International Journal of Social Science and Humanities
www.humanitiesjournals.com
Online ISSN: 2664-8628
Received: 24-04-2026, Accepted: 25-05-2026, Published: 09-06-2026
Volume 8, Issue 2, 2026, Page No. 168-174

Grassroots nationalism and rural resistance: A historical study of Bargarh District villages in the Indian freedom struggle

Kousika Kumbhar[1], Sumati Bibhar[2]

[1] Assistant Professor, Department of History, Odisha State Open University, Sambalpur, Odisha, India
[2] Department of History, Odisha State Open University, Sambalpur, Odisha, India

DOI: https://doi.org/10.66856/ijssh.2026.8.2.8093

Abstract

The Indian freedom struggle was a mass-based movement shaped not only by prominent national leaders but also by rural communities whose collective efforts sustained anti-colonial resistance at the grassroots level. The villages of Bargarh district in western Odisha played a significant role in spreading nationalist consciousness, organizing resistance, and supporting Gandhian movements during the colonial period. Villages such as Panimora, Samlaipadar, Ghess, and regions around Bijepur and Sohela emerged as important centers of political awakening and anti-British activities, with active participation in major movements like the Non-Cooperation Movement, Civil Disobedience Movement, and Quit India Movement, demonstrating strong commitment to the cause of independence. This study examines the historical importance of these villages by analyzing their role in mobilizing rural populations and highlighting the contributions of local freedom fighters such as Parbati Giri, Chamaru Parida, and Jitendriya Pradhan. It further explores the socio-economic conditions that fostered resistance, including agrarian distress, colonial exploitation, and the spread of Gandhian ideology, while also emphasizing the participation of women and marginalized groups in the nationalist movement. By situating Bargarh within the broader framework of India's independence struggle, the article highlights the importance of rural agency and grassroots nationalism in shaping historical outcomes and underscores the need to integrate regional histories into mainstream historiography for a more comprehensive understanding of the freedom movement.

Keywords: Grassroots nationalism, rural resistance, Bargarh District, freedom struggle, Gandhian movement, Odisha history

Introduction

The historiography of the Indian freedom struggle has traditionally emphasized the role of major urban centers and nationally prominent leaders, often overlooking the crucial contributions of rural societies. However, recent historical inquiries have increasingly recognized that the strength and sustainability of the anti-colonial movement were deeply rooted in the participation of rural India. Villages across the subcontinent functioned not merely as passive recipients of nationalist ideas but as active agents of resistance against British colonial rule. In the context of Odisha, the villages of Bargarh district emerged as significant centers of political mobilization, grassroots organization, and nationalist awakening. Despite their geographical distance from colonial administrative hubs, these villages played a decisive role in sustaining the momentum of the freedom struggle through mass participation, civil disobedience, and localized resistance.

Historically, the region that constitutes present-day Bargarh district formed part of the undivided Sambalpur region, which possessed a distinctive socio-economic and cultural landscape. The area was characterized by an agrarian economy, cohesive village communities, and rich folk traditions that shaped collective identity. The imposition of British colonial policies particularly those related to land revenue, forest administration, and resource extraction disrupted traditional systems and led to widespread socio-economic distress among peasants and tribal populations. Excessive taxation, restrictions on forest usage, and exploitative administrative practices generated resentment and gradually fostered a climate conducive to resistance. These local grievances, when combined with the broader currents of Indian nationalism, facilitated the emergence of organized anti-colonial movements within rural society.

The Gandhian phase of the freedom struggle marked a turning point in the political transformation of Bargarh's villages. The penetration of nationalist ideology into rural areas was facilitated by Congress workers, local leaders, school teachers, and social reformers who acted as intermediaries between national leadership and village communities. The principles of non-violence, swadeshi, and self-reliance resonated strongly with rural populations, leading to widespread participation in movements such as the Non-Cooperation Movement (1920–22), the Civil Disobedience Movement (1930–34), and most notably, the Quit India Movement of 1942. Villagers actively engaged in boycotts of foreign goods, refusal to pay taxes, organization of protests, and support for underground nationalist activities. As a consequence, many were subjected to imprisonment, economic penalties, and administrative repression by colonial authorities.

