



MADHUSUDHAN DAS: THE CATALYST OF MODERN ODISHA

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Abstract

The present work is a humble attempt to enumerate and highlight the pioneering work of Madhusudan Das in the three issues which mainly occupied his attention, Unification of Odia speaking areas, Liberation of Odia women and Economic progress of Odisha. Hence to justify his work here it is narrated that Madhusudan Das was the soaring character whose contribution to the making of modern Odisha is many sided. Possessed immense courage and fearless mind he practised what he believed. He devoted his entire life to the cause of Odisha's welfare. He worked hard all his life for the political, social, intellectual, economic regeneration and upliftment of Odisha.

Key Words: *Odia speaking areas, liberation, economic development, Odisha, political, upliftment.*



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Introduction:

“Madhusudan Das was a great man not only of Odisha but of the whole India. I have been hearing his name for the 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 Odisha came up for discussion and consideration, the name of Madhusudan absorbed all this and came into prominence”.

Jawaharlal Nehru.

Odisha remembers with deep gratitude and pays its rich tribute to makers of modern Odisha who made pioneering contribution in myriad fields. Notable among them are Utkalamani Pandit Gopabandhu Das, Maharaja Krushnachandra Gajapati Narayan Deo, Fakir Mohan Senapati, Pandit Nilakantha Das, Radhanath Ray and last but not least Madhusudhan Das. Their sincere endeavour ultimately paves the way for creation of separate state of Odisha on 1st April 1936.

Odisha formerly rendered Orissa is one of the thirty states of India located in the East of India. It is the ninth largest state by area and the eleventh largest population. Odia is the official and the most widely used spoken language. The ancient kingdom of Kalinga which was invaded by the Mauryan Emperor Asoka in 261 B.C. resulting in the bloody Kalinga war coincides with the modern day of Odisha. The modern state of Odisha was established on 1st April 1936, as a province in British India and consisted predominately of Odia speaking regions. But the Odia speaking regions lay dismembered in foreign Presidencies and outlying Provinces and numerous Feudatory States. Odisha had lost her identity. Her culture had been obliterated beyond identification.¹ At this critical juncture, Madhusudan arrived in the socio-politico-economic scene of Odisha, as a plentiful response of nature to the demanding requirements of the land. He came as a messiah for the thousands of his countrymen who were rolling in abject poverty, hunger and humiliation.² The sole objective of his life was the revival of Odisha into its former glory and unite the Odia speaking territories. He dreamt of the economic prosperity of his land, who had suffered enough from British exploitation and negligence.³

Madhusudan Das, the Grand Old Man of Odisha (*Kulabruddha*), popularly known as Mr. Das, Madhu Barrister, Utkal-Gourab, (*Glory of Odisha*) and Odisar Janaka (*Father of Odisha*) was born on 28 April, 1848 in an aristocratic *Karana* family of the village Satyabhampur of the Cuttack district. His father Choudhury Raghunath Das was a legal practitioner by profession.⁴ His mother Parvati Debi was an orthodox Hindu lady, a strong moralist with great vision and foresight who inculcate moral influence on Madhusudan. After completed his primary education in his own village, he passed matriculation from Cuttack Ravenshaw Collegiate School and left for Calcutta for higher education.⁵ He took his B.A. Degree from the Calcutta University in 1870. After his graduation he served as a teacher in high school.⁶ Leaving teachership and later on the post of a clerk from Balasore, again he went to Calcutta for higher studies. He completed his Master Degree (M.A.) and B.L. Degree from same University in 1873 and 1878

respectively.⁷ He was a man of scholarly attainment and had a fair knowledge of not only in Sanskrit but Persian as well and became the first Odia to be a lawyer. After the sad demise of his wife he returned to Odisha and became a distinguished legal practitioner at Cuttack. Besides his legal profession, he thought for the all round development of the people of Odisha.

After the above deep discussion about the great pioneer Madhusudan Das, here in the next paragraph we are addressing the matter with focusing on following objectives like

1. To highlight about his work in the light of unification of Odia speaking tracts through Utkal Sabha and Utkal Samilani.
2. To make an analysis regarding his vision about economic development of Odisha.
3. To deep study regarding his attempt to liberate the women of Odisha.

