Chapter-VI

Rise of Oriya Nationalism and Its Impact upon the Social Life of Sambalpur
RISE OF ORIYA NATIONALISM AND ITS IMPACT UPON THE SOCIAL LIFE OF SAMBALPUR

The period from 1905 to 1947 saw remarkable progress in the field of western education in Sambalpur. Along with the spread of English Education, the modern ideas like democracy, sovereignty of the people, rationalism and humanism made their entry into Sambalpur. Socio-Cultural life of Sambalpur were deeply influenced by these ideas. The spread of humanistic, rationalistic and scientific ideas of the west led to the flowering of socio-cultural activities during the period under review.

The far reaching changes took place in the socio-cultural life of the people of Sambalpur after the establishment of Zilla School in 1852 A.D. The political consciousness began to grow. The language agitation began to emerge. In fact, the foundation of modern Sambalpur was laid, a new epoch in the history of Sambalpur was ushered in.
A) Socio-Political Reformation:

(i) Political Awakening:

The growth of political consciousness in Sambalpur was first manifest in a language agitation of the 19th century known as the Oriya Movement which was at first a socio-cultural agitation, but gradually assumed a political trend at the turn of the century.

One of the direct outcome of the spread of English Education in the second half of the 19th century was the emergence of a purposeful and organised national consciousness in Sambalpur. There was a distinct awakening among the Oriya-speaking people who began to assert their rights as sons of the soil and claimed that justice be done to them. Several factors were responsible to bring about such a consciousness. Among the determining factors of such an awakening might be mentioned the language affinity.

In the process of conquest the British conquered tract after tract of the Oriya speaking area and placed this territory under different administration without considering the interest
of the people. Thus, the district of Sambalpur was administered by the Central Province. In each of these tracts Oriyas being too far away from the administrative centre and forming too small a factor to determine their purpose effectively lived as a minority community.¹

The hostile attitude of the Hindi-speaking people in Sambalpur and of the Bengali in Orissa Division and of the Telugu in Ganjam, placed the Oriya language and culture in great danger. The political dismemberment imposed upon the Oriya-speaking people checked their healthy growth. The Oriyas were treated as an alien element in their own soil. There was discriminatory treatment towards them in education, employment and social justice. Besides it, a systematic effort was made to destroy Oriya script, language and culture.²

**Language Agitation in Sambalpur:**

The Central Province was a Hindi-speaking Province with the exception of Sambalpur district where Oriya was spoken by the people. The Government was aware of this in 1862 when the district was tagged with the Central Provinces.
Ethnologically and culturally Sambalpur was an Oriya region. Since 1865, Oriya was used as the official language in the district administration not-withstanding the fact that in all other districts of the Central Province, Hindi was used as the court language.

No change was made by the Government in the language policy till 1895. In the Government records, the district was therefore termed as 'Oriya Country.' This difference gave rise to administrative difficulties between Sambalpur and other districts of the Central Provinces, where Hindi was the official language.

Besides language difference, the custom of Mahaprasad prevailing among the Oriyas posed a serious problem to run the administration effectively. Therefore the Government considered it expedient to substitute Hindi for Oriya. They thought that the substitution of Hindi for Oriya would not cause public resentment as the language spoken in Sambalpur was a mere local dialect and had more in common with Hindi.
To remove these difficulties, the Government of the Central Province substituted Hindi for Oriya as the official language of Sambalpur and simultaneously changed the medium of instruction in school. The new language policy offered a great opportunity to the Hindi-speaking people to qualify for Government jobs over the Oriya-speaking people for their ignorance of Hindi had a relative disadvantage. 

Unexpectedly for the Government the people of Sambalpur reacted against the imposition of Hindi. Their mother tongue and social customs came under grave peril. The Sambalpur Hitaisini, a Oriya weekly newspaper, started its publication on 30th May 1889 under the patronage of Sir Basudev Sudhal Dev of Bamra at Sudhal Press, Deogarh. The Sambalpur Hitaisini published a series of editorials on the issue. The people thought that, like the Bengalis who had tried to abolish Oriya from the Orissa Division, the Chief Commissioner was trying to obliterate Oriya from Sambalpur. Several Public meetings were organised to ascertain the views of the people and to educate them on the evil consequences of the new language Policy. Dharanidhar Mishra, (He was the first Matriculate of
Sambalpur) a leading member of Oriya elites of Sambalpur organised the meetings in the town and neighbouring villages. He could mobilize the public opinion against the arbitrary decision of the Government.

In a very well represented public meeting of Somnath Babu, the affected people resolved to submit a printed memorandum to Lord Elgin, the Viceroy pleading for the revocation of the order of the Chief Commissioner. The memorandum was signed by about six thousand persons in Oriya and submitted to the authorities on 5th July 1895. It was an excellent document in which the misconception and prejudices of the Government were brought under sharp focus and the cause of Oriya language and culture was strongly defended by convincing arguments in support.

