



Indian National Army and the Indian freedom struggle outside the frontiers of India: A study on the contribution of Ganjam district

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Abstract

The Indian National Army (INA) under the dynamic leadership of Netaji Subash Chandra Bose played a very significant role in the India's grim struggle for freedom outside the frontiers of India. In this crucial struggle for freedom the role of the Odia people was important. There were approximately one thousand of Odias in the INA and among them the number of Odias from Ganjam district alone was six hundred. This article tries to explore and evaluate the significant contribution of people from the Ganjam district to the efforts of INA in the freedom struggle of India.

Keywords: INA, Subhas Chandra Bose, Odias, Ganjam, freedom movement of India,

Introduction

The Indian National Army (INA) under the dynamic leadership of Netaji Subash Chandra Bose played a very significant role in the India's grim struggle for freedom outside the frontiers of India. In this crucial struggle for freedom the role of the Odia people was important. There were approximately one thousands of Odias in the INA and among them the number of Odias from Ganjam district alone was six hundred.

After the formation of INA in Singapore a large number of Odias joined it. Names and photographs of INA soldiers of Ganjam are available at the INA Museum at Salimgarh Fort, Delhi. The reasons behind the joining of Odias in the INA were many. Firstly, Subash Chandra Bose was an Odia and the Odias were always in companion with him since his plunge into politics and Indian Freedom Movement. Secondly, lakhs of people from Orissa were serving in Burma, Singapore and Malaya during the colonial rule before the arrival of Subash.



Thirdly; they were attracted by the towering personality and oratory power of Subash. Fourthly, there were a number of Odias as prisoners of war in that region. Fifthly, the main leaders of Ganjam were the active members of the Forward Bloc of Subash Chandra Bose.

In Ganjam District, freedom fighters like Dibakar Patnaik, Banamail Maharana and Jugal Kishore Panigrahi joined the forward Bloc of Subash in 1940. Dibakar Patnaik was one of the Vice-Presidents of the All India Forward Bloc. There were one lakh Odias in Burma during the freedom movement of India. It can be noted here that, United Nations ex-Secretary General U Thant's father was an Odiya. They had built a number of temples in Burma. They formed an organization known as 'Rengun Odia Yuvak Sangh'. This was formed to serve the Odiya people who were working in Burma.

The birth of Odiya press and vernacular literature led the rising of Indian nationalism among the Burmaese Odias. They established two printing presses in Burma. Consequently, a number of Odiya weekly newspapers like 'Prabhat',

'Burma Odiya' and 'Lokasikhaya' Could be published. Thus the Odiya press in Rangoon served as a powerful instrument for the growth of Indian nationalism.

Similarly the formation of socio-cultural and religious associations in Burma injected a spirit of glory and patriotism among the Burmese Odias. The cultural troupes formed in Burma played a significant role to unite the Odias. Purnanada Dharma, Ramananda Dharma, Alekha Dharma, Utkala Sangha, Pathagaras, Kalaparishads, Youth Associations, Yatra Dals, Natya Sanghas, Kirtan Dals, Bart leelas, Sakhinachas, Dashkathias, prahlad Natks, and Burma-Odia Ras smiti were found to have paved the way for the achievement of unity among the Indians. In this context the activities of 'Burma-Odia Ras Samiti' was noteworthy. The founder of this cultural troupe was Sri Krushna Chandra Tripathy of Pitala and Sri Ganesh Rath. Among others Sri Brundaban Panda, Ramchandra, Sri Utchabandanda Pradhan, Sri Madan Mohan Tripathy, Sri Somananth Panigrahy, Sri Bhagirathy Panda, Sri Laxaman Biswal, Sri Bharat Biswal, Sri Pitbash Panigrahy, Sri



Kanda prdhan, and Sri Mohan Pradhan were its active members. Sri Ram Chandra Das, Khali Padhi Sri Harihara Patnaik were its advisers.

The Indian Independence League was first formed by Mohan Singh in Singapore. But it remained an unruly crowd of Indians. Even when Mohan Singh was at its helm, he could not convert the INA into a revolutionary army of India's liberation. After that, Rash Bihari Bose become the President of INA. Rash Bihari Bose handed over the leadership of the Indian Independence League to Netaji on July 4, 1943. He named it as Azad Hind Fauj. The INA was given its battle cry in this meeting:

"Comrades I soldiers I let your battle cry be – 'March onto Delhi Chalo'. How many of us will individually survive this war of freedom, I do not know. But I do know this, that we shall ultimately win and our task will not end until our surviving heroes hold the victory parade on another graveyard of the British Empire – the Lal Kila or Red Fortress or Ancient Delhi".

