

The Making of the Province of Odisha

Surasinha Patnaik

“Orissa has had the distinction of many firsts to its credit. It was the first state in our country to have been created on the basis of language. It constituted the fruition of long cherished dream of our nationalist leaders for linguistic reorganization of states.

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New Delhi

K.R. Narayanan

President of India

(The message of K.R.Narayanan, Former President of India on the occasion of the Odisha Day, 2002)

This significant and proverbial message of K.R.Narayanan, the former President of India throws light on the most splendid achievements of the Odia people in its entire existence for last 500 years. Degeneration started and the mighty empire of Odisha started tumbling down and ultimately, Odisha lost its freedom in the year 1568 soon after the ignominious and treacherous defeat of the legendary King Mukunda Deb. The period followed an account of desperation, subjugation and exploitation. The illustrious Odia race had lost its identity and was practically on the verge of being erased out from the pages of history. During British rule in the 19th century, Odisha lay shattered and dismembered and the Odia speaking territories were placed as the forlorn and dejected appendages to the four provinces of Bengal, Madras, Central Province and Bihar.

The perilous femine of the year 1866 had practically removed one third of the population from the Odia mainland. Being placed in the valley

of despair, shadow and frustration, the Odia identity was crushed to the point of extinction and obliteration. But, the severe jolt of the heart rendering pathos of untold miserable accounts of privation and degradation of the devastating famine,aroused a sense of concern. A search for the identity of Odia race soon began in the form of agitation followed by spiraling unrests. By the year 1866 Odisha was the 12th southern most neglected Division of the gigantic Bengal Presidency. The total geographical area of Odisha Division consisting of the districts of Cuttack, Puri, Balasore and Angul covered an area of 9098 sq. miles whereas the total geographical area of wide spreading Bengal Presidency was 1,84,717 sq. miles. How insignificant was the size of Odisha division compared to the mighty Bengal Presidency. Being grappled with debilitating disabilities and stung by grievous wounds of maladministration, Odisha lay neglected in the administrative set up of Bengal Presidency. Practically out of the ashes of frustration, the

struggle for resurrection began from the year 1866, which continued unabated without respite covering nearly a period of 70 years and at last, the long cherished dream of the creation of the province of Odisha became a reality on 1st April 1936 being acknowledged and acclaimed as the first linguistic state in the entire country.

But, when we study the actual situation of linguistic scenario in the year 1936 we were taken aback by astonishment and surprise, when we comprehend stupendous and glorious achievement accomplished by the Odia people being placed numerically as the 9th linguistic group of people in number in the entire country. According to the figures of Census of 1931 the total number of Odia population came hardly around 1.11 crores. The eight top most language speaking people were as follows:

Hindi 41.41 crores, Bengali 5.34 crores, Telugu 2.63 crores, Maharastrian 2.08 crores, Tamil 2.04 crores, Punjabi 1.58 crores, Kannada 1.12 crores and Odia 1.11 crores.

Really we were astonished to find out that out of an infinitesimal beginning in the year 1866, Odisha acquired the status of the province in the year 1936. By the year 1895 Odisha was the tenth southern most division covering an area of 9098 sq. miles in the mighty Bengal Presidency which was covering an area of 1,33,597 sq. miles. The Odisha Division was constituted with four districts of Cuttack, Puri, Balasore and Angul covering an area of 9098 sq. miles as detailed below

Name of the District	Area in sq. miles
Cuttack	3633
Puri	2499
Balasore	2085
Angul	881
Total	9098

Besides these four districts, seventeen feudatory states were also attached to Odisha Division covering an area of 14,387 sq. miles with a population of 25,76,978. The seventeen feudatory states were; Athgarh, Baramba, Dhenkanal, Hindol, Khandpara, Narsingpur, Nayagarh, Nilgiri, Ranpur, Talcher, Tigiria, Baud, Daspalla, Keonjhar, Mayurbhanj, Athmallik, Pal Lahara.

