Integration of *Gaḍajāta* and Formation of New *Oḍiśā*: Dr. Harekṛṣṇa Mahatāba

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Abstract:

Dr. Harekṛṣṇa Mahatāba, a visionary leader and key architect of modern *Oḍiśā*, played a central role in integrating the princely states (*Gaḍajāta*) into the *Oḍiśā* province and shaping a progressive state in post-independence India. His efforts in the mid-20th century transformed *Oḍiśā* from a fragmented region of princely states into a unified, modern political entity. Through initiatives like the *Prajāmaṇḍaḷa* movements, the *Hīrākuda* Dam project, the establishment of Bhubaneswar as the capital, and the promotion of industrial and social reforms, Mahatāba laid the foundation for a "New *Oḍiśā*" that balanced tradition with progress.

Keywords: Harekṛṣṇa Mahatāba, *Bhāratī Mandira*, *Gaḍajāta* Movement, *Hīrākuda* Dam Project, *Kanika Prajāmaṇḍaḷa* Movement, New *Oḍiśā*, Development of Cuttack City, Establishment of the Capital in Bhubaneswar, Textile Industry in *Oḍiśā*

Introduction:

In every life, there is a significant achievement, but maintaining discipline and order is not possible for an ordinary person. Only an accomplished practitioner can progress on this path through self-discipline. As such a great practitioner, the life struggle of *Utkaḷa Keśari* Harekṛṣṇa Mahatāba, the builder of modern *Oḍiśā*, is rare. Reading his biography, one does not need to read the history of independent *Oḍiśā* separately from his personal experiences. At a time when *Oḍiśā* was known throughout India as a poor state plagued by natural disasters, Harekṛṣṇa Mahatāba, with his unique perspective and mental strength, embraced all *Oḍiās* as his children and changed the image of *Oḍiśā* on the map of India.

1.   Harekṛṣṇa Mahatāba:

Such a great personality was born on Tuesday, November 21, 1899, in the village of Āgarapaḍā in Bhadrak district to Kṛṣṇacaraṇa Dās and Tohafā Bibi. Although Kṛṣṇacaraṇa Dās's home was actually in Cuttack, he was staying at the house of Jagannath Mahatāba in Āgarapaḍā, Bhadrak. Since Jagannath had no son, he adopted Harekṛṣṇa Mahatāba as his foster son, and his foster mother was Dhannabibi. At that time, Mahatāba was the second child of his father. His elder brother was Sri Narasiṁha caraṇā Das, and his younger brother was Gopāḷa Dās (*Sādhanāra Pathe*-1, p. 3-5, Susmita-Ch-2, p. 88*).

Initially, Mahatāba began his studies at an old school. At that time, Kṛṣṇa Caraṇa had established a lower primary school and later a middle English school through his efforts. Since there was no facility for English education, Kṛpāsindhu Mahānti used to come to Mahatāba's house for private English tutoring. After completing his studies at the village school, he went to Bhadrak High School for further education. At that time, his father had arranged for him to stay with a tenant, which was unpleasant for him, but he had to stay there and study. This was because the hostel manager used to embezzle the money sent for him. However, it was later revealed that this was his father's plan, as his intention was to ensure that the children did not go astray with money (*Sādhanāra Pathe*-1, p. 5-7, Susmita-Ch-2, p. 88-89*).

During his five years of study in Bhadrak with much difficulty (1912-16), the World War was ongoing (1914-18). At that time, he heard about various activities of the revolutionaries in Bengal. The story of Jatin Mukhārjī and his group fighting bravely against British soldiers in Balasore and losing their lives greatly

influenced him. As a result, he thought that he too should join that war. During this period, CID officers were monitoring the activities of students in schools. Most of the teachers in his school were Bengalis, and they used to narrate stories of the country's independence and revolution (*Sadhanāra Pathe*-1, p. 8, Susmita-Ch-2, p. 89*). While he was studying in high school, his biological mother passed away. His mother's death was the first shock for him, drawing his mind toward renunciation, meaning he became attracted to the philosophy of Maya (*Sadhanāra Pathe*-1, p. 10-12).

After his mother's death, his marriage was arranged with Srimati Subhadra Devi, the daughter of Sri Ānandarām Siṁha from Asuresvar village in Cuttack. In his family, except for his mother, no one else was educated (*Sadhanāra Pathe*-1, p. 13-14*). While preparing for the matriculation examination, he had to deal with his mother's death, marriage, and also the responsibilities of land and temple work in the village.