Within this broader rural landscape, certain villages acquired particular prominence due to their extraordinary contributions to the freedom movement. Panimora, for instance, occupies a distinguished place in the nationalist history of Odisha as a village that produced a remarkably high number of freedom fighters and demonstrated organized resistance during the Quit India Movement. Its collective participation earned it recognition as a symbolic centre of rural defiance. Similarly, Samlaipadar gained historical importance through its association with Parbati Giri, one of the most prominent women freedom fighters of Odisha, whose activism exemplified the increasing involvement of women in the nationalist struggle. Other

villages such as Ghess, along with regions around Bijepur and Sohela, contributed significantly to the spread of Gandhian ideology and the mobilization of rural populations.

The role of these villages highlights the importance of examining the freedom struggle from a subaltern and regional perspective. Rural communities not only supported national movements but also adapted them to local contexts, thereby transforming the nature of political resistance. Their participation underscores the decentralized and participatory character of the Indian freedom struggle, where local initiatives complemented national strategies.

This article aims to provide a comprehensive historical analysis of the importance of Bargarh district villages in the Indian freedom struggle. It seeks to examine the interplay between socio-economic conditions and political mobilization, the role of local leadership, and the contribution of ordinary villagers in shaping the course of the nationalist movement. By situating the experiences of Bargarh within the broader framework of Indian nationalism, the study attempts to bridge the gap between regional history and mainstream historiography, thereby offering a more inclusive and nuanced understanding of India's path to independence.

Objectives of the Study

1. To examine the role of Bargarh district villages in the Indian freedom struggle and their contribution to grassroots nationalism.
2. To analyze the socio-economic and political conditions that facilitated rural participation in anti-colonial movements.
3. To investigate the significance of villages such as Panimora, Samlaipadar, Ghess, Bijepur, and Sohela in mobilizing nationalist consciousness.
4. To evaluate the contributions of local freedom fighters, particularly Parbati Giri, Chamaru Parida, and Jitendriya Pradhan, in strengthening the freedom movement in western Odisha.
5. To explore the influence of Gandhian ideology, peasant participation, and women's activism in shaping rural resistance.
6. To contribute to regional historiography by highlighting the importance of village-level experiences in understanding India's struggle for independence.

Methodology

The present study adopts a qualitative historical research methodology based on the critical examination of both primary and secondary sources. Employing descriptive, analytical, and interpretative approaches, the research explores the nature and extent of rural participation in the Indian national movement, with particular reference to the Bargarh region. The study relies on a wide range of secondary materials, including district gazetteers, archival records, scholarly books, peer-reviewed journal articles, contemporary newspaper reports, and biographical accounts of freedom fighters, to reconstruct the historical narrative of nationalist activities in western Odisha. A chronological and thematic framework has been utilized to trace the development of anti-colonial consciousness and to examine the interrelationship between local socio-economic conditions, nationalist ideology, and grassroots political mobilization. Particular attention has been given to regional historical sources in order to highlight the contributions of rural communities that have often remained underrepresented in mainstream nationalist historiography. Furthermore, oral traditions, local narratives, and collective memories preserved within village communities have been consulted as supplementary historical evidence, providing valuable insights into popular perceptions of the freedom struggle and the enduring historical memory of nationalist resistance at the local level.

Historical Background of Bargarh District

Historically, Bargarh district formed part of the larger Sambalpur region in western Odisha, characterized by agrarian settlements, localized zamindari structures, and cohesive village communities. The socio-economic fabric of the region was deeply rooted in agriculture, supported by traditional systems of landholding and community cooperation. However, the advent of British colonial rule introduced significant administrative and economic transformations that disrupted these established structures. Colonial policies, particularly in the domains of land revenue, forest administration, and resource extraction, intensified state control over rural life and generated widespread discontent among peasants and tribal populations.

