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Rama Devi: Inheritor of Madhu Babu's Legacy

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Celebrating the 88th anniversary of Odisha's creation as a state, we reflect on its formation in 1936 based on linguistic lines. This milestone was a historic achievement, fulfilling the aspirations of Odisha's people and marking the culmination of a significant struggle led by prominent leaders such as Madhusudan Das and Rama Devi. Both figures not only spearheaded India's independence movement but also played vital roles in the social transformation of Odisha, shaping its modern destiny.

The paths of Madhusudan Das and Rama Devi intersected, heralding an era of progress and transformation in Odisha. Under Madhusudan Das's mentorship, Rama Devi's dedication to social welfare gained direction and purpose. Together, they championed the upliftment of marginalized communities, leaving a legacy of service and sacrifice.

Madhusudan Das's vision of a modern Odisha, grounded in equality and justice, resonated deeply with Rama Devi's advocacy for social reform and women's empowerment. Their collaboration transcended societal barriers, uniting them in their pursuit of a better future for all. Rama Devi, born on December 3, 1899, in Satyabhamapur, Cuttack district, epitomized courage, resilience, and dedication to social justice and women's empowerment. Influenced by Mahatma Gandhi's political ideologies and Madhusudan Das's visionary leadership, her early years were marked by patriotism and a fervent desire to contribute to India's independence. Her marriage to social activist Gopabandhu Chowdhury further fueled her passion for social change.

Rama Devi emerged as a symbol of women's pride, challenging social rigidity and political instability. Before her involvement, political awakening in the 19th century was confined to society's higher strata, excluding common women. Gandhi's call to fight for the nation reverberated throughout Odisha, making the freedom struggle more inclusive and transforming Rama Devi's life, leading her to be revered as the "Universal Mother" among Odias.

On January 26, 1931, the first Independence Day was celebrated across India, with "Purna Swaraj" as the new freedom struggle slogan. In Odisha, Rama Devi led mass meetings and hoisted the national flag on Lingaraj Temple, resulting in her arrest alongside other Congress leaders. This period saw the launch of the Civil Disobedience Movement by Gandhi, which



invigorated Odisha's leaders, including Rama Devi. Despite police oppression, Rama Devi inspired young girls to boycott British goods and participate in civil disobedience, showcasing her leadership and organizational skills.

Beyond politics, Rama Devi was a relentless advocate for social reform and women's rights. She founded the Alaka Ashram in Cuttack district, providing care for the marginalized and advocating for untouchability eradication and women's education. She lived among the Harijans, teaching their children and sharing their lives, embodying her commitment to social justice.

Madhusudan Das, the architect of modern Odisha, significantly influenced Rama Devi's leadership. His progressive vision of an inclusive society deeply resonated with her, guiding her efforts in social reform and nation-building. He inspired her commitment to serving the marginalized and promoting women's education, seeing it as essential for empowerment and societal progress. His support empowered her to challenge traditional gender norms and advocate for women's rights.

Rama Devi promoted basic education in Odisha, establishing self-help principles and educational initiatives in Bari. She managed to run schools with community support even after Congress withdrew its backing. Her contributions extended to the tribal areas of Koraput, where she addressed health issues like leprosy and established health homes for tribal children, founding the Nabajivan Mandal for their welfare.

Remembered as "Maa" among Odias for her socio-political activities, Rama Devi's life was marked by selfless sacrifice and dedication to the destitute and suffering. Madhusudan Das's protective attitude towards her stemmed from his concern for the hardships of the freedom struggle, yet he respected her commitment and supported her endeavors.

Their mutual admiration and support were evident, with Rama Devi performing Madhusudan Das's last rites and striving to honor his legacy. Reflecting on their lives, we are reminded that true progress is measured by its impact on others' lives. Celebrating their legacy, we honor the resilience, compassion, and determination that define the soul of Odisha.

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