From the mess where Mahatāba was staying, a handwritten monthly magazine named '*Malaya*' was being published. For this magazine, his classmates Udayanārāyaṇa Mahānti and Upendra Prasād Mahānti used to collect news and write by hand (*Sadhanāra Pathe*-1, p. 20). Along with that, they also published an English handwritten magazine called *Dustbin*, the entire responsibility for which fell on Mahatāba. Amidst all this, he secured the second position in the I.Sc. examination (Science) and later pursued a B.A. in Sanskrit. At that time, Ārttaballabha Mahanti, who was in the Sanskrit department, was very fond of Mahatāba. Even while studying under his guru, Mahatāba wrote in English against the atrocities of the police and government employees in Cuttack city and published them in *Utkaḷa Dipika*. At that time, the writings in *Utkaḷa Dipika* were half in English and half in Odia (*Sadhanāra Pathe*-1, p. 21, Susmita-Ch- 2, p. 90).
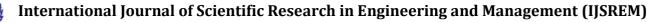
2. *Bhāratī Mandira*:

Towards the end of 1919 or the beginning of 1920, after the Bakra festival, a library named '*Bhāratī Mandira*' was established at Nabakṛṣṇa Choudhury's house by a group of contemporary students (*Chittaranjan, p. 14, 12*). Among them were young individuals like Nabakṛṣṇa Choudhury, Harekṛṣṇa Mahatāba, Yadumani Maṅgarāja, Rāmakriṣṇa Bose, Nikuñjakishore Dās, and others (*Chittaranjan, p. 12*). Inspired by the broader Indian nationalist sentiment, the young members of *Bhāratī Mandira* engaged in political discussions with renewed enthusiasm, which was almost unprecedented in *Oḍiśā* at that time (*Chittaranjan, p. 15*). In this library, apart from reading books, they discussed various social and political issues. The library was financially supported by Gopabandhu Choudhury, while *Śrī* Bhagirathi Mahapatra was its main organizer, and *Śrī* Lakshmi Narayan Sahu encouraged these young individuals. Due to suspicions of some objectionable activities being conducted there, intelligence department officials visited the library posing as readers (*Chittaranjan, p. 12*). Within a short time, this library grew into a significant institution, collecting newspapers from various regions (*Chittaranjan, p. 14*).

In September 1920, the members of *Bhāratī Mandira* sent Mahatāba to attend the Calcutta session of the National Congress, where he participated as an observer (*Sadhanāra Pathe-1, p. 20, Susmita-Ch-2, p. 93*). Later, Mahatāba attended the Nāgapur session and, upon returning, shared his experiences with his friends at *Bhāratī Mandira* (*Chittaranjan, p. 15*). At the Nāgapur Congress session, Mahatāba had his first meeting and introduction with Gopabandhu, and he also became acquainted with the entire youth group of *Oḍiśā* (*Chittaranjan, p. 15*).

During the time when the Congress was calling for a non-cooperation movement against the British government, *Utkaḷa* Gourab Madhusudan Das was appointed as a minister in the Bihar and *Oḍiśā* government. This felt like a shameful blow to the young members of *Bhāratī Mandira*. Disapproving of Madhusudan Dās's step, they decided to create an effigy of him and burn it at a protest meeting in Naībāli (*Chittaranjan, p. 15, Susmita-Ch-2, p. 93*). Pamphlets in Odia and English were printed and distributed widely. A commotion at the Cuttack Town Hall meeting led the organizers and sponsors of Madhusudan Das's felicitation to abandon the event. Mahatāba stated, "Our meeting went on. We condemned Madhusudan Dās as harshly as possible, and a resolution of condemnation was also passed (*Chittaranjan, p. 16*)."

With the call for the non-cooperation movement, *Bhāratī Mandira*, as an institution, almost automatically

shut down, and most of its young members directly entered the political arena. Mahatāba and Nabkr̥ṣṇa Choudhury left Ravenshaw College. This *Mandira* became the foundation for the creation of modern *Oḍiśā*.

3. *Gaḍajāta* Movement:

To liberate India from British exploitation, Mahātmā Gāndhi adopted non-violent, non- cooperation movements as the only effective strategy instead of armed rebellion (*Sadhanāra Pathe-1, p. 26*). When a special session of the Congress was held in Calcutta in 1920 to discuss Gandhi's non-cooperation proposal, there was no significant Congress presence in *Oḍiśā*. Initially, Harekṛṣṇa Mahatāba was deeply inspired by Madhusudan Dās's ideology, courage, and enthusiastic speeches. He avidly memorized many of Madhusudan Das's writings and sayings published in the newspaper *The Oriya*. Additionally, he wrote these inspiring words in large letters and displayed them around his mess. One of Madhusudan Dās's sayings that consistently motivated Mahatāba was: *"Life blood of a people is not too dear a price to secure justice for their progeny."* This statement was related to the integration of the *Gaḍajāta* (princely states) and the formation of *Oḍiśā* as a province. Madhusudan Das further stated: *"History of Bengal should not be lost upon us,"* implying that Oḍiās should learn from the Bengalis (*Sadhanāra Pathe-1, p. 22*). However, Mahatāba never heard Madhusudan Das speak about the country's independence or sacrificing one's life for it; his focus was solely on the unification of Odia-speaking regions and protection from the arrogance of neighbouring Bengalis (*Chittaranjan, p. 14-15, Sadhanāra Pathe-1, p. 26, Susmita-Ch-2, p. 91*).

