Formation of Separate Province of Odisha: A Dynamic Leadership of Rajendra Narayan Bhanjadeo of Kanika

Right from the establishment of *Utkal Samillani* (Utkal Union Conference) in 1903 to the formation of Odisha as a separate province, many nationalist leaders, kings and zamindars were fighting both against British colonial government and Indian leaders for the amalgamation of Odia-speaking tracts into a separate province of Odisha. Rajendra Narayan Bhanja Deo, the King of Kanika, was one among them. He had dedicated his life, like Madhusudan Das and Gopabandhu Das, for the all-round development of Odisha. He was born in a royal family of *Aul*, in the erstwhile sub-division of Kendrapara on 24 March 1881 and was adopted to Kanika royal family in 1896. After completing his schooling career from Ravenshaw Collegiate School, he went to Ravenshaw College for graduation. Then he sailed to London for law degree. He ascended to the throne of Kanika in 1902. At once, he was a veteran leader, a true patriot, a nationalist, a first line leader of Odia Movement, a benevolent ruler, a philanthropist, co-founder of Utkal Union Conference and a good friend and disciple of Madhusudan Das. He died in 1948. He had played a very significant role for the formation of separate province of Odisha. So, this paper attempts to explore his pioneering contribution for the formation of Odisha as a separate province in the year 1936.

The present state Odisha was scattered into different parts of India before independence. There was no clear-cut geographical boundary of Odisha, except her name in pen and paper. Further, for the administrative and revenue convenience the British colonial Government placed Odisha under different presidencies. Some of the people also tried to destroy her language; stating that ‘Odia is not a language but purely a dialect’. It became a great headache of Madhusudan Das, a great patriot of Odisha. He tried to merge different parts of Odia-speaking tracts into a separate province. In order to achieve the well-thought out purpose, he tried to fulfill his grievances through the Indian National Congress and became an active member of Congress. He had also given different memorandums to Indian Nation Congress. But the Congress was busy for the national issues; avoiding the regional ones. So, due to the contradictory policy with the leaders of Indian National Congress, Madhusudan Das withdrew from the Congress in 1902. Sharing the same view with other leaders like Rajendra Narayana Bhanja Deo, Madhusudan Das decided to form a regional association to work for the cause of Odisha, outside from National Congress. At the instance of Madhusudan Das, a meeting was convened at the Kanika courtyard on 25 October 1903. In this meeting, it was decided to form *Utkal Sammilani* (Utkal Union...
Conference) in December 1903. The first aim of the Utkal Union Conference was to campaign for the unification of the States of Odisha. Along with Madhusudan Das, Rajendra Narayan Bhanja Deo, the King of Kanika too became an important member as well as the co-founder of Utkal Union Conference. And he was fully associated till the formation of separate State Orissa in spite of some ups and downs inside the Conference. It has been said that, the Utkal Union Conference was the brain child of Madhusudan Das and was nurtured in the lap of the Kanika chief Rajendra Narayan Bhanja Deo. He also provided fund for the management of Utkal Union Conference and for Odia Movement. It can be said that ‘without his active participation and contribution the Odia movement for separate province could not have been materialized.’

From the very inception of Utkal Union Conference, Madhusudan Das wanted to decentralize the power and work of the Utkal Union Conference into four of his honest persons. Among them Rajendra Narayan Bhanja Deo was the close associate of Madhusudan Das. It can be said that, the king of Kanika had good relationship with British Government. So, it may be presumed that, Madhusudan Das might be aware that without the support of British Government, it will be a daydream to make Odisha as a separate province. That’s why he encouraged Rajendra Narayan Bhanja Deo to keep good relationship with British Government. The first session of Utkal Union Conference was held on 30th and 31st of December 1903. In that session, he was one of the members of the standing committee, and the president of managing committee. He delivered emotional inaugural speech to the gathering, for the purpose of injecting Odia patriotism into people’s mind. Besides that, he donated five hundred rupees in the first session of the Utkal Union Conference. The Odia speaking people of Berhampur and Vishakhapatnam were suffering from linguistic minority and also exploited by the Government of Madras Presidency. So, at the instance of Rajendra Narayana Bhanja Deo, the fourth session of the Utkal Union Conference was held on 26th December 1906 at Berhampur and he was made to preside over the meeting. In his presidential address he had emphasized the problems of Odisha like agriculture, trade and commerce, industry, education, women education, and so on. In addition, the resolution was also passed to spread the very idea of Utkal Union Conference at the grass roots level at his instance. After the session was over, he sailed to England taking the grievances of the people of Ganjam.

