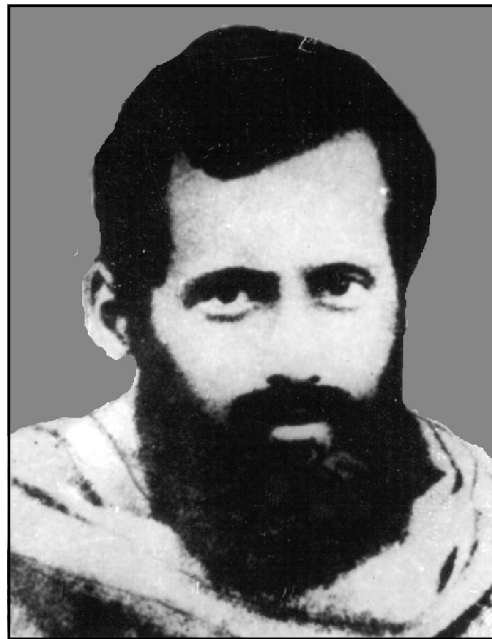


## Utkalamani Gopabandhu Das as the Harbinger of Social Modernisation

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The predominant image of Gopabandhu Das embedded in our mind and consciousness is that of a freedom fighter, poet, educationist, founder of leading Oriya daily the Samaja, legislator and above all a selfless and self effacing person ever dedicated to the cause of suffering humanity. The numerous records on his epoch making life and deeds celebrate this enduring image of Utkalmani and none less than Mahatma Gandhi, copiously referring to Gopabandhu's highminded ideals, underlined that defining image and even went to the extent of writing in 1921 that if there were 100 such people in the country, Swaraj would be certain over a period of one year. Even Gopabandhu's supreme selflessness manifested in his decision to survive only on rice and dal after the non-cooperation movement stunned Mahatma Gandhi. When Gandhiji asked him "...Whether this poor diet would not affect his health" Gopabandhu replied "Should we not submit to this privation



for the sake of swaraj?" Mahatma Gandhi in his article "My Orissa Tour" written in the Navajivan on 10th April 1921 exclaimed at Gopabandhu's reply and observed "I was silenced". It is worth noting that Mohan Das Karam Chand Gandhi who attained the exalted status of Mahatma for his service and sacrifice and for identifying himself with the humblest of the human beings was never silenced by a mere answer from any national leader of great accomplishment, reputation and stature. Such rare observations of Mahatma Gandhi constituted historic tributes to Gopabandhu and possibly are unparalleled in the annals of our struggle for independence. Mahatma Gandhi after returning to India from South Africa in 1915 had not given such stirring remarks even as he met and closely interacted with towering personalities like Gopal Krishna Gokhale and Bal Gangadhar Tilak. In fact when Bal Gangadhar Tilak, the author of the rallying slogan of our freedom movement "Swaraj is my Birth Right"

and one of the best known examples of a man acclaimed for self service, came late to a function in 1917 Mahatma Gandhi noted that such late arrivals would inevitably delay our Swaraj. The comments of Mahatma on Gopabandhu and Tilak are not only contrasting but also revealing and enable us to understand the stature and standing of Utkalmani at the national level on account of his dedicated services to the lowly and the lost. The inspiration Gandhiji got from Gopabandhu and the confidence and optimism he displayed to attain Swaraj within a year after seeing Utkalmani's sacrifices and suffering for the cause of Swaraj testified to the remarkable saga of his selfless service to people, society and nation. While the people of India and particularly the people of Orissa reverentially commemorate his life of exceptional service and sacrifice and often cite his hallowed name as the shining example of a man devoted to wipe out every tear from every eye of the victims of flood and famine, they are insufficiently aware of his robust social vision and modern mind.

The dearth of literature and research on Gopabandhu's worldview is a sad reflection on our intellectual tradition which has failed to adequately appreciate and make people aware of the genius of Utkalmani as a fine exponent and practitioner of a movement for modernization of our social tradition.

