

Maharaja Sri Ramchandra Bhanj Deo

A grand patron and promoter of the Odia literary world and one of the dynamic spirits of the Odia language movement of the 19th Century was the illustrious ruler of Mayurbhanj State. Maharaja Sriramchandra Bhanj Deo whose contribution and whole-hearted support has left an indelible imprint in the sands of Odisha. Born on December 17th, 1871 in a Royal family of Mayurbanj, his father's name was Krushna Chandra Bhanj. He completed his elementary education at Baripada. He lost his father when he was only 9 years old. After death of his father Sri Ramchandra Bhanj Deo continued his education with the patronage of the then Bengal-Bihar-Odisha's junior British Saheb (Chota Lat Sahib). Later Sri Ramchandra stayed in the Mayurbhanj Bhawan at Cuttack and under the able guidance of Guru Bretam Kiddel Saheb he continued his higher education for 12 years. Both Gobindchandra Mohapatra and Mr. Kiddel influenced and patronized his education as a result of which Sri Sri Ramchandra Bhanj Deo qualified in the Ravenshaw Collegiate School entrance exam in 1888. Later on he passed his F.A. exam from Ravenshaw College. While studying B.A. he ascended the throne as a result of which he was unable to appear in his B.A. final exam. In 1896 he married Lakshmi Kumari. He formed the state council for democratic system of administration. He was dynamic and took the initiative to organize the State press established by his deceased father. His teacher Pundit Gobind Chandra Mohapatra greatly influenced him for patronizing and promoting Odia mother tongue and development of literary works. He had great love and passion for development of Odia language. During his regime Utkalmani Pandit Gopabandhu Das became his close aide and was appointed as the Govt. lawyer. Maharaja Sri Ram Chandra Bhanj Deo proved a true son of the soil after assuming direct control over the state of Mayurbhanj on 15th August 1892 A.D. and was felicitated with the honour of 'Maharaja' by the British Government in 1903 A.D. Maharaja Sri Ramchandra Bhanj Deo indeed a man of perfect knowledge and wisdom. He increased the number of schools in his kingdom to 431 by the year 1910 which was only 41 at the time of his accession. He was a staunch devotee of

learning. He had a strong conviction that without the progress of Odia language the National solidarity, political stability and social upliftment of Odisha was not possible. As such, he did not confine his activities to Mayubhanj alone but also put forth his efforts for the amalgamation of dismembered Odia speaking tracts. His contribution to the growth of Odia literature is immense. Two leading journals entitled "Utkal Prava" a monthly and "Manorama" a weekly were published on 1st April 1891 A.D. and 23rd October, 1905 A.D. respectively under his patronage. Utkal Prava was published by Mayurbhanj state press. He had taken great efforts to encourage and inspire the authors for which he dedicated "Utkal Prava" to them. Maharaja's "Deshara Adhyatmika Unnati" Rajasikhya Sapekhyia was published continuously in the 1st, 2nd and 3rd editions that shed light on spiritual and material development of society. This book was published in an anonymous name that is 'novice' which literally means 'new preacher'. It was told by one of the literary critics Gokul Chandra Satpathy that Maharaja wrote this essay consulting his bosom friend Sashi Bhusan Ray. Maharaja was also a great critic of literary writings which was discovered through the letters written by him to the different authors.

Maharaja Sri Ramchandra Bhanj Deo's unblemished love for Odia nationalism and Odia literature crowned him to be nominated as the 1st president of Utkal Sammilani inaugurated at the Idga Padia at Cuttack on 30.12.1903. During his regime the scientific system of iron production was introduced. Among his achievements the railway line from Rupsa to Baripada, library at Baripada comprising of rare invaluable books, opening of 8 hospitals, skill development training school for the artisans at Baripada, 'Matha' industry got a boost during his reign. On December 30th, 1903 in the 1st session of Utkal Sammilani Maharaja Sri Ramchandra Bhanj Deo presided the session as the President. As a true patron of Odia Nationalism and leader of Odia language movement he rendered valuable services the extending financial support for the remodeling the dilapidated parts of the science department of Ravenshaw College by donating Rs.27,000/- and Rs.7000/- for establishment of S.C.B. Medical College and also constructed

buildings for 'Utkal Sahitya Samaj' and Victoria Jubilee library at Baripada where the meetings would be permanently conducted and the books and documents could be stored safely. Maharaja passed away on February 22nd, 1912 A.D. but his unflinching love for Odia nationalism, his genuine effort for Odia language movement and his sincerity to build up a moral and spiritual character of Odia people will forever inspire generations to come.