However, inspite of all the public protests, memoranda and personal pleadings by the end of 1895 Oriya ceased to be the official language of Sambalpur. From 1st January 1896 Hindi became the medium of instruction and court language. The imposition of Hindi had an injurious effect upon the mental faculties of the Oriya children. The number of
Hindi teachers and Hindi schools began to increase at the cost of Oriya teachers and Oriya schools. The employment of the district went to the benefit of Hindi-speaking people. This had a tremendous impact upon the Oriya-speaking people as the new policy impeded their social and cultural growth. From that year they started continuous agitation on all fronts for the amalgamation of Sambalpur with the Orissa Division.

**Amalgamation of Sambalpur with Orissa:**

The restoration of Oriya as the court language of Sambalpur was partial fulfilment of the objective of the Oriya Movement. This success inspired demand for the implementation of Andrew Fraser's suggestion, "Sambalpur ought to be joined with Orissa to which it really belongs." The amalgamation of Sambalpur with Orissa Division was not far to be attained.

After due consideration and exchange of views with the Provincial administration, the Government of India recommended the transfer of Sambalpur, along with the adjoining Feudatory states like Bamra, Kalahandi, Patna,
Rairakhol and Sonepur, from the Central Provinces to the Orissa Division. The two Feudatory States (Gangpur & Bonai) under the Chhotnagpur Division along with the above mentioned areas were also amalgamated to the Orissa Division and came under the Bengal administration with effect from 16 October, 1905. This marked the end of a successful Oriya Movement at the beginning of the present century.

It appears, therefore, that Oriya language provided the bond of unity among the politically scattered areas inhabited by the Oriyas. The language crisis and the perilous situation faced by Oriya culture served as a powerful stimulus to arouse the dormant spirit of the Oriyas and galvanized them to vigorous action. Their initial struggle to safeguard Oriya-culture intimately assumed a political character, when the Oriya Movement of the 19th century got transferred in to the amalgamation movement of the present century. To spearhead the amalgamation movement the elite class formed the first political organisation in 1903, which came to be popularly known as the Utkal Union Conference.
The language agitation started in Sambalpur and became widespread in Orissa. Sir Andrew Fraser, Chief Commissioner of Central Provinces, visited Sambalpur in 1901 when people met him in large number and submitted a memorial to restore Oriya language and to transfer the district of Sambalpur to Orissa. Sir Andrew Fraser appreciated the cause of the popular movement of Sambalpur and recommended it owing to the ethnical and linguistic differences between Sambalpur and other districts of Central Provinces. As a result, subsequently in October, 1905 the bulk of the district was transferred to Orissa and remained a part of the Province of Bengal until 1st April 1912 when the Province of Bihar and Orissa was constituted.

B) Social Reformation:

The spread of English education led to the emergence of an elite class in Sambalpur. The middle class intellectuals always formed a core in any revolution. This class was most responsive to the call of socialism, equality and human rights, for people of this class had the ability to took beyond their time. They subjected every institution of the society to test of reason
and through that fostered the ideas of change and progress. The Oriya Poets and Writers like Gangadhar Meher, Bheema Bhoi and others advocated social reforms in their poems, stories and essays.

The prominent middle class intellectuals played a significant role in the socio-cultural revolution in the 2nd half of the 19th century and first half of the 20th century. Some of them made remarkable contribution in the field of Oriya literature. Some played very important role in the spread of ideas relating to social reform ideas in Sambalpur. They were bent upon uplifting Oriya community from a lamentable state-administrative neglect and social degeneration.

Bheema Bhoi (1858-1895) was a blind poet who belonged to the Kondh tribe. He could compose poems extempore. Though blind and deprived of education, he composed verses which reveal high philosophical thoughts and divine inspiration. Bheema Bhoi's literary creation always carried a special message for the exploited people of Orissa and he attempted through their pages as much as through his field work to instill a new faith in them. Some of his works echoed
his mutinous voice against the social set up. He laid bare the superstition that had polluted the entire social atmosphere and had emasculated the people of Sambalpur and laid stress on a fresh and free national life. Even, he could sing the song of eternal sacrifice:

Mo jibana Pache

Narke Padi thau

Jagata Udara Heu.

(let my soul go to hell but let the world be saved).

Gangadhar Mehr (1862-1924), is regarded as the nature poet of Oriya literature. Through his writing, Poet Gangadhar evinced great patriotism, love for language, culture and tradition. His epic *Utkal Laxmi* and Poems *Utkala Bharatira Ukti, Matrubhumi, Udbodhana, Nabavarsa*, and other creations depict his nationalist spirit and project the Poet as a great educationist. Meherian Poetry attempted to resist attacks on Oriya language from various quarters during the later part of 19th century.
Gangadhar Meher was not only a great lover of Oriya and Sambalpur, but also a great lover of India. Two important factors were responsible to influence Gangadhar to be a nationalist. Firstly, the background of the place where he was born and lived. The resistant movement of the great hero Veer Surendra Sai of Sambalpur against the British rulers was such an event in the history of Indian Freedom Movement, which signified the nationalist spirit of the people of Sambalpur. This was the background of his locality, which encouraged him to be a patriot. Secondly, he, as a nationalist, was also influenced by the Indian Freedom Movement under the able leadership of Mahatma Gandhi who visited Orissa in 1921. So, this movement under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi deeply influenced him, and as a result he wrote his lyric Bharati Bhavana in 1923 to give expression to his national spirit. Through the lyric, he vehemently criticized the corrupt administration and attitude of British rulers in India.

