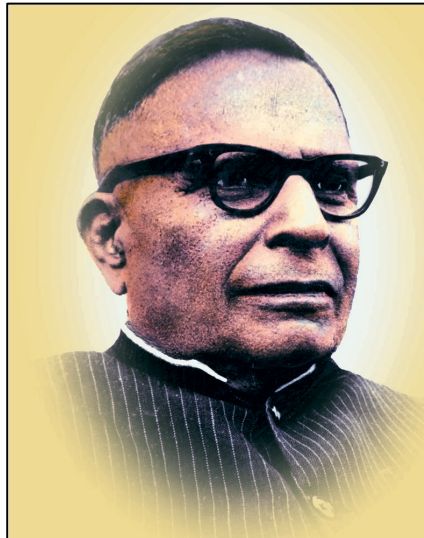




Dr. Harekrushna Mahatab - A Curious Combination of Conspicuous Characteristics

Dr. Narayan Panda

Dr. Harekrushna Mahatab was the dazzling luminary in the azure firmament of politics for a span of about 40 years. Words fail to picture out the connotations of the multi dimensional personalities who towered phoenix-like in the contemporary era. His contributions are myriad to awaken, enliven and enlighten moribund Orissa. Right from 1936 till his demise in 1987, he prevailed and pervaded the Orissan time and live as a statesman, pioneer of a new dawn, leader par excellence, literateur who hatched the wagons of languishing Orissa to a star. He was the Orissan protagonist of Independence moment from 1940 to 1950 and played the pioneering role in the amalgamation of princely listed states of Orissa with the Union in 1948-49. He kickstarted the work of resurgence with the construction of Hirakud Dam, establishment of the High Court at Cuttack and Capital at Bhubaneswar. The successor to the Chief Minister after 1950 like Biju Pattnaik, Biren Mitra, Nilamani Routray, Janaki Ballave Pattnaik were the creation of his magic lamp. For his unprecedented work of nation building, he has



aptly been ornamented with the epithet “**UTKAL KESHARI**” .

Dr. Mahatab was born in the village Agarpada in Balasore on 21st November 1899.

He was a lotus on the sting heap. His father Krushna Charan Das hailed from a poor family but under the turn of tide of time he married the eldest daughter of Zamindar Jagannath Mahatab. Although moderately educate, Krushna Charan was known for extra ordinary acumen. His wife was a devoted woman of intellect. She read mythologies she could lay her hands on. Mahatab’s father worked hard for usher in educational renaissance in his village. Mahatab started primary education at his village

school. Thus he came to Bhadrak High School at the age of 17. His schooling synchronized with the out-break of the first World War. Mahatab was inspired by the ideals of Bagha Jatin and got involuntarily indoctrinated to the life of evolutional. He came in contact with the monks of Ramakrishna Mission which influenced him to dedicate his life for the service of the people. The



death of his mother during high career was a bolt from the blue but Swami Brahmananda taught Maya Cult and lifted him up while he was drooping in despondency. He passed the Matriculation Exam. in First division in the year 1917.

Mahatab was admitted to Ravenshaw College where he studied I. Sc. He joined Utkal Sammilani as a volunteer in 1918. He was instilled with revolutionary reverberation from the protest of Tilak against Rawlat Act. Mahatab couldnot resist the temptation of joining the non-violent non-cooperation movement. He came in contact with Gopabandhu Das and went by his advice to participate in the movement after his B. A. exam. When Gandhiji came to Orissa on 24th March 1921 to spread the gospel of non-cooperation movement, Mahatab accompanied him to Cuttack, Puri, Bhadrak, Satyabadi, Berhampur. After Gandhiji's exit, Mahatab remained in the charge of organizing Congress in Balasore district. He remained the Secretary of Balasore District Congress Committee. He gave the Congress Organization a new lease of life. After March 1921, Mahatab relinquished his family for devoting heart and soul for the uplift of Congress Organization. Mahatab met Malabyaji at Lucknow as regards opposing Kanika ransacking on his return he was arrested under 108. During his rigorous imprisonment at Cuttack, he wrote "*Sadhanar Pathe*" portraying the persecution metedout to the freedom fighters in the jail. At the time of Bhagalpur Jail sojourn, he wrote "*Ajaba Dunia*" and "*Free Thinking*" in Oriya and English respectively. After his release from Bhagalpur Jail, Mahatab in collaboration with his co-workers Niranjana Pattnaik, Gopabandhu Choudhury, Nilakantha Das worked wholeheartedly for the recrudescence of Khadi Andolan, village organization and for that purpose to unleash wide scale probation of the message

of the Congress, Mahatab set up "*Prajatantra*"- the Oriya daily.

Before the release of Gopabandhu from jail, Mahatab was the President of the Orissa Congress Committee. Then he was elected to Bihar-Orissa Governor's Council. The high flood in 1927 in Balasore compelled Mahatab to give up position and along with Utkalmani Gopabandhu worked day and night to help the flood victims. Mahatab accompanied Gandhiji during his 4 days' whirlwind itinerary across the length and breadth of Orissa and gave him a glimpse salt cottage industry and terrorization in Kanika. Gandhiji appreciated Mahatab's role in an article published in "*Young India*".

