Industrial Development of Orissa and Madhusudan Das

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Madhusudan Das, popularly known as Madhu Babu is one of the great personalities of Modern Indian History and the chief architect of modern Orissa. He was the first Oriya Graduate in Arts, the first Oriya M.A., the first Bar-at Law, the first Oriya Advocate, the first Oriya member of the Legislative Council, the first Oriya to visit England and the first Oriya to realize the legitimate interest of the Oriyas.

This uncrowned King of Orissa was born on 28th April 1848 in the village of Satyabhamapur situated hardly at a distance of twenty kilometers from the town of Cuttack. He was provided elementary education in his village school. After passing the entrance examination from Cuttack he became a teacher in Balasore Zilla School for a period of two years. He was educated at Calcutta and obtained M.A. and B. L. degrees from the Calcutta University. In 1881 he came back to Cuttack to start as a legal practitioner and established himself as a foremost advocate of the town. At that time the Orissa division was comprised of Balasore, Cuttack and Puri districts and was administered from Calcutta through a Commissioner posted at Cuttack.

Madhusudan's appearance at the Cuttack court marked a new age in the history of Oriya Nationalism. In order to organize the national life of Orissa he founded Orissa Sabha or Oriya Association in 1882 that slowly expanded as a mouth piece of the Oriyas and became its president in 1885.In that year he presented a memorial containing demands like extension of railways, industry, education and amalgamation of Ganjam and Sambalpur with Orissa to Sir Richard Thompson, the lieutenant governor of Bengal during his visit to Orissa.

Madhu Babu was not only an ardent nationalist, outstanding legislator, widely acclaimed advocate, well known journalist but at the same time a great industrialist. His pioneering efforts in the industrial progress of Orissa played a significant role in shaping the economic prosperity of Orissa. He thought that Orissa was rich in mineral resources, raw materials and manpower, but the people were very poor having lost their industrial activities. So for the economic prosperity of Orissa he devoted his time and invested his money. In his own words he said that "I have been an industrialist during the greater part of my life. I have spent my life's earnings in reviving and improving local industries." He was of the view that economic emancipation was the prerequisite for political independence of the country. In this context the present paper deliberates upon some of such outstanding efforts made by Madhu Babu for the industrial development of Orissa which is based on some literary sources.

Orissa was famous for its traditional filigree work which was an exquisite art. Sambalpur was famous for its artistic textiles. Berhampur was
famous for beautiful pata products. But because of the defective economic policies of the government, the cottage industries and handicrafts of Orissa were slowly in a dying condition. Being determined to revive the glory of Orissa's arts, Madhusudan set up a large factory in 1897 known as Orissa Art Ware inside the compound of his house for production of indigenous art wares and arranged their sale in a large building adjacent to his house. A separate school of Art Ware was attached to the factory with hundred trainees who produced beautiful articles. He also provided training to 150 weavers from his factory for production of handloom fabrics. He devoted much of his time to improve the artistic skills keeping in mind the choice of foreign market. He introduced different types of hand operating machines for production of wares of different shapes and sizes. In order to popularize the Orissan artistic skills he presented filigree articles to many British Officers. He went abroad twice and presented his craft products to the notable dignitaries of Great Britain and Europeans in order to popularize the Orissan art. His art wares were highly appreciated by high British officers like Charles Elliot, W. wedderburn, Maddox Lawrence and many others. When the Lt. Governor of Bengal, Sir John Woodburn visited the Orissa Art Wares, he was presented an address in Oriya written on a palm leaf, artistically ornamented and enclosed in a silver casket bearing the of the Bhubaneswar temple in miniature form. Woodburn was highly pleased to see the craftmanship of the artisans and Madhu Babu discussed with him the problems of the artisan class of Orissa.

In the Orissa Art Wares factory along with filigree work, horn ivory, wood carving, brass alumunium and many other beautiful handicraft products were manufactured. He introduced new methods of work structure and taught the workers to produce articles matching the modern taste of the people. Horn articles were exported to Calcutta, Bombay and to many other places and were highly appreciated. The Statesman and the Friend of India, a newspaper of Calcutta wrote on March 2nd, 1901 that "the specimens of Orissa Art that were shown to us in silver and gold, ivory and horn are in everyway excellent, graceful and original design."

