CHAPTER - 2

LIFE AND ACTIVITIES
2.(A). **BISWANATH DAS : A PEEP INTO HIS LIFE AND ACTIVITIES**

The Early Life:

An eminent freedom fighter, a remarkable statesman, an able administrator, an active and honest politician and a charismatic leader, Biswanath Das was born with a silver spoon in his mouth on 8th March 1889 in the village of Belgaon near Polosara in the district of Ganjam (now belonging to the Gajapati district). The district of Ganjam, at the time, was under the Madras Presidency of the British India. His father was Shri Krushna Das and mother Smt. Manikya Devi but later on he was adopted by his uncle Sri Madhusudan Das. He was born in a cultured landed - aristocratic Brahmin family practising strict Brahminic rites and rituals. But in Madras estate the landlords were called Zamindars.

1. According to Jugal Mishra, Dr. Hari Hara Das etc. Biswanath Das was born on 8th March 1889 in the village Belgaon near Polosara but, according to Debi Prasad Rath and Smita Rath, it was 21st April 1889.
the Rayatwari system, there were large farmers or rayats who possessed extensive landed property as owners and not as tenants. Biswanath Das was born in one such rayat family owning more than ten thousand acres of land. He had a large family which consisted of hundred members and all of them were in a joint family with common mess and common dinning. This feature of the family life later on became responsible for his habit of dinning with friends till the last day of his life¹.

2.(A) Education and Influence :

(i) Early Education :

His family was a conservative Brahmin family and, as usual, imposing a rigorous puritanic life upon its members. The family emphasized a traditional education and hence, during his early years, Das got informal education in Sankskrit. As the tradition of the family, the children at the time of going to bed at night

¹. 'Due to the gigantic size of the family, the women folk, it is said, remained engaged by turn in cooking and serving food all the twenty four hours of the day'. See, Dash, S.C. in 'Our First Prime Minister', op.cit.
were told by their elders fine stories about Gods and their incarnations. Such stories were mostly from the Bhagbat Gita, Ramayan, the Mahabharat and other religious scriptures. Such stories containing some moral lessons at the end, were influencing the innocent minds which were gradually being conditioned by a deep sense of faith in God and the supernatural sanctions. Not to be surprised, Das, to his last, was utterly God fearing and cherished an unshakable faith in the Vedas and other religious scriptures.1 Das loved and gave respect to Sanskrit because, as he believed, Sanskrit was the mother of most of the Indian languages. Such knowledge in Sanskrit and access to Bhagbat Gita and Upanishad etc. placed Das in a convenient position to be an excellent public orator. It was a habit with him to quote one or two stories or episodes from the mythological scriptures and was being applauded by the audience.2

1. "The child is early told by his parents and other adults what he should and should not be like. He is told what are desirable or good personal characteristics and what are undesirable or bad characteristics. As a result of these teachings in the values of his culture, the child comes to develop a conception of what he ought to be - the 'ideal self'.


2. See, Das, Dr. Hari Hara in 'Biswanath Das : Symbol of National Pride', op. cit.
an excellent style of establishing rapport with the people and communicate with them on topics whatsoever. Extensive reference to and quotations from the religious scriptures cultivated to his personality an image which the people thought to be infallible. That, Das had an uninterrupted and long innings in politics was made possible by his grass-root contact. He tried to know almost every one around him and he was also known to almost every one of his state. To be gracious upon the poor and the needy has been the teachings of almost all world religions. Not to be surprised, Das was looked upon as a 'Messiah' to the exploited and the down trodden.

2.(A)(ii) Higher Education :

Biswanath Das started his educational life with some formal education at Ganjam. He was going to Abadhanas (the primary teacher proficient in Sanskrit and Ethics). Since he was the progeny of an aristocratic family, not infrequently those Abadhanas were coming to his family to impart him some extra lessons. After the primary level education was over, he came to Cuttack for higher studies. He matriculated from Town Victoria High School (presently known as Bhakta Madhu Vidyapitha). He completed his graduation from the historic Revenshaw
College at Cuttack and proceeded to Calcutta for legal education and training.