The imposition of high land revenue demands, coupled with exploitative practices by intermediaries, led to increasing agrarian distress. Peasants frequently faced indebtedness, crop failures, and administrative coercion, which collectively undermined their economic stability. Additionally, restrictive forest laws deprived local communities of traditional rights over forest resources, further aggravating their grievances. These conditions fostered a climate of resistance; wherein local discontent gradually intersected with the broader currents of Indian nationalism.

The spread of nationalist ideology in Bargarh was facilitated by the activities of the Indian National Congress and associated social reform movements. Congress workers, teachers, and local leaders played a crucial role in disseminating ideas of swaraj, swadeshi, and non-cooperation among rural populations. The influence of Gandhian philosophy was particularly significant, as its emphasis on non-violence, self-reliance, and moral resistance resonated deeply with the socio-cultural ethos of village communities. As a result, rural inhabitants increasingly participated in major national movements, including the Non-Cooperation Movement, Civil Disobedience Movement, and the Quit India Movement.

The region also inherited a legacy of earlier resistance, notably the anti-colonial struggles led by Veer Surendra Sai in the Sambalpur area. Although his activities were centered in adjoining regions, his defiance against British authority served as a powerful symbol of resistance and inspired subsequent generations in western Odisha. This historical continuity of resistance contributed to the emergence of a politically conscious rural society by the early twentieth century.

Panimora: The "Sangrami Tirtha" of Odisha

Among the villages of Bargarh district, Panimora occupies a distinctive and revered place in the history of India's freedom struggle. Situated in the Sohela region, this seemingly ordinary rural settlement emerged as an

extraordinary centre of nationalist awakening during the Quit India Movement. Its unwavering resistance to colonial authority and the collective participation of its inhabitants earned it the honorific title "Sangrami Tirtha", meaning the *"Pilgrimage of Struggle."*

What makes Panimora particularly remarkable is the scale and intensity of participation at the village level. Historical accounts consistently note that around thirty-two villagers were imprisoned for their involvement in anti-British activities during 1942. For a single rural settlement, this number is exceptionally high and reflects not only political awareness but also a deeply rooted spirit of sacrifice among ordinary peasants, farmers, and villagers. Unlike urban centers where leadership often came from educated elites, Panimora's movement was collective, grassroots-driven, and community-oriented, making it a powerful example of rural nationalism in Odisha.

Important Freedom Fighters from Panimora

Panimora, located in the Sohela region of Bargarh district, emerged as a significant center of rural resistance during the Quit India Movement. Among the many villagers who participated in the struggle, a few prominent individuals stand out for their leadership and contribution.

Jitendriya Pradhan: Jitendriya Pradhan emerged as one of the most prominent and widely respected freedom fighters of Panimora in Bargarh district. His active involvement in the Quit India Movement placed him at the forefront of rural resistance against British colonial rule. At a time when communication and political awareness in villages were limited, Pradhan played a significant role in spreading nationalist ideas and encouraging villagers to participate in the movement.

He was actively involved in organizing local resistance activities, including participation in protests and acts of civil disobedience directed against colonial authority. His commitment to the cause led to his arrest and imprisonment, which was a common fate for those who openly challenged British rule during 1942. His imprisonment not only reflects his personal sacrifice but also highlights the risks undertaken by rural activists.

After independence, Jitendriya Pradhan continued to be remembered as a symbol of dedication, courage, and patriotic commitment. He remained an important figure in local historical memory, representing the link between past struggles and present identity. His death in 2022[7] marked the passing of one of the last surviving representatives of Panimora's direct participation in the freedom movement, thereby closing an important chapter in the region's history.

Chamaru Parida: Chamaru Parida played a decisive and influential role in organizing and directing the nationalist activities of Panimora's villagers. Unlike many participants who contributed individually, Parida functioned as a grassroots leader and mobilizer, bringing together people from different social and economic backgrounds to unite against colonial rule.

Under his leadership, Panimora witnessed coordinated participation in demonstrations, protest marches, boycotts of colonial institutions, and anti-government campaigns. He was instrumental in instilling a sense of unity and collective purpose among villagers, which was crucial for sustaining resistance in a rural setting.

