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## Role of Chandrasekhar Behera in the Utkal Union Conference

Jagannath Khilar

\*Research Scholar, F.M.University, Balasore

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The freedom movement of Orissa in parallel with the freedom struggle of India was an epoch making event in the annals of Indian history. With the entry of Mahatma Gandhi into the political mainstream of India, the freedom struggle got a new twist and turn. Too, the people of Orissa did not lag behind. Gandhiji's visit to Orissa and his subsequent address in Balasore, Cuttack, Berhampur etc. injected new vim and vitality into the nerves of Orissa people. Different schools of thought from revolutionary to Gandhian, from liberals to radicals, from landlord to peasants, from capitalists to workers and all deeply embroiled with the spirit of Nationalism, develop the passion for sacrifice in their mind and determined to give a severe blow to the supremacy and hegemony of the British on this soil. The sole aim of all the leaders was to attain the goal of 'swaraj' and free India from the clutches of the colonial rule. The ideas and ideologies that inspired them became the incessant source of inspiration to strive their effort for enriching the goal of freedom. In this backdrop, Sri Chandrasekhar Behera was one of the illustrious son of Western Orissa who started his career from a humble begging and by dint of his sheer merit, benevolence and philanthropic work, he proved himself as a distinguish leader, profound social worker, a brilliant teacher, a successful municipal commissioner, a veteran freedom fighter and an ardent nationalist who evolved round in the horizon of Western Orissa by his capacity and sagacity. Western Orissa was fortunate to have such a luminous star who fought for the entire life for poor, downtrodden, destitute and tried his level best to raise the dignity and honour of Orissa to the dizzy height. His role in the *Utkal Union Conference* created several milestones for the future posterity and he earned laurels, honour, prestige and dignity for himself. Here is an elucidation of such immortal noble deed.

On 20 May 1873, Thursday at 9 AM, Sri Chandrasekhar Behera adorned the lap of his mother Pratimadevi and father Sri Padnanava Behera in the village of Dhankauda in a good noble Brahmin family. He was the eighth child of his parents. With this birth, the village Dhankauda got her illustrious son. On the 21st day of the birth of the child a 'Namakaran' ceremony was observed in the family and the child was given the name of Chandrasekhar, Etymologically, the name is an epithet of the lord Shiva, who holds 'moon' (Chandra) on his head. The astrologer who prepared the horoscope recorded that the child would be a gifted one and earn laurels not only for his family but also for the entire society. The prophecy became true when Chandrasekhar grew in age.

With the gradual march of time a lot of changes took place in the life of Sri Chandrasekhar Behera. As his uncle Sri Bhagirathi Behera and his aunty Smt. Ahalya Behera had no child, they adopted him as their son at the age of five. He was shifted from Dhankauda to Jhaduapada village and looked after by the foster parents. His new mother Ahalyadevi was an affectionate and caring mother. Her life of immaculate purity and devotion registered a deep impact in the heart of Chandrasekhar. She showered the uninterrupted love towards the young boy. Though, Ahalyadevi was not highly educated, yet she inculcated the value of true humanism and service to the mankind in the mind of Chandrasekhar which was respected in his life when he grew in age. The adoptive Parents took every possible step to bring up the child as a man of character and gave all possible amenities for his physical, mental and spiritual development.

After completing his education, Chandrasekhar passed the vicissitude of his life. In the early career of his profession he was a teacher and became the harbinger and precursor of high cultural, ethical and moral values. Then he became a clerk in Nagpur Secretariat under the British Government. But having an independent mentality, he left the Job and became an advocate in the Sambalpur court. During that period, his dormant passion of nationalism became active and he jumped into the mainstream of national politics and became the Champion of the freedom struggle of Western Orissa.

Chandrasekhar had great love for the Oriya people and when the chief Commissioner as Control province Sir John Woodburn in his resolution No. 237 dated 15 January 1895 proposed the substitution as 'Hindi' in Place as 'Oriya' language for the police and the court work of Sambalpur, he along with other leaders strongly opposed it. When Chandrasekhar Behera was working in the Nagpur secretariat, the non-Oriya people were making frantic effort to replace 'Oriya' language in the office of Sambalpur District. Sri Behera got the scent of the sinister design and immediately conveyed it to satyabadi Padhi, the sub-magistrate of Bargarh, Sri Dharanidhar Mishra of Sambalpur in 1897 and others. A Panic and alarm spread among Odia people in Sambalpur district and they took up the cause and were determined to fight for this issue till to the last. Chandrasekhar returned to Sambalpur & accelerated the language agitation along with other leaders. This news was published in *Sambalpur Hiteishini* and created a great consternation among the Oriya loving people. The news published in *Utkal Deepika* from Cuttack on 11 May 1895 revealed that there was a meeting of *Utkal Sabha* on 3 May 1895 under the presidentship of Utkal Gourav Madhusudan Das. In his presidential address Madhubabu strongly condemned the official memorandum of Sir John Woodburn and said that the order, of the chief commissioner was completely faulty, unjustified and it should be withdrawn immediately.