On August 15, 1938, the integration of the *Gaḍajāta* states drew widespread attention, sparking the *Prajāmaṇḍaḷa* (People's) movement in these regions. The primary reason for the *Gaḍajāta* integration and the *Prajāmaṇḍaḷ a* movement was that while people in the coastal *Mogalabandi (Costal Area)* areas enjoyed full autonomy in governance, assemblies, trade, and commerce, their neighbours in the *Gaḍajāta* states had no such freedoms under personal rule (*Sadhanāra Pathe-2, p. 78, Susmita-Ch-2, p. 96*). At the time, the British administration and princely rulers were linked only through the Viceroy and Governor. After the British left India, many *Gaḍajāta* rulers decided to remain independent, leading to the creation of approximately 500 to 600 independent states. Between August 15 and December 1947, many *Gaḍajāta* rulers began merging their states with India (*Sadhanāra Pathe-2, p. 79, Saroj Ranjan, p. 59, Drishti – 21 Aug 2019*).

Traveling from Cuttack to Sambalpur required three licenses and permits, and flying aircraft over these regions was prohibited. Despite being engaged in studies, Harekṛṣṇa Mahatāba believed that integrating the *Gaḍajāta* states into *Oḍiśā* was the only solution and worked peacefully to achieve this to the best of his ability. His opinion was: *"A responsible ministry should be formed with elected representatives from each Gaḍajāta state. The princely system should be abolished, and the Gaḍajāta should be merged with neighbouring provinces"* (*Sadhanāra Pathe-2, p. 79*). This view later sparked significant controversy.

By then, Dr. Pattābhi Sitaramayya had formed the Deccan State Union with 14 *Gaḍajāta* states, and *Saurāṣtra* was in the process of merging to form a province. The *Gaḍajāta* of Chhattisgarh and Madhya Pradesh had formed the Eastern State Union, indirectly supporting Sitaramayya. Their aim was for the Gaḍajāta rulers to govern independently. This was evident post-independence when rulers continued governing their states autonomously. However, noting various administrative issues in the *Gaḍajāta*, Mahatāba advocated for their integration, believing it would lead to progress and development (*Sadhanāra Pathe-2, p. 80*). The rulers, fearing exploitation by the educated and cunning *Mogalabandi* residents, urged their subjects not to merge with *Oḍiśā*. As public discontent grew and the movement intensified, Mahatāba discussed solutions with Sardār Patel to address the rising tensions (*Sadhanāra Pathe-2, p. 81*).

In October 1947, the Communist Party initiated the Nīḷagiri tribal movement, fuelled by two statements. Lord Wavell had remarked: *"Even if the Hindu-Muslim issue is resolved, the tribal issue remains"* (*Sadhanāra Pathe-2, p. 82*). Similarly, Reverend El, the tribal advisor for *Oḍiśā* and Madhya Pradesh, stated: *"Tribals should remain separate from the general population, or they will be exploited"* (*Sadhanāra Pathe-2, p. 82*). After Mahatāba refuted these views, Lord Wavell wrote to him, expressing regret for the misunderstanding.

During the Nīḷagiri *Prajāmaṇḍaḷ a* movement, tribals set fire to non-tribal homes and confiscated crops. As a

result, non-tribals fled to Balasore. The movement was primarily led by Śrī Śarat Pattnaik of the Communist Party, whom Mahatāba met at the *Prajātantra* office to discuss solutions. Sardār Patel entrusted Mahatāba with resolving the *Gaḍajāta* movement. When Sharat Pattnaik refused to comply, Mahatāba, along with Nabakr̥ṣṇa Choudhury, B.C. Mukherjee, P.R. Men, and Commissioner Senapati, discussed the Nīḷagiri movement (*Sadhanāra Pathe-2, p. 82-83*).

Nabakr̥ṣṇa Choudhury, B.C. Mukhārjī, P.R. Men, and Commissioner Senapati went to Nīḷagiri and defeated the Raja's police force. During discussions with the Raja, they presented photographs of atrocities and torture inflicted on non-tribals due to the tribal movement. The Raja, expressing regret, handed over Nīḷagiri's administration to the Balasore Collector. At the time, Mahatāba was in Delhi and, upon receiving news of the Nīḷagiri integration in the evening, he and Sardar Patel were overjoyed (*Sadhanāra Pathe-2, p. 84-87, Saroj Ranjan, p. 59-60*). On November 14, 1947, Nīḷagiri became the first *Gaḍajāta* to merge with *Oḍiśā* (*Ashok-2022*).