Parida is also associated with leading Satyagraha movements, which followed Gandhian principles of non-violent resistance while symbolically challenging the legitimacy of British authority. These activities required both courage and organization, as participant's risked arrest and repression. His leadership helped transform Panimora into a structured and active centre of resistance, rather than a passive participant in the broader national movement.

Through his efforts, the village gained recognition for its disciplined and organized defiance, ultimately contributing to its identity as *"Sangrami Tirtha."*

Dayanidhi Nayak: Dayanidhi Nayak represents the crucial yet often underrepresented dimension of the freedom struggle supportive and network-based activism at the grassroots level. While not always at the forefront of public leadership, his contributions were vital in sustaining the movement within the village.

He actively participated in anti-British protests alongside fellow villagers and contributed to maintaining the momentum of resistance during the Quit India Movement. In addition to visible forms of protest, Nayak is believed to have supported underground nationalist activities, which became increasingly important during periods of intense colonial repression when many leaders were arrested or forced into hiding.

Such underground efforts included maintaining communication between activists, assisting in the dissemination of nationalist messages, and providing logistical support to those involved in resistance activities. These roles, though less visible, were essential for the continuity and effectiveness of the movement.

Dayanidhi Nayak's contribution highlights the collective and multi-layered nature of rural resistance, where success depended not only on leadership but also on cooperation, coordination, and sustained grassroots participation.

The contributions of these great personalities reflect different yet complementary aspects of the freedom struggle in Panimora leadership, mobilization, and support. Together, they represent the broader group of villagers whose combined efforts transformed Panimora into a significant centre of anti-colonial resistance.

Their legacy underscores the fact that India's independence was not achieved solely through national leaders, but also through the courage, unity, and sacrifices of rural communities, whose contributions remain an integral part of the nation's historical narrative.

Samlaipadar and the Rise of Women's Participation

The village of Samlaipadar, located near Bijepur in Bargarh district, occupies a significant place in the history of Odisha's freedom movement, particularly for its contribution to the rise of women's participation in nationalist activities. This otherwise modest rural settlement gained historical prominence as the birthplace and early centre of influence of one of Odisha's most celebrated women freedom fighters, Parbati Giri.

During the nationalist period, Samlaipadar evolved into an active hub of Indian National Congress activities. Local leaders and activists regularly organized political meetings, awareness campaigns, and discussions to mobilize people against British colonial rule. These gatherings played a crucial role in spreading nationalist consciousness among

villagers, including women and youth who were traditionally excluded from political participation.

Growing up in such a politically charged environment, Parbati Giri was deeply influenced by the ideals of freedom, sacrifice, and service to the nation. From an early age, she was exposed to the activities of Congress workers, which shaped her ideological outlook and inspired her to actively participate in the freedom struggle. Her early experiences in Samlaipadar laid the foundation for her later involvement in major movements, including her participation in the Quit India Movement.

The emergence of Samlaipadar as a centre of nationalist activity also reflects a broader transformation within rural Odisha, where villages gradually became spaces of political awakening and mobilization. Importantly, it highlights how women, inspired by leaders like Parbati Giri, began to step beyond traditional domestic roles and contribute actively to the struggle for independence.

Thus, Samlaipadar not only nurtured a prominent freedom fighter but also symbolizes the growing participation of women in India's nationalist movement, marking a significant shift in the social and political fabric of rural society.

Early Life of Parbati Giri: Parbati Giri was born in 1926 in the village of Samlaipadar near Bijepur in Bargarh district. She grew up in a politically active and aware environment that played a decisive role in shaping her early consciousness. Her family background, particularly the influence of her uncle Ramachandra Giri, had a profound impact on her upbringing.

Ramachandra Giri was an active member of the Indian National Congress and frequently organized meetings and discussions in the village. These gatherings attracted nationalist leaders, workers, and local villagers, turning Samlaipadar into a vibrant centre of political interaction. As a young girl, Parbati Giri attentively listened to discussions on freedom, self-rule (Swaraj), and resistance against British colonial rule. Such early exposure instilled in her a deep sense of patriotism and commitment to the national cause.

