

Utkal Gourav Madhusudan Das : The Maker of Modern Odisha

Dr. Siddhartha Kanungo

Madhusudan Das, popularly known as Madhubabu was the moving spirit of Odisha for about a half century in its political, economic and social life. After his return from Kolkata, he found that Odisha had become the land of disease, sorrows and affliction and where people were suffering from abject penury and starvation. A race once acclaimed for its heroism and bravery had become weak – physically, mentally and spiritually.

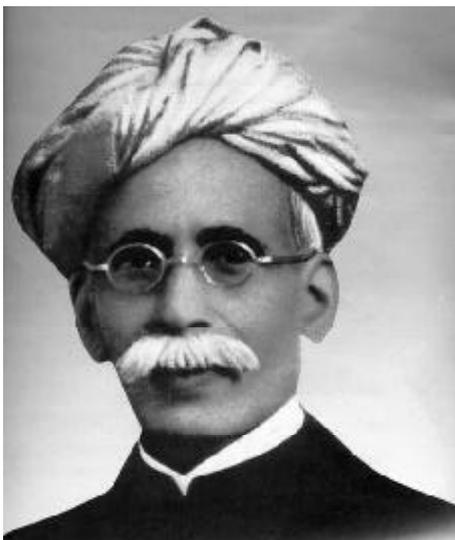
Madhusudan's career in Odisha for about fifty years (1880s to 1934) was an example of unparalleled dedication to the making of Modern Odisha. He played a key role in the amalgamation of different Odia speaking tracts lying scattered in neighboring provinces into a great political entity. At the same time he made significant contribution to the socio-economic and cultural progress of Odisha which ultimately stabilized the political Odisha.

As per the advice of Sir Richard Garth, Chief Justice of Calcutta High Court, Madhusudan Das returned to Cuttack on 25.09.1881. Through

his effort, Odisha's first Girls' High School and first Library were established at Cuttack.

Utkal Sabha (the Odisha Association) happens to be the first organization to promote national movement and it was established on 3rd

August, 1888 at Cuttack. The Sabha conducted its first meeting on 21st August, 1889. Kashinath Das (Zamindar of Bhingarapur), Madhusudan Das and Gouri Shankar Ray were President, Vice-President and Secretary respectively. Madhusudan Das made efforts to expand the Canal System and agricultural activities in Odisha in 1884. Although he did not attend the first session of Indian National Congress in Mumbai, he presented a memorandum to Sir Richards



Thomson (Lt. Governor of Bengal) on the development of agriculture and industry, expansion of Railways in Odisha and amalgamation of Ganjam and Sambalpur Districts with Odisha in the same year i.e. 1885. Madhubabu also discussed reorganization of segmented Odisha and improvement of its administration and education system with Sir Richard Thomson.

Madhubabu attended the Indian National Congress Session held from time to time between 1886 to 1898 and drew their attention to Odisha in each session of Indian National Congress. But he disassociated himself from Indian National Congress when it rejected the proposal of Madhubabu for formation of the State on linguistic basis.

Madhubabu lodged a protest against British Government regarding the administration of Lord Jagannath Temple on behalf of Gajapati Raja of Puri in 1886. He also protested against the introduction of Bengali language in Odisha and took a leading role in establishment of a special institution i.e. Lady Thomson Women's Dispensary in the campus of Ravenshaw College for treatment of Women in the same year i.e. 1886. Subsequently in April, 1887, Madhubabu pleaded for the Gajapati Maharaja relating Lord Jagannath Temple case in Calcutta High Court. He was assisted by Barister J.T.Woodroffe and Mr. Sandel. He won the case.

It is worthwhile to point out at this stage that much before Mahatma Gandhi, Madhubabu raised his voice against Salt Tax at the Cuttack Municipality Hat on 11th February, 1888. When he urged Govt. to reduce tax on salt he pointed out that the total tax per head in England was Rs.8/- against the per capita income of Rs.300/- where as in India it was Rs.16/- against the per capita income of Rs.20/- per annum. In November, 1888 Madhubabu put forth the grievances of the Odia people before Sir Stewart Colvatu Bayley, the Lt. Governor of Bengal as President of Odisha Association. Due to the intervention of Madhusudan Odia language was introduced as official language in Madras Presidency.