While visiting Pāraḷākhemuṇḍi, Mahatāba was hosted by the Rāja (King), whose second son had married the Nīḷagiri King's daughter. When the Raja (King) mocked his daughter-in-law, Mahatāba remarked: *"The lower Gaḍajāta is fading, the upper Gaḍajāta is smiling, and the middle Gaḍajāta thinks it's time will come."* This meant that while upper *Gaḍajāta* rulers had merged, lower ones had vanished, and middle ones believed they could remain forever, which was impossible as they would eventually merge with the province (*Sadhanāra Pathe-2, p. 86, Saroj Ranjan, p. 61*).

In response to alleged atrocities by the *Oḍiśā* government, the Gaḍajāta Rājyamaṇḍaḷis lodged complaints with the Indian government. Mahatāba deemed urgent resolution of these issues necessary. On December 14, 1948, at Cuttack's Raj Bhavan, various *Gaḍajāta* rulers discussed integration with Sardār Patel. Patel presented a pre-prepared integration document, stating: *"No arguments or discussions—sign the Gaḍajāta integration document, as there is no other way"* (*Sadhanāra Pathe-2, p. 89, Saroj Ranjan, p. 60*). Leaders of various *Gaḍajāta Prajāmaṇḍaḷa* organized a conference in Cuttack, where chief ministers and ministers demanded governance free from royal control. These Prajāmaṇḍaḷa s sent resolutions opposing integration to Mahatāba (*Sadhanāra Pathe-2, p. 90*).

The Dhenkanal Prajāmaṇḍaḷa movement was led by Sāraṅgadhara Babu and Pabitra Babu, who had studied in America. Upon returning, they sought the king's support for industrial development in *Oḍiśā*, but despite promises, no ruler extended help. This led to a dispute in 1933 between the king and Sāraṅgadhara Babu, sparking the Prajāmaṇḍaḷa movement, in which Sāraṅgadhara involved Mahatāba. While resolving the Nīḷagiri movement, Sāraṅgadhara Babu opposed Mahatāba, stating: *"The oppressors of the people should be punished"* (*Sadhanāra Pathe-2, p. 90*).

Post-integration, the *Oḍiśā* government took over all administrative responsibilities, with rulers only overseeing operations. During Dheṅkānāḷa integration, Nabakr̥ṣṇa Choudhury, Mahatāba, and Sardar Patel convinced Sāraṅgadhara and Pabitra Babu, who initially resisted but later agreed. After Dheṅkānāḷa and Āṭhagaḍa merged, *Prajāmaṇḍaḷa* s in Keonjhar, Sundargarh, and other *Gaḍajāta* opposed integration. The next day, Sardār Patel, frustrated, told them: *"The people who have been oppressed and are protesting against the rulers have no right to let the rulers speak on their behalf"* (*Sadhanāra Pathe-2, p. 92*). Hearing this, the Mayurbhanj king handed over governance to the *Oḍiśā* government. Patel feared that if rulers refused to sign, what could be done? Mahatāba responded: *"If they don't sign, they won't survive. The people won't let them stay"* (*Sadhanāra Pathe-2, p. 93*).

That evening, the Pātna *Mahārājā* was the first to sign the integration document, followed by all other rulers except Kaḷāhaṇḍi. When one ruler resisted, Mahatāba and Patel grew frustrated, but V.P. Mohan convinced the Kaḷāhaṇḍi Rāja (King) to sign. However, Patel's parting words as he left Cuttack deeply hurt Mahatāba: *"The rulers couldn't govern their states, so their states were taken. The Prajāmaṇḍaḷa s demand they be handed over to them. Should we take states from thieves and give them to bandits?"* (*Sadhanāra Pathe-2, p. 94*).

When the Bihar government claimed *Ṣaḍheikaḷā* and *Kharsuām̐* should merge with Bihar, despite their

signing *Oḍiśā*'s integration document, they later withdrew and merged with Bihar. On January 1, 1948, after the *Gaḍajāta* integration was complete, the Indian government established administration in the merged regions per legal provisions, integrating them with nearby districts or designating some as separate districts. Nilamaṇi Senāpati oversaw this process. The integration resulted in *Oḍiśā* being divided into two Commissioner Divisions: (1) Cuttack and (2) Sambalpur. A High Court was established in *Oḍiśā*, with prominent legal experts *Śrī* Bīrakiśora Ray, *Śrī* Jagannāth Dās, and *Śrī* Liṅgarāja Pānigrāhi appointed as judges, and the Supreme Court Chief Justice Kenya inaugurated it (*Sadhanāra Pathe-2, p. 94-99*).
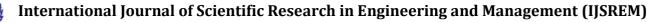
Post-integration, when Mahatāba visited these regions, the rulers could not tolerate it. In 1948, dissatisfied rulers incited *Prajāmaṇḍaḷa* s to protest. Ministers, influenced by the rulers, complained to Delhi about alleged atrocities by the *Oḍiśā* government in the *Gaḍajāta*. Mahatāba proposed: *"Those rulers who are dissatisfied should merge with the province, or Oḍiśā, including the Gaḍajāta, should remain under Governor's rule for a few years"* (*Sadhanāra Pathe-2, p. 101*). When Sardār Patel relayed this directly to the rulers, they rejected all proposals. Frustrated, Patel said: *"You want to remain Gaḍajāta and expect me to send troops to protect you. That's not possible"* (*Sadhanāra Pathe-2, p. 101*).