Inspired by these ideas, she chose to dedicate herself to the freedom movement at a young age. She left formal education early and joined Congress organizational activities, demonstrating strong determination and a spirit of sacrifice that characterized many young participants in India's nationalist struggle.

Her ideological and practical training was further strengthened at the Bari Ashram, a centre influenced by Gandhian principles. There, she learned spinning (charkha), weaving (khadi), self-reliance, and social service key elements of Gandhian constructive programmes aimed at promoting economic independence and moral discipline.

This formative phase laid the foundation for her later active participation in the Quit India Movement, where she emerged as one of the most prominent women freedom fighters from Odisha.

Role in the Freedom Movement: Parbati Giri played a dynamic and courageous role in India's struggle for independence, particularly in the rural regions of western Odisha. Moving beyond the confines of her village, she travelled extensively across areas such as Bargarh district, Sambalpur, Padampur, and Panimora, spreading Gandhian ideals among the masses. At a time when communication infrastructure was limited, such direct engagement was crucial in building political awareness.

She actively promoted the principles of self-reliance and swadeshi, encouraging villagers to adopt *khadi*, boycott foreign goods, and support the nationalist movement. Her efforts were not limited to ideological propagation; she worked at the grassroots level, motivating people to participate in collective resistance against colonial rule.

During the Quit India Movement, her involvement became more direct and assertive. She organized and participated in protests, demonstrations, and acts of civil disobedience against British authorities. One of the most remarkable episodes of her activism occurred when, at the young age of sixteen, she reportedly took part in the occupation of the SDO (Sub-Divisional Officer) office at Bargarh as part of nationalist agitation. This bold act of defiance led to her arrest, and she was subsequently imprisoned for nearly two years in Sambalpur Jail.

Parbati Giri's contribution is particularly significant because of her role in mobilizing women and marginalized sections of society in rural Odisha. At a time when women's participation in public and political life was limited, she emerged as a powerful ***प्रेरणा*** **(**inspiration) and leader. She encouraged women to step out of traditional roles and join the freedom movement, thereby broadening the social base of nationalist participation.

Her activism reflects a larger historical transformation, where rural women became active agents in India's independence struggle. Through her courage, leadership, and commitment, Parbati Giri not only contributed to the nationalist cause but also helped redefine the role of women in society, leaving behind a lasting legacy in the history of Odisha and India.

Ghess and Rural Political Consciousness

The village of Ghess, located in Bargarh district, also contributed to the spread of nationalist ideas in western Odisha during India's freedom struggle. Though not as prominently documented as some other centers, Ghess formed an important part of the rural network of political awakening that developed in the region during the Gandhian phase of the movement.

Congress workers and Gandhian activists frequently visited the village to organize meetings, discussions, and awareness campaigns. These efforts aimed to educate villagers about British colonial exploitation, the importance of Swaraj (self-rule), and the need for collective resistance. Such interactions helped transform Ghess from a quiet rural settlement into a space of growing political consciousness.

Parbati Giri herself visited Ghess as part of her wider efforts to mobilize rural populations. Through her engagement, she encouraged villagers to adopt Gandhian principles such as swadeshi, use of khadi, non-violent resistance, and participation in nationalist activities. Her presence also inspired women and marginalized groups to take part in the movement, thereby broadening its social base.

Over time, Ghess became integrated into a larger network of politically aware villages, including centers like Bijepur, Samlaipadar, and Panimora. These interconnected villages collectively supported Congress campaigns, coordinated local activities, and sustained the momentum of the nationalist movement at the grassroots level.

The participation of Ghess clearly demonstrates that the freedom struggle in Bargarh was not confined to a few

isolated centers, but rather represented a widespread rural awakening. This network of villages played a crucial role in strengthening the foundation of India's independence movement by ensuring that nationalist ideas reached even the most remote areas.

