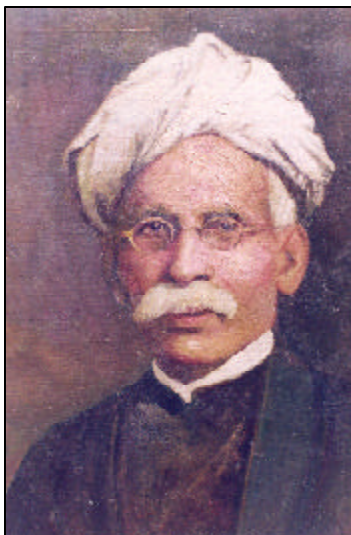


## Madhusudan Das - Precursor of the Co-operative Movement

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The celebrated Madhusudan Das, a domineering forerunner in the Indian renaissance and resurgence, the vanguard in the Swadeshi industrialisation, the prime mover and maker of the first linguistic state of Orissa and a hallowed mentor of Mahatma Gandhi, is also acclaimed as the pioneering torch bearer and the sagacious precursor of the co-operative movement. As a trend setter and harbinger of the movement, he organised the first multifacet co-operative enterprise of the country "The Cuttack Co-operative Store" as early as 1898, after completion of his highly rewarding memorable journey to European countries.



During the first phase of his continental tour, on reaching London in the month of May, 1897, Madhusudan was deeply struck by the amazing manners and highly evocative ways in which the giant co-operative enterprises and stores were running, by closely pursuing the cardinal and benign principles enunciated by the Rochdale pioneers. He was thrilled. A spirit of inquisitiveness had overpowered him. He soon visited Manchester, the headquarter of the

Central Wholesale Co-operative Store and was taken away by surprise, observing the proficient and dextrous ways of running the store with great deal of ingenuity and alacrity and at the same time holding the price line,

thus bringing the lasting improvements to the toiling masses. In fact, the Central Co-operative Wholesale Store with its wide ranging diverse activities, embracing the remote corners of the earth was practically laying down the comprehensive conceptual basis for "Co-operative Commonwealth". With an eye for unerring details, Madhusudan studied with an enterprising zeal about the intricacies and

subtleties of running the co-operative endeavours. At the same time he had the unique and much sought after privilege of directly interacting with Jacob George Holyoke, the towering and astounding international celebrity of the time.

During the concluding phase of his continental tour, he visited Germany, Italy, Belgium and other leading countries, where co-

operatives had held their unchallenged supreme sway in the sphere of Co-operative credit management applied to agricultural and industrial sectors and wherein co-operatives convulging through the deep recesses of the economy was setting up the immutable pattern of co-operative way of living. Madhusudan was exhilarated. A spirit of adventure had overpowered him.

After the highly exciting and enlivening tour he reached his home town Cuttack, the capital of the state of Orissa, during the last part of the year 1897. Infact during the entire sojourn of the continental tour, he was taken over by a spirit of wanderlust and at the same time was overpowered by an indomitable urge of spearheading and shaping the economy of Orissa on co-operative lines. The idea of co-operative commonwealth had its mooring in his visualisation. With a view to translate his innovative contemplations into a concrete reality, from the month of February, 1898 onwards, he invited in every weekend to his residence people from every walk of life. On these occasions he kept the audience enthralled and spellbound by narrating the enviable and heart rendering accounts of highly specialised and sophisticated co-operative enterprises functioning in the European countries. During these highly communicative deliberations, he visualised the organisation of a National Agricultural Co-operative Bank for Orissa, thus bringing agricultural pursuits, indigenous rural industries and highly remunerative diversified plantation farming under its preview where in co-operative would remain as the main structural pattern. The detailed blue print depicting his imaginative visions drawn up with a great deal of ingenuity is available for closer study. However, the nineteenth

century Orissa, steeped in deep ignorance was not prepared to take up such a gigantic leap. Ultimately he had made compromises and decided to launch a multi-faced co-operative with rural agricultural base and Swadeshi industrialisation in the forefront, in form of "The Cuttack Co-operative Store in which by safeguarding interest of the primary agriculturists and Swadeshi artisans, he would offer a remunerative price to their products through Cuttack Co-operative Store. Of course in this framework, the interest of the consumers would be reigning supreme. He further visualised advancing credit to the primary cultivators during the season of agricultural activities and would link up their products with marketing and selling operations run by "The Cuttack Co-operative Store".

