

**SPEECH BY THE PRESIDENT OF INDIA, SHRI PRANAB  
MUKHERJEE AT THE INAUGURATION OF THE  
CONVENTION OF NON-RESIDENT ODIAS, ORGANISED  
BY ODISHA FORUM**

**New Delhi: 06.01.2017**

It is indeed a pleasant occasion for me to be present at the Prabasi Odia Conclave, 2017 organized by the Odisha Forum and the Government of Odisha. It is a commendable initiative, admirable in its scope and professed objectives.

2. Friends, Right from the epic Battle of Kalinga that turned a raging violent monarch to Ashoka - the Great missionary, Odisha has many firsts to its credit. It stands out as the first State to have been created on the basis of language in 1936, eleven years before independence. It was the first State of the Union to embrace the process of integration of Princely States into the Indian Union and voluntary democratization of erstwhile Princely States.

3. In this regard, it is worthwhile to quote Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, who wrote, "... I had the privilege of initiating the twin process of integration (of princely states) and democratization, which for its small beginnings in distant Orissa, has gradually swept over the whole of the subcontinent."

While on the topic of India's democratization, I would be remiss to not talk about the leaders of Odisha during the freedom struggle. They played key roles in the freedom struggle as well as in making a deep impact on Mahatma Gandhi who was moved by their selfless service and sacrifice for the cause of Odisha and India.

4. These virtues are best exemplified in the contributions of Utkalmani Gopabandhu Das who has been rightly described as a compassionate rebel, surviving only on Rice and Dal. In 1921 during his first visit to Odisha, Gandhiji seeing him surviving as such, asked him if such poor diet would not adversely affect his health? Gopabandhu replied that he was willing to suffer such privation for the sake of Swaraj. Gandhiji in his article 'My Odisha Tour' praised the conviction and wrote that he would surely make India free if he could gather hundred Gopabandhus in India.

5. Indeed the ethos of Swaraj in all its glory has been guiding this pearl of east which has contributed in many ways to building India.

6. The people of the State have a glorious legacy inspiring the rest of the country. While reflecting on prabasi Odias my mind goes back to deep recesses of history of the State. The earliest examples of prabasi Odias represent fine examples of entrepreneurship and business acumen which are now needed and indeed applied, across India to register higher growth and development.

7. Speaking of Prabasi Odias, I am reminded of the legendary Utkal Gaurab Madhusudan Das, who spent considerable part of his life outside Odisha spearheading a movement to start the first ever step in the form of historic Utkal Aammilani in 1903 to unify Odisha as a separate state. It was also he who established the first educational institution for women which became a college in 1913 much ahead of the first women's university in Bombay set up in 1916, a loft endeavour at the time and a worthy endeavour for all times.

8. It was with his efforts that women law graduates could enter the legal profession as a practicing member of the Bar in India. Till 1923 the Legal Practitioner Act did not mandate women law graduates to pursue law practice. Madhusudhan Das filed a writ petition in Privy Council in London and pleaded that in public interest women law graduates should be permitted to become lawyers. This is perhaps the first example of public interest litigation. Eventually in 1923 the Legal Practitioner Act was amended permitting women law graduates to become lawyers.

9. Such insights throw light on the remarkable contributions of Odia leaders who contributed considerably for the cause of Odisha and India.

10. Today, in India as indeed the world over, Odias are excelling, they have registered their presence in every nook and corner of India on the strength of their merit and worth and have attained excellence based on their higher educational attainments. We have today a large pool of prabasi Odias who are well known for their excellence in diverse fields of politics, judiciary, journalism, bureaucracy and literature.

11. The rich cultural heritage of the State is best reflected in myriad forms of dance, music and performing arts. Odisha has a long and rich history of excelling in art, culture, music, dance and architecture. In recent times, many Odia poets and litterateur have won the Sahitya Academy, Gyanpitha and other national awards. It is befitting that Odia has now been recognized as a classical language.

12. I am therefore glad to note that you are devoting a session to "Odisha, the Soft Power" which will showcase Odisha's strength in this field.

I am sure that the large gathering of Odias from different parts of India and world would bring together the diverse talent pool of the State and harness their capabilities and expertise for growth, development and onward progress of Odisha and India. I am sure that this Prabasi Odia conclave will take forward such a vision.

13. People of Odisha' who are outside the State and India, as well as the residents of the State will have to take immediate as well as far reaching steps, with the Government playing the role of a proactive catalyst.

14. At a time when world has been integrated in lightning speed we need to take advantage of such integration and bring together talents within Odisha and outside to provide synergy for our onward development and progress.

15. In this regard, I feel that this conclave is a historic step for not only Odisha but for whole of India. The illustrious C. F. Andrews, a close associate of Ravindranath Tagore and Mahatma Gandhi wrote an illuminating article entitled Spirit of Odisha in 1927. In the very first para of that article, he observed that if love is the first act of service then it is easy to serve Odisha for he never saw such loveable people in rest of India.

16. With these words I have great pleasure in associating myself with the loveable people of Odisha and prabasi Odias on the occasion of the organization of Prabasi Odia Conclave 2017. I greet all of you on this occasion and wish the conclave all the Success.

JAI HIND