

Dr. Harekrushna Mahatab : A Versatile Genius

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The name of Dr. Harekrushna Mahatab has become a household name in Orissa. He was a versatile genius who had possessed the qualities of a great man. He was in a line a freedom fighter, an astute politician, a prolific writer, an eloquent speaker, a social scientist, a reputed journalist, a celebrated historian, a popular leader, an architect of modern Orissa, a nation builder and above all a statesman in the true sense of the term. Pioneering in multidimensional fields he himself had become an institution.

Born on 21st November, 1899 in an aristocratic noble family at Agarapara, now in the district

of Bhadrak (Orissa) he was educated in his village primary school, secondary education in Bhadrak High School and lastly his college education in the Ravenshaw College, Cuttack. During his school days he was greatly moved by Swami Vivekananda and became a revolutionary in his outlook. When he was continuing his study in the Ravenshaw College, the Non-Co-operation Movement started. At the clarion call of Gandhiji he discontinued his study and plunged into freedom movement and became a true disciple of Gandhi. After the untimely demise of Pandit Gopabandhu Das he became the spearhead of the freedom struggle in Orissa till India achieved independence. He was nominated by Subhas Chandra Bose, the then President of the Indian National Congress to the All India Working Committee of the Congress in 1938. He was the only fortunate man from Orissa who was arrested in the Ahmed Nagar Fort along with other top ranking politicians of India who were the representatives of contemporary India like Sardar Patel, Moulana Azad, Jawaharlal Nehru, Dr. Prafulla Chandra Ghose, Acharya Kripalini, Acharya Narendra Dev, Gobinda Ballav Panth,



Asaf Ali, Dr. Pattabhisitaramaya etc. for about three and half years and was released in May, 1945. His autobiography Sadhanara Pathe itself is the main source to reconstruct the history of freedom movement in Orissa.

As a political leader he became the first Chief Minister of independent Orissa and held the same office in another term in 1960. He became the Minister for Commerce and Industries in the Central Cabinet and was the Secretary General of the Congress Party in Parliament. In 1955, he was appointed as the Governor of undivided state of Bombay. Besides holding these offices he was elected to the Parliament and the Orissa Legislative Assembly several times. Directly or indirectly till his death, he was the pivot around whom the whole administrative

machinery of the state revolved whether he was in office or not.

As a man of letters he authored many books viz. *Pratibha*, *Tautor*, *Avyapara*, *Chhayapathara* *Yatri*, *Charichakshu*, *Sesha Ashru*, *Palasi Abasane*, *Chudangadeva*, *Jivana Samasya*, *Odisha Itihasa*, *Nutana Dharma*, *Atmadana*, *Yuga Sanketa*, *Gandhiji-O-Orissa*, *Sadhanara Pathe* (Autobiography), *Gan Majlis* (1st & 2nd Vol.), *Trutiya Parva*, 1975, *Anandara Sandhana*, *Dasha Varshara Orissa* (all in Oriya) which touched upon various branches of literature comprising novel, story, essay, drama, poem etc. He also authored in English, *History of Orissa*, *Beginning of the End*, *While Serving My Nation*. He patronized the upliftment of Oriya language and literature. He instituted 'Prajatantra Prachar Samiti' in 1947 through which he established himself as a true journalist and culminated in *Jhankara*. 'Prajatantra' became a laboratory where both journalism and literature were experimented. His 'Gan Majlis' is a feature of this class. Through 'Gan Majlis' he was able to mould the political and social character of Orissa. He became the Editor of 'Jhankar' since its inception in 1949. He was the founder of 'Visuv