Gandhian Ideology and Rural Transformation

One of the most significant features of the freedom movement in the villages of Bargarh district was the deep and lasting influence of Gandhian ideology. The ideas of non-violence (ahimsa), self-reliance (swadeshi), and moral resistance resonated strongly with rural populations, as they were closely connected to everyday life and economic conditions. These principles provided not only a political framework but also a practical path for villagers to participate in the national movement.

Under the guidance of Congress workers and local activists, villagers were encouraged to adopt several Gandhian practices as part of the struggle against colonial rule. These included:

- Wearing *khadi* as a symbol of economic independence
- Boycotting foreign goods, especially British-manufactured textiles
- Participating in non-cooperation and civil disobedience movements
- Promoting village-based industries and crafts
- Resisting unjust taxation imposed by colonial authorities

Among these, khadi spinning (charkha) became one of the most visible and meaningful activities. It served both economic and political purposes economically, it promoted self-sufficiency and reduced dependence on imported goods; politically, it symbolized resistance to British industrial dominance. For many villagers, spinning and wearing khadi became acts of patriotism, integrating nationalism into daily routines.

In this context, Parbati Giri played a crucial role in spreading Gandhian ideals across rural areas. She actively travelled to different villages, training people especially women and marginalized communities in spinning, weaving, and self-reliant practices. Her efforts went beyond political mobilization; she also encouraged social reform, including greater participation of women in public life and the upliftment of disadvantaged sections of society.

The impact of Gandhian ideology led to a profound transformation in rural society. Villages were no longer passive observers but became politically conscious and actively engaged communities. Nationalism was no longer confined to speeches or urban centers; it became embedded in everyday activities such as clothing, work, and social interaction.

Women in the Freedom Movement of Bargarh

The participation of women in the villages of Bargarh district represents a vital yet often underrepresented chapter in Odisha's nationalist history. Although many of their contributions remain undocumented in formal records, women played a decisive and sustaining role in the freedom movement, particularly at the grassroots level. Their involvement ensured continuity, support, and expansion of nationalist activities in rural areas.

Women in Bargarh actively engaged in a wide range of activities that were both political and socio-economic in nature. These included:

- Participation in processions, demonstrations, and protest marches
- Engagement in khadi production, including spinning and weaving
- Providing shelter, food, and logistical support to Congress workers and activists
- Assisting in the dissemination of nationalist ideas within villages
- Taking part in social reform initiatives, including efforts toward equality and community upliftment

Through these roles, women became integral to the functioning of the movement, often working behind the scenes while also stepping into public spaces during moments of mass mobilization.

Among them, Parbati Giri stands out as the most prominent female freedom fighter from the region. Her courage, determination, and active participation in movements such as the Quit India Movement inspired many rural women to overcome traditional social barriers and join the nationalist cause. At a time when women's public participation was limited, she emerged as a powerful example of leadership and commitment.

Parbati Giri's work also highlighted the interconnection between political freedom and social reform. She not only fought against British colonial rule but also addressed deep-rooted social issues within society. She actively opposed untouchability, promoted women's empowerment, and emphasized the importance of education and self-reliance as essential components of a free and just society.

The role of women in Bargarh's freedom movement demonstrates that the struggle for independence was not solely a political battle but also a social transformation. Through their participation, women helped redefine their position in society and contributed significantly to the success of the nationalist movement. Their legacy remains an essential part of the region's historical and cultural identity.

Peasant Participation and Agrarian Resistance

The nationalist movement in the villages of Bargarh district cannot be fully understood without examining the agrarian context in which it developed. Peasants constituted the majority of the rural population and were directly affected by the economic policies of British colonial rule. Their everyday struggles became a powerful foundation for political mobilization and resistance.

Colonial land revenue systems imposed heavy taxation on cultivators, often without regard to agricultural conditions or crop failures. In addition, the presence of intermediaries such as zamindars and revenue agents led to further exploitation and economic insecurity. Many peasants faced indebtedness, loss of land, and declining living standards. These conditions generated widespread dissatisfaction and resentment toward the colonial administration.