Upon learning that rulers were inciting tribals to protest, Mahatāba took active measures to counter the movement. Prominent leaders like *Śrī* Harihar Patel, *Śrī* Raj Ballav Mishra, *Śrī* Sundaramani Patel, *Śrī* Surendra Mahanti, *Śrī* Madhusudan Mahanti, and *Śrī* Yadumani Maṅgarāja led this massive movement. The *Ṣaḍheikaḷā* and *Kharasuaṁ* movements left a lasting scar on *Oḍiśā*. Despite Mahatāba 's efforts to build rapport with the rulers, they were largely unsuccessful. The *Kharasuaṁ* prince, rejecting Mahatāba 's offer for a secretary position, incited tribals against the *Oḍiśā* government. Mahatāba sought Keonjhar's Chotarāy and *Kanikā's* Raja for negotiations with *Kharasuaṁ* and *Ṣaḍheikaḷā*, but these discussions bore little fruit. Consequently, *Kharasuaṁ* tribals, with support from goons in *Siṁhabhūm* and Jamshedpur, protested to merge the two *Gaḍajāta* with Bihar (*Sadhanāra Pathe-2, p. 101-104*). Eventually, Mahatāba had to concede that *Ṣaḍheīkaḷā* and *Kharasuāṁ* would merge with Bihar, and their rulers agreed. On May 18, 1948, these two Gaḍajāta merged with Bihar (*Ashok-2022*).

Mahatāba worked to integrate Mayurbhañja, where *Śrī* Śarat Candra Dās, a veteran Congress worker, was the Prime Minister, easing the process. However, those benefiting from the Kings opposed integration, and the king was dissatisfied with his ministry's actions. *Kesi Niyogi*, his *Devan* and political advisor, influenced him. When Mayurbhanj's integration with *Oḍiśā* was proposed, some prominent individuals sent a memorandum to West Bengal's Chief Minister, advocating merger with West Bengal. Chief Minister Prafulla Ghosh wrote to Mahatāba, titling his letter *"The Height of Foolishness,"* deeply hurting Mahatāba. Mahatāba responded: *"If he thinks merging Mayurbhanj with West Bengal is illogical, he should come to Bāripadā and say so."* Prafulla Ghosh, honoring Mahatāba 's request, visited *Bāripadā* and stated: *"Merging Mayurbhanj with West Bengal is unnatural; merging with Oḍiśā is natural. West Bengal is not prepared to take responsibility for an unnatural merger"* (*Sadhanāra Pathe- 2, p. 106-107, Saroj Ranjan, p. 61-62*).

On October 1, 1948, Mayurbhanj signed the integration document with *Oḍiśā*, becoming part of it by January 1, 1949 (*Ashok-2022*). Mahatāba collaborated with the Maharaja to plan the region's development. However, a tribal rebellion led by Santal leader *Śrī* Sonārām Soren began, sparked by the practice of *Ganthi Fera* (arming with bows and arrows). The Santals declared Rāiraṅgpur theirs, performing human sacrifices with great fanfare and severing communication between Mayurbhanj and Rāiraṅgpur. To suppress the rebellion, many tribals were imprisoned, and fines were imposed. Mahatāba met Sonārām Soren, Rāmacandra Mājhi, and others in jail, explaining the consequences of violent protests, leading them to acknowledge their mistakes. The next day, Mahatāba redirected the fines collected to the Collector for the region's development (*Sadhanāra Pathe-2, p. 109-110*).

Mahatāba had two options for *Gaḍajāta* integration: aligning with the rulers or the *Prajāmaṇḍaḷa* leaders. Neither fully supported integration. The rulers opposed it, while some *Prajāmaṇḍaḷa* factions partially agreed with the rulers, and others supported Mahatāba. Those supporting Mahatāba, often former employees, had to confront the rulers, dampening the enthusiasm for integration among the people (*Sadhanāra Pathe-2, p. 101-*

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4. *Kanikā Prajāmaṇḍaḷa* Movement:

In 1921, the rayats (tenants) launched a movement opposing the new land settlement proposal. This movement was organized under the leadership of *Śrī* Chakradhar Behera. During the non-cooperation movement, Harekṛṣṇa Mahatāba led the rayats in protest against the suppression of public discontent and the exploitation by the *Kanikā* king's administration, particularly targeting the lower classes. Between 1918 and 1919, food grain shortages, followed by floods and famine in 1920, forced *Kanikā's* residents to pay numerous illegal taxes. The farmers of *Kanikā* resisted the king's oppression in an unprecedented manner. They provided all possible support to Mahatāba and raised awareness among the people about the king's atrocities and exploitation (*Sadhanāra Pathe-1, p. 11, Susmita-Ch-2, p. 97*).