It is to be noted, here that during his graduation studies at Cuttack, he was deeply influenced by the life and activities of two eminent persons - Madhusudan Das, a front ranking lawyer turned politician, and Gopabandhu Das, a social worker turned politicians. These twin influences placed Das in an advantageous position. Being inspired by their ideals and nobles deeds he was drawn into the vortex of two simultaneous struggles, the struggle for national independence under the leadership of Gopabandhu and the struggle for the amalgamations of the Oriya-speaking areas under the leadership of Madhusudan Das. Both the movement differed on the question of priority. He acted like a bridge between them. He had grass-root contact from the very childhood and as in future life he acquired a degree of law and became a junior to Madhusudan Das, he was in a position to utilise his legal experience and acumen to social service and the cause of the common people.

Gifted with a frail health and short stature, Das was strong and robust enough in expressing his views and comments. During his student days at Calcutta he not
only participated in the rallies but actively and sincerely organised meeting to protest against the British imperialistic exploitation. Such political socialization was gradually making in him a rebel to wage a tirade against the British rule. Das sub-consciously was laying foundation for his future political career.

After his return from Calcutta and juniorship to Barrister Madhusudan Das just for two years, he rushed forward to Berhampur, his native place. He had no time to waste; he set himself against the exploitation of the Rayats by the Maharajas and the Mustadars. At this point, it is perhaps not unnatural to evaluate, his activities. It has already been stated that he was born in a landed aristocratic family. But, unlike an aristocrat, he joined his shoulders and hands with those of the exploited lot.

2.(B)(i) Activities:

Peasant Movement:

The selfless and Philanthropic heart of Das did not allow him to relax in pomp and luxury. The
life that was indoctrinated under the strict vedic and associated ritualistic traditions was to be dedicated for the upliftment of the neglected. Organising the country's firstever peasant's movement Das created a thousand ripples in the heart of Congressmen in other parts of the countries.

After organising a regular and recognised forum to represent the grievances of the poor peasants - the Ganjam District Zamindari Rayats' Association, he became its President and appointed V.V.Giri as its Secretary. Till to the last, V.V.Giri was addressing Das as 'Bade Bhaiya' (the elder brother)¹. Later on, through this organisation, both of them got elected to the Madras Legislative Council from the northern districts of the Madras Presidency. Inside the Council, both of them jointly fought demanding immediate concessions to the Royats and became successful to some extent. At this stage, Das advised Giri to take up the cause of the unorganised and exploited railwaymen. Giri made the first ever organisation of the railwaymen and earned instant popularity as a labour leader. At this stage Das, Giri

1. See, Dash, Dr. S.C., "Our first Prime Minister", op. cit.
and the Raja of Bobili were working hands-in-gloves. And the Raja of Bobili, later on became the Chief Minister of Madras. In course of time, V.V.Giri became a nationally reputed labour leader and trade unionist. The country honoured his efforts by making him the Vice-President and, then, the President of India. Here, Das appears to be a touch stone. In one sense he was behind all the success of Giri but he himself could not come to the lime light as he remained to the last with his own people. Whatever remained to be achieved for the emancipation of the Rayats, was achieved during the time of premiership of Das. The process that he had began reached the grand finale when the Congress Government of Das (July 1937- December 1939) took certain radicals measures and brought about a series of legislations (the details have been discussed in Chapter-III).

2.(B)(ii) Struggle for Integration of the Oriya-Speaking Tracts :

(a) Introduction :

The period under discussion (1920's) saw Orissa thoroughly vivisected - the northern part
remaining under the Bengal - Bihar Presidency; the Western part in the Nagpur Presidency and the Southern part including Ganjam - the birth place of Das, in the Madras Presidency. These three Oriya-speaking portions under different Presidencies of the British India almost received the shock of identity-crisis. Just because the people, speaking the same mother tongue (Oriya), were placed under another Presidency speaking another language, immediately became a population of minority. The dominant linguistic group of the different Presidencies make and engineer conspiracy in a methodical way to impose their languages upon the minority Oriya-Speaking people. The Bengalese in the North, following the slogan of High School teacher Kantilal Bhattacharya, started telling "Oriya ek tu Swatantra Bhaṣa Noye " (Oriya is not a separate language). By 1924 the British Governor of the Nagpur Presidency made an order to the effect that the Hindi should be the court and official language within his jurisdiction. In the South the picture was most precarious. Whatever little linguistic concession was giving to the minority Oriya-speaking people, existed for the name sake. Even in the upper primary school the language Oriya was taught by the Telugu teachers and the names were so peculiarly misspelt and sentences so jocularly uttered by them that the Oriya virtually
became an object of caricature. Thus there was apprehension at least in the minds of a section of liberated urban elites that the identity of the Oriya as a separate language might be eliminated very soon. At this stage a section of the Oriya-speaking population started demanding a separate state for the Oriya-speaking population by amalgamating the entire Oriya-speaking tracts.¹

