

Gopabandhu Das

Gopabandhu Dash (Odia: ଗୋପାବନ୍ଧୁ ଦାଶ) (1877–1928) known as Utkalamani (Gem of Odisha) was a social worker who excelled in the field of politics as well as literature.

Early life : The revolutionary student

Born on 9 October 1877 to Swarnamayee Devi and Shree Daitari Dash in Suando Village, near Puri, Odisha, Gopabandhu was a legend in the Indian culture. He served his people even at the cost of his family. At the age of twelve, he married Aпти, but continued his education. After completion of primary education, he joined Puri Zilla School in 1893, where he met his teacher Mukhtiar Ramachandra Dash, who was not only a genius but also a nationalist.

It was at this school and with this teacher that Gopabandhu learned many nationalistic values. The inadequate response of authorities for the victims of cholera prompted him to start a voluntary corps Puri Seva Samiti. This movement later led to establishment of a separate hospital for cholera patients at Puri, and made Gopabandhu's name in society.



Literary Excellence and Social Movements

As a student Gopabandhu's literary fervor was excellent. During those days the Odia literary world was divided between the ancient, *The Indradhanu* and the modernists, *The Bijuli*. Gopabandhu realized that a nation as well as its literature lives by their tradition. He believed that a national superstructure of the present can endure only if it is based upon the solid foundations of the national heritage. His satirical poem in *The Indradhanu* led to an ugly incident and punishment meted out by the Inspector of schools. Gopabandhu refused to apologize for such writing in lieu of punishment.

He attended Ravenshaw College, Cuttack despite his father's recent death. During this period, he started *Kartavya Bodhini Samiti* (Duty Awakening Society) to encourage his friends to do their duty as citizens and take on social, economic and political problems. He was leading a team to aid flood victims, when he heard of his son's serious illness but remained to serve the locals rather than return home to his son. His social services as a young man prevented this brilliant student from completing his undergraduate degree, although he later earned his BL, LLB with distinction at Calcutta University.

In Kolkata, he started a labor union and set up night schools for Odia laborers and cooks. He came in contact with the *Vande Mataram* group which infused him with the Swadeshi spirit. His new mission was to reform society through improving the educational system. His wife died when he was only twenty-eight, and his three sons had already died. He left his daughters with his elder brother, and gave his brother his share of the family property in the village to support them.

Educational Reforms

After coming back from Kolkata, he worked as a government lawyer in Mayurbhanj court. Law did not interest him, so he gave up his practice and worked for the welfare of the people. He believed that only education can improve and develop society so in August 1909, he established a school in *Satyabadi Bana Vidyalay*, near Puri. The objective of the institution was to spread idealism, patriotism, nationalism and intellectual pursuits among its students in a Gurukul environment. This experiment was opposed by orthodox Brahmins, who did not wish their children consorting with children of other castes, but the school remained. Gopabandhu Dash was instrumental in developing the education and society of Odisha. In 1921 this school was renamed *National School*. Several other individuals started similar institutions. His initiative in inviting public saw a remarkable transformation in Ravenshaw College, which was under financial crisis. Because of his affection for Indian culture, he established a Sanskrit college at the holy city of Puri.

Professional career

Pandit Gopabandhu Das arrived at his first job as a teacher in Nilagiri but afterward he left the assignment to become a lawyer. Graduating in law from Calcutta University, he set up his practice at his home district of Puri. Later he moved to the High court in Cuttack. During this period he was also appointed as a Government lawyer in Mayurbhanj court. After had a consummate legal practice Pundit Gopabandhu Das decided to quit the profession for social work and mass education. He strongly believed that education had a huge role to play for the

upliftment of the society. In his mission to work for a better society and welfare of the common masses he established a school at a place called Satyabadi in 1909. This effort of Pundit Gopabandhu Das played a key role to improve the education and social welfare of Odisha. Hugely motivated by the positive response he received from the people of Odisha the school was converted into a high school the following year. The school secured affiliation from the Calcutta University and for the first time matriculation exam was held in the year of 1914. The school further secured an affiliation from Patna University in 1917. Due to soaring success the school was converted to a National school in the year 1921. Unfortunately the school was closed in 1927. Though the school was restarted a few years after it failed to emulate its hoary past. Pundit Gopabandhu Das was a member of Utkal Samilani from 1903 to 1921 for which he was elected President in the year of 1919. Pundit Gopabandhu Das was truly versatile personality. He was an eminent writer and poet. Some of his poems like "Ma Ra Kabita ", "Dharmapada", "Bandi Ra Atma Katha" are testimony of his evident skills of a great poet. Pundit Gopabandhu Das had a miserable family life. He lost both of his parents in his childhood days. Pundit Gopabandhu Das who completed his education as an orphan went on to lose his wife son and younger brother when he was a young man. Even after so many personal setbacks we have to salute the spirit of this great man to work with complete dedication to ensure that poor people of Odisha lead a better life. He was certainly shining gem for state of Odisha and a great son of the state.

