

National Movement in Orissa and Pandit Gopabandhu

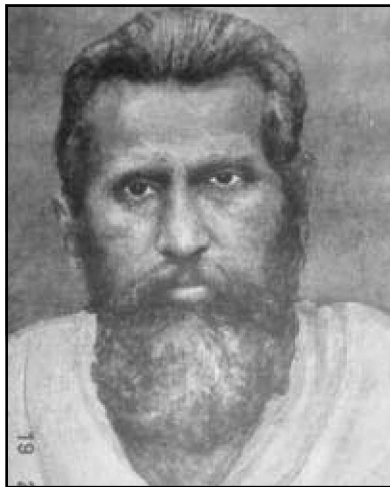
Dr. Janmejay Choudhury

The advent of Pandit Gopabandhu Das in Orissa politics brought a radical change in the outlook of the political minded people. Gopabandhu was an ultra-nationalist. At first he was a staunch follower of Madhusudan, a moderate and his junior for legal practice. The Swadeshi resolution of the Congress Party had a deep impact on him for which he started a National School on the model of the Decan Education Society. This institution became famous as the Satyabadi School, where with a band of devoted teachers Gopabandhu introduced a new pattern of education most suitable to Indian Society. The School in course of time served as a nucleus for fostering a strong national spirit among the Oriya Youths. For about 40 years the school provided leadership in the sphere of political, social and literary activities in Orissa.

Gopabandhu differed from Madhusudan Das on the question of the objectives and outlook of the Utkal Union Conference. As an Ultra Nationalist he felt suffocated under the policy of moderation. He did not distinguish between Oriya nationalism and Indian nationalism and suggested

that the Utkal Union Conference should eschew the path of moderation to be more dynamic. A conflict of ideas took place between Madhusudan Das and Gopabandhu Das which ultimately ended with the victory of the latter.

" In his opinion, the Indian National Movement is marching ahead and its reaction are



felt in Orissa. There is spontaneous excitement among the Oriya Youths." In September 1920, Gopabandhu attended the special session to the National Congress at Calcutta, where the members accepted Gandhi's programme of non-cooperation. By then he had started the Samaj as a weekly newspaper to propagate the ideals of the Congress and formed the District Congress Committee at Puri with himself as its President. He was

impatient to tolerate the Utkal Union conference any further. In the annual session of the congress held at Nagpur in the last week of December 1920 under the presidentship of Vijayarghavachariar, the final decision on the launching of non co-operation movement took place. Thirty five delegates from Orissa including Gopabandhu Das, Niranjan Pattanaik, Bhagirathi

Mohapatra, Jagabandhu Singh, Mukunda Prasad Das, Jadumani Mangaraj and H.K. Mahatab attended the Nagpur Session. It was the largest number of Oriya delegates ever attending congress session. Besides accepting the main resolution on non-cooperation, the members from Orissa supported the formation of provincial congress committees on the linguistic basis. It was a very wise move to spread the congress programmes to different regions of the vast sub-continent. It was agreed that Orissa should have a separate Congress Committee to be known as 'Utkal Pradesh Congress Committee'. Detailed rules and regulations on organizational matters were also adopted at Nagpur to give the Indian National Congress a new shape and outlook before the ensuing struggle. Gopabandhu Das and Jagabandhu Singh returned from Nagpur before the Congress Session was over in order to attend the Utkal Union Conference held at Chakradharapur on 30th and 31st December 1920 and 1st January 1921 with his associates. Madhusudan Das declined to Preside over the session and did not go to Chakradharapur to avoid political confrontation with the younger group. Jagabandhu Singh from Puri, a close associate of Pandit Gopabandhu was chosen as the president with the overwhelming support of his followers. Gopabandhu got the resolution resolved that the aims and objectives of the Indian National Congress be accepted as those of the Utkal Union Conference in addition to the accepted objectives of the conference. The session became a landmark in the history of the conference, because for the first time it accepted the Congress creed as one of its objectives. The session was presided by Jagabandhu Singh, but Gopabandhu played a dominant role in bringing about the change in the outlook of the conference. On the second day of the conference, Gopabandhu moved the resolution asking the Utkal Union Conference to

accept the objectives and aspirations of the Indian National Congress. He pointed out that the Congress was the national forum in which the people of Orissa should join in large number and their demands for separate province and other privileges could be fulfilled only by participation in the national movement spearheaded by the Congress under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi. The Chakradharapur Session of the Utkal Union Conference gave a new political perspective and draw the leaders in Orissa back into the mainstream of national politics.