The idea got spontaneous and instantaneous response from all the quarters. The Cuttack Co-operative Store came into existence on 11th June, 1898 with Madhusudan Das as the honorary secretary and Jankinath Bose, the father of Netajee Subash Chandra Bose as the treasurer. The print out copy of the notification in regard to the organisation of Cuttack Co-operative store as published in Utkal Dipika, the foremost weekly of the State on its 18th June, 1896 issue is reproduced below :

"At a public meeting held on 11th June 1898 at the residence of M.S. Das which meeting was attended by a large number of pleaders, Mooktars and amlahs. It was decided to start a co-operative store for the supply of articles of necessary consumption such as rice, dal, ghee, oil, cloth, firewood and etc. to the share holders and to the general public. The business is to be commenced with capital of Rs.10,000 shares of Rs.5/- each. The allotment

of share will be open till the 26th instant within which time all applications must be made to the Honorary Secretary, Madhusudan Das, Cuttack Chandi, Cuttack. The application must specify the number of shares wanted.

At least half the value of the shares allotted, must be paid on or before the 5th of July and the balance must be paid before the 5th of August next.

The following gentlemen have been appointed Director :

Babu Hari Charan Banarjee, pleader, Madhusudan Das, pleader, Janki Nath Bose, pleader, Banamali Das, Mooktar, Babu Raj Kishore Mohanty, Mooktar, Jadu Nandan Muzoomdar, Nazir, Collectorate, Babu Jagat Balhab Ghose Sherestadar, Judge's Courts, Moonshee Mohamed Ali, Translator, Judge Court, Babu Madhusudan Das was appointed Secretary and Babu Janki Nath Bose, Treasurer.

There will be meeting of share holders every six months.

M.S. Das  
Hony. Secretary

The response was spontaneous and instantaneous and by the end of October a sum of Rupees six thousand was collected towards share capital, out of the total authorised capital of Rupees ten thousand. Besides this the individual savings account were opened with the store to inculcate the habit of thrift among the members and regular deductions from the salary of the Government employees were ensured towards the raising of thrift deposit. In fact Madhusudan exhilarated the successful depositors, by rewarding gifts.

During this period Madhusudan published a statement in the Utkal Dipika on

2nd July, 1898 explaining in a convincing manner the salient features of co-operative store in the broader perspective by profusely citing the instances of his direct encounters with the different models of co-operatives functioning in the foreign countries.

With the functioning of the store the agricultural commodities were procured directly from the producers and the industrial goods were purchased from the Swadeshi industrial manufacturers. This had helped in checking the price line and making goods available at a comparatively cheaper rate. The store was doing brisk business.

Besides this, a section of the store being called "Udyog Samiti Bhandar" was set apart for selling the Swadeshi products including ornate textiles, embellished with highly imaginative designs and handicrafts embossed with intricate artistic motifs. Entire business of the store was conducted with a fervour of Swadeshi sentiment of soul stirring patriotism.

From the reports published in the Utkal Dipika, the store was earning on an average a profit of 25% in the first few years of its functioning. The Cuttack Co-operative Store was functioning successfully for a considerable length of time established a rare record of proficiency and dexterity in its business operations.

The spirit did not die down. Madhusudan had further visions to be fulfilled. Successful functioning of Cuttack Co-operative Store had created a deep and powerful impact and the air of the region was charged and heavily laden with the idea of co-operation.

