

# Madhubabu: The Linguistic Revolutionary and the Formation of Odisha

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## ABSTRACT

The formation of Odisha as a separate linguistic province in 1936 represents a significant milestone in Indian political and cultural history. At the center of this historic achievement was Madhusudan Das, popularly known as Madhubabu, whose visionary leadership laid the foundation for Odia linguistic nationalism. This paper examines his pioneering role in advocating linguistic reorganization, mobilizing Odia identity, and institutionalizing collective consciousness through organized movements such as the Utkal Sammilani. It further evaluates post-independence legislative efforts to implement Odia as the official language and highlights the continuing challenges in fulfilling his linguistic vision. The study concludes that while political statehood was achieved, the complete institutional realization of Odia as a functional administrative language remains an ongoing responsibility.

**KEYWORDS:** *Madhusudan Das, Linguistic Nationalism, Odisha Formation, Utkal Sammilani, Odia Language Movement, Official Language Policy.*

## INTRODUCTION

In the history of the Odia nation, few personalities have been as widely admired, intellectually profound, and visionary as Madhubabu. In twentieth-century Indian political history, he distinguished himself as a dynamic leader, an eloquent orator, and a farsighted architect of regional identity. From every perspective, he embodied self-respect, creativity, and constructive leadership dedicated to the upliftment of Odisha.

### Madhubabu and the Demand for a Linguistic Province

Madhubabu was among the earliest pioneers advocating the formation of a province based on linguistic identity. In 1900, he passionately placed his demand before Lord Curzon, the then Viceroy of British India, emphasizing that the comprehensive development of Odisha required the unification of all Odia-speaking regions.

During his visit to Puri, Lord Curzon was deeply impressed by the architectural magnificence of the Jagannath Temple. Subsequently, in 1903, the Risley Circular directed the consolidation of Odia-speaking tracts. Regions such as Kalahandi, Patna, Sonapur,

Rairakhol, Bamra, and Bonai were gradually integrated.

In 1903, Madhubabu founded the Utkal Sammilani at his residence "Madhusmriti," aiming to awaken Odia consciousness and unify scattered regions. In December 1907, the organization formally demanded the consolidation of all Odia-speaking territories under one provincial administration.

The passage of the Government of India Act 1919 and the recommendations of the Montagu–Chelmsford Report strengthened the constitutional foundation for linguistic reorganization. These sustained efforts culminated in the formation of Odisha as a separate province on 1 April 1936, commemorated annually as Utkal Divas.

Unfortunately, Madhubabu did not live to witness this historic realization, as he passed away in 1934. At the time of its formation, Odisha comprised six districts—Cuttack, Puri, Ganjam, Koraput, Sambalpur, and Balasore. By 1992, administrative reorganization expanded the number of districts to thirty.

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### **The Sacrifice and the Unfulfilled Dream**

Madhubabu's dedication to the Odia nation may be compared to the legendary sage Dadhichi, symbolizing complete self-sacrifice for a greater cause. Yet, despite political success, his linguistic vision remains only partially fulfilled.

In 1954, under Chief Minister Nabakrushna Choudhury, the Orissa Official Language Act, 1954 was enacted, recognizing Odia as the official language of the state. Government directives in 1966 and declarations in 1985 sought to implement Odia in all administrative offices. However, practical enforcement remains inconsistent, particularly in higher administrative and judicial domains where English continues to dominate.

Although seminars and cultural forums promote Odia symbolically, implementation in governance often remains limited. This gap between policy and practice reflects the continuing challenge of linguistic empowerment.

### **Linguistic Identity and Collective Responsibility**

Madhubabu consistently emphasized self-respect and cultural preservation. His lifelong struggle for a separate Utkal province was ultimately directed toward the upliftment and flourishing of the Odia language. He entrusted future generations with the responsibility of safeguarding this heritage.

The preservation of Odia is not merely administrative; it is cultural, ethical, and existential. History provides numerous examples of languages that have declined due to neglect. Therefore, active use of Odia in speech, writing, education, and governance is essential for sustaining identity.

### **Conclusion**

Madhubabu's struggle achieved political statehood for Odisha but left a continuing moral and cultural responsibility. The full realization of his dream lies in the genuine institutional implementation and social acceptance of Odia as the primary medium of administration and identity.

Let us pay heartfelt tribute to this great visionary and collectively pledge to promote and preserve our mother tongue. Through united effort and shared responsibility, we can build a healthy and progressive society rooted in linguistic pride.

We are Odias. Odia is our mother tongue. We take pride in our linguistic identity.

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