We must be mindful of the fact that India in its long history was repeatedly subjected to foreign invasion and control not due to its economic deprivation and poverty but because of the social factors which restricted our outlook, fostered blinkered approach to life and narrowed our understanding of society and universe. India was shining through its wealth and riches and the radiance of the shining India very powerfully drew the attention of rest of the world. Not only the

mysticism of the land but also the authentic celebration of life in all its splendour made India the center of attraction and all attempts were made by the Europeans to exploit its treasure. While the restlessness of mankind to reach the shores of India was finding concrete manifestation in the attempts of Vasco da Gama and Columbus to explore sea routes to this enchanting land we in our own country were confined to inhibition of social taboo and prohibition to undertake sea voyage. This regressive social custom combined with the rigidities of caste and religious dogma constituted the single most important factor behind the degeneration and decline of India in her history. The sensation of renaissance felt in many parts of the country and the mighty struggle for independence under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi represented, among other things, the deeply felt desire of our people to change society along progressive lines and initiate processes so that modernization of society, outlook and attitude could take place. After all it is only through the processes of social modernization that the consciousness of the people could be awakened and their worldview broadened.

The downfall of India despite its glorious heritage of science and technology can be attributed to the way education and talent was appropriated by particular castes for centuries. In a way there was hundred percent reservation, in diverse fields of life, on the basis of caste. Swami Vivekananda in one of his insightful writings observed that the monopolization of education and intelligence by a few was responsible for the decline of India. The low levels of literacy rate in India for thousands of years in spite of the millennia old tradition of worshipping the God and Goddess of learning Ganesh and Saraswati respectively highlighted the social factors that retarded the progress of mass

education and resulted in all round backwardness of the nation. During our freedom struggle it was progressively realized by our leadership that there is no better way to change society and nation than educating people, expanding their abilities and inculcating among them the values of service, nationalism, sharing, fellow feeling, compassion and understanding. Gopabandhu spearheaded a movement for social modernization through education. It was silent and unspectacular but had revolutionary implications for society. His approach remained far above narrow confines of caste and religion and covered the whole nation. It is well known that in 1909 he established the Satyabadi Bana Vidyalaya which possibly became the first ever experiment in our country for conducting open-air school. Mahatma Gandhi wrote appreciatively on this effort. A celebrated educationist of that time Sir Asutosh Mookerjee understood its significance for the nation when he wrote "The promoters of this school have set a laudable example to the country...one cannot but wish that every village in Bengal should possess a genuine place of instruction like the Satyabadi School". The thoughtful observation highlighted the nationalistic and universal approach of Gopabandhu whose ideas are of immense importance for our age.

A survey of his writings brings to light his wide ranging ideas and his modern approach and educates us about his farsighted vision. A thorough study and understanding of Gopabandhu's life and work help us to understand that he was a refreshingly modern person and had the innate desire to modernize society and broaden the attitude and outlook of people. At the heart of that path breaking approach remained education.

On 16th September 1912 i.e. three years after he established Satyabadi School he

addressed the Puri District Educational Conference organized at Satyabadi and said "Education is the well spring of all national development". (*Siksha samasta jatiya unnatira muladhar*). A man committed to national development through education was obviously perturbed to see caste based organizations becoming the nucleus for the spread of education. In the address cited above he painfully observed that Brahmana Samiti, Karana Samiti, Kayastha Samiti, etc. were engaged in extending educational facilities to the members of their respective castes. In the second half of the twentieth century sociologists like Rudolf and Rudolf focused attention in understanding the role played by caste in promoting the cause of modernisation. They interpreted that tradition in spite of its apparent contradiction with modernization process has the potential of advancing it. By way of example they referred to the construction of schools and hostels by caste associations for students belonging to particular castes for availing modern educational facilities. But Gopabandhu in the beginning of the twentieth century had indicted caste based approaches to impart education and remarked that howsoever noble the objective of such associations might be their attempts based on narrow considerations could not promote the educational advancement of the nation as a whole. His observations "these associations are communal, not universal", "*Ehi sabu Samiti Sampradayika- Sarvajanin Nuhen*", brought out the limited scope of caste associations and therefore advocated and pursued the wider vision free from all constrictions. He specifically emphasized on spread of education among all castes and communities and the establishment of Satyabadi School was a splendid example of his broad minded approach to education. He carefully analysed the report concerning spread of education in India and learnt

