired by **Krishna Devi** wife of Punjabi businessman residing in **Sambalpur**. She was very adventurous. She was ever ready to confront the **British** repressive measures with a brave heart. When **Bhagirathi Pattanik** was behind the bar **Jambubati Devi** with her son Prafulla used to stay with **Krishna Devi**. **Jambubati Devi** finally left her home on 11th February 1931 with her family to tread the path of virtue by joining the freedom movement. Her main objective was to liberate the motherland from slavery. Entire family proceeded towards **Sambalpur** via **Remenda, Manpur, Bargarh, and Bhatli**. To inculcate **Gandhian** ideology of economic growth among the peasants they organised two meetings. The first meeting was held on 21st February and the second meeting was held on 2nd March at **Sambalpur**. She stayed at **Dehripali** in **Sambalpur** for some time. Every evening woman from around the nearby areas

gathered to listen her. **Jambubati Devi** beautifully explained them in simple local language about **Satyagraha, Swaraj, Swadeshi** and **Barjjan** .She encouraged them to join the struggle for freedom.

Anti-liquor campaign started in undivided **Sambalpur** district under the leadership of **Lakshmi Narayan Mishra**. A women wing was formed with **Jambubati Devi, Tulasi Devi**, wife of **Bihari Ram**, mother and wife of **Ram Bharose** and a number of **Harijan** women also joined this wing. They all together started picketing in front of liquor shops. This program continued for one month. **Jambubati Devi** along with **Harijan** women launched picketing before liquor shops at **Jharsuguda**. She inspired **Harijan** women to join **Gandhian** constructive programs for their economic growth. She encouraged them to participate in **Satyagraha**.

In 1932 the annual session of **Indian National Congress** was organised at **Puri**. **Jambubati Devi** and **Prafulla Pattanik** proceeded towards **Cuttack**. On their way they had to suffer repressive measures of the police. **Prafulla Pattanaik** was cut and caned severely. **Jambubati Devi** escaped to the house of **Rama Devi** .There she came across **Sarala Devi**. **Jambubati Devi** was profoundly inspired by her personality.

In the meantime **Bhagirathi Pattanik** had been arrested and imprisoned in the first phase of the **Civil Disobedience Movement**. In the second phase of the **Civil Disobedience Movement**, **Jambubati Devi** was arrested and courted imprisonment in **Sambalpur** jail. She suffered imprisonment along with common criminals in a very unhygienic condition. She started social service by requesting the jail authority to provide better amenities for convicts .Thus she became a caring mother for all the Prisoners of Sambalpur jail.

On 1st August 1933 the call for individual **Satyagraha** was well responded in **Western Odisha**. **Bhagirathi Pattanaik** had given a prior information to the district authority regarding a demonstration to be organised along with his wife **Jambubati Devi** .They did picketing before a textile shop .On 22nd September **Jambubati Devi** along with her family was arrested and courted imprisonment for a term of six month in **Bhagalpur Central Jail** where she privileged to meet **Sarala Devi**. Both of them spent a good time in spinning,

reading books and discussing on various issues of the nation. On 26th January 1934 she was released from the jail.

On 15th January 1934 a terrible earthquake occurred in **Bihar**. Motherly heart of **Jambubati Devi** cried to help the earthquake victims. A group of volunteers led by **Upendra Nath Mishra** rushed to **North Bihar** to serve the destitute. **Jambubati Devi** immediately joined the group with her husband and son. They got the opportunity to meet National level leaders like **Jawaharlal Nehru, Mahatma Gandhi, Meeraben** and **Bhagyavati Devi** (sister of **Dr. Rajendra Prasad**) and **Jamuna Lal Bajaj** as co-workers in a camp to help the destitute. For her tireless hard work to help the victims, she was recognised by **Rajendra Prasad** and **Narayan Singh** who felicitated this daughter of **Odisha** in the soil of **Bihar**. **Jambubati Devi** was fortunate enough to greet **Mahatma Gandhi** at **Jharsuguda** railway station on 4th May 1934. When **Mahatma Gandhi** arrived there to launch his historic **Harijan Padyatra** across **Odisha**. During his two days stay at **Jharsuguda** along with **Thakkar Bappa** and **Meeraben**. **Jambubati Devi** was privileged to serve **Gandhiji** and his associates.

On 24th March in 1935 a meeting was organised at **Jharsuguda** in which **Jambubati Devi** was the chairperson. She paid homage to all the martyrs of the freedom movement and asked the people to carry forward the constructive programmes of **Mahatma Gandhi**. On the occasion of 50 years completion of the formation of **Indian National Congress** **Jambubati Devi** led a procession of Congress workers at **Barpali**. On 8th December 1935 she bravely addressed the Congress workers without caring the repressive measures adopted by the police.

Prafulla Pattnaik the worthy son of the worthy parents invited them to **Bihar** to serve the poverty stricken Santhal people. **Bhagirathi Pattnaik** and **Jambubati Devi** proceeded towards **Bihar** on 11th March 1942 and reached **Ramudiha** on 14th March. **Prafulla** was running an Ashram at **Ramudiha** in **Bihar**. They visited places like **Dumka, Deogarh, Rohini** and **Amarpara**. She stayed in Ashram to serve the destitute. **The Quit India Movement** launched by **Mahatma Gandhi** in 1942. Responding the call of **Bapuji** “**Do or Die**” **Jambubati Devi** led a procession of some students of **Gheremara Training School**. She was arrested there with her son **Prafulla** at **Dumka**. Her son was courted imprisonment

for 21 years. She was also imprisoned. Due to her old age and broken health she was released soon from the jail. She stayed in the house of **Pandit Vinodananda Jha** whose wife regarded **Jambubati Devi** as mother. She became the mother of entire **Santhal** folk of **North Bihar** as well. On 17th July 1943 she felt pain on her chest due to hard work and negligence of her own health. She became the victim of cardiac failure and passed away. She could not see the independence of her beloved motherland .Her son and husbands were behind the bars at that time. So her body was carried by **Brahmins** to the burial ground and **Ayodhya Prasad Mishra** lit up the funeral pyre.

Thus the life of a great woman freedom fighter of **Odisha** rested in peace. She will be ever remembered for her lifelong self less service, struggle and dedication for the motherland. Her life from 1931 to 1943 was full of exciting and enchanting events that mirror her sacrifice and devotion. She was a good wife, affectionate mother, a skillful organiser, sincere Congress worker and a dedicated freedom fighter. Her service and sacrifice for the cause of mother land has not yet been properly appraised in the pages of history of the freedom movement. It is high time, her role should be incorporated in the pages of history. Her lofty personality and adventurous story would ever encourage the womanhood of India.

References

- Gartia,R.K (1987) Bhagirathi Pattnaik the freedom fighter*
Gartia,K .C(2005) Nari Netri Jambubati Devi in Sushil K. Bag(Ed) Barpali Ra Baraputra Naik.R (2005) “The Pattnaiks’A Strange family of Freedom fighters from Barpali Kumar Hussain , Freedom movement of Sambalpur published by Sambalpur University 2001 “Smruti Saurav”, Trimurti Printer Badbazar
Mishra, C.R , Freedom Movement in Sambalpur
Orissa State Archives, Bhubaneswar, “Role of Orissa in Freedom Struggle”.
Parida, N.K , Amara Garba Ebam Gauraba(Odia), 1985