The new province of Bihar and Odisha came into existence on 1 April 1912. In order to run the province a Legislative Council of Bihar and Odisha was constituted that comprised 21 members (both elected and nominated). Raja Rajendra Narayan Bhanj Deo was elected to the council from the landlords’ constituency of Odisha. The people of Odisha were not satisfied with the tag of Odisha in Bihar in 1912, their dissatisfaction took a concrete shape in December 1916 when the twelfth annual session of the Utkal Union Conference at Balasore formed a committee of seven members ‘with a view to collecting materials and carrying on continuous executive work of the Odia-speaking tracts throughout the years’. The Committee consisted of Madhusudan Das, Raja Rajendra Narayan Bhanj Deo, Harihar Panda, Brajasundar Das, Gopabandhu Das, Sudam Charan Naik and Raja of Seregarh (Ganjam). The Committee prepared an address with a memorandum of arguments, and a statement and a map of the Odia tracts. The Committee presented them before the E.S. Montague, the Secretary of State for
India, and Lord Chelmsford, the Governor General at Calcutta on 11 December 1917. Besides that, Raja Rajendra Narayan Bhanj Deo and Madhusudan Das paid a private visit to the E.S. Montague, Secretary of State for the same in December 1911. Raja Rajendra Narayan Bhanj Deo narrated the problems of Odia in different regions of India and justified the formation of a separate state before the Secretary of State.¹²

In last couple of years in the second decades of twentieth century, rift started between moderate nationalist of first generation and the so called ‘Satyabadi Group’ of second generation of the members of the Utkal Union Conference. So, towards the end of 1918 Madhusudan Das announced his retirement from Utkal Union Conference, soon after Braja Sundar Das, the closest follower of M.S. Das and the secretary of the Utkal Union Conference also resigned. Madhubabu attributed the Utkal Union Conference to utter physical exhaustion.¹³ In that situation; all the responsibility of Utkal Union Conference was taken by Rajendra Narayana Bhanja Deo till the next session. In 1919, the Utkal Union Conference session was held at Puri which was presided over by Chandrasekhar Behera. In that session a provision was made to meet the Viceroy of India regarding the cause of Odias and the responsibility was given to Rajendra Narayana Bhanja Deo.¹⁴

A special session of the Utkal Union Conference was summoned at Cuttack on 22-23 September 1918; Madhusudan Das presided over the conference. On 22 September two resolutions regarding Odisha and her future constitution were passed like Odia-speaking tracts under one administration and to constitute a sub-province for Odisha. The question of constituting a sub province for Odisha on the lines indicated in the Montford Report was persuaded both in the Legislative Council. Madhusudan Das raised the question in the Bihar-Odisha Legislative Council in 1919 and the Raja of Kanika [Rajendra Narayana Bhanjadeo] interpolated the Government of India in the Imperial Legislative Council on the subject in 1919. Sachidananda Sinha brought the resolution on the matter in the Legislative Council of India on 20 February 1920. The resolution wanted that a mixed committee of non-officials and officials should be appointed ‘to formulate a scheme for the amalgamation of the Odia-speaking tracts at present administered or controlled by the Governments of Madras, Bengal and Central Provinces with the existing Odisha division of the provinces of Bihar and Odisha. On 20 February 1920, Rajendra Narayana Bhanjadeo strongly supported the motion. He pointed out that it was a question which concerned the very vital needs and aspirations of about eleven millions of people. Unless the problem was satisfactorily solved, the people would remain dissatisfied. The Government of India promised an enquiry into the matter. The government constituted a committee of enquiry known as Philip-Duff enquiry committee came to Ganjam for investigating the amalgamation of this Odia-speaking area to Odisha and later accepted it. Again he was elected to the new council of Bihar and Odisha, from Zamindars’ constituency in December 1920.¹⁵