Gangadhar Meher was a liberal nationalist. His revolutionary and appealing literary works generated great interest among the Oriya people to work for the development of
their mother-land and mother tongue. His writings depict, in an innovative, inimitable, colloquial style, the conditions that prevailed in the society the superstitions and also political chaos that confronted Sambalpur.

All these Oriya intellectuals held before the common man the lens through which he could see what threatens him socially, culturally, politically and which made him aware of the danger that lie ahead. They created awareness in the minds of the people that the removal of social and religious superstition would go a long way in socio-cultural regeneration of Sambalpur.

Contribution of Zilla School of Sambalpur to the cause of social and political reformations are remarkable. It was established in 1852 at the heart of Sambalpur town and was also a national school later. This school was the product of lofty idealism of a few young intellectuals who were convinced that much of the evil could be eradicated through proper development and training of the young. First time in the history of India, the students of the Zilla School were to adopt the non co-operation Movement and boycott the classes. The walls of the school were filled with posters bearing the slogans like “Do
Chandra Sekhar Behera, Nrusingha Guru, Laxminarayan Mishra, Dharanidhar Mishra and others were inspired by Gandhiji's ideals, formed very close group and carried on their nationalistic, social and educational activities from Zilla School of Sambalpur.

They always rebelled against social superstitions and class-barriers and in fact against the Brahminic traditions although they came from conservative Brahmin families. In the process, however, they invited the wrath of the high caste people of the society. They fought against child marriage, supported female education, sympathized with the down-trodden and socially ostracized.

On 23rd December, 1928 Gandhiji, first time visited Sambalpur. He stayed with Chandra Sekhar Behera (who was the President of District Congress Committee) and was pleased with the hospitality of the latter. The message of Gandhi reached the nooks and corners of Sambalpur on account of the untiring efforts of Chandra Sekhar Behera. He firmly opposed social evils like untouchability, for the removal of which he had set up a committee for the depressed class.
Braja Mohan Panda, an eminent educationist, a zealous social worker of Sambalpur had also set up one High School at Larambha in 1938. The aims of establishing a high school at Larambha was to enable the poor students of rural areas to continue secondary education with less expenses. This residential school was the first rural school in Orissa upto independence of our country. Thus, the Zilla School of Sambalpur and the residential High School, Larambha played an important role in the social reformation of Sambalpur in the pre and post independent era.

**Upliftment of Backward Class People:**

Observance of untouchability and adherence to it pained Gandhiji most. It was to him the 'miserable enslaving spirit', a "sin against God and man and is, therefore, like a poison, slowly eating into the vital of Hinduism." The *Shastras* do not sanction it. It has come to the society, when it must have been at the lowest ebb. It has since arrested the growth of the bulk of the community. He was convinced that once untouchability is driven out of the Hindu heart, Hinduism can well deliver its definite message to the world. With this intention,
he launched the untouchability campaign. For the first time Gandhiji called the untouchables as *Harijans* out of sympathy for their poor lot. Earlier, these people were identified as depressed class and exterior castes.27

Gandhiji, through the National Congress, expressed his desire for a social order based upon equality of man and man, and man and woman. It would be a society of the ethical, nationalist and the self-reliant people. It would be free from communal bitterness, religions recrimination and the absurdities that the formal religions often impose on the innocent and the ignorant. It visualizes the full growth of individual without one’s losing the sense of contentment, and the capacity of social growth.

Although the Government established the special schools for the rapid spread of literacy among the *Harijans* and *Adivasis*, the bulk of students were reading in common schools. By 1947, extreme apathy was noticeable in their attitude towards education. Hence some suggested the necessity of introducing compulsory primary education among the backward class people. In this connection E.S.Hoernnel, the
Commissioner of Orissa Division, wrote to the Special Officer-in-Charge of Primary Education as follows:

"It seems to me that one of the chief incentives to a boy to take his schooling seriously is that his parents desire him to be educated and take interest in the progress. The effects of Primary Schools on depressed class boys whose parents voluntarily send them to school to learn are not so encouraging as to suggested that the really beneficial results are to be attained in present conditions only by compulsion."^28

This extremely limited spread of education among the backward class people no doubt provided stimulus for the growth of political and social consciousness among them. Marked change was noticeable in the conduct, position and activities of the educated Harijans and Adivasis.

The Utkal Union Conference which was founded in 1903 with the unification of Oriya-speaking areas adopted programmes for the removal of social exploitation and economic disparity among all classes including women and the backward classes. It had an impact on all concerned. Its federal structure
also facilitated the spread of such ideas to the villages. Newspapers started coming in (after publication of *Sambalpur Hitaisini*), people showed interest in the political discussion and their children started going to schools. All these opened up a new vista of progress for the backward class people. The educated among the down-trodden people started pondering over their status in the social set up and would not accept their exploitation and ostracism a freak of destiny.