During this period, the anti-royal movements in Nīḷagiri and *Kanikā* were significantly aided by the *Prajātantra* newspaper. *Prajātantra* became the primary weapon in dismantling the monarchy. On Mahātmā Gāndhi's birthday, October 2, 1923, *Prajātantra* was first published from *Mukura* Press. Later, on January 27, 1926, it was published from *Prajātantra* Press. In 1931, a lawsuit led to the newspaper's closure. In 1923, *Prajātantra* was born to protest against the exploitative tendencies of the monarchy and the decay of feudalism, with the goal of establishing a democratic system in place of royal rule (*Prajatantra-2023, p. 37, 42, 44, Susmita-Ch-2, p. 97*). The *Kanikā Prajāmaṇḍaḷa* movement began in 1921. *Prajātantra* played a crucial role in spreading Mahatāba's ideology and vision to the public, promoting and establishing the movement. Had the people of Bhadrak's Cāndbāli and Cuttack's coastal areas not protested against the king, *Kanikā* would have remained a *Gaḍajāta* state (*Prajatantra- 2023, p. 37,* Susmita-Ch-2, p. 98).

Articles about the deplorable conditions of the people were published in Gopabandhu Das's newspaper *Samaj*. In 1922, the exploitation, torture, and atrocities by the Kanika Raja were discussed at the *Utkaḷa* Sammilani, prompting Gopabandhu Dās to visit Bhadrak. At the time, Section 144 was imposed in Bhadrak, and Gopabandhu Dās and Bhagirathi Mahapatra were sentenced to two years in prison for violating prohibitory orders (*Prajatantra-2023, p. 39*). Following Gopabandhu Dās, Mahatāba and his workers continued the movement. Mahatāba and Nirañjana Pattnaik attended the Congress session in Lucknow to address the issue and, upon returning to Cuttack Station on June 28, 1922, were imprisoned for one year (*Prajatantra-2023, p. 40*).

During his imprisonment, the *Kanikā* king offered to release Mahatāba if he refrained from interfering in his affairs. Mahatāba rejected the proposal, stating: *"As a non-cooperator, I have willingly sacrificed myself. It is inappropriate for the king to meddle in these matters"* (*Prajatantra-2023, p. 40*). In February 1922, Mahatāba distributed a pamphlet criticizing the *Kanikā* king for suppressing the non-cooperation movement and land taxes. In one pamphlet, he wrote: *"The Kanikā government thinks it can obstruct the wave of the non-cooperation movement by extending its hand. But it must remember that the awakening sparked,* (Susmita-Ch-2, p. 97-98).

While in Bhāgalpur Jail, Mahatāba initially refused to defend himself but later issued a written statement addressing the charges against him: *"I can confidently say that whatever I have preached or done could be punishable by a fine of 124 crores. P.C. gave me the opportunity to propagate Gāndhiji's ideas in Balasore district, and Gāndhiji was punished on the same charge. Be that as it may, I firmly believe in what I am preaching and urge people to consider and adopt this view. I do not force anyone to accept my opinions. My view is that the current government is so immoral and autocratic that it should not be allowed to continue even for a moment. No one should obstruct this process. This government must be removed immediately, and that is my firm belief. I do not agree with the rule that grants bail in response to good conduct. I am prepared to endure long-term imprisonment, but I do not wish to provide any bail"* (Susmita-Ch-2, p. 98).

Ultimately, Mahatāba was sentenced to one year in prison. He was initially held in Cuttack Jail and, after a month, transferred to Bhāgalpur Jail, where he endured significant physical hardships, including being shackled. However, he spent his time in jail practicing yoga and reading religious texts like the *Gītā* and

Bhāgabata. He devoted most of his time to studying, writing, and typing, successfully writing a novel in Odia titled '*Ajab Dunia*' and a book called *Free Thinking*. Unfortunately, in 1930, police raided the *Svaraj Mandira* premises in Balasore and confiscated '*Ajab Dunia*'. The news of Mahātmā Gāndhi's six-year imprisonment deeply pained Mahatāba. In this controversial mindset, upon release, he went straight to Hazāribāga to meet Gopabandhu Dās. Influenced by the non-cooperation movement, *Kanikā's* people seized the opportunity. The *Kanikā Prajāmaṇḍaḷa* movement, sparked by severe criticism and discontent with the settlement, became popularly known as the "*Kanikā Meli*" (*Prajatantra-2023, p. 38, Susmita-Ch-2, p. 98*). This movement later significantly influenced the formation of a new *Oḍiśā* across the state.