(b) Starting the Movement (Utkal Sabha):

The first ever organisation that provided a regular forum for the mission of integrating the Oriya-speaking tracts was the Utkal Sabha. "Sashibhushan Roy, the son of the famous Oriya poet Radhanath Roy, was its President. Utkal Sabha was making regular representations and even sending delegation to the Viceroy (the administrative Chief of the British India). Thus the Utkal Sabha had already

led the foundation of creating Oriya-nationalism and impressing upon the alien ruler to fulfil the demands at the earliest opportunity.

(c) Utkal Sammilani:

In 1903, however, another all Orissa body, which was larger than the Utkal Sabha - the Utkal Union Conference (popularly known as the Utkal Sammilani) at its inaugural session at Berhampur. It was organised by Barrister Madhusudan Das and a group of young enthusiasts, all educated and liberated like Biswanath Das. In the Conference Sashibhusan Roy, the President of the Utkal Sabha mooted a proposal that there should not be two different organisations for the same purpose. In the better and greater interest of the Oriyas, he, on the dias, announced the merger of the Utkal Sabha with the Utkal Union Conference and proposed the name of Barrister Das to be its President. Hereafter, the entire process of liberation of the Oriya and the creation of separate state of Orissa was under the banner of the Utkal Union Conference.
(d) The Phillip-Duff Committee (1927):

Biswanath Das started organising the Oriya-speaking people in the Ganjam and Koraput region to make persistent demand for the creation of a separate State of Orissa.

Due to such demands, the alien Government was forced to appoint a Committee - the Phillip-Duff Committee in February 1927. The recommendation of the Committee was that a region of Ganjam and Koraput along with some adjacent areas pre-dominantly populated by the Telugu-speaking people should merge with Orissa in case Oriya became a separate Orissa. After such recommendation the Bihar-Orissa Government deputed a subordinate Bengali Officer - U.M. Sen, to assess and recommend whether the inclusion of these areas in Orissa would be financially viable. Sen recommend negatively which was thoroughly contested and contradicted by Biswanath Das. He took all the rigorous and painful labour to prepare a balance-sheet of the total income and expenditure of the region to disprove Sen's claim that it was a financially deficit
region and the integration of the region with Orissa might be financially counter-productive.

(e) The Simon Commission Visits Orissa:

Meanwhile, the Simon Commission had been appointed by the British Parliament to tour throughout India to assess the political demands of the Oriya. Just because, there was not a single Indian as the member of the Commission, the Indian National Congress readily boycotted it and started giving the slogan "Simon, go back". However, the Simon Commission was appearing liberal and sympathetic to the demands of the different linguistic groups. The Commission came to Orissa in 1921. Here was the golden opportunity for Das. He exploited the situation in such a manner which explained nothing but his statesmanship and political foresight. As a faithful Congress Worker, he should have boycotted the Simon but instead the Congress in Orissa under his leadership and persuasion accorded a rousing welcome. He was severely criticised and even rebutted by the Indian National Congress. But just because he was honest to the extent that whatever he
was doing was in the greater interest of the people, he never lamented for what he did. Such a welcome, amidst stiff protest elsewhere, entirely changed the impression of the Commission and later on taking a sympathetic attitude, it announced that the demand of the Oriyas for a separate state on the linguistic basis was legitimate.

(f) The Round Table Conferences at London (1930-32):

Then came the three Round Table Conferences at London between the period (1930-32). India sent a large delegation mostly of the Congressmen. The Maharaja of Parlakhemundi, not an official delegate, attended the Conference with personal expenditures. His purpose of attendance was to make the demands of the Oriyas and issue to be discussed in the Conferences. All the papers, host of memoranda along with Annexures and rejoinders informations and statistics that he carried with him were mostly prepared by Biswanath Das and Satyanarayan Rajguru (the family priest of the Maharaja). The labour of Maharaja did not go in vain. And the three Round Table Conferences decided that the demands for the creation
of separate state on the linguistic basis in different parts of India (mainly in Orissa) were the issues to be considered seriously\(^1\).