Madhubabu not only addressed a public meeting on 11th May, 1895, protesting against

imposition of Hindi in Sambalpur area but pleaded for its merger with Odisha Division. At the same time he wrote a series of articles in Utkal Dipika on banishment of Odia. Later Odia was introduced as official language in Sambalpur.

Madhusudan Das was elected as Member to the Bengal Legislative Council from the Odisha Chhotnagpur Constituency on 14th March, 1888. He presented his argument in the Council regarding the decline of salt industry in Odisha in April 1896. In the same year he also demanded in the Bengal Legislative Council for higher education facilities for Odia students. Madhubabu went to England in April 1887. He met prominent British politicians, discussed with them Odisha's grievances and presented them his booklet. Odisha Art Ware Works was founded by him in 1897 where nearly 150 artisans worked in Brass, Silver, Gold and Aluminium ware and also in sola, horn, ivory and wood.

In December, 1903, Madhubabu formed the Utkal Union Conference a non-political organization. It was open to all Odias of feudatory States, British Odisha and those domiciled in Odisha. At the behest of Madhusudan, Lord Curzon took a decisive step towards uniting the scattered Odia tracts under Bengal administration. Madhubabu set up Utkal Tannery on an experimental basis in his residential house at Cuttack. Nearly 300 workers were employed. This pioneer Odisha industry lasted for 25 years. Nevertheless the industry had trade contracts with foreign countries like England, Europe and Japan.

First partition of Bengal took place in 1905. Odisha Division along with Sambalpur and five adjacent Feudatory States of Kalahandi, Patna, Sonapur, Bamara and Rairakhhol were kept under the administration of the Lt. Governor of Bengal. In June, 1907 Madhubabu made second trip to London along with the Raja of Kanika. He

addressed meetings there, met prominent members of Parliament and circulated pamphlet "Unrest in India" as the representative of eleven millions people of India. He could succeed in enlisting sympathies of John Moreley, Secretary of State for India.

In the year 1910, in Bengal Legislative Council Madhubabu pleaded for introduction of agricultural farming in the rural Schools of Odisha on experimental basis. Madhubabu delivered his presidential address in 1992 at the Bihar Students' Conference and highlighted the Swadeshi Movement which he had started almost two decades back. Madhubabu took oath as a Member of Bihar-Odisha Legislative Council on 20th January, 1913. He was felicitated by Sir Surendranath Banerjee on 1st January, 1915 for becoming pioneer in the whole Country in building the States on linguistic basis which in the long run would strengthen the spirit of Indian Nationalism. Madhubabu led a delegation on behalf of the Utkal Union Conference in 1917 to Lord Chelmsford and presented him with a memorandum about the just demand for amalgamating the scattered Odia tracts.

Madhusudan accepted Ministership (1921-23) of Bihar-Odisha Government as per the Mont-Ford reforms under the system of Dyarchy at a very crucial period of Indian Nationalism. Local Self Government Act was passed. It was infact the most outstanding and singular achievement of Madhusudan Das.

Madhubabu resigned from the Ministership on 4th March, 1923 and his request to serve as Minister of Local Self Government on honorary basis was turned down by the Government. He was infact the first Indian who resigned from Ministership on ideological ground. The Legal Practitioner Act of 1879 was amended in 1923 at the behest of Madhusudan Das. Mahatma Gandhi paid a visit to Utkal Tannery on 19th August at the request of Madhusudan Das.

O' Donnel Committee was formed in 1931. Madhubabu made his deposition before the Commission. On 20th November, 1931, he organised a meeting at Jamshedpur and pleaded for amalgamation of Singhbhum District with Odisha.

The eventful life of Madhusudan came to an end on 4th February, 1934 at 1.35 A.M. when he breathed his last. Mine is a humble attempt to indicate only some of the important events in the life of Madhusudan Das, the architect of Modern Odisha. He is unquestionably the greatest of personality Odisha has ever produced. Let us salute him on the occasion of his birthday which falls on 28th April.

Dr. Siddhartha Kanungo, Joint Secretary, Finance Department, Odisha Secretariat, Bhubaneswar.