The Congress and Utkal Union Conference relationship, which was far from cordial anyway, became still bitter when in 1927; the Government announced the formation of a statutory commission under John Simon to evaluate the working of Montague-Chelmsford Act of 1919, which was opposed by Congress. That was opposed only because none of the Indian members was present during the inquiry. As per the decision of the National Congress,
the members of the Congress party in Odisha boycotted the Commission. But the moderate members of the erstwhile Utkal Union Conference found some opportunity with the commission, along with the members, two members like Rajendra Narayana Bhanja Deo and Laxmidhar Mohanty (both from Kendrapara) felt that the commission along was vested with the power to give suggestions for the creation of a separate province.\textsuperscript{16} It has been said that, the king of Kanika appointed twenty railway coolies by paying Rs. 100; assigning duty to them that to hold placards written on these ‘Odisha welcome’s Simon Commission’ in front of the Patna railway station on the arrival of Simon Commission by the train. This attitude of Odia leaders impressed Simon profoundly and he appointed a sub-committee under C.R. Atlee to investigate the problems of the Odia-speaking people and to recommend measures to redress their grievances. The Committee, however, never came to Odisha, instead, it took evidence from Odia members of the Bihar Odisha Legislative Assembly that included Rajendra Narayana Bhanja Deo and Laxmidhar Mohanty. As a member of the Bihar-Odisha Legislative Council, Rajendra Narayan Bhanja Deo played a crucial role; convincing Governor of Council to send Krushna Chandra Narayan Gajapati, the king of Parlakhemundi, as a the sole Odia representative to the first Round Table Conference in London in 1930.\textsuperscript{17}

The foremost obstacle for the formation of Odisha was finance, because three important committees had reported the financial loss of the British Government and deficit budget for the maintenance of State. The registrar of Ministry of Finance reported that ‘if Ganjam will merge with Odisha Division, the then Government would lose eleven lakh and thirty five thousand annually’. O’Donnel committee stated that the formation of Odisha will make deficit of budget 35 lakhs for first year and 40 lakhs after 15 years. Hubback Committee report proposed deficit of budget 53 lakhs in the first year and it will increase to 55 lakhs after 15 years.\textsuperscript{18} The report of those three committees had demoralized thousands of Odias and their hope for the future of the formation of separate province. Under these circumstances, Rajendra Narayana Bhanjadeo, as finance member of Bihar–Odisha Legislative Council,\textsuperscript{19} challenged the Committee’s report and presented a separate budget for Odisha, for the year 1933-34 in the Council. This budget showed surplus budget of 9 lakhs 34 thousands out of the expenditure of the same year of Odisha revenue for the maintenance of separate State. So the Government was agreed in his budget estimation and made a proposal for the separate province of Odisha.\textsuperscript{20}

The Government of India Act, 1935 provided a way for the formation of separate province Odisha. In the meantime, the British authority had published the draft orders in council regarding the constitution of the province of Odisha. His Majesty issued the order on 3 March 1936 which entitled ‘the Government of India (Constitution of Odisha) Order, 1936. Rajendra Narayana Bhanja Deo along with the members of Odisha attended the Legislative Council of Bihar and Odisha for the last time on 28 March 1936. On that day the Council gave them a touching farewell. The new province of Odisha was inaugurated on 1 April 1936 with Sir John Austin Hubback as its first Governor.\textsuperscript{21}

The province of Odisha, during the period from 1 April 1936 till the formation of the Government in 1937, was ruled by the Governor and his Advisory Council of seventeen members. In that Council, Rajendra Narayana Bhanja Deo was an important member and the Chief Advisor to Governor. In 1937 he was elected to Odisha
Legislative Assembly from the United Party. He was also elected to Assembly for second time in 1946.22

Thus Rajendra Narayana Bhanja Deo had imperishable contribution to the making of modern Odisha. He was a man of versatile genius. He was also a true patriot. He came to Odisha’s politics at the need of the hour, when Odisha was on the verge of losing its political identity at the national level. His pioneering contribution to Odisha will be a big chapter in the annals of the history of Odisha.

References:
1. The name has been changed from Orissa to ‘Odisha’ and language Odia to ‘Odia’ by the 113th Constitutional amendment acts of 1 November 2011.
2. Kanika was a permanently settled estate situated in the undivided district of Cuttack.
5. Utkal Dipika 31 October 1903
10. Utkal Dipika, 28 December, 1912
12. Utkal Dipika, 15 December 1917
22. Ibid., pp. 94-95

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