A letter which appeared in an important newspaper would reveal how the self consciousness, perhaps the most significant character of nationalism, had taken roots in the backward society. The letter written by Ramchandra Dash from Cuttack, read29:-

"In the modern Hindu society even through the *Kandha* belong to a lower strata, it is very much a part of the Hindu system of law; marriages are conducted according to the regulations of the *Sastras* (Hindu scriptures). It is only since the time of Prataprudra that their social position has been brought down. I cannot comprehend why they should be considered as untouchable today."
By 1920, the untouchable formed their own association called National Conference of the Schedule Caste (NCSC). Through its resolution it pressed for separate schools for the untouchables with the help of special grants as were provided to the Girls’ schools. It also urged that free schooling be provided for all untouchables and demanded special favour and award of scholarship.\textsuperscript{30}

Many smaller associations came into existence, which met more often and discussed their development. They were elated, whenever the slightest attention was paid to their upliftment. A news item in the \textit{Utkala Dipika} carried a report from a person belonging to one of the Scheduled Caste that “...... it is quite encouraging to learn of the decision taken of the Scheduled Caste who happens to be our first graduate.”\textsuperscript{31}

In the wake of the national movement, nationalistic spirit was shaking every brick in the social structure that had been lying impotent since long. It was the tribals who played a very decisive role in the amalgamation issue by facing the attempts of Oriya leaders to unite Sambalpur with Orissa.
Harijan Movement:

Spread of education proved to be the most powerful tool for bringing about the much immediate social change among the depressed class people. Gandhiji's continuous propaganda against untouchability was much more impressive and effective in this direction. These factors not only helped a great deal in generating social consciousness among the low-caste people but also led to a considerable improvement in their social status. The Harijan movement launched by Mahatma Gandhi for the welfare of Harijans achieved a great success in Sambalpur as well as other parts of Orissa.

Nrusingha Guru, one of the leading lights in the annals of freedom fighters of Sambalpur, worked for the downtrodden people of Sambalpur. In order to put more life in the National Movement he put relentless efforts through his Anti-Untouchability Movement to carry the Gandhian creed of social orders to the interior of the district. Nrusingha Guru was noted for his fearlessness, self sacrifices and self respect. His position in the Freedom Movement of Sambalpur remains intact. His Movement was multi-dimensional. Being a true Gandhian, he
was confident that untouchability shall have to go. He wanted its removal in every sense.  

Although he was born in an orthodox Brahmin family he did not give importance to the hatred attitude of the society towards him and dedicated himself to the upliftment of the Harijans. He along with Dayananda Satpathy, being inspired by Gandhiji, began to spread his noble principle among the people, for which they had to bear but out of fear people could not speak before them.

It was through the efforts of Chandra Sekhar Behera and Nrusingha Guru that a committee for the removal of untouchability was established at Sambalpur in the early part of 1929. Long before the non-cooperation movement, Chandra Sekhar Behera had given all facilities to the Harijans for using the water from his well. He further made efforts to induce for ploughing it personally. In 7th February, 1929, Nrusingha Guru organised a public meeting in the town hall (at Sambalpur) and the Congress creed was unanimously accepted. He was asked there to remain in charge of the organisation at the district level.
The year 1928 was a remarkable year for the people of Sambalpur, when Gandhi had arrived first time at Sambalpur on 23rd December. He stayed with Chandra Sekhar Behera and was pleased with the behaviour of the people of Sambalpur.

Gandhi's decision to begin his fast on 20th September 1932 had its marked repercussions all over Orissa. At Sambalpur, people of all walk of life and even oldmen and children thought of allowing the untouchables to enter the temple and use the wells. In this way they presumed that the life of Gandhi might be saved. On 17th September, prominent high caste Hindus met in the residence of Chandra Sekhar and formed a committee to hold regular meetings in order to educate public for the removal of untouchability.

The Anti-untouchability movement under the leadership of Chandra Sekhar Behera, Laxminarayan Mishra and Nrusingha Guru assumed a new dimension in 1932. A "District Anti-untouchability Committee" was formed in a public meeting on 26th November 1932 at the Fraser Club, Sambalpur. The District Committee was to consist of twenty
one members. A Sadar Committee of organisation was also formed with fifteen persons as its members. An Anti-untouchability meeting was also held in the town of Sambalpur on 4th December, 1932 under the Presidentship of Chandra Sekhar Behera. A Working Committee of the organisation consisting of six members was formed in the said meeting. In 1932 (18th December), a resolution was passed to admit the untouchables into the temples of Sambalpur district.

Gandhiji did not plead only for political privileges of the Harijans. He aimed at a social and spiritual reawakening of the caste Hindu to eradicate untouchability. More representation of the Harijans in the legislatures would not solve the problem. All caste Hindus, Gandhiji wanted, had a duty to remove it.