Since then in the history of nationalism, the period of moderation was over, and the era of non co-operation began. Gopabandhu became the apostle of the non-cooperation movement. The leadership of Madhusudan Das was substituted by that of Pandit Gopabandhu. The non violent non-cooperation movement was sponsored by the nationalist leaders throughout the country. From Orissa twenty seven delegates including Pandit Gopabandhu Das and Harekrushna Mahtab had attended the historic Congress Session at Nagpur. On their return to Orissa they set up the Utkal Pradesh Congress Committee as the organisational base to launch the non cooperation programme. The committee consisted of Gopabandhu Das, Ekram Rasool, Bhagirathi Mahapatra and Brajabandhu Das as the President, Vice-President, Secretary and Joint Secretary respectively. To intensify the movement, District Committees were also formed in Puri, Cuttack, Balasore, Sambalpur and Ganjam.

The Non-cooperation Movement in Orissa, as elsewhere in the country began in the first week of January 1921. It aroused great enthusiasm in Orissa, mainly due to Gopabandhu's sincere efforts. He moved personally from place to place addressing large meetings and explaining the message of Gandhi. When the call for Non co-

operation was given, hundred of students left their schools and colleges. Some of people gave up their lucrative career in the Government to fight for freedom. Throughout Orissa a wave of unprecedented enthusiasm was noticed. Gopabandhu's efforts to merge Orissa with the mainstream of nationalist movement did not go in vain.

By the invitation of Pandit Gopabandhu Das, Mahatma Gandhi visited Orissa in March 1921. His visit gave a tremendous fillip to the Non Co-operation movement, besides popularizing the Congress Party. The members of the depressed classes were welcomed as members of the organization. Leaders felt encouraged to intensify the movement. Incidents of hartals, picketing and boycott became common. The elections to the Legislative Councils were totally boycotted. The newspapers like the 'Samaj' and 'Utkal Sevak' played a significant role in initiating the public to actively participate in the struggle for freedom.

Against the swelling tide of nationalism the British Government initiated stern measures. A series of arrests were made. Rajkrushna Bose became the first political prisoner in Orissa. Other leaders like Gopabandhu Das, Jadumani Mangaraj, Harekrushna Mahatab and twenty-four others were taken into custody. By the end of 1922 almost all the Congress leaders in Orissa were thrown behind the bar. In August 1922 after the Non Co-operation movement was suspended the Civil Disobedience Enquiry Committee under the Chairmanship of Hakim Ajmal Khan visited Orissa to find out if there was any possibility to renew the movement. Gopabandhu Chaudhury, Nilakantha Das and Godavaris Misra, who were outside the bar informed the committee in the

negative. The large scale arrest of leaders in fact had caused great setback to the nationalist movement. In 1923 the Swarajya Party was formed in Orissa. The Party aimed at Dominion Status and adopted such method as 'obstructionism' in the Legislatures and Local Boards. Its members eschewed the boycott policy and decided to seek election to various representative bodies so as to obstruct Government in functioning. They also espoused the cause of Swadeshi. The Congress members organized the first session of the Utkal Pradesh Congress Committee in 1924 at Cuttack. A women's branch was formed by Sarala Devi, Rasomani Devi and others. The leaders for a while devoted their attention for organizational work strengthening the Congress at the District Level. They even setup subunits of the District Committees in various police stations and enrolled more members to the party.

For the second time Gandhi visited Orissa in August 1925 and again in December 1927 which provided great incentive to the Congress Workers, apart from popularizing his programme. The death of Gopabandhu Das on 17th June 1928 gave a serious jolt to the Congress Organisation in Orissa. It created a crisis of leadership. There were numerous young men. Gopabandhu Choudhury, H.K. Mahtab, Rajkrushna Bose, Nilakantha Das, Bhagirathi Mohapatra and Biswanath Mahapatra, etc. but none of them had attained that high stature, which was essential to lead the Congress.

Dr. Janmejaya Choudhury is a lecturer in History in the Sri Jagannath College, Kaipada, Khurda.