

The Odia Movement

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After the death of Mukunda Deva the last Hindu ruler of Odisha, there was political confusion, territorial disintegration and socio-cultural disturbances in the state. Odisha came under the supremacy of the Afghans, the Mughals and the Marathas which further brought instability into this region. In the end, the British authority occupied Odisha in 1803. During the British rule, Ganjam was conquered by the British in 1759 and became a part of the Madras Presidency. Sambalpur was captured by the British in 1849 AD and became a part of Central Province. Districts of coastal Odisha like Balasore, Cuttack, Puri were conquered by the British from the Marathas and remained the parts of Bengal. Odia-speaking territories virtually became appendages to four provinces like Madras, Central Province, Bihar and Bengal. The Odias felt that they were neglected and dominated by the linguistic majorities. An attempt was made to abolish Odia language. In course of time Odia speaking people strongly voiced against the unlawful activities of neighbouring states. A notational consciousness and spirit of unification started among the people of Odisha during 19th century. Several factors were responsible for the spread of national movement in Odisha. The growth of socio-political awareness, modern education and political activities in Odisha in the 19th century had played

a vital role for the development of Odia movement. In the same way growth of press and journalism, different socio-cultural organizations, Christian missionaries gave a new impetus to the movement.

The Brahma and Mahima movement greatly helped for the rise of Odia movement in Odisha. In this critical period several organizations carried on different movements for the sake of Odia-speaking people. An association named "Utkal Sabha" was started at Cuttack in 1882. The chief aim and objects of the Utkal Sabha was to organise the Odia people and create awareness about their political rights. The most important organisation "Utkal Sabha" of Cuttack had acted as the spokes person of Odias and placed the opinions of the people before the Govt. authorities. The first meeting of the Utkal Sabha was held in the premises of the Cuttack Printing company on 16th August 1882. Many leading personalities were present on that day and took decision to establish a permanent organization in order to champion the cause of the Odia people. Chaudhuri Kasinatha Das and Gouri Sankar Roy the great personalities of that period who were fighting for the cause of the Odias became the first President and Secretary of the organization respectively. In this organization there were two vice-Presidents and few members of

executive committee. One of the great sons of Utkal Jananai, Madhu Babu was closely associated with the Utkal Sabha. Eminent editor of Utkal Dipika, Gouri Sankar Roy had taken various steps to promote the demands of Odias. Most of the meetings of the Utkal Sabha were held in the premises of the Utkal Dipika. Gouri Sankar Roy through his journal gave publicity to the activities of the organization. Utkal Sabha organised a number of public meetings regarding the interests of the Odia language, literature, culture and tradition. Growth of the Odia identity in the nineteenth century is a glorious chapter in the modern Odisha history.

The Odia movement took massive stand after the tragical famine of 1866. Number of vernacular journals of that time took responsibility for the Odia movement. The journals named Utkal Dipika, Sambada Bahika, Utkal Darpan, Utkal Putra and Sambalpur Hitaisheni always highlighted the rich heritage of Odias and created mass awareness remembering out glorious past. The associations like Utkal Bhasa, Bidyayini Sabha and Ullasini Sabha, Utkal Hitabadini Sabha and Utkal Sabha played remarkable role in Odia mass movement. Some well educated Bengalis who occupied many official positions in Odisha gave their opinion about the abolition of Odia language. Their remarks created more reaction in the minds and hearts of the Odias. They unitedly protested and opposed the supremacy of Bengalis. All vernacular journals and associations strongly criticized such attitude of Bengalis. In this situation

nationalistic Odia people came forward and worked for the safeguard of Odia culture. Early in 1903 at Rambha, on the shore of Chilika some people met under the Chairmanship of the Raja of Khallikote. The delegates present there decided to establish Ganjam Jatiya Samiti. Its first sitting was held in April 1903 in the town of Berhampur and was attended by many representatives from the Odia-speaking tracts in different Provinces. Shyam Sunder Rajguru became the Chairperson of this conference. In pursuance of the Berhampur resolution the first Odia national conference was held at Cuttack on 30-31 December, 1903. It is known as Utkal Sammilani. The Conference met under the Chairmanship of the Maharaja of Mayurbhanja was attended by the representatives from all over Odisha.

The Conference laid down the foundation of a truly Odia national organization called Utkal Sammilani. The Conference passed resolution for the unification of Odia tracts. The socio-political awakening of the people in Odisha was quite evident from such a Conference held at Cuttack. The Odia movement which thus began in 1903 was the first attempt in India to create a new Province on the linguistic basis.

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