For Subash, a vital necessity for the struggle for freedom of India was fulfilled with the coming into force of the Indian Army of Liberation. He gave example of George Washington of America and Garibaldi of Italy who successfully fought the war of liberation for their respective countries because they had army to back them. The INA., according to Netaji, had a heavy responsibility to shoulder. The tasks a head of it was full of obstacles. The soldiers must be prepared for the great sufferings ahead for the cause of the nation. Their noble sacrifices would help India reach her cherished goal of freedom. He said:

"Comrades! You have voluntarily accepted a mission that is the noblest that the human mind can conceive of. For the fulfillment of such a mission no sacrifice is too great, not even the sacrifice on one's life. You are today the custodians of India's national honour and the embodiment of India's hopes and aspirations. So conduct yourself that your countrymen may bless you and posterity may be proud of you.... I assure you that I shall be with you in darkness and in victory. For the present, I can offer you nothing



except hunger, thirst, privation, forced marches and death. But if you follow me in life and in death, as I am confident you will, I shall lead you to victory and freedom”.

The speech of Netaji brimming with sincerity and passion won the hearts of the officers and the soldiers of the INA. Subhas addressed a big rally of Indian residing in Singapore organized to demonstrate their solidarity to the Japanese Premier on July 9. Here he gave his famous call for total mobilization. He said:

...out of this total mobilization, I expect at least three hundred thousand soldiers and three crores – of dollars. I also want a unit of brave Indian women to form a ‘Death-defying Regiment’ who will wield the sword which the brave Rani of Jhansi wielded in India’s First War of Independence in 1857.

The appeal of Netaji produced instant effect on the members of Ras Samiti. They mobilized the Indians working in Burma to join the Indian independence League. Forty five Odias joined the INA in one day. They were Sri Krishna Chandra Tripathy, Sri Brundaban panda, Sri

Utchabananda Pradhan, Madam Mohan Tripathy, Somanath Panigrahy, Bhagirathi Panda, Kishore Chandra Mishra, Narayan Prusty, Mohan pradhan, Berrbhadra Karan, Hribandhu Karan, kalupani Pradhan, Bobani Mahaparta, Batcha Patra, Madhav Maharana, Dandapani Maharana, Buddhi Behera, Brundaban Behera, dutikrushna Choudury, Sombari Nahak, Kandha Dalai, Tina sethy, Arjun Pradhan, Binayak Mishra, Udayanath Pradhan, Krushna Jena, Ranka Pradhan, Ananda Biswal, Banamali Sethi, Natbar Choudhury, Arjun Gouda, Raghu Behera, Arkhita Bhuyan, Buddhi Nayak, Sridhara swain, Pitabash Panigrahi, Ganesh Rath, Khageswar Panda, Hari Patra, Pandit Ramachandra Kar, Sibaram Mahapatra, Bhobani Rana, Madhusudan Behera and Gobinda Ram Prusty. Earlier these Odias were working as volunteers in the Indian Independence League. Subsequently, they joined in the INA and performed their duties as trusted soldiers.

The Odiya patriots started to donate freely for the liberation of their motherland. The women were also inspired to come out of their sheltered existence and volunteered



to join the women's liberation ever since his entry into public life in India. With his encouragement many women had joined the mainstream of nationalist struggle in India and were working in the Congress. In Singapore, he was assisted greatly in his task of enrolment of women by a young Indian lady doctor-Laxmi Swaminathan. He met her on July 12 and they discussed on the issue of encouraging the women to join the freedom movement in South-East Asia at length. Nakul and Laxmi; two teenagers of the Ras Samiti also joined the INA. Nakul was a soldier in the Bal sena of INA and Laxmi was a soldier of Rani of Jhansi Regiment of INA.

Gradually, Subhash built his team of trusted followers who were charmed by his personality and were totally devoted to him. As they came into contact with him they were tremendously influenced by his concern for India's freedom, his sincerity of purpose and his optimism and they went on to follow him.