with a heavy heart that for every five villages of India there existed only one school. Referring to the Puri district he said with lot of sadness that in 10, 25 and even 50 villages one hardly heard of the pronouncement of the alphabets. He informed that the first syllable represented by AA and AAA was never uttered in those villages. Continuing to reflect on the deepening ignorance of people in remote villages he told that the dim ray of education had not reached there. He entertained the doubt that in hundreds of villages of Orissa people even would not be aware of the basic fact that they were being ruled by the British authorities. To day we talk of the division of society in terms haves and have nots. In 1912 Gopabandhu talked about division of society in terms of literates and illiterates. The cause of the dichotomy was obviously due to lack of education among vast masses of ordinary men and women. He therefore expressed the opinion that efforts should have been made much earlier to dispel ignorance among people. He forcefully argued for a campaign in all villages and among people of all castes and creed to make them understand about the value and utility of education for them. He favoured for broadening the scope of the campaign to include in it not only book learning but also vocational education. For he believed that excessive reading of books puts heavy burden on the brain and therefore suggested that public instruction should give equal emphasis on the use of hand, feet, ears and eyes to make mind steady, stable and focused. In 1921 Mahatma Gandhi wrote a book for school children called Bal Pothi in which he wrote that household work is education. Elaborating it further he explained that both boys and girls by doing house hold work could exercise their hand, feet, eyes, muscles and brain and grow up as healthy and balanced human beings. The comprehensive understanding of education by Gopabandhu Das and Mahatma

Gandhi and the stress they laid on both the physical, intellectual and spiritual development of the student need to be followed by the present generation which is plagued by the decline of values and crisis of standards of behaviour.

One of the distinguishing features of the movement for spread of education in twenty first century has been to make education accessible for those who are in the margins of society. Utkalmani Gopabandhu Das had nurtured that vision at least nine decades back and much before Mahatma Gandhi reached the shores of India from South Africa. Keeping in mind the special concerns of the people belonging to the labour class he specifically wanted that they would be taught about the new methods for using their skills in local industries.

The fact that his campaign for education covered all communities and castes and the fact that he wanted special education for the labourers, established his credentials as the arch advocate of inclusive society and Sarvodaya. Above all he wanted that education be made the principal instrument for building our national character. The all encompassing approach and the nobility of the challenging vision of Gopabandhu contained the seeds of total literacy campaign which took the form of a mighty tree in Ernakulam district of Kerala in the 1980s and gradually branched out to different parts of India including Orissa and emerged as a giant movement for spreading literacy in the country. The current focus at the national level on Sarvasiksha Abhiyan embodies the vision of Gopabandhu Das which covered all communities and which emphasised on their inherent right to be the recipients of knowledge and wisdom. The ideal of fraternity enshrined in our Constitution can only be realized in full measure only if the objectives set by Gopabandhu to educate every citizen of the

country are realized in practice. It is only by effective and quality public instruction that we can put an end to divisions caused by caste, religion and community and promote social solidarity, national unity and integration. Any attempt to ensure equality of opportunity for the spread of education would be a powerful step for social modernization. After all the essence of social modernization demands that people must nurture an open mind free from the fetters of narrow identities, stretch their arms to embrace new ideas and be governed by the ideals and practice of liberty, equality and fraternity. The historic efforts of Gopabandhu Das in the early part of the twentieth century to spread education among people cutting across contrived barriers of caste and creed constituted a rarest of rare instance of a leader so passionately dedicated to the spread of education in the face of countless difficulties and hindrances caused by foreign rule. His heroic efforts and his pioneering contributions make him one of the forerunners of social modernization and builder of modern India.

In my talk On Gandhi and Gopabandhu delivered on 27th March 2006 at Gopabandhu Bhavan, Cuttack, I had referred to the Education Code of Japan which prescribed opening of schools at every village of that country. That code, I stated, was responsible for spread of mass education and played a determining role in the emergence of Japan as a modern and industrialized country in the twentieth century. I made that statement without referring to Gopabandhu's collected works and then said that he by establishing the Satyabadi School had had the similar vision for the people of Orissa and India.