Madhusudan viewed the development of indigenous industries as the key to economic regeneration and real self-rule. He observed: "We have expressed our desire for Home Rule, but we do not realize to what extent we depend on other nations. It should be understood that a country which supplies raw materials to other countries for production of industrial goods is industrially very backward. We cover our bodies with clothes produced in other countries. The luxuries and necessities which we need everyday are supplied by other countries. Still we want self rule." He responded to the Swadeshi agitation of Bengal in 1905 and the idea of pioneering Swadeshi movement was conceived prior to the partition of Bengal by Madhusudan. He addressed the Swadeshi meeting, held at Cuttack on 20th August 1905 under the chairmanship of Janakinath Bose. While asking the people to use Swadeshi goods he cited two examples, one of the general Togo of Japan who used shoes made only in Japan and the other was of an Englishman buying English shoes at a higher cost instead of buying German shoes. He introduced the Charakha - the spinning wheel and encouraged cotton cultivation for production of Swadeshi cloth. Mahatma Gandhi was always a great admirer of Madhusudan as a lover of handicrafts, Gandhiji in his journal Young India often quoted Madhusudan's views on cottage industries. In his letter of August 12, 1925, Gandhiji from Calcutta quote to him that "You will of course teach me how to spread the message of the spinning wheel in Utkal" Madhusudan always attended the
Sammilani sessions in Indian dresses which were hand spun, hand woven and hand made, long before Gandhiji's Khaddar became the political watchword of India.

Establishment of Utkal Tannery was another long cherished desire of Madhu Babu. This shoe making industry was set up at Cuttack near the railway station over an area of about forty acres of land. For establishment of this factory he had invested a considerable amount of money out of his own income. About 150 workers were employed in this tannery. Madhu Babu was so much interested for this tannery that while he had been to England he tried to acquaint with the working skill of many of the shoe making factories of England. The shoes prepared out of lizard skin had demand in European countries for which Madhu Babu started collecting lizard skin from different parts of Orissa for his tannery. While setting up such industries, he appealed to the people to make and use of home made goods and articles. Leather industry of Orissa acclaimed highest estimation in Japan, France and in other places.

The Utkal Union Conference was established by Madhu Babu in the year 1903. A resolution was passed in the first session of the Utkal Union Conference in the year 1903 held at Cuttack for improvement of agricultural and industrial condition of the Oriya speaking people. Development of indigenous industries and provision for organization of annual industrial exhibition was one of the proposals of this conference which was initiated by Talcher Maharaja and accepted by Madhu Babu. The Silponnati Sabha of Cuttack was also affiliated to the Utkal Union Conference. Madhu Babu was a strong advocate of Technical education for the growth of industries in India. He pleaded for introduction of traditional crafts from primary standard and also to impart technical training to Oriya students by sending them abroad with financial support so that the economic condition of Orissa could be improved subsequently. A resolution was passed in the Utkal Union Conference vide Resolution-VII and a central committee was formed consisting some prominent members for the purpose of helping poor and deserving students.

Madhusudan wrote a number of articles on industrialization such as "Industrial Development", "Industrial Awakening," "War is business and business is War" and "Freedom from Industrial captivity" which were published in the English journal "The Oriya". On 17th February 1924 he delivered a speech on dignity of labour at Patna which was highly appreciated. He held that unless due importance was given to manual labour and proper coordination was established between mental work and manual work, the wealth of the nation could not be augmented. He was of the view that "Culture of the land is Agriculture and Culture of the hand is Industry."

Such was the endeavour of Madhu Babu for the industrialization and economic regeneration of Orissa. He was the pride and glory of Orissa. In his memory Fakir Mohan has rightly said:

"Dhanya dhanya Madhusudan
Utkal Matara Jogya Nandana
Dela Utkalaku Nabajibana
Sikhaila Lokeatibandana".

References:
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