Formation of Utkal Sabha and Utkal Sammilani:

He was deeply moved and surprised to see the discrimination meted out against the Odias by administrative authority. He was convinced that the miserable plight of the Odias was only due to the apathetic and callous attitude of authorities towards the interest of the Odia people. The Odias could not stand united only because of their vivisection and annexation with three different provinces. So, he took a solid stand for the unification of the scattered Odias by organising and mobilising strong public opinion among the Odias and pressurised the British rulers for the unification of the scattered Odia speaking tracts for the socio- economic and cultural growth of the Odias at large.⁸The Odia speaking tracts remained under *Telgu, Hindi and Bengali* domination of the Madras Presidency in the South, Central Province in the West and Bengal Presidency in the North respectively. For this purpose, he and Gourisankar Ray made efforts to establish the *Utkal Sabha* in 1882 at cuttack .⁹ This is the organisation which later functioned as the branch of the Indian National Congress. It remained the nodal organisation to fight for the National Cause for many years. It also prepared the people of Odisha to participate in local self-government. The *Utkal Sabha* took up the problems of poverty and backwardness and Madhu Babu was happy to solve some of them. After working as Vice-President and President of Utkal Sabha, Madhusudan Das felt that Odisha will have to suffer until it was united. He had recognised early that Odisha, tied to the tail ends of three separate administrative divisions of three different Presidencies, speaking different languages had no hopes of redemption, until all the Odia speaking tracts were united under one administration and in a separate province of its

own. From this feeling came the urge to unite all Odias in a bigger platform. *Utkal Union Conference* or *Utkal Sammilani* was the fulfillment of this urge.¹⁰

Madhusudan organised *Utkal Union Conference* to form the channel for discussion and negotiations with the authorities to solve the problems and open avenues for a new era of unification and integration and played a piloting role in engineering the plans and programmes, pioneering the aims and objectives and championing the cause of the Odia movement. “*Utkal Sammilani*” came into existence in December 1903 with the extinction of “*Utkal Sabha*”, it spearheaded the movement of the unification of Odia speaking units under one administration with right earnestness, disciplined plans and programmes.¹¹ The unification of Odia speaking tracts like Sambalpur, Ganjam, Chhota Nagpur, some areas of Vizagapatnam and Midanpore with Odisha division, a long felt demand of the *Utkal Sabha*, was put forth before the British government.

The *Utkal Sammilani* met annually and grew into a national assembly of Odias under the personal care and guidance of Madhusudhan. He went from place to place to carry on propaganda for it. He spent money for this organization. He drew the Zamindars and Feudatory Chiefs like the Raja of Kanika *Rajendra Narayan Bhanj Deo* and *Maharaja Shri Rama Chandra Bhanjadeo* of Mayurbhanj into the organisation. In 1907 Madhusudan went to England to convince the British public about the necessity of the unification of the Odia speaking areas. Lord Curzon supported the cause of Odisha in the *House of Lords*, and Mac Cold Scot took up the cause of Odisha in the *House of Commons*. Consequently, Odisha was separated from Bengal and the province of Bihar and Odisha was formed in 1st April 1912. The formation of the province of Bihar and Odisha was an official recognition of the identity of Odisha.¹² The Odisha division comprised the districts of Sambalpur, Anugul, Balasore, Cuttack and Puri. After that Madhu Babu voiced the demand of the Odia people several times through *Utkala Samilani* but was very much unsuccessful in his mission. At last, Odisha as a separate province on the basis of language was created by the British Government in 1936 two years after his death.¹³

Economic Development and Madhu Babu:

He was a versatile genius and an ardent nationalist, outstanding legislator, widely acclaimed advocate, well known journalist but at the same time a great industrialist. His pioneering efforts in the industrial progress of Odisha played a significant role in shaping the economic prosperity

of Odisha. He thought that Odisha was rich in mineral resources, raw materials and manpower, but the people were very poor having lost their industrial activities. So for the economic prosperity of Odisha he devoted his time and invested his money and tried to bring economic independence of the odias.¹⁴

Odisha was famous for its traditional filigree work which was an exquisite art. Sambalpur was famous for its artistic textiles. Berhampur was famous for beautiful *Pata* products. But because of the defective economic policies of the government, the cottage industries and handicrafts of Odisha were slowly in a dying condition. Being determined to revive the glory of Odisha's arts, Madhusudan set up a large factory in 1897 known as *Odisha Art Ware* inside the compound of his house for production of indigenous art wares and arranged their sale in a large building adjacent to his house. A separate school of *Art Ware* was attached to the factory with hundred trainees who produced beautiful articles. He also provided training to one hundred fifty weavers from his factory for production of handloom fabrics. He devoted much of his time to improve the artistic skills keeping in mind the choice of foreign market. He introduced different types of hand operating machines for production of wares of different shapes and sizes. In order to popularise the Odishan artistic skills he presented filigree articles to many British Officers. He went abroad twice and presented his craft products to the notable dignitaries of Great Britain and Europeans in order to popularise the Odishan art. His art wares were highly cherished by high British officers like Charles Elliot, Maddox Lawrence and many others. When the Lt. Governor of Bengal, Sir John Woodburn visited the *Odishan Art Wares*, he was presented an address in Odia written on a *palm leaf*, creatively decorated and enclosed in a silver casket bearing the architecture of the Bhubaneswar temple in miniature form. Woodburn was highly delighted to see the craftsmanship of the artisans and Madhu Babu discussed with him the problems of the artisan class of Odisha.

