**BIRBALA KANAKLATA**

Etched in the history of the Indian freedom strugle, as the youngest fighter, Kanaklata Barua was just like any other teenager but with an extra ordinary love for her motherland. Belonging to an encestry that had its roots in the erstwhile Ahom state, she joined the freedom struggle to fulfill her desire to serve the country. She was amongst a many fearless young girls and boys who were ready to lay their lives for the nation, let the way she served the motherland would forever make her an epitome of strength and valor. Kanaklata Barua was a freedom fighter and has been recognised a martyr. Born on 22nd December, 1924 to Krishnakanta Barua and Korneswari Barua, Kanaklata had responsible mind since her childhood. She became an orphan at the age of five and also lost her father at the young age of thirteen. At an age during which she was supposed to be played with her small kingdom of dolls, she was taking care of her younger brothers and sisters. All throghout her life, she had been amidst an environment of rebeliation where people were fighting with all they had for India’s liberation. As such she remained inspired to dedicate her life for the cause of the nation. At the age of seventeen, she got the opportunity to join the freedom struggle of the country. She wanteed to join the Azad Hind Fauz, but could not succeed, because she was a minor. She became a part of Mrityu Bahini, which was a faction led by Jyotiprashad Agarawala. Iventually, Kanaklata was made the leader of the women cadres of the faction.

On August 9, 1942, a resolution to “Do or Die” for the independence of India was adopted by the Indian National Congress in Mumbai. Youth from all over the country joined this struggle. The Mrityu Bahini was also a part of it. Under the aegis of Jyotiprashad Agarwala, a similar resolution was adopted in Darrang district and it was decided that the national flag of India would be hoisted at the court and at the police station. These locations was specifically chosen because they were seen as symbols of British dominations. The entire procession was to be a non-violent one. As per the plan of the Mrityu Bahini on September 20th, 1942, the national flag was to be unfurled at a local police station of the Gohpur region. The procession of the member was led by Kanaklata. Being the leader of the group, she was holding the national flag. Although the procession consisted of unarmed villagers, the police tried to nnot let them through. Rebati Mahan Som, the officer incharge of the police station warned the procession of dire concequences if they happened to enter the police station and attempt to hoist the nantional flag. The procession did not budge at such provocation and continued marching ahead. Unable to stop them, the police resorted to violent means and fired at the innocent, unarmed villagers. Ultimately, Kanaklata was hit by a bullet injuring her. Being a heroic and brave fighter kanaklata did not let such injury to diminish her love and dedication towards her motherland. She kept on holding the national flag and did not let it fall untill her fellow comrade Mukunda Kakati took it from her. He was also shot at. Kanaklata succumbed to her injury and attained martyrdom. She will forever be remembered with pride as a symbol of unconditional love for one’s motherland and unsettered courage. The unmatched contribution of martyrs like her and many more from Assam is sadly, is yet to receive due recognition at the national level.

Compiled by Ruchira Baruah