During Gandhiji's fast several people fasted for twenty four hours every day at Sambalpur. Their fasting was preceded by and associated with a Sankirtana Party every day. These were followed by a procession consisting of caste Hindus and Harijans to the Municipal ground where a mass prayer and
a meeting were held in the evening. In each meeting the 
Harijans were requested to sit in the middle.41

The Government had allowed Gandhiji to carry on the 
Harijan work from inside the jail in the hope that the attention of 
the nation would be diverted from political agitation to social 
reform. With his advice, the All India Harijan Sevak Sangh 
(AIHSS) was formed with Ghanashyam Das Birla as its President 
and A.V.Thakkar as Secretary. Its objective was to promote the 
social, economic and educational well being of the Harijans. A 
branch of the Harijan Sevak Sangha consisting of 28 members 
was organised at Cuttack under the Chairmanship of 
Balukeswar Acharya. Smt. Rama Devi, Laxminarayan Mishra (of 
Sambalpur) and Satyanarayan Sengupta were chosen as its 
Secretaries.42

The programme of the Harijan Sevak Sangha of 
Orissa or Utkal Harijan Sevak Sangha were to give the 
untouchables free access to the temples, public tanks and wells, 
open schools and hostels for their children with facilities to enjoy 
stipends and above all teach them the simple rules of health and 
hygiene. In Sambalpur attempts were made by Laxminarayan
Mishra, Nrusingha Guru and others to allow untouchables entry into the temples of the town.

Laxminarayan Sahu of Cuttack, a member of the "Servants of the India" toured round the district of Sambalpur, during the first week of April 1933. During his stay at Sambalpur Laxmi Narayan Sahu being supported by Nrusingha Guru took active part in the reformatory programme of the movement in the district. The movement received the wide support of the mass in general excepting a very few conservatives who were under the impression that Anti-untouchability would result in corruption and degradation of the Hindu society. But the local authorities looked down upon the movement with a hostile attitude as they thought it to be detrimental to the Governments' interest. This is evident from a letter written by Deputy Commissioner, Orissa Division on 28th April, 1933, dwelling on the activities of Laxmi Naryaan Sahu and Nrusingha Guru and their policy with regard to the movement.

However, the movement, with the unflagging zeal of Nrusingha Guru, gained a wider field. On 30th April 1933, the "Harijan Day" was observed. The following programme was
chalked out by the workers of the Anti-untouchability committee for the celebration of the day in the district.\(^{43}\)

2. Cleaning the Harijan quarters.
3. Bathing the children of Harijans and giving them gifts.
4. Mixed procession and *Sankirtans*.
5. Holding Public meetings.
6. Opening either a well or temple for the Harijans on that day.

Before 1934, the *Utkala Harijan Sevak Sangha* had opened 26 schools for the untouchables. They were as follows\(^{44}\):
- Cuttack –11, Ganjam –7, Balasore – 4, Puri – 3 and Sambalpur – 1. Besides, this night schools for Harijans were also opened all over Orissa including Sambalpur.\(^{45}\) In this regard a night school was opened in the village of Pitapali (near Hirakud) to give elementary education to the Harijans. Similar schools were established in other places of the district for education and enlightenment of the untouchables. Educated persons were invited to impart teaching and instructions to Harijan boys and adults.\(^{46}\) Thus widespread awareness was created through the
district of Sambalpur against untouchability and initial steps for its removal had begun in right earnest. The field was thus ready for Gandhiji's tour.

Gandhiji had to pay a short visit to Orissa and its was his second tour to Sambalpur on 5 May, 1934, in connection with Harijan Movement. In the beginning, Sambalpur and Angul had been excluded from the tour programme but the strong argument of Nrusingha Guru convinced A.V.Thakkar to include Sambalpur in the tour programme of Gandhi.

Gandhiji along with Laxmi Narayan Sahu, Pandit Nilakantha and Raj Krishna Bose reached Jharsuguda at 5 A.M. on 5th May, 1934. He was received by the people with all enthusiasm. A meeting was held at Jharsuguda where Gandhiji addressed the people and emphasized the need to remove untouchability from the society. An amount of Rs.405/- was collected for the welfare of the Harijans.

Next day Gandhiji reached at 9 A.M. in Sambalpur. He was given a warm reception by the people of Sambalpur.
Gandhiji along with Nrusingha Guru, Benimadhav Supkar and A.V.Thakkar visited the Harijan Bustee at Thilkopara (a place in Sambalpur town). He was pleased at the neatness of the Bustee and encouraged the Harijans for further improvement. He was given a present of Rs.60/- by the Harijans. At 5 P.M., a meeting was held on the bed of the river Mahanadi of Sambalpur town. Gandhiji was presented with citation written by Bhagirathi Mishra, Ex-Editor of "Seva" and it was read out by Benimadhav Supkar, the President of the meeting. Gandhiji then delivered his speech and explained the welfare of the Harijans. At the end of the meeting, an amount of Rs.998.50 had been collected from Jharsuguda and Sambalpur.49

The All India Harijan Sevak Sangha directed to the districts to utilize the resources for the development of Harijans in the concerned district, whatever had been collected in each district.

A plan was given to establish a Harijan Hostel at Sambalpur which was accepted by A.V.Thakkar considering it as the best plan of Orissa. Janardan Pujari donated his house, land and a well for the utilisation of the same.50 After
remodeling it in some respect Harijan Hostel was opened in the
town of Sambalpur with five boarders on January 1935 and
Nrusingha Guru was its care taker.  