Being propelled by the unquenchable flame of resolution, Madhusudan further propagated the idea of setting up of multifacet

agricultural Credit Co-operatives for effecting revolutionary breakthrough in the sphere of agriculture, and freeing of cultivators from the degrading, exploitative inflexities designed by the hard hearted money lenders. A spirit of optimism exuded. A new avenue was explored. By drawing inspirations from Madhusudan agriculture credit co-operative societies were set up at Charchika, Suvarnapur and Barput of the Banki region by the regional entrepreneurs, in the early part of the year 1903 thus blazing a new trail for emergence of co-operatives. A new chapter was opened. New leaves were turned out with the starting of new co-operative credit societies in Khurda and Puri regions during the later part of the year 1903 much before the enactment of co-operative Credit Societies Act, 1904.

Co-operation was firmly saddled in the land of Orissa. Practically as a visionary, Madhusudan was far ahead of the time. As a symbol of monolithic self assurance he was exerting a benign influence of hope and affirmation everywhere.

Madhusudan Das with bated breath was eagerly awaiting for the epoch making enactment of Co-operative Credit Society Act, 1904 and instantaneously welcomed it when it was promulgated on 25.03.1904. In an impassioned and resonant voice, Madhusudan from the dias of the momentous conference of the Utkal Sammilani held on 28.12.1904 said "By collective action and concerted drive, associated with the comprehensive planing and management, capital (including credit), introduction of improved use of well designed agricultural implements, we can bring about lasting and deeply stirring vital improvements in the sphere of agriculture. With this objective, multipurpose service oriented credit Co-

operative centres (Stores) should be established. In this manner, agriculturist released from the cruel and demeaning clutches of the unscrupulous money lenders would adopt varied form of the cultivation by acquiring sound and practical oriented knowledge imparted through agricultural classes". He further stressed that after ascertaining the deficiencies in the soil through conducting soil tests, required agricultural inputs including fertilisers would be applied, in order to ensure a remunerative and satisfying yield for the agriculturist.

Madhusudan Das while joining in the heroic efforts of unfolding a new age of prosperity through Co-operative enterprises he at the same time was deeply engrossed in attending a very pressing nationalist urge of supreme importance, which had overpowered and encaptured his sensitive mind. As a protest against the nefarious exploitative policies adopted by the British colonial rule, Madhusudan visualised a liberated India by spearheading and engulfing the entire country with the organisation of multitudes of Swadeshi industrial undertakings.

In fact as the torch bearer in the Swadeshi movement in the country, Madhusudan had established a chain indigenous industries under the banner of "Orissa Art Wares" from the year 1898-99 onwards and launched a determined and well organised campaign for committed use of country made goods.

Ultimately, as the vanguard and the path finder for the rehabilitation of the forlorn and dejected Dalitas in the economic front, Madhusudan started from the year 1905 the export oriented giant venture of "Utkal Tannery" in close association with subjugated untouchables. The Tannery was practically

running on Co-operative lines in which shares being held by the Dalit workers with the allotment of specific seats to them in the management of undertaking. During the first World War, Utkal tannery despatched consignments of shoes, which were worn by the British militia.

Mahatma Gandhi was overwhelmed on visiting the Utkal Tannery on 19.08.1925. He was spell bound and deeply moved in observing, how with a parental care of infallible affection Madhusudan was treating Dalita workers with filial bond of deep attachment tied among them. Paying glowing tributes to Madhusudan Das, Mahatma Gandhi said "Madhusudan Das had opened my eyes to the great crime against a part of humanity. He sought to make reparation by opening what might be called an educational tannery".

With a voice of dynamic and compelling, Mahatma Gandhi while addressing the momentous National Educational Conference on 20.10.1937 at Segoan stated that "the late Madhusudan Das was a lawyer but he was convinced that without the uses of our hands and legs, our brain would be atrophied and even it worked, it would be a home of satan. Tolstoy has taught the same lesson through many of his tales."

This was certainly a proverbial statement of historic importance, in which Mahatma Gandhi had paid glowing tributes to two of his most adored and revered mentors, who had exerted overpowering and deeply engrossing influence on his life.