Recognizing this, Congress activists and local leaders worked to link agrarian grievances with the broader nationalist movement. They explained that colonial exploitation was not only political but also economic, and that independence was necessary to achieve justice and relief for the rural population. This connection made the

freedom movement more relevant and meaningful to peasants.

As a result, villagers actively participated in various forms of resistance, including:

- Anti-tax campaigns, opposing excessive land revenue demands
- Boycott movements, particularly against foreign goods and colonial institutions
- Civil disobedience, defying unjust laws and administrative authority
- Non-cooperation, including refusal to assist colonial officials in their duties

These forms of participation reflected a growing awareness among peasants that their economic hardships were closely tied to colonial rule. The movement was no longer seen as distant or urban-centered but as something directly connected to their lives and livelihoods.

The participation of peasants in Bargarh highlights the agrarian roots of India's freedom struggle. Rural communities came to understand that political independence was inseparable from economic justice, fair taxation, and local self-governance. Their involvement transformed the nationalist movement into a mass-based struggle, ensuring its strength and eventual success.

Cultural Nationalism in Bargarh Villages

The nationalist movement in the villages of Bargarh district was significantly strengthened through cultural expressions that made political ideas accessible to the rural population. Folk songs, village gatherings, and traditional performances became important mediums for spreading patriotic messages and creating awareness about the freedom struggle. In western Odisha, oral traditions played a vital role in preserving the memory of local freedom fighters, with stories and songs celebrating their courage and sacrifice. These cultural forms not only informed people about nationalist ideals but also inspired participation by connecting the movement with familiar social practices.

An important example of this cultural dimension is the Dhanu Jatra, which, although rooted in mythology, contributed to social unity and regional identity. The collective participation of villagers in such festivals strengthened community bonds and fostered a shared sense of belonging. This unity indirectly supported the growth of nationalist sentiment by creating a cohesive social environment. Thus, cultural nationalism allowed the freedom movement to become deeply embedded in everyday rural life, extending beyond formal political organizations and ensuring wider participation.

Impact of the Quit India Movement in Bargarh

The Quit India Movement marked the peak of nationalist activity in the villages of Bargarh district. Inspired by Mahatma Gandhi's call of "Do or Die," rural communities across the district intensified their resistance against British rule. What had earlier been gradual political awakening now turned into direct confrontation with colonial authority, as villagers organized protests, processions, and acts of civil disobedience.

Among these villages, Panimora emerged as the most prominent centre of resistance. It became a symbol of organized rural defiance, where villagers openly challenged British authority through demonstrations and nationalist activities. The colonial administration responded with repression, leading to the arrest and imprisonment of many participants, which further highlighted the intensity of the movement in the region.

The movement brought about several important consequences. It led to a significant rise in political consciousness among villagers, who increasingly understood the link between colonial rule and their socio-economic conditions. There was also greater participation of women and youth, who stepped forward to support and sustain the movement at the grassroots level. Additionally, the movement helped in strengthening Congress organizational networks in rural areas, improving coordination among villages and activists. It also contributed to the widespread expansion of anti-colonial sentiment across western Odisha, making nationalism a shared rural experience.

The Quit India Movement transformed the villages of Bargarh from passive observers into active agents of nationalist change. It marked a decisive shift in the character of the freedom struggle in the region, where collective rural action played a crucial role in challenging colonial authority and advancing the cause of independence.

Historiographical Significance

The study of the villages of Bargarh district makes an important contribution to the historiography of India's freedom struggle by challenging the traditional focus on urban centers and nationally prominent leaders. Much of early nationalist historiography emphasized elite political leadership, major cities, and high-level negotiations, often overlooking the grassroots dimensions of the movement. The experience of Bargarh, however, clearly demonstrates that nationalism was not confined to urban spaces but was deeply embedded in rural society, where villages functioned as active centers of political mobilization and resistance.