\((g)\) The O' Donnell Committee (1931):

The O' Donnell Committee was appointed by the Government of India Resolution No. F. 12/VI/31 dated 18th September 1931. The purposes of the Committee were two folds -

(a) to examine and report of the financial and other consequences of setting up a separate administration for Orissa; and

(b) to make recommendations regarding the boundary in the event of separation\(^2\).

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2. The Committee consisted of S.P.O. Donnell, the Chairman and H.M. Meheta of Bombay, T.R. Phookan from Assam, Maharaja Krushna Chandra Gajapati of Parlakhemundi on behalf of Orissa, Sachidananda Sinha on behalf of Bihar, P. Narasingha Raju on behalf of Telugus as members, -in fra-
Just a little earlier to the appointment of the Committee, Census was conducted in the Madras Presidency, the Oriyas of the Koraput-Ganjam region had the early experience that during the earlier census the Telugu enumerators were deliberately reducing the number of the Oriya-speaking people and the records were being manipulated accordingly. Thus, during the census of 1931, these people became extra courteous to protect their own rights and appeal dated 14.10.31, printed by ASHA Press Berhampur was circulated on rising the donation of Rs. 25,000/- from the Ganjam-Koraput to collect information for pleading the case more accurately before the Committee.

1. The appeal was signed by Goura Chandra Rajendra Dev, Sri Sashibhushan Rath, Madhusudan Panigrahy, Biswanath Das, Bhubaneswar Rath, Digambar Radh, Mandhata Gorachand Patnaik, Jagannath Padhi Khadanga, Damodar padhi, Niranjan Patnaik and Lingaraj Patnaik.
In 1932, a Committee was set up under the leadership of Krushna Chandra Gajapati, to send a delegation to the Viceroy¹.

Biswanath Das, preparing the financial details for the delegation, could clearly show that the new taxes that the province would get under recommendation of the Federal Finance Committee would bring Orissa new receipts to the tune of Rs. 20 lakhs. Thus, he disproved that inclusion of Ganjam-Koraput region in the province of Orissa would not be financially viable.


24th December 1932, is a milestone on the road to the creation of a separate province for Orissa. This was the day when, the Secretary of State of England, Sri Samuel Hoare made a declaration on Orissa in the Round Table Conference\(^1\).

Finally, on 1st April 1936, Orissa was born as a separate State including the Ganjam-Koraput region, the region in which Biswanath Das was born. The dream, the dedication and the sacrifice of Biswanath Das became a reality.

2. B.(iii) The National Freedom Struggle:

(a) Non-Cooperation Movement (1920-21):

After establishing through contacts with the people from top to the grass-roots and solidifying the social base, Das headed for the third stream of simultaneous activities - participations in the national freedom struggle. He began his political career after being influenced by the call of 'Non-cooperation' by Mahatma Gandhi. The young blood,

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1. See, Annexure No. 8.
the youthful vigour and the perpetuated mythological teaching of the childhood did not allow Das, like most of his contemporaries throughout the country to relax or idle or even to continue with his legal profession when there was a call of the motherland for liberation. During his studenthood at Cuttack and Calcutta, he was influenced by the life and activities, the plans and the programmes of action of the top Congress leaders - specifically of Gandhiji, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, Sardar Patel, Dr. Abul Kalam Azad and Gopabandhu Das of Orissa. Thus when the opportunity was at hand, Das, as a dedicated youth, launched into the freedom struggle by taking part in the Non-cooperation movement. During his days at Calcutta, as a law student he was active in Congress politics and as a Congress activist, he was organising protest meetings and rallies against the alien British ruler. Such a sense of hatred was gradually making him a protestor and a rebel. He was thoroughly politically socialised.

Gandhiji visited Berhampur on 29th March 1921. His stayed in the official residence of Madhusudan Panigrahi, and advocated turned Congress activist. This was the opportunity for Biswanath Das and his associates to place a typical problem before
Gadhiji. Gandhiji, no doubt, came to Berhampur for spearheading the non-cooperation movement in the Southern part of Orissa but Das gave the movement an emotional twist. He, along with the intelligentsia of Berhampur, successfully convinced Gandhiji that no movement can sustain for a long time if and/or so long as people with unity of purpose did not stand behind it. They highlighted how was the Oriya-speaking population, vivisected and they made a doubt whether the people might be influenced by the call of nation when they were destined to live as if foreigners to one another by remaining under separate administration in separate Presidencies. Unless they are united and allowed to live in a separate province how can nationalism, the mission of Gandhiji be expected of them? Thus, they wanted to create an impression in the mind of Gandhiji that closely associated with the Indian nationalism was the Oriya nationalism. People normally recognised the nation only through the province in which they lived. Gandhiji was impressed and was convinced that the logic was correct. He declared 'Before the sun rises tomorrow, the Telugu-Oriya boundary dispute should be settled. The
stronger Telugu must yield to the weaker Oriya"\(^1\).