5.   **New *Oḍiśā*:**

On April 23, 1946, Harekr̥ṣṇa Mahatāba was prepared to form a ministry and take the oath of office. However, Budhirāma Dubey, involved in the Quit India Movement in Koraput, raised objections. Mahatāba asked Dubey his opinion on the *Hīrākud* Dam project. When Dubey opposed his views, Mahatāba, along with ministers like Nabakr̥ṣṇa Choudhury and Nityānanda Kānungo, formed the ministry and moved forward on the path of *Oḍiśā*'s progress. After becoming Chief Minister, Mahatāba had several plans for *Oḍiśā*'s development, but his primary focus was on creating a new *Oḍiśā* by integrating the *Gaḍajāta* (princely states) with the *Oḍiśā* province, abolishing the *jamindāri* system, implementing the *Mahānadī* project for flood control, constructing a new capital, and establishing large-scale and cottage industries to generate employment for the people (*Susmita-Ch-2, p. 114*).
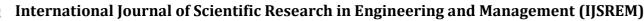
(a) Hirakud Dam Project:

In 1943, due to a famine in Mohammad Nagar, the British government considered the Dāmodar River Dam project in 1944. While in jail, Mahatāba wrote to his younger brother, Gopāḷa Dās, asking him to inform Thakkar Father about the need for a dam on the Mahānadī River to control floods in *Oḍiśā*, as prisoners were only allowed to write to family members. Mahatāba wrote*, "If Thakkar father truly loves Oḍiśā, he will launch a movement for the Mahānadī project"* (*Sadhanāra Pathe-2, p. 45*). Upon receiving Mahatāba 's letter, Thakkar father initiated a campaign in the *Times of India*. After his release from jail, Mahatāba furthered this movement.

Floods were a major issue in *Oḍiśā* at the time. On March 15, 1945, *Oḍiśā*'s governor, Sir Hawthorne Lewis, laid the foundation stone for the *Hīrākuda* Dam. However, despite the passage of several years, construction had not progressed (*Basant, p. 18*). In 1946, Mahatāba pressured the Indian government to start the Mahānadī dam construction. As Sir Akbar Hydari was in charge of the department, Mahatāba faced no significant obstacles in initiating the project. However, opposition to the *Hīrākuda* Dam intensified in the Sambalpur region.

In 1945, after consultations with Sir Hawthorne Lewis and Advisor Gokhale, the foundation stone for the dam was laid in Sambalpur's *Hīrākuda*. Shortly afterward, protests against the dam began, halting the survey work. At the time, people in Sambalpur performed ritualistic homa *Yajña* at the *Samalei* Temple, praying for Mahatāba 's demise. A satyāgraha (Silent Protest) against the dam was led by *Śrī* Budhirāma Dubey, who claimed Sambalpur would join the Eastern State Federation of *Gaḍajāta*. Mahatāba learned that the then-anti-*Gaḍajāta* integration leader, the Patna Maharaja, was encouraging Sambalpur's leaders. Discussions with Budhirāma Dubey and Śaṅkar Prasād Miśra yielded no results. Eventually, after Mahatāba informed Lord Wavell, the Patna *Mahārāja* was urged not to support the movement (*Sadhanāra Pathe-2, p. 45-48*).

Congress leader Paṇḍita Lakṣmīnārāyaṇa Miśra, acting as an emissary in Delhi, presented public opinion against the *Hīrākuda* Dam to Rājendra Prasad. Both leaders, Lakṣmi Bābu and Rājendra Bābu, acknowledged the concerns, as it was natural for rulers emerging from mass movements to sympathize with public protests, according to Mahatāba. Consequently, Mahatāba had to heed their advice but did not give up. He explained the benefits of river dams to Sambalpur's people, raising awareness with the support of Nabakr̥ṣṇa Choudhury. Gradually, the anti-dam movement weakened. Once Sambalpur's residents understood the dam's benefits, Mahatāba convinced Lakṣmi Babu and Rājendra Babu to resume the dam's construction (*Sadhanāra Pathe-2,*

p. 47-48).

Interestingly, the movement was primarily led by the Gountiā's (landlords), who employed people at merger wages of four paisa or two annas. They feared that the *Hīrākuda* Dam would destroy their economic system. After construction began, daily wages increased from four paisa or two annas to one and a half rupees, causing significant inconvenience to the Gountiā's. Post-construction, Sambalpur residents gained access to water at low costs, and Mahatāba earned their trust (*Sadhanāra Pathe-2, p. 49*).

(b) Development of Cuttack City:

Harekṛṣṇa Mahatāba invited a town planner from Jāmsedpur's Tata Company to assess Cuttack's potential for development. The planner concluded that building a modern city in Cuttack was geographically challenging, highly expensive, and nearly impossible. Consequently, Mahatāba decided to shift *Oḍiśā*'s capital to Bhubaneswar. However, this decision sparked strong protests. Prior to this, Sir Hawthorne Lewis and Mahatāba had already finalized Bhubaneswar as the capital (*Sadhanāra Pathe-2, p. 52*).