Mahatab along with Gopabandhu Choudhury was arrested on 17th April 1930 for his stewardship in the Salt movement. During his Jail Sojourn, Mahatab translated Balmiki's Sanskrit Ramayan into Oriya and wrote the Oriya Version of the Gita in simple prose style. Aware of the fact that Mahatab was sending clandestinely his articles to *Prajatantra*, he was transferred to Hazaribag Jail. During his stay at Patna camp jail, he collected poems from the political prisoners and it was published in 1946 captioned "*Bedira Jan Jan*". There he also wrote the drama "*Swarajya Sadhana*". As a result of Gandhi – Irwin pact, all the political prisoners were released and Mahatab returned to Balasore to the applause of people of Bhadrak station.

After attending the Congress Convocation at Karachi, Mahatab spent a month at Sabarmati Ashram. After the 1932 Third Round Table Conference fiasco, the Congress was pronounced illegal and distinguished leaders like Nilakantha Das, Acharya Harihar, Gopabandhu Choudhury were arrested and imprisoned and Mahatab was among them. He



spent six months at Hazaribag Jail where he came in touch with Khan Abdul Gaphar Khan. There he wrote the Novel “*Nutan Dharma*” wherein he depicted about the Harijan movement. Mahatma Gandhi undertook Padayatra from Puri to Bhadrak in 1934 and Mahatab was alongside. He spent the last day of his Yatra in Mahatab’s Bhadrak house. He tested Mahatab and Subhadra Mahatab at spinning there.

Orissa became a separate state in 1936 and thanks to Mahatab’s efforts, Biswanath Das was made the first Prime Minister and Mukunda Prasad Das the Speaker of Orissa Bidhan Sabha. Mahatab was elected the president of Pradesh Congress Committee in 1938. In 1939, he was anointed the President Gadajata Praja Andolan Committee. Mahatab was able to strike a reconciliation between the king of Nilagiri and his subjects. Gandhiji started Satyagraha in 1940 against the non-response of the British Government for granting complete independence to India. Mahatab started Satyagraha of self on 1st December 1940 at Remuna in deference to Gandhiji’s standing. As a result, he was imprisoned at Berhampur jail. He was released on 1st December 1940. He attended the Congress Working Committee at Bardoli and came to Wardha with Gandhiji. Returning from Wardha, he published Weekly named “*Rasava*” at Cuttack to spread the gospel of Congress.

Mahatab was imprisoned in Ahmedabad Port from 9th August 1942 to 1945. During the time he wrote the History of Orissa, three epic, three novels and a Motley of poems. He was brought to Sambalpur jail in April 1945 and there he spent a month. On release he met secretly at Cuttack and developed intimacy with Biren Mitra. In the wake of the Second World War, Elections were held to the Provincial Legislative Assemblies in 1946. Mahatab was crowned the Chief Minister

of Orissa on 23rd April 1946. From April 1946 to 15th February 1961 for a spell of about 15 years he adorned the Chief Minister’s Chair in Orissa; then as the Minister of Commerce and Industry in the Central Govt., the Secretary General of Parliamentary Congress Party, the Governor of undivided Bombay province.

The task of completion of truncated Orissa build up a solid back ground to it, solve her social and economic problem so that Orissa can roll on its juggernaut of progress occupied preponderance in Mahatab’s scheme of things. He played the pivotal role in the onerous task of consolidation of princely states with the Orissa province. Sardar Ballavbhai Patel the Iron man of India confessed the perspicacity of Mahatab in ushering in the arduous undertaking of integrating princely states to adjacent provinces and the unique work throughout India soon achieved completion.

He was first to moot out the idea of setting up of the Capital of Orissa at Bhubaneswar ; his plan was acknowledged and Jawaharlal Nehru, the Prime Minister of India laid the foundation stone on 13th April 1948.

Amidst all round developmental work in the nascent province, Mahatab was twisted away to become the Cabinet Minister of Industry and Supply in the Union Ministry on 13th May 1950. He formulated distinctive policy for the rapid spread of Industries. He extended his all possible patronage to start production in Kalinga Tubes of Biju Pattnaik. He tabled a Bill in the Parliament of granting licence to private undertakings. He attended the conference of Common Wealth Nations’ Ministers at London in October 1951.

From 1956 to 1960, Mahatab formed the second Ministry in Orissa. During the stint he accelerated the completion of the Capital at



Bhubaneswar. He completed the construction of the Secretariat Building, the Raj Bhawan and the Assembly Buildings. He established the Museum at Bhubaneswar and at Nandankanan Botanical and Zoological Gardens, Oriya Sahitya Academy, Sangeet Natak Academy and Lalita Kala Academy, Rabindra Mandap and Bhanja Kala Mandap. To crown all his achievements his book in English “While Serving My Nation – Recollections of a Congress Man” came to light on 2nd January 1987.

