

## Rambha Palace : An Altar of Odia Movement

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The Rambha Palace was a monument of great importance not only for Ganjam but also for whole Odisha. This beautiful palace is situated on the bank of Chilika Lake. This palace was built by Thomas Snodgrass, the Collector of Ganjam in 1791-92 on Government expenditure. European engineers were engaged for its construction. Later, on this ground, Snodgrass was dismissed from his service. Subsequently, it was purchased by king Rama Krushna Mardaraj of Khallikote to be used for his residence. When he faced great financial crisis, because of famine in Odisha, he sold it to F.J.V. Minchin, the owner of the Aska Sugar Factory. This palace attracted the attention of King Harihar Mardaraj who purchased it and made it his residence. Being attracted by its scenic beauty, Lord Curzon, the Governor General of India once stayed here. Harihar Mardaraj was always in the forefront of the Odia movement till his death in 1909. After the sad demise of the King Harihar Mardaraj at an immature age of 39, his queen Kanaka Manjari Devi rose up to the occasion and finished many incomplete work of her King. She was a very sociable queen of the Khallikote ruling dynasty.

The foundation of the famous Utkal Union Conference was laid here in the presence of eminent personalities like Utkal Gourav

Madhusudan Das and Maharaja Sriram Chandra Bhanja. It was the Rambha Palace which provided the befitting platform for the amalgamation movement of Odia Speaking Tracts on the auspicious occasion of the 2<sup>nd</sup> birthday of Yuvraj Rama Chandra Mardaraj on 13.01.1902, the worthy son of King Harihar Mardaraj. King Harihar Mardaraj sent royal invitation to many kings and distinguished personalities like Radhanath Ray, Sri Nilamani Vidyaratna, Sri Fakir Mohan Senapati, Narasingh Das, Madhusudan Das, Sriram Chandra Bhanja and Sri Gadadhara Bidyabhusan. The 2<sup>nd</sup> conference of Utkal Sammilani was hosted by king Harihar Mardaraj from 29.04.1905 to 01.05.1905 to harness the cause of the Odias as they were not getting their legitimate justice. In the year 1909, Harihar Mardaraj organized the 3<sup>rd</sup> Rambha Conference which was reorganized as the Utkal Union Conference. Thousands and thousands of delegates from different parts of Odia Speaking Tracts united at Rambha Palace with the invitation of King. The important role played by King Harihar Mardaraj at the early part of 20<sup>th</sup> century was the amalgamation of Odisha. King Harihar Mardaraj was the principal leader of the Odia movement till his death in 1909. Then his son Rama Chandra Mardaraj organized another Odia conference in the precinct of Rambha Palace

where Madhusudan Das vowed to realize the most cherished dream of the Odias to get a separate State of their own. King Ram Chandra rose to the occasion to accomplish the incomplete nation-building exercise of his father. The Phillip-Duff Commission that visited Odisha to assess the situation relating to merger of Odia Speaking Tracts and formation of Odisha province stayed at Rambha palace from 17.12.1924 to 21.12.1924 as distinguished guests of the King Ramachandra Mardaraj who succeeded in persuading the Commission to support the cause of the Odias. Utkalmani Pandit Gopabandhu Das and Gopal Chandra Praharaj were also among the main guests of Khallikote to stay at Rambha Palace.

In the year 1927, the Simon Commission under the chairmanship of Sir John Simon was guest in Rambha Palace where King Rama Chandra Mardaraj boldly advocated for amalgamation of the Odisha province. In 1931, the Government constituted a Boundary Committee under the chairmanship of Sir Samuel Hoare and O'Donnell. King Rama Chandra Mardaraj hosted the Committee in his Rambha Palace with the single motto of uniting the Odia race.

In the process of the nation building exercise, when King Rama Chandra Mardaraj was 22 he

had hosted their Excellency Lord and Lady Willingdon at Rambha Palace. King Rama Chandra Mardaraj had left no stones unturned in inviting high dignitaries like Gandhi and sister Miraben to Rambha Palace when they were moving through the various states for the cause of Swaraj. In 1955, King Bahadur had assembled Sri Balabant Ray Mehta, Pandit Nehru, Sri U.N. Dhebar (Congress President), Lal Bahadur Sahstri, Gobinda Ballava Panta, Nabakrushna Choudhury at Rambha Palace to discuss on various issues about the nation. From Lord Wavel to O'Donnell, Mr. A.C. Duff, Mr. C.F. Phillip, Sir John Austin Hubback and many national and state leaders also stayed at the same palace for few times. Many dignitaries who had been the guests of Khallikote especially during the time of King Harihar Mardaraj and King Rama Chandra Mardaraj stayed at this historic Rambha Palace. So Rambha Palace has earned the distinction of an important monument in the annals of Odisha history. Which was an altar of Odia Movement.

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