The Indian National Army (Azad Hind Fauz) of Netaji Subhas consisted of many Odiya soldiers. The soldiers had displayed their uncommon heroism as an integral

part of the Indian National Army of Subhas. The list of the Odiya soldiers of the Indian Army is available in the Records of the Home Department. They were classified under three categories such as 'Black', 'Grey' and 'White'. Many Odias joined the INA of Subhas, the Indians in Burma got excited and inspired. Many Odias also joined the INA being inspired by Subhas and his unqualified devotion to the cause of India's freedom. As per the report in Nabeen dated 16th April 1946, Sri Krishna Chandra Tripathy (Who was made Propaganda Officer in INA) and thousands of Odias to joined the Indian National Army. Sri Tirpathy had the main responsibility of bringing more and more of Odias to the INA. On the request of Sri Tripathy, Netaji sent Colonel Braja Mohan Patnaik, the Labour & Development Secretary of INA and an efficient Odiya Officer to share his burden of work which was becoming heavy. Sri Ananta Choudhury gave all his property to the Azad Hind Government being inspired by Colonel Braja Mohan Patnaik. Fourteen years old Kumari Laxmi who at that time was desperate joined the INA and Subhas and was imprisoned in Malay. "This Kumari



Laxmi or Laxmi Panda is said to be the lone Odiya woman freedom fighter in the Jhansi regiment of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose's INA.

Most of the soldiers were from Ganjam and Puri districts. Only two of them were from the district of Cuttack and one was from Balasore. 1100 civilians of Southern of Eastern India were detained in Burma which included many Odias. About fifty-five Odias of the Azad Hind Fauz were Braja Mohan Pattanaik., Krishna Chandra Tripathy, Kumari Lakshmi (of Rani Jhansi Wing), Nakula (of Bala Sena), Narasimha Das of Lochapada (Ganjam), Utsaba Pradhan (of Pakidi), Mohan Pradhan, Somanath Panigrahi, Bira Patra of Gobindapur, Rajan Sarangi of Mahuala. Ganesh Rath of Pitala, Ananta Choudhury of Kukudakhandi. The Odias in Burma took an important role in the movement of the Azad Hind Fauz for the inspiring address for the Major General Lakshmi of Jhansi Rani Wing in Rangoon on the occasion of Kasturba Memorial Day.

(Nabeen, April 16, 1946)
Braja Mohan Pattanaik was a very efficient Odiya officer in the Army who organized the Odias the in

Burma in support of Subhas. A disciple of Krishna Chandra Tripathy named Lakshmi (of ten years) joined the Jhansi Rani Wing and was imprisoned in Malay for her activities in Burma. On July 20, 1943 Subhas left Singapore for a tour to other South-East Asian countries. The main destination was Burma whose leader Dr. Ba Maw had invited Netaji to attend his country's first independence ceremony on August 1, 1943. On this occasion the Burmese Odias presented Rs. 21,111.00/- to Subhas Bose. Sri Krishna Chandra Tripathy, and Odia Patriot was appointed as the public Relation Officer of Indian National Army. As many as 350 Odia People were admitted in the Indian National Army in one day. The top rank Odia Officers in the Indian National Army were Colonel Brajmohan Patnaik, Doctor Birkishore Bhuyan, Lieutenant Narsingh Charna Dash, Krishna Chandra Tripathy, Damodar Panda, Gadadhar Mahapatra, Agadhu Samntara and Raghunath Behera.

The Indian National Army (Azad Hind Fauz) of Netaji Subhas had included many Oriya soldiers. The Oriya soldiers had exhibited



their uncommon bravery in the Indian National Army of Subhas. The Profile of some leading Oriya soldiers of the Indian National Army has been given below:

Laxmi Panda

Laxmi Panda was one of the youngest members of Netaji Subash Chandra Bose's Indian National Army and the only Oriya woman to have enlisted. Laxmi Panda's parents too formed a part of this workers army. Laxmi was born in 1930 near Rangoon where her parents were engaged in the Railways. She had early memories of the exploitation of the workers by the Gora Sahibs, and clearly recalled that she too was engaged in the job of cutting grass for the horses of the white supervisors. When the Japanese overran the parts of Burma in 1942, British air bombardments became a daily routine. Her father was a soldier of Subash Bose's Indian National Army, and both her parents were killed in a British air raid. The young Laxmi and her younger brother became orphans. They were mute witness of the death of their parents.

The determination to avenge the death of her parents

made her go to the nearby INA Camp where she begged for enrollment in the rank and file. The frail Laxmi was hardly fourteen years of age, and was refused by the Camp commanders. However she stayed outside the Camp gates, and when Subash Bose came for inspection she blocked his way. She was personally taken aside to him, and her determination melted the hearts of the INA leaders. She was taken in the Rani Jhansi Regiment under Captain Lakshmi Sehgal. Initially she was given soft jobs of housekeeping and cooking, but the young Laxmi soon proved her mettle and won the hearts of her superiors. She trained in swordsmanship, shooting and espionage. As she was well versant with the Burmese Language, she was often sent across enemy lines for collection of intelligence.