A.V. Thakkar, President of AIHSS, M.R. Mallani, the
Secretary and Babaji Ram Das from Gorakhpur were in constant
touch with the Hostel. Besides Acharya Harihar Das, Nanda
Kishor Das and Pandit Lingaraj Mishra used to visit occasionally
and stayed in the hostel. Sukanta Rao, the Headmaster of Zilla
School, donated Rs.5/- for encouraging the boarders. Shyama
Charan Tripathy, the then Director of Public Instruction granted
a sum of Rs.300/- annually and thus the hostel became an
embodiment of Anti-untouchability movement.

During the year 1937-38, Government had
introduced a provision for welfare of Harijans. A non-recurring
grants of Rs.2000/- was given to the Harijan Sevak Sangha for
the construction of a hostel for the Harijans. Subsequently the
hostel of Sambalpur received Rs.130/-.

The 'All India Harijan Day' was observed in Sambalpur on 29 July, 1934. The following resolutions were passed in the meeting:

i. The meeting recorded a vote of thanks to Gandhiji for dedicating his life for the upliftment of Harijans.

ii. The meeting resolved that no body should be regarded as contemptible by reason of birth and that all untouchables should have equal rights and privileges in public schools and that such night school should have legal sanction sooner or later.

iii. It was agreed that every leader of Hindu community should strive for every possible legitimate and peaceful means for removing the social disabilities imposed on the Harijans.

Nanda Kishor Das of Balasore, Secretary of Provincial Harijan Sangha visited the town of Sambalpur on 23rd August, 1934. A Harijan Meeting was held on 26th August, 1934 at the house of Chandra Sekhar Behera. A Working Committee consisting of seven members was formed and the following
people were elected as the members of Provincial Congress Committee54 :-

1. Chandra Sekhar Behera
2. Nrusingha Guru
3. Raghabji Joshi
4. Ambika Madhav Pattanaik
5. Nagalmal Kedia
6. Mahavir Singh
7. Devji Haribhai Patel

After the formation of the Working Committee, Nandakishor Das had sanctioned a sum of Rs.728/- for the upliftment of Harijans in the district of Sambalpur. The fund was utilised for the improvement of the Harijans in the social and educational sphere.

In different places of the district, Primary Schools were opened numbering six and also number of wells were constructed for the utilisation of Harijans, which were managed by the Harijan funds. Harchand Naik, the Headmaster of Bargarh High School, was given a scholarship to five Harijan
students of Rs.3/- to Rs.5/- each for encouragement among them.\textsuperscript{55}

The Anti-untouchability movement was carried on by the Congress activities. Laxmi Narayan Mishra laid the foundation of a Harijan home at the village of Panchapara under Jharsuguda Police Station. The work for the welcome and upliftment of Harijans was taken up a great momentum.\textsuperscript{56}

The conservative Hindus, being convinced by Nrusingha Guru's arguments, also allowed the Harijans to use the water of their well. Chandra Sekhar Behera, the Pioneer in this regard and the staunch supporter of Anti-untouchability Movement, passed away on 23\textsuperscript{rd} January 1936. A condolence meeting was held at Balibandha (a Place of Sambalpur town) on 3\textsuperscript{rd} February, 1936 to mourn the death of Mr.Behera and to appeal to the people to follow his example by abstaining upstanding from drink and doing welfare work for the Harijans.

Laxminarayan Mishra's "Youth Conference" aiming to long the grievances of the district before the Government assumed a new vigour when it, at the efforts of Nrusingha Guru,
took up the activities of the Anti-untouchability Movement. It became known as *Yuvaka Sammilani* (Youth Conference) from 17th April, 1936. During the 3rd week of June 1936, a Oriya weekly newspaper entitled ‘Jagarana’ was published in Sambalpur as an outcome of the movement of *Yuvaka Sammilani*. Mr.Nityananda Bohidar was its editor and publisher.57

Nrusingha Guru, a member of the *Yuvaka Sammilani* and the Secretary of the Harijan Sangha used to stir the minds of the people in favour of Anti-untouchability movement through his forceful writing in ‘Jagarana’. He, through his writing, could convince the people about the disadvantages suffered by the Harijans. A meeting was held in the 3rd week of June, 1936 for the progress of Anti-untouchability activities in the district and the following resolutions were passed58:-

1. The idea of untouchability be removed from the Hindu mind.

2. Harijans be allowed to enter the temples.

3. Harijans be requested not to indulge in drinking, beef eating and gambling.
4. The District Council of Sambalpur be asked to excavate well for Harijans.

5. The Government be moved to encourage the education of Harijans.

6. Government be asked to do away with liquor system.

A Harijan temple was built at Pandripathar in Jharsuguda Police Station. Laxminarayan Mishra and Bodhram Dube attended the opening ceremony. The National flag was hoisted with National song. Both the leaders addressed the people and exhorted them to take spinning with right earnest. On 2nd October 1936, a procession marched through the streets of the town of Sambalpur and a meeting was held at Balibandha in celebration of Harijan Nabah.