Later when I read the first volume of Gopabandhu's collected works it was instructive to know that Gopabandhu in his speech at the Puri District Education Conference in 1912 had

referred to the Education Code of Japan announced by the Emperor of that country. He said that the code outlined the vision of the modern Japan in which not a single subject would remain unlettered and deprived of education. Stating that Japan laid the foundation of its national development the day it announced and implemented the code, he asked with a heavy heart "When would our so called benevolent Government announce such a code for us?" That stirring question represented the agitation of his mind and his restlessness for liberating the people of India from the thralldom of ignorance which paralyzed their mental faculties and crushed their spirit even as they struggled to physically survive. It also meant that had Gopabandhu's desire to have a Education Code been implemented, Orissa and indeed the whole of India would have had the indices of development no less significant than that of Japan.

The fact that Gopabandhu was aware of the Education Code of Japan, the fact that he attributed the phenomenal progress of Japan to that code which accelerated the spread of education among people reveals his deep understanding of the matters concerning advancement of education in other countries and its role in completely transforming them as modern and front ranking nations of the world. His breadth of vision was an eloquent testimony to his modern approach. His fervent desire that the British Government of the day should introduce such a code amply demonstrated his eagerness for a revolutionary development of our society and nation through education. Much later Dr. B.R.Ambedkar the principal architect of the Constitution underlined the value of education by saying "We may forego the material benefits but not education". The modern studies in twenty first century have revealed that the GNP of a nation can be appreciably increased more by

educating people than by investing in any other sector of the economy. The numerous Human Development Reports of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) now emphasise on spread of education for building human development and the Secretary General of the United Nations Dr. Kofi Annan has made education a key component for achieving the Millennium Development Goal for the humanity. A rudimentary understanding of Gopabandhu Das's profound thoughts and his intensely practical action for the cause of education make us aware of his role as one of the leading torchbearers of social modernization in Orissa and the country.

While dwelling on the role played by Gopabandhu Das in setting the process of social modernization one is struck by his ability to assimilate ideas from different sources. Earlier I referred to the Education Code of Japan and the way Gopabandhu cited it as a model for our own country to introduce education and quicken its process for the larger advancement of the people and nation. It was indicative of his all embracing mind which was receptive to ideas from different sources, be it foreign or indigenous. A man all the while engaged in addressing the miseries of the starving people and serving society had also the deep concern for changing society along modern lines. While doing so he remained tuned to the developments in the sphere of education in other parts of the country and wrote about them to inform and inspire people to follow those examples. It was indeed characteristic of Gopabandhu Das to look at the bright spots of learning, in the midst of pervasive illiteracy, and derive appropriate lessons for educating the masses. In a moving piece written in Satyabadi in 1916 on the theme "Education in the Indian States", Desiya Rajyare Siksha, he glowingly referred to the eloquent statement of Gopal Krishna Gokhale that the first and foremost

requirement of India was education. Adding that Gokhale made that statement in the context of the spread of primary education he lamented that the British Government did not pay heed to the pronouncements on the ground that those were impossible to implement. However, Gopabandhu happily cited the example of Baroda State where the impossible was made possible. Writing that several attempts were being made to spread education in many other Indian States, he proudly mentioned the campaign launched in Mysore which apart from establishing schools for primary education set up libraries for promoting mass education, made special provisions for the upliftment of the neglected sections of society and put massive efforts for the improvement of agriculture and industry. Giving the shining example of Travancore State, he outlined the noteworthy features such as the establishment of a school in every three square mile, enrolment of half of the eligible boys and girls in the school and even the registration of all the students in the school of a particular Taluk. The exemplary success in generating momentum for the spread of education among people gladdened the heart of Gopabandhu and he wrote about them to mobilize people and public opinion in Orissa to show similar results. To motivate people to pursue education he used to explode the popular myth that education was a luxury for them. In fact, when a district authority declared that 'secondary education is a luxury, those who want it must pay for it' Gopabandhu rejected the argument by saying that education is indispensable and whether it is primary, secondary or higher education it would be wrong to categorise it as luxury for the human being. He then stated that the divinity of the beast like human being could only be brought out by education alone. Declaring that the principal objective of education is concerned with the organization of a well ordered life he added that

such lofty goals could not be achieved either by developing logical reasoning or getting awards through excellence in the field of cricket and football. The role models for our youth to day are not those whose life is well ordered or based on values but those who have achieved name, fame and positions of strength and power. The role models are the cricketers and accomplished sports persons who are being deified for their success irrespective of their worth as human beings. To day when values are being disintegrated in wild pursuit of hedonism the remarks of Utkalamani Gopabandhu Das stirs our conscience to reevaluate our approach for nurturing our younger generation and inculcating in them the ideals and standards of a conscientious citizen.

