



## Utkal Gourab Madhusudan Das

*Panchanan Agrawalla*

For many more generations to come Utkal Gourab Madhusudan will continue to occupy a place of profound veneration in the hearts of millions of people of Odisha and inspire them to patriotic works and social activities. For about half a century he continued to guide and influence the social and political life of the State. He sacrificed all his wealth for the cause of Odisha and her people. Born on 28<sup>th</sup> April, 1848 in a middle class Zamindar family in Satyabhamapur village of Cuttack district (Odisha) in an early period of British rule over this part of India, Madhusudan played a very notable historic role for the renaissance of the dismembered Orissa Province and her crippled literature, culture, arts and crafts.

Madhusudan belonged to the first generation of Indian nationalist struggle and belonged to the category of Dadabhai Naroji, Ranade and Rames Chandra Dutta. Like them his conception on the contemporary economic problems was crystal clear. He was aware of the aspect of the colonial rule and was worried about the draining away of India's resources. A keen student of history and an ardent admirer of Orissa's glorious heritage, Madhusudan was aware of the harmful effect of British economic policies upon flourishing cottage industries. Orissa was famous for gold and silver filigree works of gossamer delicacy. But inroad of machines had

jeopardized this artistic native craft. Madhusudan's nationalism immediately took interest in rescuing this glorious cottage industry of Orissa from ruin. Inside his own residential premises he set up a large factory in 1897 employing one hundred fifty craftsmen at his own expenses. The factory soon became famous as Orissa Art Wares and produced beautiful filigree works of extraordinary artistic excellence. Revival of an old native industry was not his only aim. He was eager to restore the craftsmen of Orissa to a state of economic prosperity. In 1902, on the occasion of John Wedderburn, the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal's visit to the Orissa Art Wares, Madhusudan urged upon the distinguished visitor to encourage the industry by giving liberal grants and to create an incentive among the workers by awarding prizes. Madhusudan often arranged industrial exhibitions to display the products of the Orissa Art Wares and sent large quantities of beautiful specimens as presentation to foreign dignitaries. The press was eloquent in praising the laudable efforts and felt amazed at the lavish investment made by Madhusudan.

Madhusudan was a great exponent of Swadeshi. Before the Indian National Congress came to think of the Swadeshi movement, he launched a movement in favour of indigenous goods. His Swadeshi programme included a



scientific study of the ancient and indigenous system of medicine. On the occasion of the Utkal Union Conference, he advocated the use of home spun cloth with a view to revive the ancient weaving industry in Orissa. He would himself turn up with *dhoti*, *chadar* and coat made of *khadi*. From the rostrum of the Conference he appealed for starting a *charakha* movement in Orissa. For such early initiative taken in revival of the indigenous spinning and weaving industries.

Madhusudan was requested by Gandhi for guidance- "You will of course teach me how to spread the message of the spinning wheel in Utkal (12.08.1925). During the course of his visit to Orissa in 1925." Gandhi came to the Utkal Tannery and being highly impressed with the undertaking, bestowed fulsome praise on Madhusudan for his admirable efforts. As a member of the Imperial Council (1913-1916) Madhusudan tried to impress upon the Government that the development of industries in the country was their obligation. Industrial development would lead to a general economic prosperity in the country. The decadent and wretched conditions of industries in India were due to the insulator influence of the British rule. In a voice ringing with bitterness he said; That is feeling of the weaver who has taken to plough, leaving his loom, that is feeling of the artisan whose hand stands paralyzed to day, that is feeling of the artisan's son who took to English education with a view to get employment as a clerk, but failed to secure such employment, and that is feeling of an old man( himself) who has associated intimately with artisan during the last quarter of a century and has noticed their struggle for existence( proceedings of Imperial Council (1914-15).

**Puri Jagannath temple case-** In 1885 the Raja of Puri Sri Dibyasingh Dev was

transported for life being convicted in a murder case. The then Government instituted a civil case against the Raja for taking over possession of the Puri Jagannath temple. The Dowager Rani Surjyamani Pattamahadei challenged this as the mother guardian of minor Raja Mukund Dev. Mr Madhusudan Das, though was a Christian, defended the Rani in this case for the protection and preservation of age old sanctity of the Puri Jagannath temple and the Raja of Puri who is held in great esteem by the entire Hindu world and who performs the most important work, the "Chhera Panhara (brooming of the Lord Jagannath Rath) before the beginning of Rath Yatra ceremony. The Rath Yatra ceremony of Lord Jagannath would have lost its sancity and historicity of Utkal connected with this ceremony would have been affected very much. The lower Court however gave the decree in favour of the Government. Therefore, the District Judge appointed a receiver to take over the possession and management of the temple. Mr. M.S.DAS went to Caclutta to consult the eminent Barristers of that time about this case. Three eminent Barristers Gurudas Banerji, Evans and Woodruff whom Mr Das showed the records advised him not to proceed further in that case as they saw no chance of the defendant's success in the High Court. Despite this disappointing advice Mr. Das did not lose his faith in God. He himself prepared the case briefings and printed the papers at his own cost and thereafter consulted some other Barristers who gave opinion. Then an appeal was filed in the High Court. A Division Bench which heard this case had set apart three days for appellants lawers to argue the case. On the day of hearing the Court room was packed to its capacity as the case had aroused all India interest. The Barristers of the Rani finished their arguments within three hours instead of three days. The Judges who heard the case were simply charmed



by the brief and effective style of the argument and thanked the Barristers in the open Court. The Barristers who were magnanimous persons and men of high character told the Court that the praise for this brief and argument was mainly due to Mr Das, a young lawyer from Cuttack. The Judges were much pleased with Mr. Das and invited him to an evening party where he was introduced to other judges and eminent persons of Calcutta. Immediately after that the Lt. Governor of Bengal invited him to the Government House for having compromise with the Rani over the Puri temple affair. In 1888 a deed of agreement between the Raja of Puri and the Government was made. Mr Das had won a great victory for the Jagannath temple and Puri Raja holding high traditional honour and dignity of the historic Temple of the Hindu world. Two other cases in which Mr Das had exposed the conspiracy and mischief of the local British officials were equally important.

Madhubabu was home tutor of Ashutosh Mukherji, who subsequently became Sir Ashutosh and most illustrious educationist of Bengal. Sir Ashutosh had life long respect and regard for Mr Das as Madhusudan gave free private tuition. Madhu Babu was also teacher of Shyamaprasad Mukherjee. SP Mukherjee was the founder of Bharatiya Jana Sangh. Madhusudan Das passed away on 4<sup>th</sup> feb 1934.

On 13th feb 1953 Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru gave speech at Cuttack "Madhusudan Das was a great man not only of Orissa but the whole India, I had been hearing his name for last fifty years. Though I had no opportunity to meet him directly yet I have seen him from a distance. He was a very great friend of my father. During this

period whenever the affairs of Orissa came up for discussion and consideration, the name Madhusudan absorbed all this and came in to prominence. You all know all that he had done for Orissa."

According to Dr. Rajendra Prasad, the first President of India — "I first met M.S. Das when I came to preside over the Bihar Students Conference which was held at Motihari in the year 1912. We travelled together on our own way to Champaran and conversation I had with him in the train and on the steamer left an indelible impression on my mind about his personality, intellectual depth, fearlessness and love and devotion to country. In a long life full of varied activity he was ever striving to serve the people and as he told me, although he ruined himself financially he never sent his hat round for the public help."

According to Dr. Harekrishna Mahtab— "Madhusudan was inspired by two cardinal virtues of Christianity-humility and forgiveness. Though a Christian, he believed in the essential equality of religions."

**Reference:**

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