Milan' which is a unique literary institution in India. Taking their birth under this huge marquee of this Visuv movement many writers to-day are well established in their own respective fields and their contribution in making our literature rich and glorious is unforgettable. He was the guardian of modern Oriya literature and acted as a bridge between literature and politics. Considering all his achievements we can conclude that he was a versatile genius. He was the President of Orissa Sahitya Academy, President of the Orissa Sangeet Nataka Academy, Lalitakala Academy for two terms and was the member of the Executive Committee of the Central Sahitya Academy for two terms. He was a researcher as well as a historian. He wrote history of Orissa for the first time in a scientific manner. Andhra University, Utkal University and Sagar University have conferred on him the Honorary Degree of Doctor of Letters, Doctor of Literature and Doctor of Laws respectively. As a historian he selected Bhubaneswar, the sacred land of Kharavela and Kapilendra Deva, the two invincible heroes of Orissa history, as the capital of Orissa which is an epoch making step.

He not only wrote history but he himself became history by his remarkable achievement for merging the Princely States taking initiative from Nilagiri State with the Province of Orissa. Speaking of Mahatab's role in the merger of States Sardar Patel said, "He was the living spirit in that drama. I am happy that I helped him to realize what was not only his dream and his ambition, but also the dream and ambition of all Oriyas. I am happier still that it was that backward province as they call it, which led the way for the rest of India to follow." He established Hirakud Dam Project, inaugurated the New Capital at Bhubaneswar, Kalinga Iron Works, Ferro-Manganese Work at Joda, Cement, Steel and Aluminum Plants which served as the milestones on the path of economic progress of Orissa.

According to S.C. Dash, a political scientist of Orissa "This was a wrong decision for him (Mahatab). Otherwise, with his reputation as a Governor, he might have developed just on the model of one of his distinguished contemporaries (Zakir Hussain) who left education to become the Governor of Bihar from where he ultimately entered the Rashtrapati Bhavan

through the office of the Vice-President. Had not power hunger obsessed Mahatab the history of Orissa would have flown through a different course and he himself would have been a different man.”

Such a great soul departed on 2nd January, 1987 creating a great vacuum in every sphere of human life. When his dead body was proceeded from his residence Ekamra Nivas to his birth place Agarapara for cremation, the whole path from Bhubaneswar to Agarapara was crowded by the sea of humanity to pay tribute to their beloved departed leader which proved how he had won the heart of mass millions. When his dead body reached Agarapara

thousands of people from all walks of life along with celebrities had come over there Galaxy of writers, politicians, artists, journalists and above all the Hon'ble Governor B.N. Pande assembled which proved that he was the real representative of the state intelligentsia.

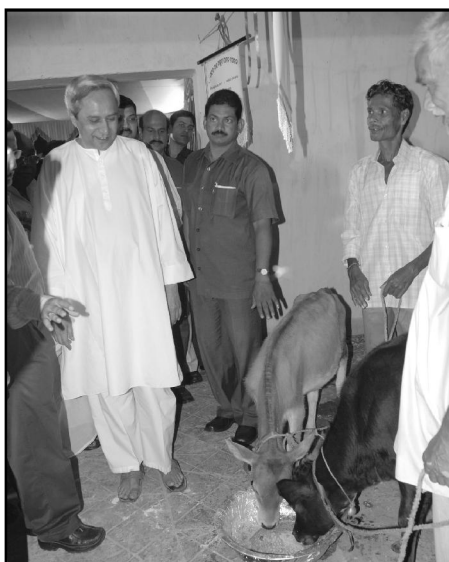
Speaking highly of Mahatab the Sardar said, “A true patriot in that he loves Orissa but loves India more. A practical and a born leader of men, Mahatab has carved out for himself a name which will live in Orissa's history. More than ten years ago he conceived a future for Orissa which he had the good fortune to realise in his own life time.” Taking into account the yeomen service he

had rendered to the state, Mahatab can rightly be called the Maker of Greater Orissa.

References :

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*Hon'ble Chief Minister Shri Naveen Patnaik
launching the Calf Rearing Scheme under
Rashtriya Krishi Vikash Yojana at Jagannathpur
on 2.11.2010.*