Biswanath Das was not personally unknown to Gandhiji. He along with Sashibhusan Rath, Sribacha Panda and Niranjan Patnaik represented Orissa in the Nagpur Session of the Indian National Congress in 1920. The session was also attended to by Gandhiji. The Nagpur session adopted a resolution that the Congress Committee should be reconstituted on linguistic basis. Accordingly, Orissa's first ever Congress Committee was established in Ganjam on 14th March 1924, under the leadership of Biswanath Das. The Nagpur-session was followed by the Chakradharpur session. Unfortunately the session saw a division among the Congress leaders of Orissa. The division was mainly due to the priority to be attached to Indian Nationalism or Oriya sub-nationalism. While Barrister Madhusudan Das and Maharaja Parlakhemundi demanded "Orissa first, India next", the other group led by

\(^1\) See, Panda, Dr. Prahallad, "in Biswanath Das: A bridge between Orissa Amalgamation Movement and National Liberation Struggle" op. cit. p. 23.
Gopabandhu Das and Dr. Harekrushna Mahtab demanded "India first, Orissa next ". However, the leaders like Biswanath Das served as a bridge between the national liberation struggle and the Orissa Amalgamation Movement. Not to be surprised, barring a few conscious and educated Congress activists, the Non-cooperation Movement of 1920-21, could not achieved a magnetic dimension in the Southern part of Orissa.

(b) The Civil-Disobedience Movement (1930-31):

By the time Non-cooperation Movement was fading away, Gandhiji gave his second call for Civil-disobedience. It coincided with the call and purpose of the Salt-Satyagraha. Biswanath Das resigned his official position as the member of the Madras Legislative Council and joined the Civil-disobedience Movement. Under his leadership, people like Dibakar Patnaik, Niranjan Patnaik, Sarala Devi and others were drawn to the Movement. Biswanath Das remained at the forefront of the Salt-Satyagraha. He launched the Satyagraha at Huma. To make an appeal to the people
and to motivate and stimulate them to the cause of Satyagraha, Das and Sarala Devi addressed a public meeting at Huma, where the Salt factory of the British was located. On 8th May 1930, a close associate of him Niranjan Patnaik was planning a raid on the factory\(^1\). On the declaration of the District Magistrate of Ganjam, a number of Congress leaders including Biswanath Das got arrested on 26th June 1930, under sections 143 and 117 of the Indian Penal Code and Sections 74 of Salt Law.\(^2\) Das had to suffer the firstever imprisonment of life. But it was just for a year. He was confined to the Central Jail, Vellore.

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1. See, *The UtkalDipeeka' 17th May 1930.*

2. The District Magistrate of Ganjam wrote: "As there was some talk of rowdy element causing trouble, Mr. Sashibhushan Rath (popularly known as S.B. Rath) Editor of ASHA and Mr. Biswanath Das, Ex-Member of the Madras Legislative Council, were arrested and convicted; these had undoubtedly been stirring up trouble behind the scenes and they had great influence among the Oriyas". See, Behera, Dandapani, "The Civil Disobedience Movement in the Ganjam District 1930-31", in Orissa History Congress Proceedings, Berhampur, 1977, p.161.
Towards the end of 1931, Gandhiji, decided to suspend the Movement because, for the first time, the leaders of the Indian National Congress was invited by the British to participate in the Round Table Conference at London. In 1932, Gandhiji returned from the Second Round Table Conference thoroughly disillusioned and disappointed. At this point of time, he with the support and approval of the Indian National Congress, decided to resume the suspended Movement. Again there was, as if a national outburst. Biswanath Das, as an individual Satyagrahi was arrested at Berhampur along with Mrs. Laxmibai and Dibakar Patnaik. Soon after Gandhiji's 'Dandi March' and 'Salt Satyagraha', the Movement gradually started loosing its tempo.