At the time, a movement against the *Māchakuṇḍa* project emerged due to an agreement between the kings of Māndrāja and Jeypure. Protesters argued that the project should solely benefit *Oḍiśā*, questioning why Māndrāja was included. Some members of the *Utkaḷa Sammilani* also obstructed land acquisition efforts. Cuttack residents opposed the Jeypure king, leading Mahārāja Bikramdeba to focus on developing various regions in Andhra Pradesh, supporting universities, schools, and institutions financially. This created resentment toward *Oḍiśā*, diminishing his sympathy for the state. Mahatāba later resolved this through discussions with the king (*Sadhanāra Pathe-2, p. 52*).

Protests led by some lawyers erupted against acquiring land near Cuttack for a Central Research Institute. Additionally, land acquisition for a thermal station in Chaudvāra to generate 3,000 kilowatts of electricity faced resistance. Although these were local movements, they were portrayed as widespread protests, limiting Mahatāba 's ability to act. Had there been purely local issues, Mahatāba could have established the thermal station without difficulty. Around this time, a 15-year-old report from 1931 about a famine was published on August 9, 1947, in the *Prajātantra* newspaper, countering the *Samaj* newspaper. The *Samaj* portrayed all government projects as anti-public and remained defiant despite government requests. In response, Mahatāba resumed printing *Prajātantra*. Motilal Paṇḍita and Bīren Miśra handled its distribution, while Mahatāba took full responsibility for its content. Many educated youths praised and supported Mahatāba 's efforts (*Sadhanāra Pathe-2, pp. 52-54*).

(c) Textile Industry in *Oḍiśā*:

A textile factory license granted to *Oḍiśā* by Rājagopāḷacāri was confiscated and transferred to Bombay. After its cancellation and return to *Oḍiśā*, Bombay's businessmen launched a movement in favor of *khadi*. They criticized the *Oḍiśā* government, citing Mahatma Gāndhi's call for *khadi* production, and opposed the use of foreign clothing in India. Mahatāba suspected the motives of Bombay's textile industrialists, who claimed the *Oḍiśā* Congress government was establishing the textile factory for political reasons. J.C. Kumārappā, a key figure in the All-India Village Industries Association, also sharply criticized the *Oḍiśā* government (*Sadhanāra Pathe-2, p. 61, Saroj Ranjan, pp. 46-47*).

After discussions with Rājagopāḷacāri, Kumarappa, and *Oḍiśā* Congress leaders, Mahatāba decided that the textiles produced by the factory would be exported, while only khadi would be sold domestically. Adopting this as the textile factory policy, Mahatāba established a textile mill in Chaudvāra and began cloth production (*Sadhanāra Pathe-2, p. 61*).

(d) Establishment of the Capital in Bhubaneswar:

The proposal to establish Bhubaneswar as the capital was adopted in the *Oḍiśā* Legislative Assembly on September 30, 1946. Prior to this, debates about the capital of the separate *Oḍiśā* province had been ongoing since 1936. Some proposed keeping the capital in Cuttack near Chaudvāra, others suggested Raṅgeiluṇḍā

near Berhampur, and some advocated for Khurdhā. However, the majority favored Cuttack. Before Bhubaneswar was chosen, American forces had cleared a jungle there to build an aerodrome during World War II, sparking the idea of establishing the capital there. Sir Hawthorne Lewis and Gokhale had also discussed this. Thus, before forming the ministry in 1946, Mahatāba planned to shift the capital to Bhubaneswar (*Sadhanāra Pathe-2, p. 61, Susmita-Ch-2, p. 115*).

Bhubaneswar is the only place in India with a history dating back to Emperor Āśoka's time. After the formation of the separate *Oḍiśā* province, the Indian government decided to allocate 30 lakh rupees for the capital. However, constructing a new capital required 2 crore rupees. When the Indian government refused to provide this amount, Mahatāba met Liaquat Ali and explained the financial needs, leading to the approval of funds. Bhubaneswar became the only Indian capital to receive a grant from the central government for its construction, while other capitals like Caṇḍigaḍa received aid in the form of loans (*Sadhanāra Pathe-2, pp. 62- 63*).

Conclusion:

In the mid-20th century, Harekṛṣṇa Mahatāba played a pivotal role in the integration of the *Gaḍajāta* (princely states) and the formation of a new *Oḍiśā*. His visionary and forward- thinking approach enabled the state to emerge as a progressive entity in education, industrial development, and social reform. His emphasis on modernization and governance laid the foundation for a unified *Oḍiśā* post-independence. The transformation of *Oḍiśā* from a collection of *Gaḍajāta* regions into a modern political state reflected a blend of tradition and innovation. Mahatāba 's commitment to cultural identity and regional pride fostered a sense of unity among *Oḍiśā*'s diverse communities. His initiatives not only facilitated infrastructural development but also empowered the local populace, setting a precedent for future governance. Ultimately, Harekṛṣṇa Mahatāba 's legacy stands as an integral part of the story of new *Oḍiśā*, symbolizing a delicate balance between heritage and progress. His contributions continue to inspire the state's development while underscoring the importance of leadership in driving social and economic transformation.

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