She was working with the famous Janaki Thevar, Gown, Shah Nawaz Khan, Sehgal and Dhillon. Laxmi Panda recollected that, Netaji personally gave her a new name 'Indira', to avoid confusing her with the famous Captain Laxmi Sehgal. Netaji told her that in the INA she would be henceforth known as Indira. Six months of



intensive arms training in Burma shaped Laxmi into battle readiness for the onward march to the battlefield on the India-Burma border. Laxmi Panda recalled how Netaji had instructed her regiment to break into groups of 150 to move out of Rangoon when the INA was retreating. Laxmi was in the second group that was led by Janaki Thevar and had a rough retreat, their train was bombed and the women had to walk to Bangkok-it took 26 days of night marches braving bombs and machine guns firing at them. Food was scarce, they ate roots and boiled leaves. Many a time they went hungry for days, even eating the flesh of the pack horses that had died. She married another INA veteran Khageswar Panda in 1951. She was a brave Oriya lady, who had fought alongside Netaji and Lakshmi Sehgal in Burma and had survived to come back. She breathed her last on 15th Nov 2008.

Brajmohan Patnaik

Brajmohan Patnaik was born on March 8, 1913 at Udaypur. He had established the Odisha Azad Hind Fauz Association at Hinjilicut. His father's name was Radhamohan and mother's name was Natramani Devi. He completed

his M.B.B.S. degree from Patna University and then joined as medical officer in the Gorka Regiment under the British Army. He served the people during the Second World War in Singapore. When the Japan invaded Singapore he was arrested and was kept in the Japan prisoners' camp. By the call of Netaji Subhas he joined the Azad Hind Fauz as the captain of Medical Board. In 1944 he joined the Azad Hind Government's Labour department. He was arrested by the British Government and was imprisoned at Lalkilha fort in Delhi. After the Independence of India he was released from jail. In 1947 he was appointed as the secretary of Azad Hind Fauz's Helping Committee. He lasted his breath in 1976.

Dr Birkishore Bhuyan

Born in 1914 Birkishore Bhuyan was one of the founding members of Azad Hind Fauz. During the Non-Cooperation Movement the British government had banned on the publication of Press. Defying the Government ban Dr Birkishore Bhuyan had published a litho newspaper. For this act he was imprisoned for six months. He was released from jail on February 5, 1934. After his



release he joined Gandhiji's Padayatra and covered Cuttack, kendrapanda and Jajpur. In 1934 he left for Burma and joined as a plant operator in Smlter Experimental which was running under the banner of Burma Corporation Limited. Later on he was promoted to Assistant Technical Engineer. He was also a private practisioner. During the Second World War the Indian Independent league was formed by Rasbihari Bose and Dr Birkishore Bhuyan joined in that organization. When Netaji came to Burma Dr Birkishore Bhuyan met him and joined the Azad Hind Fauz.

Dr Birkishore Bhuyan served as a Medical Officer in number 8 units of Field Propoganda Camp of Azad Hind Fauz. After the capture of Burma by Japan Army they were arrested and kept in Rangoon Central jail. He returned to Odihsa in 1949 as a medical officer in a refugee carriage ship that was carrying the Indian rufeeges from Burma.

Krushna Chandra Tripathy

Krushna Chanda Tripathy was born at Pitala in Ganjma district on March 24, 1916. His fathers name was Ragahunath

Tripathy and mothers name was Kundan. After completion of his school education he served as a school teacher and came contact with Tarini Charan Patra, a noted Music Teacher of Ganjam district. Patra and Tripathy went Burma and started dance and music in various places of Burma. He formed Odia Ras Simiti to propagate the nationalism among the Odia's living in Burma. While in Burma he came into contact with Subhas Chandra Bose and joined the Azad Hind Fauz. He completed his training at field propoganda Training Centre of Azad Hind Fauz and later on served as a public Relations Officer in that organization. He published a Odia newspaper in Burma named 'Swadhin Bharat'. He was captured by the British Army and was imprisoned for 8 months in Rangoon. He was returned to India in 1946.

Utchabananda Pradhan

Sri Pradhan was born on November 1`9 1927 at Pakidi near Pital in Ganjum. His father's name was Sridhar and mothers name was Champa Dei. After completion of his formal education in his own village he went to Burma in 1937 with his father. He became a active



member of Odia Ras Samiti. In 1934 he joined the Azad Hind Fauz as a special group leader. In 1945 he was arrested and imprisoned for 8 months. On December 1945 he was released from jail and started a weekly newspaper named 'Prabhat'. After returning from Burma he served as a volunteer in Punjab. The Punjab government arrested him and imprisoned in Lahore jail for 4 months. He was released from jail on August 1947.

