

A Visionary

Birth Day Celebration of Late Dr. Harekrushna Mahtab at Ekamra Nivas, Old Town, Bhubaneswar on 21.11.2007

I am extremely happy to be here today to participate at this 108th year- Birth Celebration of Utkal Keshari Dr. Harekrushna Mahtab and pay my humble tribute to this great son of the soil who himself was truly a legend. We have gathered here this morning to take fresh inspiration from the life and works of Dr. Mahtab to whom I have the opportunity of knowing him closely several decades ago. He was the Governor of Bombay, my native place for about one and a half years from March, 1955 to September, 1956. He was the first Oriya to be the Governor and that too of a large and important state like the then Bombay. As Governor, he was highly popular and mixed freely with all sections of society for which he is still remembered with respect by many including myself. I remember him as a people's Governor, a man of high values and immense strength of conviction. We also had close association and relationship since 1971. I also visited Orissa at his invitation. He also visited my home in Delhi regularly. I am greatly impressed by his multi-dimensional personality and great contribution to Orissa and our country. This morning my heart is full with his happy memories.

Such celebrations go a long way in making the others, particularly the present generation knowing about the great persons and simultaneously drawing inspiration from them to rededicate their lives for the cause of motherland. The noble personality of Dr. Mahtab is so significant that we feel the impress of the great principles, which had guided his relentless struggle in the cause of the poor and suffering masses of the state and the country. The august audience here has already listened to illuminating speeches from other speakers paying glowing tributes to this multi-faceted personality and his outstanding contributions to the state as well as the country. I shall refer briefly to some of the salient points about his remarkable career.

Dr. Mahtab was one of the gems that the state of Orissa was blessed with. His life is such an open book whose every chapter and every page has some thing to tell and to inspire the people of the state who have followed him and will follow in future. It is indeed incredible but true that very few could achieve in lifetime what Dr. Mahtab had achieved through a rare combination of forceful and towering personality, clear vision and insight into future to put the state on the path of development.

Dr. Mahtab was a visionary and a dynamic personality who strove relentlessly for the upliftment of the people of the state and the country. Born in a Zamindar family he preferred to lead a very simple life due to influence of his father and this habit helped

him a lot in later life. He himself admitted that his early training in a simple and disciplined life helped him greatly in his participation in the freedom movement and in shouldering great responsibilities later. During his student life in Ravenshaw College at Cuttack he formed a special free thinking group with his classmates like late Naba Krushna Choudhury where they got together to work in the manner which they considered right without caring for others remarks. His strong will and independent thinking made him a leader among students. Being profoundly influenced by many eminent persons like Swami Vivekananda, Mahatma Gandhi, Utkalmani Gopabandhu Das, Utkal Gaurav Madhusudan Das, he shaped his political career and devoted his whole life to raise the state from its backwardness to a higher position. Dr. Mahtab was also one of the members representing Orissa in the Constituent Assembly for drafting the Indian Constitution.

Dr. Mahtab's keen interest in the industrialization of Orissa resulted in the establishment of several industrial units in the state, like the gigantic steel plant at Rourkela with large-scale utilization of the mineral resources of the state. He is proudly remembered as the maker of modern Orissa. The way the state is moving fast on the track of massive industrialization now underway, if he would have alive today would feel very happy as his dreams are turning out to be reality. As the Chief Minister of the State he fought for giving special attention to Orissa in view of the fact of its economical backwardness.

Dr. Mahtab's contribution to the literary renaissance of the state was equally impressive as his role in the political field of the state. He was a highly acclaimed poet, novelist, essayist and a fearless journalist. I am given to understand that his collection of essays, "Gaon Majlis" for which he won prestigious Central Sahitya Akademi Award reflects the true picture of the problems of the rural people of the state and it is heartening that it continues to be appreciated by all irrespective of age. His notable contribution is towards the publication of "The Prajatantra" which is now known as one of the leading dailies of the state and the credit for this goes to him who continued to be its editor for long time. Through Prajatantra he created many outstanding journalists who are now taking forward the profession of journalism to the high pedestal through their unbiased and fearless reporting they learnt during their stint in the daily. He also established The Prajatantra Prachar Samiti which encourages and groomed many talented writers in different branches of Oriya literature.

It was a recognition of his magnanimity and trust of the people he occupied so many illustrious positions during his life time and it is surprising to find that he never ran after fame, rather fame ran after him. One must imbibe his noble qualities so as to

become humble and polite in his life. I take this opportunity to congratulate the recipients of this year's Dr. H.K. Mahtab Award and I am sure they will continue to serve the state in their respective fields with renewed vigour and others will also draw inspirations from them.

Though Dr. Mahtab is not in our midst in flesh and blood he continues to be a guiding force on the road to the true service of the state as well as the country. The state owes a deep debt of gratitude to Dr. Mahtab and it is only proper that we should get together to honour and revere his memory today when his birth anniversary is celebrated. Let his multifaceted life encourage the present generation to make their life sublime and purposeful. This will be our fitting tribute to Dr. Mahtab on this particular day.

Jai Hind