Like a bolt from the blue, in the year 1896 Hindi was introduced in the Odia speaking district of Sambalpur as a part of Chattisgarh Division of Central Province in lieu of Odia as the court and administrative language. This created anguished frustrations among the people which had resulted in creation of agitative fervour in the entire Western Odisha. In the turbulent period of turmoil and agitation, the movement for the restoration of Odia language was championed by Dharanidhar Mishra and other stalwarts and duly steered by Madhusudan Das. The momentous eventful meeting of Madhusudan Das with Lord Curzon, the Viceroy of India during the third week of October 1900 at Simla brought deep and stirring changes in the map of Odisha. The Risley Circular issued by Lord Curzon on 3rd December 1903 contained a well conceived concrete proposal for the amalgamation of disjointed and vivisected Odia-speaking territories. As a part of implementation of this circular, the district of Sambalpur covering an area of 3724 sq. miles was merged with the Odisha Division and with this merger of Sambalpur the total geographic area of Odisha Division was increased by 13659 sq. miles with a population of nearly 12,25,593 as detailed below on the historic and red lettered day of 16th October. This brought a sigh of relief among the disgruntled Odia people.

Name of the feudatory states	Area in sq. miles	Population (Census 1911)
Kalahandi	3745	3,50,529
Patna	2399	2,77,748
Sonepur	906	1,69,877
Rairakhal	833	26,888
Bamra	1988	1,23,378
Gangpur	2492	2,38,896
Bonai	1296	38,2777
Total	13659	12,25,593

Against the loud voiced proclamations made in the Risley Circular propounding the amalgamation of dismembered and dissected Odia speaking territories under a single administrative control, the eagerly awaited solution to Odia problems was crushed down to the point of insignificance, when the Odisha Division with its infinitesimal size was tagged to the wide stretching Bihar in the year 1912 to make the composite province of Bihar-Odisha. Odisha was fifth southern most dejected division of the state was having geographical area of 12,822 sq. miles whereas the rest of the four divisions of Bihar namely Tirhut, Bhagalpur, Patna and Chottanagpur constituted an area of 42,360 sq. miles. The other provinces to which Odia speaking territories were tagged as the degrading appendages, were of gigantic proportions in size as detailed below.

Sl. No.	Name of the provinces	Area in sq. miles
1.	Central Province & Berar	99,970
2.	Madras	1,42,277
3.	Bengal	77,521
4.	Bihar	55,182

In these provinces, the voice of the minority group of Odia people was submerged and practically lost its relevance and propriety. Even in Bihar-Odisha province, the fate of the Odia people was doomed as the preponderant voice of the people were reduced to apartheid minority of insignificance.

As a gust of fresh air, Mahatma Gandhi appeared in the Indian political scene in the year 1920. A message was sent to Mahatma Gandhi by Madhusudan Das during the month of February 1920 through the top ranking Odia leader Brajasundar Das attracting his benign attention to the intricate problem of vivisection of Odia speaking territories and to the dismemberment of Odia people, forming infinitesimal minority in different states and a question was raised before him as to whether the modern India would be built on the ashes of the disintegrating mighty Odia race. Mahatma Gandhi soon responded by declaring his unequivocal decision regarding the formation of provinces on the linguistic basis. In spite of the bountiful sympathies showered and meaningful assurances made by Mahatma Gandhi, the remorseful apathetic attitudes shown by the other national leaders led to utter frustration and dismay among the Odia people.

Madhusudan Das had raised before the Butler Committee on 15.4.1928 at Bombay the issue of the amalgamation of Odia feudatory states of Saraikela and Kharswan lying in the remote corner of Chottanagpur region of Bihar-Odisha Province. As per the favourable recommendations of the Lothian Committee constituted for this purpose these two feudatory states were annexed to the Odisha Division in the year 1933 as detailed below.