In the *Odisha Art Wares* factory along with filigree work, horn ivory, wood carving, brass aluminum and many other beautiful handicraft products were manufactured. He introduced new methods of work structure and taught the workers to produce articles matching the modern taste of the people. Horn articles were exported to Calcutta, Bombay and too many other places and were highly appreciated.¹⁵ He introduced *the Charakha - the spinning wheel* and encouraged cotton cultivation for production of *Swadeshi* cloth. He brought the village weavers to his

workshop and imparted them better training in weaving. A type of cotton cloth prepared under his guidance was popularly known as *Madhu Babus Cloth* and people had great liking towards it.¹⁶ For the promotion of leather industry in Odisha, he established his famous shoes factory *Utkal Tannery* in 1905. This shoe making industry was set up at Cuttack near the railway station over an area of about forty acres of land. For establishment of this factory he had invested a considerable amount of money out of his own income. About one hundred fifty workers were employed in this tannery. Within a very short time the *Utkal Tannery* earned great reputation not only throughout India but also in abroad for its quality products. The process through which Madhu Babu examined the quality of the goods led to incur heavy loss at times and the factory was closed for that.¹⁷ Such was the endeavour of Madhu Babu for the industrialisation and economic regeneration of Odisha. He was the pride and glory of Odisha.¹⁸ In his memory Fakir Mohan has rightly said:



"Dhanya dhanya Madhusudan

Utkal Matara Jogya Nandana

Dela Utkalaku Nabajibana

Sikhaila Loke Jatibandana".

Education and Madhu Babu:

He played a stellar and conspicuous role in disseminating education in Odisha for which he had taken lot of pains. As the vice-chairman of the Cuttack District board and as a member of the legislative council, Madhusudan had tried to set up more schools not only in the coastal Odisha, but in the feudatory estates too. He was also took keen interest for the development of women's education. Under his care the only girls school in Odisha thrived when it was about to be closed in 1907. He made his adopted daughter *Sailabala* the head mistress of that school who had returned from England after receiving training in women education. The school as a premier educational institution of women education developed in Odisha and was named as *Sailabala Womens College* after the name of Madhu Babu's adopted daughter *Sailabala*.¹⁹ Another great venture of Madhusudhan Das became successful when women with law degree became eligible for practise. He was greatly responsible for spread of women's



education in Bihar and Odisha. *Shudhansubala Hazra* the sister of *Sailabala Das* was the first advocate in India. It was achievable only through Madhu Babu's efforts.

Apart from this he was also a writer and has written many famous articles and poems in both Odia and English language. The famous poems of Madhusudan Das are "*Jati Itihash*", "*Utkal Santan*", "*Jananira Ukti*" etc. Madhubabu had the rare distinction of becoming First Odia in a number of fields such as

- First Odia Graduate
- First Odia M.A.
- First Odia Law Graduate
- First Odia Advocate
- First Odia to visit Europe.
- First Odia to become a member of Provincial and vice regal Legislative Council.
- First Odia Minister.
- First Odia Minister to resign for not taking salary meant for Ministers.²⁰

Conclusion:

For the eradication of the plights of the Odia people, he really thought from the core of his heart. His sole object was all round development of Odisha. He did not like that Odia people should be looked down upon by others. He spent all his earnings for the common cause and died as a pauper. In the last part of his life he had to declare himself insolvent. He died on February 4, 1934. As an elder statesman, a learned man, matured politician, social worker, champion of female education, promoter of cottage and small scale industries, economic reformer he was in every sense the pride of Odisha. His heart was always full of love and sympathy for the poor and distressed. He earned like a prince and spent like a prince. He really found delight in helping others. He is unquestionably the towering personality that Odisha has ever produced. His immense contribution towards the State and Nation would be admired forever and he will continue to remain as a source of motivation for the younger generations. Till today, he is loved, liked, adored, admired and respected in the memory legions of Odias. He is rightly called the maker of new Odisha. For this, generations of her people will cherish his name with reverence and affection. Posterity will cherish and even accolade the incredible feet accomplished by this benign soul.

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