(c)(i) Biswanath Das: As the Premier of Orissa:

Under the Government of India Act, 1935, Orissa was already recognised as a separate province, though it was formally inaugurated on 1st April 1936. Under the Provision of Provincial Autonomy of the said Act the first ever election to the Orissa Legislative Assembly was held in July 1937. The Congress under the

leadership of Biswanath Das scored a comfortable majority of 37 in a House of 60. Thus, emerging as the largest single majority party on the floor, the Congress had the constitutional right to form the Government. But, as per the decision of the Indian National Congress, the leaders of the Congress in the provincial legislatures demanded an assurance from the Governors to the effect that he must not unnecessarily interfere in the normal activity of the government. In case the Governor interfered, the Ministers should not hesitate to take the issue to the public. No Governor in any province gave such an assurance. Hence, the Congress, as in Orissa, decided to dissociate itself from the ministry-making.

As an alternative the Governor of Orissa wanted to have a minority puppet government. He requested the Maharaja of Parlakhemundi, who was the President of the National Party to form the ministry. The Maharaja accepted the invitation. On 1st April 1937, he formed a Ministry along with two Cabinet Ministers. The people of Orissa became restless and even violent when a minority Government was
administered with the oath to assume office\textsuperscript{1}. On the day of inauguration of the Government, a strike was organised throughout the state\textsuperscript{2}.

Due to its minority position and absence of numerical strength the government of the Maharaja was virtually ineffective and counter-productive from the standpoint of the people of Orissa\textsuperscript{3}.

Due to want of time and popular support the government was a failure on every front and had to resign ultimately.

\begin{enumerate}
\item See, The Amrita Bazar Patrika, March 8, 1937.
\item Commenting upon the performance of the Maharaja's Government, C. Rajgopalchari said, "the lions of the sixty five days circus will not bite even if heads are put into their mouth".
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Meanwhile, the Governors in different States assured the Congress of their non-interference in the normal activities of the Government. Under the instructions of Indian National Congress, the Congress in the provinces started forming the Government. As the undisputed and well recognised leader of the Congress, Biswanath Das was sworn in as the Premier of Orissa on 19th July 1937.

(c)(ii) Achievements of Das : as the Premier :

After becoming the Premier of Orissa, Das got the opportunity, long awaited, to transform his dreams into reality. As the first ever struggle of his life, Das had started his social service by taking the cause of the poor exploited peasants. Not to be surprised, the Rayat's problems became the most important issues for his government. He started giving a final shape to the status of the Rayats and, as corollary, aimed at reforming the existing agricultural system. Immediately after assuming office, the Das's Ministry during the first session of the Assembly, introduced two important Tenancy Bills - (a) Madras Estate Land (Orissa Amendment) Bill, 1937; and (b) Orissa Tenancy (Amendment) Bill, 1937. The purpose of
these two bills was immediately to eliminate the plights of the tenants and to accord them to status.

The Das government rightly thought that simply by according the tenants the rights over the land they were tilling, the problem could not be solved. The government, felt that, without State support and government's loans, the poor tenants could not make agriculture productive. Hence, the Prime Minister himself introduced the Orissa Co-operative Land Mortgage Bank Bill, 1938. The main purpose of the Bill were - (a) regulation of the business of money lending, (b) reduction of the high rate of interest and exorbitant compound interest in order to relieve a large number of poor peasants in the villages.

Besides, several major social reforms measures were also implemented during his Premiership between (1937-1939). The measures may be catalogued as follows :-
(a) total prohibition in the province;
(b) promotion of education and removal of illiteracy;
(c) removal of untouchability;
(d) abolition of Bethi (forced labour);
and (e) jail reforms.

At the educational front, Orissa was one of the most backward states of India. The Das government gave priority to the primary education for elimination of illiteracy. But it did not mean that he neglected higher education in the state. The need of a University in Orissa was long overdue. The government appointed a committee to examine the feasibility of having a University in Orissa.

