



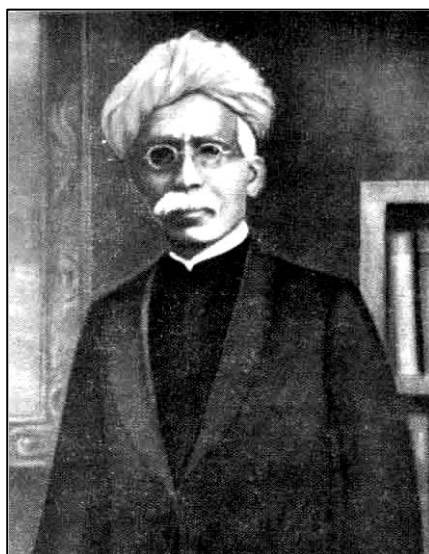
Madhusudan Das, The Pioneer of Industrial Revolution in Odisha

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The British rule became major cause of the growing poverty of the Odia people. The collapse of rural artisan industries was caused largely by competition with the cheaper imported machine goods from Britain. The cotton weaving and spinning industries were worst hit, silk and woollen textiles fared no better and a similar fate overtook the iron pottery, metals, oil-pressing and tanning. Consequently, the ruined handicraftmen and artisans failed to find alternative employment. The only choice open to them was to crowd into agriculture. The increasing pressure on agriculture was one of the major causes of the extreme poverty of Orissa under British rule. Furthermore age old method of cultivation, lack of irrigation facilities, over assessment of land revenue, fragmentation of land, rigid manner of the collection of revenue and exploitation of the peasants by the landlords and money lenders were mainly responsible for the prevalence of deep poverty among the peasantry of Orissa.¹

Madhusudan Das had already emerged by the beginning of the 20th Century, as the

indispensable leader of the Odias and was organising the Odia nationalism into a new form. His sympathy with the public cause and his pragmatic approach to many of the problems endeared him to the Odias who had already started addressing him as the 'Grand old man' at the age of 50.²



Madhusudan Das destined to occupy on very important place in the social, political and economic scene of Orissa for fifty long years. Madhusudan was born on 28 April 1848 at Satyabhamapur in Cuttack district in a respectable family. He was graduated from the college of London Missionary Society. After the completion of Law

Degree, he started his practice in Alipore Court of 24 Praganas. In 1881 he returned to Cuttack to start legal practice.³ Soon he was deeply involved in the socio-political life of Orissa.

On behalf of the Odias he forwarded following suggestions to the Government in shape of a representation when Sir Rivers Thomson visited Cuttack in 1885.⁴



1. Expansion of Railways.
2. The development of industrial training
3. Appointment of Odias in high posts.
4. Planning for agricultural development.
5. Amalgamation of Odia speaking areas.

In 1898 he advocated the opening of a co-operative society in a gathering of important persons of Cuttack.⁵

Mr. Madhusudan Das as a practical politician realized that without material prosperity politics has no significance. History told him that Odias built the great temples at Puri, Konark and Bhubaneswar at an incalculable cost with wealth brought from outside by the development of their industrial resources. The coastal districts of Orissa always subject to flood and drought which invariably bring famine in their company. The inland province of Orissa is hilly and mountainous. Therefore agriculture cannot and could not feed the millions of Odia mouths. Industry and specially the cottage industry had to be revived.

Madhusudan Das, the most ambitious man of Orissa started thinking deeply about the possibilities of the economic development in Orissa. In 1900 he advertised for the "Orissa Art wares" which he established with a view to expanding the cottage and the traditional small scale industries of Orissa.⁶ He realized that in order to keep pace with time and to prosper, it would be wise to take greater interest in industry. Madhusudan Das is more often remembered for his contribution to Orissa's industrialization. His achievements in this field were all the more spectacular since no conscious efforts had been made in this direction. Through the "Orissa Art wares" he first started making on a large scale the filigree works which are traditional handicrafts of Orissa. Various other cottage industries caught

his attention too and he helped them to develop on sounder footing. He exhorted the village weavers to come over to his workshop and receive better training in weaving.⁷ He presented filigree articles to many British officers in India and abroad. His art wares were highly admired by the top level British Officers like W.Weddenburn⁸, Charles Elliot⁹, I.E. Webster¹⁰, W. Lawrence¹¹, U.S. Club¹² and many others.

Besides Horn, Ivory and wood carving brass, aluminium and many other beautiful handicraft products were manufactured in his workshop. Madhusudan devoted himself for their improvement. He introduced new methods in remodelling the working structure and taught the workers to produce articles matching the modern taste. Horn articles were exported to Calcutta, Bombay and many other places. Varieties of fancy articles including paper cutters, sticks, combs, birds, toys and decorative articles were made out of horn.¹³ The comb factory could not become profitable as raw materials were not available plentifully in Orissa. It was disposed off subsequently.¹⁴

The long cherished Utkal Tannery was established by him near Cuttack Railway station over an area of forty acres of land. He was convinced of the importance of such a concern in view of the cheap export of huge quantities of raw leather to England and the subsequent selling of finished goods back in India at an exorbitant price.¹⁵ Skins of crocodiles, serpents, and lizards which were easily available in Orissa were collected for the shoe factory at his instance. He laid utmost importance on the quality of the shoes that were being produced at his factory. Products used to be very meticulously examined for defects and he was never prepared to compromise even with very minor imperfection. He had invested a very considerable amount of money out of his own



income and incurred large debts to make it operational.¹⁶

In the beginning the tannery had appreciable progress and its products had great demand in England and America.¹⁷ Due to his utmost emphasis to quality, the factory used to incur heavy losses at times. The entire concern was cent percent Swadeshi.¹⁸ Utkal Tannery used to be frequently visited by important personalities, all of whom were full of praise for it. Gopabandhu Das described this as a great deed.¹⁹ Mahatma Gandhi paid a special visit to the Utkal Tannery on 19 August 1925, while it was on the brink of ruin.²⁰ Utkal Tannery became a losing concern and could not be sustained for long. It almost closed down in 1927.

It may be worthwhile to quote Swami Bichitra Nanda Das in connection with Madhusudan Das contribution towards the industrialization of Orissa.

“He emphasized the usefulness of cottage industry, the formation of joint stock companies and co-operative industries as early as 1903 ... Really he lived much ahead of his time. He was 50 years ahead of his country men in Orissa, but people did not take up the spirit of industrial life and did not like to develop the particular national genius of their, but tried to seek jobs for making both ends meet. Even, so early in 1903 he introduced Charakha (spinning wheel) which was piled formerly in every household in Orissa. He helped and encouraged cotton cultivation to save the people from hard competition with west and to save the struggling weavers and cultivators in their hard competition with Manchester goods.²¹

Madhusudan was the patriot of patriots with rarest personality who sacrificed the whole of his life for the sake of his own nation.

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