A.V. Thakkar, Acharya Harihar Das and Laxminarayan Sahu arrived at Sambalpur on 8th October, 1936 and visited the Harijan localities of Sambalpur and Jharsuguda. The Congress leaders and social workers in their address stressed the importance of the upliftment of the Harijans. The speakers appealed to the audience to remove untouchability from the Sambalpur district and co-operate with the Anti-
untouchability movement. It was proposed in the meeting to move the District Council and the Municipal Committee to admit Harijan pupils into their schools. Members of Marwari and Gujarati Community promised to contribute subscription for the digging of a well for the Harijans.60

Nrusingha Guru showed a new spirit in attracting many members of the depressed class into the fold of Khadi and Charkha Movement them organised through out the state. Nrusingha Guru opened a centre at Sadasingha of Sasan. About six hundred ‘Gandas’ (Harijans) by caste enrolled themselves as Congress members and joined the organisation with great enthusiasm. A Ganda, named Kastaram Tandi took very active part in organising Khadi and Charkha Movement in the rural areas of the district.61

Gandhiji felt, “the Harijan Movement is religion by nature.” All great religions owe their existence to the foot march undertaken by great spiritual leaders. Puri is a place of pilgrimage and a centre of religion. So the change over to the really religious method of pleading ought to be undertaken here. Cherishing the ideals of Budha, Nanak, Chaintanya, the great
seers of the past, he announced his intention of starting Harijan welfare campaign by undertaking Padayatra. Gandhiji explained, “through experience I have learnt that an atmosphere created by going in motors and vehicles is quite different from the atmosphere made by going on foot.” Gandhi’s Dandi March stirred a great political upsurge in the country earlier. But his pilgrimage from Puri for Harijan work was destined to arouse profound social awareness among the country men.62

The Padayatra of Gandhiji in Orissa for Harijan welfare had a tremendous impact on national life. Despite the formidable resistance of the Sanantanists, the pilgrimage of Gandhiji gave a momentum to the programmes like village reconstruction, Harijan welfare and Khadi throughout Sambalpur as well as Orissa and heralded a new era of social emancipation. Most of the civil resisters, who now turned to constructive workers devoted themselves whole heartedly for the socio-economic upliftment of the people of Sambalpur. Subsequently after Gandhiji’s visit on 1934, remained aloof from political work and having joined till India Seva Sangha solely denoted himself to the down-trodden.
Many Congressmen, of course, were critical of Gandhiji for his new emphasis on Harijan welfare but eventually his mission proved to be a remarkable success in creating a new identity of the Harijans vis-à-vis the National Congress. The nationalist struggle against the alien government became more vigorous and purposeful hereafter. As a result, the Government took some steps for the upliftment of Harijans. In 1946, the Temple Entry Authorisation Act was passed by the Government of Orissa for the upliftment of Harijans. In the same year, the Government also passed the Orissa Removal of Civil Disabilities Act, 1946, for the untouchabilities and it was appended to the constitution of India later on.63

**Awakening of Women:**

For countless centuries women in Sambalpur have been subordinate to men and socially oppressed as other parts of Orissa. The main cause of their degraded condition in the society was that the benefit of education was denied to most of them. During the period under review the progress of women's education contributed to the liberation of Oriya women in a remarkable way. It played a very important role in creating
political and socio-cultural awakening among them. Women played an active and important role in the struggle for freedom, participated in large number in the Salt Satyagraha. After 1918 they marched in political processions, picked shops selling foreign cloth and liquor, spun and propagated Khadi, went to jail, faced lathis, tear gas and bullets during public demonstrations. Several women became members of Municipalities and Local Boards and held posts in different offices.

Progress in education opened up a new vision for the Oriya women of Sambalpur. Even then, it was not easy for women to ignore the age-old social taboos and go in for higher education. But a wind of change, blowing already in other progressive provinces, was being awaited eagerly. Different social organisation also took interest in pushing forward the cause of women’s education.

Attempts were also made to provide some professional training for the widows, who did not enjoy any social status. The Government started a Female Training School and granted ten scholarships of Rs.10/- each for widows, who
The educational progress of women received much encouragement from Utkal Union Conference which stressed female education almost in every session.

Similarly the non-cooperation movement in 1921 gave a great impetus to the activities of Oriya women. When this movement subsided, the Oriya women thought of organising a "Utkal Women's Conference." The occasion created excitement among women belonging to different classes. Ladies of aristocratic origin, who would not otherwise come to public gatherings also extended it. There were representation from all religious groups and sects and the participants showed keen interest in the discussion.

The women of Sambalpur worked for their welfare through the above associations. Many of them became participants in the National Movement. The achievements of the following Oriya women of the different walks of life were commendable.

Among the Pioneer women leaders of Sambalpur; Jambobati Devi, Prabhabati Devi and Parbati Giri stood
foremost. Inspired by nationalistic and progressive ideas, they took active part in nation building activities. Most of them were not only great freedom fighters but also outstanding social workers. They were vigorous advocates of social reform and worked actively to improve the condition of women and to spread education among them. The literary activities of some of them were considerable. On the whole, it can be said that they had a tremendous influence on the social, cultural and political life of Sambalpur in the 20th century.