People working in the field of Politics have to adopt the tactics of brinkmanship as the corridors of politics are replete with conflicts, confrontations, political personages have to face approvals of approbation and condemnation. This happens almost without exception in political personality. But however tarnished it might have been made, it is brushed to transparency and they earned the esteem of people and get themselves enshrined in history. Right from 1930 to 1987, accounting to 50 years and more, Mahatab was an extraordinary personality. The History of Orissa can't be written without Mahatab's majestic marvels in marshalling the life and destiny of millions.

A microscopic analysis, it envisages that without shadow of a little doubt, Mahatab was endowed with qualities to be the destiny maker of the populace. Ranging from student career to struggle for freedom and administration of the nation, he always commanded a unique leadership. He was always the forerunner, not a back trailer. In youths, he was a staunch follower of age old, experienced leaders like Gandhiji and Gopabandhu; on the contrary, he was the path-finder for elders and juniors. His role model contemporaries were Jawaharlal Nehru, Sardar Ballav Bhai Patel, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad,

Chakrabarti Rajgopalchari. From the correspondence he maintained with them, it is crystal – clear Mahatab was their equal in every aspect and from all points of view. Sardar Ballavbhai Patel explicitly confessed that the process of amalgamation of Princely States with the Indian Union germinated in the masterly brain work of Mahatab was his work started in that direction from Orissa. He was able to exchange his thoughts fearlessly with Jawaharlal Nehru on community development, Hindu Code, Land Reform and a lot of administrative complexities. He came up with his individual concepts and suggestions about anything and everything freely and frankly. He always ventured to attend his goal by virtue of his ability, wits, strategies and superintendence of schemes and proceeded in accordance with his own framework with parleying with other leaders, he was adjudged and honoured as at par or even at a higher level in excellence. He was never affected by least little sense of inferiority complex.

After his exodus from the arena of politics at the end of 1960, all other leaders forming ministry in Orissa in succession sought his benediction and guidelines. He wrote in “*Gaon Majlis*” with the august stature of the top-most and matured person of the society which was sought by all and sundry as gems suggestion society reconstruction and reorganization. The young followers or rather disciples, such as Biju Pattnaik, Nilamani Routray, Nandini Satpathy, Janaki Ballav Pattnaik who basked in the sunshine of his favour of learning and getting initiated into politics, later turned out to be Chief Ministers of Orissa. He led kindle light for a multitude in the field of education, literature, culture and politics. There is no exaggeration to adorn him with the epithet of unambiguous friend, philosopher guide in heterogeneous fields of life.



His organizational and superintending potentialities were beyond doubt none to second. His ingenuity was evident from the very beginning. He organized meeting and seminars in students' career at Bhadrak High School and Ravenshaw College in common and social life striking conciliation in Kanika Praja Andolan, management of Zilla Board, Salt Satyagraha at Inchudi in Balasore, Orissa Congress Organization and above all conduct of Orissa administration for a long spell as a Chief Minister, amalgamation of princely states in Orissa, founding the new Capital at Bhubaneswar, construction of Hirakud Dam inspite of confrontation of conflicting interests stand a testimony to his unquestioned efficiency. His fortitude, intellect tactics and courage was widely acclaimed for discharging the duty as Secretary General of Parliamentary Congress, the onerous Governors' duty in Bombay, management of Swaraj Ashram, Prajatantra Press, Editing Sahitya Patrika and different dailies.

He was a grand success in administration, organization for his pragmatic approach. He never persuade the will of the wisp; rather what would be practically feasible. He was a strong antagonist of impractical ideas and schemes.

In the prime of youth, he was exulting with intrepid frame of mind of dash on to implement the progressive and humanistic ideology of his own. His independent thoughts and cravings of philanthropy is clearly manifest in stories, poems, novels, dramas, essays of his writing. He was dead against social obscurantist concepts,

casteism, dowry system. He fervently advocated female education, awakening of women to their legitimate right. Whatever touched his mind as condign, he geared up for achievement what come may. He was determined to proceed with a steadfast mind and a sense of dedication. In spite of pre-occupation in politics and a host of activities he was whirled about in, he did not neglect his duty of writing for newspapers carrying historical research and creation of literature.

Mahatab has multi faceted dimensions in state craft, administration, service to people, protagonist of literature. His contributions for gaining independence, economic and social progress is unparallel and undisputable. In recognition of his virtues and connotation, the Utkal University decorated him with Honorary D. Litt. Degree in 1956. His statue was installed in the Central Hall of the Parliament in 1989. The State Library of Orissa, heterogeneous educational institutions and other organizations have been named after him. In words of Chakrabarty Rajgopalchari and Lady Mount Batten, Mahatab occupies a glorious and unforgettable place in the history of Orissa for his work for independence and progress of the nation in multifarious field. May time never come when the effulgence of his personality will be eclipsed and extinguished.

Dr. Narayan Panda, Principal Secretary, Seashore Sahitya Academy, 443, Saheed Nagar, Bhubaneswar.

The charity in life is more than all ceremonies. – Talmud