Political career

Gopabandhu's political exposure began with Utkala Sammilani in 1903, but he persuaded others to merge this with the National Congress to make the Odia movement a part of the Indian National Movement. Thus he became the founder president of Congress in Odisha. He was imprisoned several times for participating in the freedom movement. He quit Congress, disillusioned by the infighting among the leaders in their search for power and returned to serving the people directly. Then he became the national vice president of *Lok Sevak Mandal* till his death.

He was an active sentinel of Odia Movement, freedom fighter and a great social reformer. As an educationist he was responsible for establishment of Satyabadi School at Satyabadi in the Puri District. Imbued with patriotic fervour the students of Satyabadi School were known as indefatigable fighters against British Imperialism. Gopabandhu regarded politics as an instrument of service to the people. In the words of Mahatma Gandhi, Gopabandhu was one of the Noblest Sons of Odisha. His spirit of service and sacrifice finds an apt echo in his following

lines. "Let my body mingle in the dust of my motherland and let my countrymen walk across it; and let my flesh and bones fill in the potholes of my country's self-independence "

Influence on Gandhiji

Gopabandhu's simple living style often influenced others and made the people come closer to him. He used to wear a dhoti only. Once after completion of a state level meeting of Congress workers Gandhiji & Gopabandhu were sitting together for lunch along with other workers. Special arrangements were made for both of them to sit on a table as per congress tradition. But Gopabandhu opted to sit with others on the ground. When different items were served, Gandhiji wanted special items made only for him to be shared with Gopabandhu also. But in return Gopabandhu replied, he can take only those items that are prepared for all. He then advised Gandhiji to take steps to make Congress a party of upper & middle class people to a party of mass including the poor. After which Gandhiji started wearing dhoti so as to come closer to the poor. Gopabandhu's heart was always eager to listen to the poor. One day after visiting a flood hit area he was taking food along with others, when a poor hungry man was crying outside the house for food. All were tired. So were joking among each other to avoid pain. It was he who could listen the cry amidst so much disturbances. He hurriedly went to the poor man, called him inside and shared his food.

Contribution to Journalism

He was instrumental in making Odia journalism suitable for the common man. He published a monthly magazine called Satyabadi in 1914. Later on 4 October 1919, the auspicious day of *Vijayadsahami* he started the weekly newspaper *The Samaj*, which became the most popular daily news paper of Odisha. He served as editor "Samaj" continuously until his death. Later he donated *The Samaja* to *Lok Sevak Mandal* after his death. Handed over to the Lok Sevak Mandal, New Delhi through the will of Pandit Gopabandhu Das, the Samaja is today managed by Servants of the People Society. About 80 percent of the net profit of The Samaja is spent for the welfare activities of the people of Odisha by way of extending stipend to students in need, aiding patients and victims of natural calamities and through miscellaneous charities and donations. A large sum goes to the Gopabandhu Institute of Medical Science and Research at Athgarh, Odisha. Gopabandhu was a nationalistic warrior by heart. He wrote many poems & novels encouraging the younger generation to serve for national integration. He once said, "*Pachha ghuncha nahin veerara jatake, na mare se kebe parana atanke*", meaning a yodha never flees, nor fears death. While in Hazaribagh Jail from 1922–1924, he wrote a heart touching novel called "Bandira Atmakatha" (The Biography of a Prisoner) expressing his love for people of Odisha. There he has written "Misu mora deha e desha matire, desabasi chali jaantu

pethire | desara swarajya pathe jete gada, misu tahin padi mora mansa hada||” (“Let my body mingle in the dust of my motherland and let my countrymen walk across it; and let my flesh and bones fill in the potholes of my country's self-independence) whose meaning is, let my body merge in the soil of the nation and help my countrymen walk on me, let each hole in the path of development of the nation be filled with my flesh & bone.

Death

Gopabandhu fell ill while attending a fund raiser ceremony in Lahore for the flood victims of Odisha, of which he never recovered. He died of prolonged illness on 17 June 1928. But his sacrifice still ignites many hearts to dedicate their soul & body for the nation.