The women were also inspired to come out of their sheltered existence and volunteered to join the women's auxiliary corps of the INA and the Rani of Jhansi Regiment. The Japanese did not like the idea of Subhas for forming women's auxiliary corps and Rani of Jhansi Regiment. They feared that the inclusion of women would encourage laxity and indiscipline in the armed forces. However, Netaji struck to his point firmly and went ahead with the task of enrollment of women of the INA. In fact, Netaji was an avid supporter of the cause of women's liberation ever since his entry into public life in India. With his encouragement many women had joined the mainstream of nationalist struggle in India and were working in the Congress. In

Singapore, he was assisted greatly in his task of enrollment of women by a young Indian lady doctor-Laxmi Swaminathan.

Slowly Subhas built his team of trusted followers who were charmed by his personality and were totally devoted to him. As they came into contact with him they were tremendously influenced by his concern for India's freedom, his sincerity of purpose and his optimism and they went on to follow him. Patriotism of the insatiable spirit of nationalism formed the fundamental basis of the revolutionary struggle of the INA against the British. The struggle by the INA was a struggle of the Indians, by the Indians for the freedom of India. "Emancipation of India", Netaji said, "must primarily be the work of the Indians themselves."

To the pleasant surprise of Netaji and the delegates General Tojo announced his intention to transfer the Andaman and Nicobar Islands to the Azad Hind Government. Subhas accepted the offer because of its propaganda value. He named the Andaman and Nicobar Islands as 'Saheed' and 'Swaraj' respectively.



“For the Indians the return of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands represents the first territory to be liberated from the British yoke. By the acquisition of this territory, the Provisional Government has now become a national entity in face as well as in name. the liberation of the Andaman has symbolic significance because the Andaman was always used by the British as a prison for political prisoners. Most of the political prisoners sentenced servitude for conspiracies to overthrow the British Government – and there have been hundreds of them were locked up in this Island. Like the Bastille in Paris, which was liberated first in the French Revolution, setting freed political prisoners, the Andaman where our patriots suffered is the first to be liberated in India’s fight for independence.

Blood is calling to blood.... There in front of you is the road, our pioneers have built. We shall march along that road. We shall carve our way through the enemy’s ranks and if God wills we shall die a martyr’s death. And in our last sleep we shall kiss the road which will bring our Army to Delhi. The

road to Delhi is the road to freedom”.

The 48th birthday of Netaji was enthusiastically celebrated by the people in South-East Asia. They donated gold and jewellery weighing one and half times of his weight. Subhas donated all these wealth to the war fund and went to the battle front on the bank of river Irrawaddy to boost the morale of his troops. Then, Netaji broadcasted a message to Mahatma Gandhi praying for his blessings for the Indian War of Independence. In that message he gave justification of his escape from India, Collaboration with the Axis Powers and the objectives of his Provisional Government of Azad Hind. He was the first man to address Gandhiji as the ‘Father of the Nation’. He said:

Troops of the Azad Hind Fauz is now fighting bravely on the soil of India and in spite of all difficulty and hardship they are pushing forward slowly but steadily. This armed struggle will go on until the Britisher is thrown out of India and until our tri-colour National Flag proudly floats over the Victory’s House in New Delhi.

In May 1944 the INA captured Kohima and hoisted the



tricolor flag of independence on the Indian soil. On 21 October Netaji inaugurated the provisional Government of free India. But the combined army of the allied powers rushed to north-east India in huge number and defeated the INA. However, they could not defeat or capture Netaji. The role of INA had far-reaching influences on Indian political scene. Although they could not make India free, they injected a fresh wave of revolutionary upsurge in India. The soldiers of Indian Naval revolted against the British Government. The British Government no longer enjoyed the loyalty of the Indian Army. Thus Netaji and his INA heralded the independence of India.

In the light of above discussion, it can be said that, the INA soldiers from Ganjam district participated very actively in all the stages of Indian freedom struggle outside the frontiers of India and also in the Imphal operation. Their dedication and sacrifice for the cause of independence was tremendous and remarkable. But their last days were very miserable. Many of them could not get the freedom fighter pension. The pity is that, they could not even get the due recognition that they deserved

either from the Government level or from the public and remained as unsung heroes of Indian Freedom Struggle.

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