Madhusudan was a militant champion of upholding the unalloyed democratic spirit in its magnificent display of splendid exposition. While piloting the monumental Local Self Government Bill on the floors of

the Bihar and Orissa Legislative Council in the year 1923 he introduced the most dynamic and radical provision of "Recall" in which a duly elected representative losing the solemn confidence so sincerely reposed on him by the electors would have to relinquish his long cherished duly acquired coveted seat. Madhusudan had never compromised with the fullest display of democratic spirit in its pristine purity and supreme magnificence.

Further delineating the sublime duties and responsibilities assigned to a duly elected representative of the democratic bodies including the co-operatives, Madhusudan told in a deep resonant and hypnotic voice in the Bihar and Orissa legislative Council on 27.07.1921 as follows :

"When a man comes in as a representative, first of all he has to govern himself. He must say to himself; my wish is nothing, my wants are nothing, my demands are nothing, first of all, all that is mine must be postponed to what belongs to my electors, my rights must yield to what is within the rights of those whom I represent."

Madhusudan also fought valiantly for liberation of the women and was instrumental in conferring the rights on women to practise in the law courts of India as the lawyers.

On the threshold of embarking upon newer stages of evolution of co-operatives, Madhusudan continued to be the main driving force and guiding angel. Under his sagacious benign influence, the Central Co-operative Financing Agency at Banki came into existence as early as in the year 1910, thus heralding an age of federal co-operatives steering the further course of action. The Swadeshi Industrial setup so diligently nurtured by Madhusudan, soon acquired the resplendent co-operative hue, thus



setting the pattern for industrial growth. In this manner the co-operative movement was catapulted to a speedier take of motion ensuring a phase of sustainable development.

During those days of conservatism and exploitation, Madhusudan in his entire illustrious career struggled tirelessly and relentlessly for conferring inalienable and absolute right of the land on the small tillers, so that they would be credit worthy and eligible for availing loans and other assistance from the co-operative organisations.

Born at the remote village of Satyabhamapur in the district of Cuttack on 28th April, 1848, Madhusudan lived a full epoch-making eventful life. After his long cherished dreams being fulfilled on attaining eighty sixth year of age, he left this world on 04.02.1934. Throughout his entire life he fought consistently and untiringly without respite to bring the dismembered Oriya people together and created the province of Orissa for them. As a life-long astute legislator in the imperial council and in the councils of Bengal and Bihar and Orissa he had a rare record of brilliant and outstanding performances. His outpouring of relentless biting criticisms against the British imperialism in this council had earned for him a reputation rarely achieved by his contemporaries. Madhusudan was appointed as a minister in the Bihar and Orissa Council under the Montford Reforms. He had the rare privilege of piloting the most progressive local Self Government Bill 'which had put powers in the local bodies to far greater extent than in England' (Sir. Henery Wheeler).

Pandit Nehru while paying his heart rendering homage has said "Madhusudan Das was not only leader of Orissa, rather he was a great Indian leader, who did many pioneering

works for the uplift of Indian social and economic conditions."

In the words of Sri Aurobindo, Madhusudan Das was a "highly spirited leader". Rajendra Prasad held him as a great "personality of intellectual depth marked with fearlessness and devotion to the country". According to Shyama Prasad Mukharjee "he was a mighty Indian nationalist first and every thing else afterwards."

Tested and tempered by the fire of knowledge and experience Madhusudan possessed a highly incisive and analytical mind in which pragmatic application of ideologies and concepts acquired top most priority in his plan of action.

As an infallible guide of the masses, as a co-operator of pioneering zeal and as the pathfinder in the Swadeshi Movement, Madhusudan had the rare record of outstanding performances. As a torch bearer in the field of co-operatives he had occupied an unrivalled position. In this year of centenary celebration of the co-operative movement, let us pay glowing tributes to Madhusudan Das and take a solemn pledge to dedicate ourselves for the noble cause of furtherance of the mission of the co-operation.

Let his glowing example of supreme sacrifice and self-effacing dedication in which he pursued the goal relentlessly continue to inspire and guide the countrymen for all times to come.

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