The evidence from this region highlights several key historiographical insights: villages acted as organizational hubs for nationalist activity, linking local populations with broader Congress networks; women and peasants played a central role in sustaining and expanding the movement through participation, support, and sacrifice; and Gandhian ideology successfully penetrated even remote rural areas, transforming everyday practices into instruments of political resistance. These findings emphasize the need to move beyond a narrow, leader-centric narrative and adopt a more inclusive perspective that recognizes the contributions of ordinary people. Therefore, a comprehensive understanding of India's freedom struggle requires integrating such regional and rural experiences into mainstream historical scholarship, thereby presenting a more balanced and complete account of the nationalist movement.

Expected Outcomes

1. The study is expected to demonstrate that rural communities in Bargarh district played a significant role in sustaining and expanding the nationalist movement at the grassroots level.
2. It will highlight the importance of village-based mobilization in transforming nationalism into a mass movement.
3. The research is expected to reveal how agrarian grievances, colonial exploitation, and Gandhian

ideology contributed to the emergence of rural political consciousness.
4. The study will emphasize the role of women, peasants, and local leaders in shaping anti-colonial resistance in western Odisha.
5. It is anticipated that the findings will strengthen the historiography of Odisha's freedom movement by documenting regional experiences often overlooked in mainstream nationalist narratives.
6. The research will contribute to a more inclusive understanding of India's freedom struggle by integrating local histories, oral traditions, and grassroots perspectives.

Conclusion

The villages of Bargarh district played an indispensable role in India’s freedom struggle, demonstrating that the movement was not limited to urban centers or elite leadership but was deeply rooted in rural society. Through sustained political mobilization, active peasant participation, the spread of Gandhian ideology, and the use of cultural nationalism, these villages became vibrant centers of anti-colonial resistance. The integration of everyday practices such as khadi production, boycott movements, and village-level organization into the broader nationalist framework highlights the depth of rural engagement in the struggle for independence.

Villages such as Panimora, Samlaipadar, Ghess, and regions around Bijepur and Sohela emerged as important centers of nationalist awakening. Freedom fighters like Parbati Giri, Chamaru Parida, and Jitendriya Pradhan came to symbolize the courage, resilience, and determination of rural Odisha. Their contributions, along with those of many unnamed villagers, reflect a collective spirit of resistance that sustained the movement at the grassroots level.

The history of Bargarh’s villages ultimately demonstrates that India’s independence was achieved not only through the efforts of nationally recognized leaders but also through the sacrifices of countless ordinary villagers. Recognizing and integrating these rural contributions is essential for a more balanced understanding of the freedom struggle. Their legacy deserves greater acknowledgment within Indian historiography as well as in public memory, as it represents the true breadth and inclusiveness of the national movement.

References

1. Das P. Freedom Movement in Odisha. Vidyapuri, Cuttack, 1992.
2. Government of Odisha. Bargarh District Gazetteer. Gazetteers Unit, Government of Odisha, Bhubaneswar, 1988.
3. Government of Odisha (Odisha State Archives). History of Freedom Movement in Odisha. Odisha State Archives, Bhubaneswar, Various Editions.
4. Government of India. Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav: Parbati Giri. Ministry of Culture, New Delhi, 2022.
5. Government of India. Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav: District Repository (Odisha). Ministry of Culture, New Delhi, 2022.
6. The New Indian Express. Panimora Freedom Fighters and Quit India Movement Contributions. The New Indian Express, 2022.
7. The Times of India. Jitendriya Pradhan of Panimora and His Role in Freedom Struggle. The Times of India, 2022.
8. Parbati Giri Official Memorial Site. Life and Legacy of Parbati Giri. Official Memorial Publication, n.d.
9. Feminism in India. Parbati Giri and Women in the Freedom Movement. Feminism in India, 2021.
10. Regional Historical Studies on Western Odisha Nationalism. Studies on Rural Mobilization, Gandhian Influence and Agrarian Participation in Bargarh District. Various Publications.
11. Oral Traditions and Local Historical Narratives of Bargarh District. Community-Based Accounts of Village-Level Participation in the Freedom Movement. Field Survey Records, 2024–2025.