



## **RAMAKRUSHNA SAMANTASIMHAR: A HERO OF BARI IN THE EARLY FREEDOM MOVEMENT OF INDIA**

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### **Abstract**

*This paper covers a research work on the contributions of Ramakrushna Samantasimhar, a great hero of Odisha who dared to protest the mighty British power in a remote place like Bari in Jajpur district during the Great Revolt of 1857. He united the landlords of Bari against the land revenue policy of the British government. He taught a great lesson to the British Authority to withdraw the Sunset Law (Permanent Settlement) after the Great Revolt. His gallantry encouraged Bari people to participate actively in the freedom movement later on. Details of his contributions have been described in this paper in a lucid manner which would inspire the readers of History, students, research scholars and academicians interested in history of freedom movement of India.*

**Keywords:** *Ramakrushna Samantasimhar, Bari, Early Freedom Movement*



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Standing on the threshold of 21st century, when India moves ahead galvanizing globalized culture and civilisation, one should eagerly cast a retrospective look on the polychromatic spectacle of Indians struggle for freedom. The transformation of the colonial India into an independent modern India owes much to the virile chauvinism of Indian millions who fought gallantly against the British hegemony all over India. Their struggle and strive, pain and perseverance brought freedom for mother India.<sup>1</sup> It was materialized because of the rise and unprecedented growth of nationalism. The response of the rapid growth of nationalism apparently felt among the common mass. They enthusiastically participated in the freedom movement. Their feeling of patriotism proved to be charged with emotions and sacrifice.

The term nationalism means a spirit which derives its inspiration from spontaneous craze of people to be free from foreign dominance. That intense desire is expressed in political institutions and political activities. The spirit of nationalism accelerated during the second half of 19th Century.<sup>2</sup> It got a vibrant political boost up through the Indian National

Congress. The nationalistic spirit got fully matured and took the shape of national movement. Indian subcontinent was ablazed with nationalistic fire. Consequently India attained her long cherished freedom on 15 August 1947<sup>3</sup>. In the zeitgeist of time 69 years have passed. Since India attained her independence, the dark shadow of colonialism has disappeared. No vast scope is yet chalked out to reflect the entire panorama of Odisha's participation in national movement from its inception till its culmination. No sincere effort has been made to assess gingerly the intrinsic character and exact quality of Odia patriotism in the historical perspective. When distinguished leaders of India against foreign rule are extolled and edified the undying contributions of undistinguished freedom fighters for the cause of motherland was given a dim reflection.<sup>4</sup> The love and dedication, the service and suffering of common Odia people of rural and semi-urban areas are quite memorable and deserve special mention in the pages of history. Bari, an undistinguished place in Binjharpur (Thana) Police Station of Jajpur district, needs special depiction in the pages of history. Jajpur was the capital of ancient Odisha.<sup>5</sup> It was the most reputed religious and cultural centre. Bari block of Jajpur district has enhanced the pride and glory of this region by playing a vital role in the arena of freedom movement. Role of Bari in the freedom struggle is not less significant in comparison to any other such places.

Today's Jajpur district was a part of undivided Cuttack district till 1993. Cuttack was divided into six sub-divisions i.e. Cuttack Sadar, Jajpur, Banki, Kendrapara, Athagarh and Jagatsinghpur for administrative convenience. Jajpur sub-division again had six police stations. Those were Binjharpur, Dharmashala, Badachana, Sukinda and Korei.<sup>6</sup> In Binjharpur Police Station (Thana) Bari was a Block. Now Bari is in Bari-Ramachandrapur Thana. Bari Block was comprised of 108 revenue villages. Bari was a terrific name for the British. English men were in trepidation at the very name 'Bari'. As Bari played a vital role in the freedom struggle and added an unforgettable and glorifying chapter to the history of freedom movement.

The role of Bari in freedom movement can be adjudged from the Great Revolt 1857, till the attainment of Independence. The Great Revolt of 1857 is an epoch making event in the history of modern India. Such an ever heart-throbbing phenomenon occurred with great nationalistic fervour and spirit that Vinayak Damodar Savarkar regarded this revolt as "*The First War of Independence*".<sup>7</sup> The Revolt of 1857 spread to larger part of north eastern India and even to the remote Jajpur sub-division of Cuttack district. Particularly Bari, in Jajpur Sub-division, contributed a lot to this ever memorable occurrence.