**Jambobati Devi:**

Jambobati Devi was one of the most remarkable personalities of modern Sambalpur. She was an active participant in the National Movement and a Pioneer of the women's movement in Sambalpur. Jambobati Devi was the first woman freedom fighter of Western Orissa and took active part in the Swadeshi Movement. Herself and her husband Bhagirathi Patnaik and son Prafulla suffered imprisonment for about five times. Jambobati was arrested during the Quit India Movement in Dumka, Bihar on 17th August 1942. After some months she was released and died in the house of Binodananda Jha, who
later became the Chief Minister of Bihar. She died on 15 July, 1943 when her husband and son were both in Jail.\textsuperscript{67}

Jambobati Devi took an active interest in the eradication of untouchability and the spread of Khadi. As she was an ardent believer in the Gandhian philosophy of rural movement. In 1931 she joined in the Salt Satyagraha at Inchudi (Balasore) along with other ten women of Sambalpur.\textsuperscript{68} She also took an affective lead in picketing the liquor shops. Many liquor vendors returned their liquor licences to the district authorities.

Jambobati Devi was not only a distinguished leader of National Movement but also a social worker of national fame. She was basically a humanist. Jambobati Devi is remembered greatfully for her contribution to the upliftment of Sambalpur’s down-trodden people.

**Prabhabati Devi:**

Among the great leaders of modern Sambalpur, Prabhabati Devi occupied an important place. She is a prominent leader of the Freedom Movement and a famous social worker. She dedicated her life to the cause of the poor, the
unfortunate and the oppressed. She was affectionately called *Nani* (elder sister) in every nook and corner of Sambalpur. Her generosity to the orphan, depressed classes and women of Sambalpur was fabulous. In 1938, she came in close contact with Malati Choudhury at Bari (Cuttack).

In August 1942, Quit India Movement was launched. It spread like wild fire to different parts of Sambalpur. Prabhabati Devi took important part in the Quit India Movement, when she was only 26 years old. She courted imprisonment till 1944. On release from Prison, Prabhabati Devi opened 'Siksha Sivir' for illiterate women at Bargaon.

After being released from the jail, she dedicated herself to social service. She joined the Charkha Movement and organised different centres to train the villagers in the use of Charkha and weaving cloth, where constructive activities were undertaken for the upliftment of women and spread of literacy among them. She was a lady of remarkable simplicity. Thus, Prabhabati Devi played a significant role in the building of modern Sambalpur in the Pre and Post Independence era.
Parbati Giri:

The next towering personality was Parbati Giri. She is a prominent leader of the Freedom Movement and also a famous social worker. All her life, she carried on the struggle for the improvement of condition of ryots and backward classes.

Parbati Giri joined in the Freedom Movement when she was only 12 years old. She was a great humanist who possessed immense sympathy for the untouchables. She was one of the pioneers of Harijan welfare in Sambalpur. She was a great champion of Hindu-Muslim unity. In 1942, she took active part in the Quit India Movement for which, she was sentenced to two years imprisonment.

Parbati Giri was inspired by the ideas and ideals of Mahatma Gandhi. She was a great supporter of the Congress Movement in Sambalpur. She was a perennial source of inspiration for the oppressed, depressed and helpless. Her activities, no doubt, gave a great deal of encouragement to women’s movement in Sambalpur.
India is above all the land of great women. Women have always been and will always be the part and parcel of our society. Through the ages they have been playing a key role in bringing about transformation in our socio-political set-up. There need be no better sobriquet for this legendary figure. Dedication was the motto of her life. But for her names the story of the freedom struggle and social reforms in Sambalpur would have been incomplete.

Thus, these women pioneers were able to awaken a general interest and enthusiasm among the educated and uneducated women folk in Sambalpur both through individual and joint efforts. They were not only active participants in the Oriya National Movement but were also great champions of women’s emancipation movement. They installed a new life with a firm will in the women of Sambalpur to resist all injustices advanced to them. Today the women no longer want to remain confined to the four walls of their houses. They are marching on equal footing with their male partner. Prominent leaders like Jambobati Devi, Prabhabati Devi, Parbati Giri and others freed themselves from the age old restriction of *Purdah* and offered
themselves at the alter of Freedom Movement. These eminent Hindu women created a landmark in the history of Sambalpur by coming out to public platform and taking leading part in the freedom struggle as well as in other social and educational problem of the time. Thus the work of these pioneer women leaders form a brilliant chapter in the history of Social and National Progress in Modern Sambalpur.

With the change of mental attitude of the Oriya people after receiving new ideas through education and cultural activities, the society could not remain static. There came a social awakening which resulted in bringing about certain social reforms.

The first meaningful social reform that came in the wake of renaissance was the abolition of inhuman practice of Sati. There after the widows were liberally treated. Consequently, the women in general were found to have enjoyed greater freedom. Ground was also prepared for introduction of widow-remarriage. Child-marriage was indirectly discouraged. The efforts were being made to bring the women out of their dreadful seclusion by providing them with education.
It opened a new vision of the women of Sambalpur. They became conscious of their social status.\textsuperscript{75}

It was in the beginning of the twentieth century that they started to involve themselves in socio-political movement of Sambalpur. Further more, the rigidity of caste-custom in the society was viewed liberally. All these social changes made the people of Sambalpur more progressive in outlook. An age of socio-economical renaissance was thus inaugurated.
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7. Ibid.
9. Sambalpur Hitaisini, 8th and 20th February, 1895.
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58. *Ibid*.
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