A sensitive and caring person he had the ambition to refine the administrative machinery by educating people. To day when alarming levels of corruption have affected the administrative machinery and made it unresponsive to the needs of people and society we need to hark back to ideas of Gopabandhu Das to search for solutions to the problems besetting the governance. It is, thus, evident that he wanted to achieve a larger goal through education- a goal which went beyond removal of ignorance of people, augmenting their earning capabilities, empowering them and covered in its scope the enrichment and rejuvenation of life.

Earlier, it has been mentioned that the modernization of society is much more long drawn out and arduous than the modernization of industry and economy. Modernization of society involves dealing with subtle aspects such as mind and attitude of the people as compared to the modernization of economy and industry which can be achieved by introducing new machines or the new methods of production. While the former concentrates on the realm of culture and values,

the latter grapples with the more mundane world amenable to change and transformation with the help of new variety of instruments and implements. Therefore, social modernization requires patient toil and slow processes of training for changing the human behaviour and mental outlook. The enlightened ideas, prejudice free mind and willingness to change one's mindset in the light of new knowledge and thoughts are indispensable intangibles for transformation of society. It essentially means evolution of new consciousness in tune with liberal values, cultivation of humanism at the comprehensive levels of individual and society and tolerating the views and faiths of others. It can be achieved by the instrumentality of education, the content of which has to be infused with progressive thoughts and views. Gopabandhu was conscious of the fact that spread of education is the surest way to realize the goal. He was aware that primary and secondary education by itself would not be sufficient unless accompanied by higher education and research. After all the college and university teaching combined with technical and engineering education provide access to higher levels of knowledge and enable the recipients of such education to be well abreast of the latest trends and developments of academic endeavour at the national and international level. He, therefore, demanded the establishment of an Engineering School in Cuttack and due to his untiring efforts his demand was fulfilled and an Engineering School was established. He, thus, remained in the forefront of a movement for the introduction of modern and technical education in Orissa.

It is lesser known that Utkalamani Gopabandhu Das fought with a crusading zeal for introduction of higher education in Orissa. For he realised that without it the people of Orissa would not be able to make much progress in quest for a better quality of life. It is a historic coincidence

that the resolution demanding a separate State of Orissa and the resolution for a separate University for the State were introduced at the meeting of the Utkal Sammilani convened in Paralakhemundi under the leadership of Krishna Chandra Gajapati during 26th and 27th December 1914. It is indeed enlightening to note that the moving spirit behind the resolution for a separate university was none other than Gopabandhu Das. The year 2006 is the 150th anniversary of the establishment of the modern universities in India. The cities of Chennai, Kolkata and Mumbai had the distinction of leading the country in this respect. It is important to recall that Gopabandhu Das started a movement for the establishment of a modern university for Orissa. The country knows him as the founder of several trend setting institutions including the Satyabadi Vana Vidyalaya. Emphasising on primary and secondary education and combining it with the demand for a University for Orissa he emerged as a mighty force for an educational renaissance of the State. It is, therefore, important to be adequately educated about his role in demanding the introduction of higher education for the students when the freedom movement was gaining momentum and the struggle for a separate Orissa State was at its peak. The way he went about achieving it was fascinating and revealed his efforts for digging out facts concerning establishment of the universities in Europe and cogently making a similar case for Orissa. Only a few days after the Samaja was established i.e. in October 1919, he wrote a piece forcefully pleading the cause of a University for the State and sensitizing people and seeking their active support in achieving it in practice. He cited the Government decision to establish a University in Nagpur and Dhaka even though there was only one college in each of those places. Unearthing information from the pages of history he understood that many European countries had the

