Pandit Gopabandhu Das : The Maker of Modern Odisha

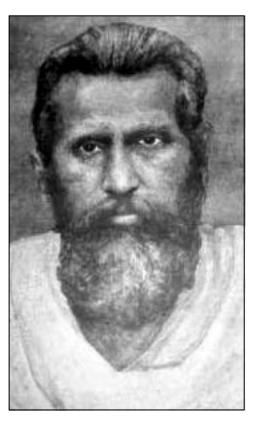
Pandit Gopabandhu Das, the maker of modern Odisha was born on 9th October 1877 in a small village called Suando in Satyabadi Police Station in the District of Puri. Shrimati Swarnamayi Devi Mother of Gopabandhu was the third wife of his

father, Shri Daitari Das who was a Muktar and a great devotee of Lord Krushna.⁽¹⁾ Gopabandhu lost his mother shortly after his birth and in many of his poems he made references to his mother about whom he had no recollection. Gopabandhu was actually brought up by his aunt Shrimati Kamala Devi who was a widow from a very early age.

G o p a b a n d h u's father Daitari was eager to see Gopabandhu educated on the new western model, but he could not tear himself away from the old traditions. Gopabandhu on completion of his studies in the upper primary school was admitted

to the middle vernacular school at Rupeleipur situated at a distance of five miles from his village.

Pandit Sadasiva Mishra of Bira Narasinghpur was the head Pandit of the Rupdeipur, middle vernacular School. On completion of his studies at Rupdeipur, Gopabandhu went over to Puri and joined the Puri zilla school. While at Puri he was



collect funds for poor students of the college and render social service to the needy. His interest in

Renubala Samantaray

introduced to Sri Rama

Chandra Das, a Muktar of

Puri, whose love for the

country and for the distressed humanity had infected the

young and impressionable

Gopabandhu passed out of

the Puri Zilla school and was

admitted into the Ravenshaw

College at Cuttack. Besides

his studies Gopabandhu took keen and active interest in

social service and debating

societies. While in the college

Gopabandhu in the company

of his intimate friend late

Brajasundar Das and

Acharya Harihar Das used to

go out to help and nurse the

poor and sick in the town and

In the year 1899

Gopabandhu.

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poetry and literature at this period was very deep and abiding⁽²⁾ Two or three of his publications contain poems. In 1902 Gopabandhu passed the F.A. Eamination. That year saw the birth of Utkal Sammilani and at Berhampur the first session of the Utkal Sammilani was held which was attended by Gopabandhu. 5

Gopabandhu passed the B.A. Examination in 1904. Shortly before his examination Gopabandhu lost his only son in most tragic circumstances, when the son was lying seriously ill in a rented house at Puri. Gopabandhu was there by his side but at that time he received a report that some villages in the interior of the district had been flooded and immediate arrangement for relief should be made.

Gopabandhu went to Calcutta for his law studies. After appearing at the B.L. Examination, Gopabandhu was in Cuttack when he received the news of his success in the B.L. Examination and the death of his wife simultaneously.

At first he began his service career as the Headmaster at Nilagiri. In 1906, he left Nilagiri and set up his legal practice at Cuttack. Before Gopabandhu joined as Government Advocate at Baripada, he had his practice at Puri.

Love of motherland and literature (Odia) was his passion since his school days. While he was a student in the Ravenshaw College, he formed the Central Young Utkal Association with the help of his friend Braja Sundar Das. This Association sent batches of volunteers to render service to the flood affected people of Jajpur and Kendrapara areas in 1907.

Gopabandhu is the ever revered institution of the Odia nation, an ever flowing sacred stretch of water. His multifarious life can be judged from various point of view. He can be characterized as a person devoted to public service, educationist, political worker, leader, poet, editor, orator, one who reveals in sacrifice, legislator, lawyer, organizer, social reformer, affectionate person with great feelings and his life represents a glorious character in the annals of the Odia nation. As a leader of the country Gopabandhu has given his well -- thought out advice to the people of Odisha in the fields of social reforms, literature, culture, religion and politics etc. Gopabandhu was a member of the Old Bihar and Orissa Legislative Council for 4 years from 1917 to 1920, and during this period he steadfastly fought for the amalgamation of the Odia – speaking tracks lying scattered in the neighbouring provinces. He pressed for permanent flood control.⁽³⁾ and famine relief measures. He pleaded that people in the coastal areas should be given the right to manufacture salt free of duty for their own consumption. He wanted the Government to implement the principle of openair education on the model of the Satyabadi School.

Pandit Gopabandhu was also a member of the Senate and Syndicate of the Patna University. He was a member of the Puri District Board⁽⁴⁾. Pandit Gopabandhu's efforts and anxiety for keeping alive Odia language and Odia culture in the outlying. Odia speaking area is not to be forgetten in Odisha. His presidential address in the annual conference of the Utkal Sammilani in 1919 at Cuttack is a historical document which even now sends a thrill through those who read it.⁽⁵⁾

Gopabandhu felt the necessity of newspapers and journals for ventilating people's grievances as well as for educating them. From 1913 to 1919, he was editing the newspaper "Asha" which had been started at Berhmapur. Ganjam by Sasibhusan Rath. In 1915 he brought

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out from the Satyabadi Press at Sakhigopal a monthly literary magazine entitled 'Satyabadi'. From this press in October 1919, he brought out a weekly newspaper entitled the 'Samaj'. Explaining the objectives of this paper, Gopabandhu pointed out, The 'Samaj' is published every week, on Saturday from the Satyabadi Press. The situation of the country is discussed in it. The Samaj was subsequently published from Puri and finally from Cuttack. It became a daily newspaper in 1930. The Samaj played a very important role in spreading national consciousness among the people of Odisha. It continues to play an important role in the public life of Odisha till today.

In the field of social reform and removal of untouchability he did pioneering work. As early as in 1910-11 he introduced inter-dinning in the Satyabadi School Hostel and adopted a Harijan boy and got him educated in the said school and then in college at his own cost. Higher Caste and Scheduled Caste students were treated alike in the said institution.⁽⁶⁾

Gopabandhu dictated his last will regarding his family matters and the 'Samaj' on the 17th June afternoon and breathed his last at 7 o'Clock in the evening of the same day. He was cremated in the Vakul Van near the Sakhigopal Temple.

Born in an oxtholox Brahmin family, Gopabandhu started life with basic comprehension of classical values of Indian civilization. His knowledge of Sanskrit enabled him to appreciate the Indian cultural heritage.

Modern Odisha in all spheres bears the impress of Gopabandhu who literally dedicated

his life in the service of the poor, the distressed and the downtrodden and for the freedom of the country. He lives today in the hearts of the Odia people. They cherish his memory with love and affection. He was the uncrowned king of Odisha.

He strongly advocated for the national development. He was not parochial in his outlook rather a great nationalist on Indian soil. He was truly the jewels of Utkal and father of modern Odisha and a great Nationalist. Subash Chandra Bose had rightly called Gopabandhu Das as the 'Father of the National Movement in Orissa." Similarly, Lala Lajpat Rai described him as "The Uncrowned king of Orissa" and Acharya Prafulla Chandra of Bengal had first described him as "Utkalmani or the Jewel of the Utkal."

References :

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