Frequent protest meetings were held in Sambalpur. Dharanidhar Pradhan, Chandrasekhar Behera, Somanath Babu, Sripati Mishra and a host of others were the pioneer in the movement. One of the protest meeting held in the premises of Brahmapura temple, Sambalpur, Sri Chandrasekhar Behera addressed the assembled people with his fiery speech and vociferously condemned the action taken by the chief commissioner and urged the people to remain united till the solution of the problem.

Sri Behera was the unparalleled leader in the language agitation movement. In order to draw the attention and get the support from the other leaders of Orissa, he participated the first session of *Utkal Union conference (Utkal Sammilani)* held at cuttack on 30 and 31 December 1903. In this session, he addressed the people, highlighting the inconvenience and troubles faced by the people of Sambalpur due to the change of official language from 'Oriya' to 'Hindi', In his thunderous voice, he exhorted the leaders to remain united and work for the union of all Oriya-speaking people and form a separate '*Utkal Province*'.

The second session of *Utkal Union conference* was again held at Cuttack on 28 and 29 December 1904, under the chairmanship of Madan Mohan Singhdeo, the Raja of Dharakote. The session passed a number of resolution, expressing a deep sense of gratitude towards lord Curzon , the viceroy of India who showed interest for the amalgamation of Oriya speaking people into Orissa Division. In this session, Chandrasekhar praised Sir Andrew Fraser the chief commissioner of central province who had taken bold steps for the merger of Sambalpur district into the Orissa Division. Chandrasekhar also supported the initiative for the development of Oriya literature, agricultural and social reforms.

On 13 and 14 April 1906, the third session of *Utkal Union Conference* was held at Balasore. The Chairman of the session was Kishore Chandra Singhdeo, the Raja of Talcher. The Participation of Chandrasekhar Behera in this session was not clear. In the fourth session of *Utkal Union Conference* was held on 26 and 27 December 1906 at Berhampur in Ganjam district. The Chairman of the conference was Sri Rajendra Narayan Bhanjdeo, the Raja of Kanika. Only one delegates from Samblapur attended in this conference.

The fifth session of *Utkal Union Conference* was held at Puri on 18 and 19 April 1908. Chandrachudamani Harichandan Jagaddeba, the Raja of Surangi presided the meeting. Five thousand people attended the session. Chandrasekhar Behera and several delegates came from Sambalpur to join in the session. Chandrasekhar Behera in his address praised Madhusudan Das for putting the demand of Oriyas before the English authorities in England. He also strongly supported the reservation of Oriya Students in Roorki and Shivapur Engineering colleges, development of education for the down-trodden and poor, improvement of the existing famine in Orissa at that time.

Sri Behera was deeply embroiled with the *Utkal Union Conference* and attended several sessions. His fiery speech in various *Utkal Union Conference* arose the dormant nationalism and injected new vim and vitality into the nerves of Oriya people. His role in the eleventh session of *Utkal Union Conference* was commendable. He played the role as a chief organizer and worked sincerely and tirelessly to make the conference successful. The eleventh session of the conference was held in his home town Sambalpur on 27 and 28 December 1915 under the Chairmanship of Laxminarayan Singhdeo the Raja of Kera In Singbhum district. The session demanded the representation of Oriya people in Imperial Legislative Council. It also gave

stress for the establishment of Universities for the Oriyas and introduction of Oriya language in the schools of Orissa.

Chandrasekhar's organizational ability, flamboyance, skills and intelligence attracted the attention of others. He was the cynosure for all. It was for this reason; the leaders of coastal belt chose a leader of western Orissa, who was devoid of any self-propaganda, to become the president of 15<sup>th</sup> session of 'Utkal Union Conference', which was held at Puri from 26.12.1919 to 27.12.1919. At that time Puri district was in the grip of famine. So famine had its impact on the Proceedings of the Sammilani. Pictures of emaciated famine-stricken people were displayed at the entrance gate of the meeting. Some famine stricken skeletal people were brought to the conference to project the severity of the famine. Gopabandhu Das delivered a heart touching speech on the suffering of people, caused by the famine. The meeting adopted a unanimous resolution, asking the government to appoint a committee of officials and non-officials to investigate into the causes of the famine.

Several issues pertaining to the interest of Orissa were discussed. The amalgamation of Oriya People into the Orissa division, development of Oriya language, development of agriculture, industry, trade and commerce and Orissa question in Montfort report were discussed. The session passed a resolution, requesting Sachidananda Sinha and Rajendra Narayan Bhanjdeo to raise the amalgamation question in the Imperial Legislative Council.

The session of the Utkal Union conference was significant when Sri Chandrasekhar Behera, in his presidential address advised the leaders of the conference to work with close collaboration with the Indian National Congress and raise the problems of Oriya people in national level. In his address Sri Behera exhibited his intellectual caliber, explained lucidly and touched every aspects of social, political and economic life of Orissa people. An extract of such address is cited here. He said:-

The 'Utkal Sammilani' was a unique organisation of the Oriya people which work for the union, cohesion and upliftment of the Oriya people. He very humbly and with a folding hand thanked the leaders who have selected him as the president of the the 15<sup>th</sup> session of the *Utkal Sammilani*. He also never forgot to give commendation to those who worked selflessly and dedicatedly to restore Odia language in the office and courts of Sambalpur and struggled hard to bring Sambalpur from the Central Province and merged it into Orissa Division. He had no ego or pride in his mind. Though, he was a good orator, yet he politely said that he is not well in his speaking style. It reflects his honesty, simplicity and humbleness.