distinguished record of founding universities for spreading higher education in spite of the fact that only one college existed there. Rejecting the specious plea that the existence of only one college was a limiting factor for starting a new university he exhorted the authorities to look at their own example of establishing universities in other parts of the country primarily on the same ground. He was perplexed as to why the case of Cuttack would be ignored when cities like Nagpur and Dhaka were being favourably considered for opening Universities there. He marshaled facts from the report of the Patna University Committee and the observations of Lt. Governor of the Bihar Province, Lord Gait to the effect that a University at Cuttack was being considered. When it was argued that Cuttack would get a University only after two or three colleges were established there Gopabandhu asked the question through the columns of the Samaja "What is the necessity of waiting for the setting up of two more colleges when there were precedents in India and abroad of having a University to cater to need of a single college?" He then wrote "Convert Ravenshaw College to a university". Let us pay tribute to the vision of Utkalmani who wanted, as early as 1919, the conversion of Ravenshaw College to a University. The dream of Gopabandhu Das has come true after more than eight decades. The Ravenshaw College has been conferred with the status of a Unitary University and a new chapter has been created in the history of educational development of Orissa. The present generation gratefully acknowledges the role played by Gopabandhu Das as the progenitor of this historic movement.

Gopabandhu in spite of the constraints imposed by the paucity of resources never privileged one type of education over another. For instance while emphasizing on primary and secondary education he was not limiting his vision



to promote college and university education due to inadequacy of monetary resources. In fact, the hallmark of his personality was his integrated vision covering all types of education. He disagreed with the proposition that by promoting higher education we might cut down on resources for educating the masses. He wrote about it in the Samaja on 8th November 1919. Noting the concerns expressed in some quarters that investments in establishing Universities might deplete the funds for the cause of primary education he however forcefully stressed on making higher education available to more and more people regardless of the hindrances on the way in the form of insufficient resources. His spirited arguments for the cause of higher education and his relentless use of the columns of the Samaja to drive home the point spoke volumes of his creative use of mass media for cause of social modernization through education.

One is struck by the boldness of his approach when one traces in his Rachanabali (first volume of his writings) his daring suggestion that Oriya students should be sent abroad for getting more modern and advanced education in the foreign soil. The land of Orissa described by Mahatma Gandhi as the land of sorrows and tears had hardly any funds for promoting primary education let alone sending students overseas for getting themselves enrolled in the institutions of higher learning and research. The fact that Gopabandhu had that courageous vision spoke of his undying spirit to reach beyond the frontiers of the country and explore the vistas of knowledge and scholarship for changing the destiny of our society and nation. To materialize that bold idea he suggested that an Education Fund (Siksha Panthi) be set up to finance the students for their studies in foreign countries. He then referred to the existence of such a fund in Ganjam, exhorted people to replicate it in other areas and use it for

the promotion of education for dispelling ignorance, reaching out to the new frontiers of knowledge in India and abroad, building human resources and changing society. His desire to overcome all barriers including financial for the cause of education represented the triumph of spirit over material deficiencies. Let us be inspired by Utkalmani's wisdom to carry forward the noble mission of spreading the light of knowledge and learning, uplifting people from the depths of ignorance and providing them access to the higher levels of education.

Utkalmani Gopabandhu was an avid worshipper of the ancient ideals of India based on our composite culture, rich literary tradition and spiritual ethos. He wanted those ideals to be integral part of our national curricula of education for developing the mental faculties of the students and ensuring the wholesome growth of their personalities. He wrote about it several times and Satyabadi Vana Vidyalaya was an exemplification of his lofty desire to teach the younger generation the values and morals which constituted the foundational philosophy of the ancient method of learning and scholarship. It may be clarified here that social modernization does not mean the rejection of all that is part of our tradition and which has contributed to the cultural refinement of our people in spite of their lack of exposure to formal education. The process of social modernization depends as much on imbibing the modern values as on harnessing the ancient wisdom which philosophically understood the unity of life and the oneness of diverse approaches to truth. Utkalmani Gopabandhu Das in an essay (written in 6th volume of Satyabadi) evocative of the grand alliance of the ancient and modern vision accorded priority to our spiritual and civilisational heritage and at the same time underlined the imperative need to learn English language, modern science and western literature. The blend of both

the modern and the ancient in the architecture of his education and his ability to assimilate ideas being generated by the vibrant intellectual traditions elsewhere in the world, made him one of the forwarding looking leaders who learnt from his times, added value to the secured wisdom and broke new grounds in transmitting them to the wider society. Two examples of institutionalization of his vision will validate the point. While the establishment of a Sanskrit toll in Puri owed to the untiring efforts of Gopabandhu and brought out his passion for advancing the learning of this ancient language the setting up of the Engineering School at Cuttack outlined his modern mindset to embrace the science and technical education. Understanding Sanskrit enables us to understand the modern language. It was Mahatma Gandhi who had said on 17th March 1940 that study of Sanskrit is an aid to the study of modern languages. In twenty- first century more studies conducted by linguists reveal that the Sanskrit language is more computer friendly than any other language. Utkalamani Gopabandhu's exhortations not to reject English language, medical education and western literature testified to his modern approach. His liberal and integrated vision fascinates the twenty first century mind and prompts us to recapture that spirit which evolved in the trying circumstances of colonial modernity imposed by the foreign rulers.

