

Chakhi Khuntia (Chandan Hajuri)

When the burning flames of sepoy mutiny had engulfed the whole country in 1857 among the valiant leaders who had dedicated their lives for the cause of common man were Chakhi Khuntia or Chandan Hajuri. He was a versatile personality. He was a poet, social reformer and great revolutionary. He had a great passion for literature and had a versatile personality.

Born in 1827 A.D. on the auspicious day of "Sambar Dashami" in Harchandi Sahi of Puri, Chandan Hajuri father's name was Hajuri Raghunath Khuntia (Bhimsena Rajpanda) and his mother's name was Kamalabati. His father Hajuri Raghunath Rajpanda was anointing sandal to the lord Jagannath and when he got the good news of his son's birth he named his son 'Chandan' though his nickname was Chakhi. Chandan Hajuri got his early education in Hindi from Ramdayal Pandit. When Chakhi attained the age of 12 years he was married to 'Sundarmani'. From his early childhood Chakhi Khuntia was dedicated and devoted to Lord Jagannath and was a great devotee of the Lord. In 1817 A.D. Puri had become the abode of the Britishers and missionaries who defamed the Hindu cult and Jagannath worship. The Missionary preachers spread degrading remarks against the Lord of the land. Chakhi Khuntia became enraged with the hostility of the missionaries and attacked the preaching centers on the Grand Road Puri and at other places and destroyed the anti Jagannath cult messages and a book on "Jagannath Pariksha" through the mighty British suppressed Chakhi and his group. These anti-religious movements and suppression led on to one of the causes of the historic sepoy mutiny in the later phase.

Chakhi Khuntia's family had familial ties with that of Jhansi Rani Laxmi Bai's. When Jhansi Rani Laxmibai previously known as Manubai was only two years old then the Dewan of the Maratha Ruler of Kashi had visited Puri. Dewan Merapant Tambe had become very close to the Bhimasena Rajpanda family and later it became transformed onto Guru-pupil relationship. In other words, Hajuri family had become

the Guru of the Tambe family. In the meantime Merapant moved onto Bithur and accepted a new service in the Court (Durbar) of Peshwa Baji Rao who fondly brought up Manubai as his own daughter. And Manubai got married to Jhansi Maharaja Gangadhar Rao and thereafter came to be known as Rani Laxmibai.

Chakhi had gone to Bithur but on his return he got an invitation message in the handwriting of Rani Laxmibai regarding outbreak of revolt. Chakhi had to leave Puri. Chakhi Khuntia at the time had composed the famous Poem "Chakanayana Ku Patita Kahi". Chakhi Khuntia left for Meerut to join the Sepoy mutiny. He reached Jhansi on May 24th 1857. On his arrival, Rani Laxmibai sought the advice of Chandan Hajuri on driving out the Britishers from the land. Chakhi Khuntia conducted survey tour in the state to know about the internal condition and affairs of Rani Laxmibai's State. He secretly toured and came to know the gradually rising of resentment against the Britishers. On his advice Rani Laxmibai increased her army and developed the war tactics. After that Chakhi Khuntia went to Bithur and consulted Baji Rao's adopted son Nanasahab who had by then had lost his empire. With Chandan Hajuri's advice both Nana Saheb and Laxmibai prepared to raise their swords against the British. During the time, revolt broke out at Barackpore with Mangal Pande as the leader and this rebellion spread throughout the country. Chakhi Khuntia warned Rani Laxmibai against the internal enemies. The British attacked Jhansi and Maharani of Jhansi consulted her council but to no avail. Chandan Hajuri at that time dissuaded her from surrendering or from begging mercy before the enemy. He advised the Maharani that being a Maratha she should try to uphold the dignity of her land. These words inspired the brave lady and she fought a bloodshed battle against the enemy. With great difficulty Rani reached Gwalior where Chandan Hajuri was in disguise and leading the rebellion there. But unfortunately Jhansi fort had to witness downfall by the treacherous deeds of Bundel Sarkar Sardar Thakur Lalaji. The Maharani was killed and her last rites were conducted before Chandan Hajuri. Tears rolled down his eyes. After that for

sometime Chandan Hajuri roamed in the forests in disguise and after 4 years of revolt, in 1865 Kumar Purnima, Chandan Hajuri reached Puri. Prior to this words of his death had reached home and his wife had become a widow. Again on seeing Chandan Hajuri back his wife anointed vermilion spot on her forehead.

He was ordered by the Police Commissioner in Puri after his return to appear before the midtown Police Station daily. But disregarding the sharp spying of the police he became engrossed in his devotional deeds and his dedication towards Odia literature. The revolutionary patriot became a great patron of Odia literature for the rest of his life. On the auspicious day of 1870 Baisakh Shukla Ashtami the valiant fighter and an erudite breathed his last. His love and passion for his land, his supreme leadership quality, his dedication towards Odia literature and above all his devotion to the Lord Jagannath and his unparalleled sacrifice makes him immortal in this land for generations.