Historian Jagannath Pattanaik says “Bari Block in Jajpur threatened the British even during the Great Revolt”. Two unexplored facts have come to lime-light which were associated with the Revolt 1857. One of these facts is the role of Ramakrusna Samantasimhar in the Great Revolt. Ramakrusna Samantasimhar of Balia village in Bari was a great revolutionary of Odisha. He was the son of Abhimanyu Samantasimhar who shines in the literary firmament of Odia literature as a great vaisnavite poet. Ramakrusna was born in this Khandayat zamindar family of Balia.<sup>8</sup> His ancestors were loyal to the British as other Zamindars did at that time. They were very influential and powerful. He lost his Zamindari only because of the selfish and high-handed attitude of the British towards these Zamindars. The introduction of sun-set law (permanent settlement) in 1793 by Governor General Lord Cornwallis the life of Indian Zamindars got distressed.<sup>9</sup> By this law the landlords were directed to deposit Rs.5000/- at the British treasury before sunset of a particular date in a year. If any zamindar failed to deposit the amount his zamindari would be auctionised by the Secretary of Revenue Office, Calcutta.<sup>10</sup> Their ill intention was to grab Indian wealth and territories by hook or crook. Another ill-intention of the white was to give auction of land lordship to Bengali Zamindars who could pay more amount of revenue than the Odia zamindars.<sup>11</sup>

Bengali people had little idea about Odisha zamindari. So, what would the British demand they would pay without reluctance as a result the British treasury would swell up. Bengali landlords had no agent in Odisha to work on behalf of them. So they had to come to Odisha to hold the auctionised land lordship.

This thing exactly happened in case of Ramakrishna’s zamindari. A Bengali zamindar, Golakh Chandra Bose snatched away Balia zamindari from Ramakrusna by paying more money.<sup>12</sup> Thus, Ramakrushna’s zamindari lapsed. His, dignity, influence and power diminished automatically. His anger knew no bound. He was in quest of an opportunity to take revenge upon the British. That long awaited opportunity came when Indians (Sipoyees and Rulers) started the Great Revolt in 1857.

Ramakrisna had organized all the Khandayatas of Balia and persuaded them to protest the British monopoly unitedly.<sup>13</sup> Khandayat people are usually brave and valiant heroes. They accepted the leadership of Ramakrusna and got ready to confront the British in Bari. They decided not to pay any tax. Ramakrusna persuaded them to collect weapons like sword knife, cudgel, bamboo poles etc, for any confrontation with the alien power at different places in Bari. People being instigated by Balia zamindar got ready to fight. They started to use offensive words towards the British. Royats also joined people in blaming and abusing them.

Ramakrusna encouraged people to confront any challenge from the opponents. The attitude of people of Bari warned the British. The Tahasildar of Golakh Chandra Bose, the new zamindar of Balia complained before R.N.Shore, the Magistrate of Cuttack that, the British rule in India was going to collapse because of such defiant upsurge of Indian people. A constable was sent to Balia, to raid Ramakrusna's house. He seized two hand bombs and some sharp swords from the houses of his two close associates; Dinabandhu Mahapatra and Upendra Jena. They were arrested and brought to Cuttack.<sup>14</sup> They were punished with rigorous imprisonment. R.N.Shore, the Magistrate of Cuttack was informed all about this fact on 14 August 1857. He recommended the Commissioner that Ramakrusna and his associates should be penalized as per Act No.11, 1857/15 on the ground that they conspired badly against the British government. Moreover, he suggested that these culprits should be trailed by special Tribunal. The Commissioner sent a thanks note to the District Magistrate edifying and justifying the report of the Magistrate.

In the long run, Ramakrushna's case was trialed in the Court and verdict was declared. Fortunately Upendra Jena was acquitting due to lack of evidence against him. Ramakrusna and Dinabandhu were sentenced to five years rigorous imprisonment.<sup>16</sup>

The cruel ruler was still not satisfied to ruin Ramakrusna Samantasimhar, the government confiscated all his property and wealth. Those valuables were put on auction and Rs.13.00 only obtained from the auction deposited in the British treasury. This incident revealed two facts; anyone who would go against the ruler would be severely punished. The revengeful attitude of the government, virtually the punishment, they awarded was meant for teaching a lesson to other Zamindars of Odisha so that they would not dare to challenge the alien government. If they did so they would suffer the same fate as that of Ramakrishna. Thus Ramakrishna Samantasimhar, an influential freedom fighter turned into a pauper because of the British atrocities.

But in the history of freedom movement in Odisha his name would always be taken with great pride and respect. Though he could not confront the British directly, he was getting prepared for a war. To the bad luck of Bari, he was arrested and imprisoned. After the 1857 Revolt Queen Victoria of England made a proclamation in November 1858. It was after the declaration of Amnesty by the British Government, in November 1858, Ramakrusna Samantasimhar and Dinabandhu Mahapatra were released. The property which were earlier forfeited, now received by Ramakrusna Samantsimhara.<sup>17</sup>

## **Implications**

The episode of Ramakrusna Samantasimhar carved an unforgettable political awareness among the people of Jajpur, Odisha. He exemplified his love and sacrifice for mother land. But his role as a great rebel has not been taken up for serious historical analysis in the entire gamut of India's freedom struggle. It is high time to include his role in the history of freedom struggle. Academicians, Policy Makers, Educationists and other stakeholder of education system need to be wise enough to include his name and contributions in the curriculum of school and higher education levels. So that our upcoming generation would be aware of contributions of a great hero of Bari to the freedom movement of India. And feel proud to be like Ramakrusna Samantasimhar to fight against injustice and foul policy of ruling class.

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