No discussion of social modernization through education would be complete without referring to the efforts to educate women and providing them their legitimate space to be the leaders and architects of a massive movement for educating the whole society and nation. It goes without saying that education of women cuts deep into society. In fact graded inequality ingrained in the caste system and extremely low status enjoyed by women in our society were primarily responsible for the degeneration of India down

the ages. What was true of India was true of the rest of the world. No revolution including the American revolution and the French revolution accorded the equal rights to women. John Adams was a key member of the Constituent Assembly of the USA who went on to become the President of that country. He played an important role in drafting the American Declaration of Independence which proclaimed that all men are created equal. His wife wrote a letter to him appealing to incorporate the rights of women in the American Constitution. But it was not heeded to. The proclaimed ideals of Liberty, Equality and Fraternity which remained at the heart of the French Revolution were guaranteed by the fundamental law of the land only to the male component of the population and the non-slaves. The French Philosopher Jean Jacques Rousseau whose seminal ideas provided the intellectual basis to the mighty French revolution declared that ignorance was entirely beneficial to women. Against this backdrop what was done by Mahatma Gandhi and Gopabandhu Das was nothing less than epoch making and the relevance of which is more than that of the great revolutions and movements of history for unchaining women from the bondages through education and expanding opportunities for them so that they played their due role in shaping the destiny of the nation. In the later part of the twentieth century it was declared that if development is not engendered it would be endangered. One can take liberty and modify it to say that if spread of education is not endangered it would be endangered. That was what Gopabandhu Das did when in his sociologically significant article on "Nari Siksha" (Education of Women) written on 6th December 1919 he commented, "If girls are not educated there would not be any improvement of the education of the country". The fact that Gopabandhu Das was taking up the women's

education at a time when he was fighting both for India's independence and the separate State for Orissa on the basis of language make his contributions more noteworthy. A cursory glance of that article makes us understand the sociologist in Gopabandhu Das explaining the sociological roots of educational backwardness of women. He outlined the social factors that prevented women to pursue education and condemned them to the depths of ignorance and illiteracy. He asked the question "How would education among women improve?" "Stri Siksha Brudhi Paiba Kipari"? He said that our social tradition did not encourage women to go to school. He then asked as to how a family would take interest in the education of the girl child when it knows that she would leave the family on attaining adulthood. He then explained that the social tradition enjoining the women to exclusively take up the responsibility of the household work came on the way of their educational advancement. Gopabandhu deserves to be hailed as a feminist for his perceptive analysis of the root cause of illiteracy among women. Attack on such social traditions constituted important steps for the emancipation of women. After all modernization of society could be best promoted only when women are given equal opportunities in the field of education. To day we clamour for gender equality and make empowerment of women the central plank for progress and development. At the core of such efforts remain the equal treatment of women and application of same standards for them as is being done for men. One is reminded of the

question of Gopabandhu to his well wishers when they repeatedly pursued him to get married again after his wife's unfortunate and untimely death. Gopabandhu sharply asked, "Would you have asked my wife for remarriage if I had breathed my last?" The question of Gopabandhu silenced them. But his profound question contained in it the more revolutionary issue of equal treatment of women for creating a good society. He extended that notion from his personal life and applied it in the larger context of society for promotion of education of women.

By attacking caste based approach to promote education, by taking up the cause of universalisation of primary education and promotion of secondary and higher education, by stressing the importance of learning English and the other streams of modern knowledge and instruction imparted through English language and above all by according importance to educate women and liberate them from the oppressive social tradition, Utkalamanai Gopabandhu Das became the harbinger of social modernization in Orissa in the first quarter of the twentieth century.

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