Before speaking something about the session, he expressed his happiness for the end of World War I. India was a part and parcel of British imperialism and the involvement of the British in the world war had definitely affected the life and the property. India had many problems. We would not able to solve our food, dress and shelter problems till now. Orissa is not an exception. He expressed that the vast land mass stretching from the river Subarnarekha in the North to Godavari river in the South and Dandakaranya in the west to the vast Bay of Bengal in the East is the living place of the Odishan people. With gradual march of time, many people from different casts, creed, religion and culture have come to Orissa, settled and merged with local people. So all the people live in this territory and share the feeling like good and bad, happy and sorrow are

called Odia and the land of Odia is called Orissa or *Utkal*. The great architecture and monuments that we see in the temple of Jagannath, Lingaraj, Konark and other temples in Bhubaneswar bear the solid testimony of developed Orissa art and culture. Further the feeling of universal brotherhood, and the tendency to see the whole world as their family (*Vasudhaivakutumbakam*) by the people of Odisha attracted others to come here and settled in this soil.

He highlighted the aims and objectives of *Utkal Sammilani*. He said Utkal Sammilani is working strenuously to inject the spirit of nationalism and national awakening in the hearts of one crore Odia people and ultimately become able to bring back the lost territory and the splendour of the people. It also work for the development of education and improvement of the socio-political condition of the people. He also delivered in his speech about the condition of Orissa, self-reliance of the people, Odia as a regional language, spread and improvement of Odia language, amalgamation of Odia people to Orissa, development of industry, trade, and agriculture, administrative reforms, spread of women education, contribution of Odia people in the freedom movement of India, social reforms and eradication of social evils from the society, famine, epidemics and other natural calamities faced by Odia people etc. His eloquence and firm resolution went deep into the hearts of the people. They were inspired and plunged themselves into the mainstream of national movement.

In the concluding remarks he said, '*Utkal Sammilani*' is not the congregation of kings, emperors, rich and wise men but it is an organization of all the people of Orissa irrespective of castes, creed, sex, colour, religion etc. In this organization there is no discrimination between rich and poor, between higher caste and lower caste, between the kings and their subjects, between literate and illiterate etc. In it all have equal respect and dignity. We, all, should work with the spirit of universal brotherhood for the development and bring together all the Oriya speaking tracts of the country, scattered over Bengal, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh (Central Province), and Madras Province into one composite state of Orissa. By re-calling our past history, he said, our forefathers were warriors and they had achieved laurels after laurels and created several milestones for future generations. We are the descendants of such heroes and can fulfill our aspiration and reach our destination if we will work dedicatedly and unitedly through the '*Utkal Sammilani*'.

In September 1920, the special session of Indian National Congress held at Calcutta, adopted Mahatma Gandhiji's idea of non-cooperation. Gandhiji's policy was unanimously adopted in the Nagpur session of the congress in December 1920. Utkalmani Gopabandhu Das, Harekrushna Mohatab, Jagabandhu Singh, Chandrasekhar Behera and other delegates attended the Nagpur Session. They returned from Nagpur to attend the 16<sup>th</sup> session of *Utkal Sammilani* at Chakradhapur. Though Jagabandhu Singh presided the meeting of the Sammilani, yet Gopabandhu Das hijacked the attention of all. In his address, Gopabandhu Das made it clear that the aims and objectives of Indian National Congress be accepted as those of *Utkal Sammilani* in addition to the accepted objectives at the Sammilani. After Gopabandhu Das, Chandrasekhar Behera addressed the people. He seconded and strongly supported the proposal of Gopabandhu Das.



Chandrasekhar in his speech motivated the people and said that it was the right time for the Sammilani to increase the scope of the work and march forward in collaboration with the objectives of Indian National Congress. Finally the resolution was passed by a overwhelming majority with applause.

After the Chakradhapur session of *Utkal Union conference*, it was the Congress, not the *Utkal Union conference*, dominated the Public life of Orissa. People who adopted the congress ideology and programme withdrew from the *Utkal Union conference* and tried to work simultaneously for the cause of Indian nationalism and amalgamation of Oriya tracts through the Congress. Hereafter, *Utkal Union Conference* failed to hold its regular annual conference.

Thus to conclude, Sri Chandrasekhar Behera was really a true son of the soil of Sambalpur. Though, his worthy hands touched almost all aspects of social, cultural and political life, yet his role in the *Utkal Union conference* was unique. His organizational skills, dynamism, inspiring speech and constructive suggestions in various *Utkal Union Conference* definitely galvanize the pace of Oriya movement to bring back Oriya-speaking region into Orissa division. For all his credit, coalesce into one, he will always be remembered with love, affection and honour for all times to come.

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