

## The Story of Vande Utkal Janani The National Song of Orissa

*Gurukalyan Mahapatra*

The famous song of Gurudev Rabindra Nath Tagore, '*Jana-gana-mana-adhinayaka Jaya-he....*' was at first adopted by the Constituent Assembly as the National Anthem of India on 24th of January in 1950 and '*Vande Mataram ...*' of poet Bankim Chandra Chatterjee was also selected as the National Song of India having equal honour.

But Tagore's National Anthem of India '*Jana-gana-mana-adhinayaka....*' was first sung on 27th December of 1911 at the Calcutta (now Kolkata) Session of the INC (Indian National Congress). The INC of course by that time was never a political party as to-day, but under its umbrella remained several political parties, who had been fighting for a common goal i.e. to liberate India from the foreign rule. Its impact was on Orissa also.

Besides, the movement for a separate province also gathered momentum in Orissa. The Utkal Sammilani (a federation of Oriyas) was leading this movement. This influenced the poet Laksmikanta Mohapatra, who was then young and energetic. He started writing Vande Utkal Janani (Glory to the Mother Utkal) and some other fiery songs with a patriotic motive. Well known national poet of Orissa Banchhanidhi Mohanty was also a good singer. He used to sing Laksmikanta's patriotic songs throughout Orissa and inspired everyone. Once Rabindra Nath Tagore wrote in one of his

essays i.e. "A Vision of India's History" that 'the history of India has been the history of a struggle between the mechanical spirit of conformity in social organization and the creative spirit of man which seeks freedom and love in self-expression' justifies Laksmikanta as a true patriotic poet. Laksmikanta later on was known as *Kantakavi* and all his patriotic songs were collected in a book titled '*Dunduvi*' which is out of print now, but all those songs have been compiled in the second part of the *Kanta Sahitya Mala* (Complete Works of *Kantakavi*, Part-II). However, out of all those patriotic songs of *Kantakavi* '*Vande Utkal Janani...*' seems to be more powerful and in all its stanzas, the glory as well as the speciality of Orissa have been portrayed which amaze everyone who listens the song.

When asked about the composing of such a powerful song, *Kantakavi's* both sons, Sri Nityananda and Sri Gour Chandra Mohapatra said that *Kantakavi* wrote this in quite a different situation being inspired by the God. The rhythm of Mother Orissa's natural beauty and charming surroundings really haunted his imagination. Nobody tried, but the State Government spontaneously accepted this song with alacrity to be its' national song which really excels all other patriotic songs of Orissa.

This song was first sung at the Utkal Sammilani's Conference at Balasore in 1912,

a few months after *Kavi Guru* Tagore's famous song '*Jana-gana-mana...*' was sung first. The '*Vande Mataram ...*' of Bankim Chandra of course, was sung much earlier i.e. in 1886 Session of INC (Indian National Congress). It is natural that *Kantakavi* Laksmikanta must have been influenced by these two patriotic songs of Tagore and Bankim Chandra, yet the Oriya song *Vande Utkal Janani* is quite original with its natural form and content and differs from these two songs in many ways. This song was used as a powerful weapon by the Utkal Sammilani to emancipate Orissa. In a meeting at Bhadrak, where the poet *Kantakavi* was feliciated, the then young leader of Orissa Harekrushna Mahtab admitted that the poet Laksmikanta's patriotic songs have inspired him a lot.

A well known writer Dr. Krushna Charan Behera a few years ago in a meeting at Cuttack told that *Kantakavi* Laksmikanta had written a similar patriotic song eulogising Mother India i.e. '*Vande Bharata Janani* (Glory to the Mother India) which has semblance with the *Vande Utkal Janani* and expressed concern that many do not know this.

It is learnt from history that when this song '*Vande Utkal Janani*' was first sung at Utkal Sammilani Conference at Balasore in 1912, the song had its spell-bound effect on the audience and surprised many dignitaries in the dias, including Utkalmani Pandit Gopabandhu Das, who was presiding over the Session. He was so much delighted that after he heard the entire song, he inquired about its writer. Then he called young Laksmikanta and embraced him and tears of joy came out of his eyes. The other dignitary in the dais, Utkal Gourab Madhusudan Das was also amazed to

hear this powerful song and spoke high of the poet.

In the past, Marathas, Mughals and Britishers ruled Orissa and its geographical boundaries changed from time to time accordingly. But one will find in this song *Vande Utkal Janani* that Orissa's natural beauty, God's bounty and boundaries remained unchanged. Orissa's high tradition of arts and crafts in the temples, culture or literature and the peaceful social living, all these things exist in this beautiful song which yet inspires and attracts everybody.

The State Government's decision to stand up to pay respect when the song is played has been praised, the full version of the song takes few more seconds than the National Anthem. The National Anthem *Jana-gana .....*'s full version is approximately 52 seconds and the '*Vande Utkal Janani*' may exceed to 62 or more. But there should not be any comparison nor a shorter version of the original Oriya National Song should be played. Orissa's National song '*Vande Utkal Janani*'s each line and stanza is important for us. These lines are so symmetrically arranged that under no circumstances the song can be shortened. Orissa's eminent persons including *Kantakavi*'s younger son and freedom fighter Sri Gour Chandra Mahapatra is not at all in favour of the shorter version of the song. However, *Kantakavi*'s family members are indebted to Late Biju Patnaik and also to the former Speaker of Orissa Legislative Assembly Sri Judhistir Dash, as this national song was made compulsory at the end of any Assembly Session during 90's.

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