Name of the feudatory states	Area in sq. miles (census 1931)	Population in lakhs
Saraikela	449	1.29
Kharswan	153	0.43
Total	602	1.72

In spite of the periodical recessions and setbacks, the struggle for the creation of the separate provinces of Odisha was fought with an unquenchable flame of resolution. A new hope was kindled with the setting up of Statutory Commission headed by John Simon. A wind of change was blowing vigorously. The struggle which was almost ground to a halt, soon acquired momentum when a delegation of Odia representatives deputed by Madhusudan Das welcomed Simon Commission at Patna railway station on 12.12.1928 and submitted the memorial on 14.12.1928. A new leaf was turned in the history of the making of the formation of province of Odisha. Soon the entire process was seized by the forces of change when the matter was taken up in right earnest in the First and Third Round Table Conferences at London, followed by serious deliberations in the Joint Parliamentary Committee meetings. Maharaja Krushna Chandra Gajapati, Raja Ramachandra Mardraj Deo, Bhubanananda das and others who actively participated in these proceedings did a praiseworthy and commendable job against the onslaught of series of the intricate problems looming large at different point of time. With a strong determination of unfaltering trust they sincerely resolved the formidable problems and fulfilled the mission. Ultimately the formation of the province of Odisha became a reality on 1st April 1936 with the amalgamation of following areas.

Name of the province	Area in sq. miles	Population
Madras (approx)	17,400	25,52,874
Central Province	1589	1,84,665
Bihar & Odisha	13,706	53,06,142
Total	32,695	80,43,681

The struggle for the formation of the province of Odisha continued nearly for 70 years without respite. The battle was fought with great deal of sagacity and fortitude against the fierce and biting opposition by the representatives of the neighbouring provinces. The creation of the province of Odisha as the first linguistic province in the entire country, aroused igniting aspirations and enduring sentiments among the other linguistic groups of people. In fact, during the last week of April 1938 a resolution was adopted in the Madras Legislative Assembly for creation of four new provinces of Andhra, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Kerala out of the old presidency of Madras. But the proposal met with a premature and untimely death when it was turned down by the British Parliament.

Soon after the independence of the country, a pattern was laid down for reorganization of the states on linguistic basis, as per the glorious tradition set by Odisha as the forerunner in the field. But the monumental history relating to the legendary creation of the province of Odisha has not yet been compiled. We are immensely grateful to the celebrated historians who had made initial ventures in this direction. But when we glaze through the pages of Utkal Dipika, Sambalpur Hitaisini, Asha (Weekly) and Sambad Vahika, we come across with vast amount of materials of references and information which have not yet formed the part of the Odishan history. This should be given rightful and justified place of recognition and acceptance in the annals

of the Odishan history. It is sincerely felt that the fully compiled exhaustive history of the making of the province of Odisha would continue to inspire the people of the country for centuries to come and infuse in them a strong patriotic feeling inspiring them for laying down their career for the cause of the country.

We would implore the Government of Odisha to draw out a well conceived comprehensive scheme for the compilation of all these materials from the journals of Utkal Dipika, Sambalpur Hiteisini, Asha (Weekly) and Sambad Vahika to prepare volumes of comprehensive history on the making of the Province of Odisha. Old copies of these journals are readily available in the Odisha State Archives and also in the library attached to Utkal Sahitya Samaj, Cuttack.

A country is known from the comprehensive accounts of its historical references. A well documented monumental history is certainly the proud possession of a nation.

APPENDIX

Sl. No	Name of the State	Area in sq. miles	Population (census 1911)
1.	Athagada	168	43784
2.	Athmallik	730	40753
3.	Bamra	1988	123378
4.	Baramba	134	38260
5.	Baud	1264	88250
6.	Bonai	1296	38277
7.	Daspalla	568	51987
8.	Dhenkanal	1463	273662
9.	Gangpur	2492	238896
10.	Hindol	312	47180
11.	Kalahandi	3745	350529

12.	Keonjhar	3096	285758
13.	Khandapara	244	69450
14.	Mayurbhanj	4243	610383
15.	Narasinghpur	199	39613
16.	Nayagarh	588	140799
17.	Nilgiri	278	66460
18.	Pal Lahara	452	22351
19.	Patna	2399	277748
20.	Rairakhol	833	26888
21.	Ranpur	203	46075
22.	Sonepur	906	169877
23.	Talcher	399	60432
24.	Tigiria	46	22628
25.	Saraikala	449	109794
26.	Kharaswan	153	38852
Total		28,648	39,45,209

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Surasinha Patnaik, Light House Square, Gopalpur 761002, Dist: Ganjam.