The short duration of his Premiership was full of events and episodes but, at the same time, a period of trial for Das. The different events clearly proved the foresight, straightforwardness, respect for honesty of purpose and statesmanship of Das. Only two such incidents could be cited to explain the context.
In 1938, the Governor of Orissa - Sir John Austin Hubback, was granted leave for four months. John Rutherford Dain, the R.D.C., was appointed as the acting Governor. Das openly opposed the appointment of Dain. He was raising a Constitutional question. His contention was that, since the R.D.C.(Revenue Divisional Commission) was an Officer, sub-ordinate to the Premier, how can the same Premier be responsible to this sub-ordinate Officer, the moment he became the Governor. Secondly, the R.D.C. sat on the gallery in the meeting of the Cabinet but the same person would be the Chairman of the Cabinet meeting after becoming the Governor. Das found in the decision a clandestine attempt to humiliate the Premier. If the decision was not reversed, he threatened, he would resign. The stand, Das took, was supported by Gadhiji, all the top leaders of INC (Indian National Congress) and all the Congress Premiers in different Provinces. The Premiers in other parts of India threatened to resign if the deadlock was not broken. The echo was to be heard in distant London. Since the Governors were being appointed by the King Emperor and since the King Emperor could not withdraw an order signed by himself, the issue was clearly taking the shape of a Constitutional crisis. Any how, the deadlock was to
break. A solution emerged when the Governor himself withdrew his application of leave.

In the same year, another Rayat Movement, popularly known as the Praja Mandal Movement took place in the princely state of Dhenkanal. Raja Sankar Prasad Mahindra Bahadur, ordered firing and, as a result, there were heavy casualties including a boat-boy of fourteen - Baji Rout. The dead bodies were carried in bullock cart for a procession around the city of Cuttack. The scene made the spectators inflamed. The Governor apprehended that the emotions of the people may take the shape of an immediate outburst where the people of Athagarh, another princely state near Cuttack might join. The Governor, to contain the situation ordered the Das government to send armed forces to these native states. Das seriously reacted to the order of the Governor and criticised it on the ground of "excess of the jurisdiction". It was because, according to the Government of India Act, 1935, the matters of the native states were the subjects placed under the jurisdiction of the Viceroy and, hence, the order of the Governor, Das explained, was in violation of the Act. Later on, Das sent the armed police when order came from the Viceroy.¹

¹. See, Dash, Dr. S.C. in "Our First Prime Minister", op. cit.
In December 1938, subjects in large number from the native state of Talcher started migrating to the nearby Angul area. The whole situation ultimately took the shape of a problem of exodus of refugees. The Das government geared up the entire state machinery to take care of rehabilitation, subsistence, sanitation, self-employment, law and order and the other human aspects. The Government had to liberally drain out a sizeable fund from the State exchequer, with least considerations for financial crisis. With the situation worsening gradually, Das took up the matter to the Viceroy who appointed major Hannessey as his agent to negotiate with the concerned parties. Finally, the Hannessey-Mahtab pact was signed on 21st March 1939.¹

Almost at the same time, one British Political Agent - Major R.L. Bazelgett was murdered on 5th January 1939 in the native state of Ranpur. Biswanath Das, as a Congressman, condemned the murder as such technique was against the Congress principle of non-violence. But, as the Premier, he behaved in a different way. Convinced of the fact that, the murder was justified since Bazelgett was nothing short of a tyrant, he wanted to express sympathy to the people as an individual. But, as the Premier he was under
Constitutional responsibility to the Governor. Anticipating that, at any moment, a call might come from the Governor, he took an early train to Ram Krishna Mission Bhubaneswar. Das, thereby, took time to respond to the call of Governor for sending police to Ranpur. The delay of twenty four hours in sending the police, allowed sufficient time to the natives to flee their villages. After twenty four hours, when the Government sent police to Ranpur, the police found the villages deserted.

That to be a Premier, some one must be having the expertise in crisis management is clearly evident from a small incident. Thinking that, the long standing genuine demands were being ignored by the Government the students of the Medical School of Cuttack went on strike from 26th March 1939. The grievances of the students were supported by the intelligenta. But the Das Government came down heavily upon the striking students. The aggrieved students adopted the Congress methods of Satyagraha against the Government. The credibility of the Congress party was at stake. Thus, seniormost Congress leaders like Pandit Nilakantha Das started negotiating with the
students for a compromise. To the surprise of the Satyagrahis, Das himself came for negotiation. Such duality in behaviour surprised many of his colleagues.  

2.B.III(d) QuitIndia Movement (1942):

In December 1939, the first Phase of his life as office bearer came to a close when his government resigned to respond to the call of the INC (Indian National Congress). The INC took such a fateful decision of instructing its government in the provinces to resign on the eve of the British unilateral declaration of India joining the British side in the Second World War. The balance sheet of the achievement and failure of the Das Government proved that, whatever success it achieved, was a mixed success. Whatever could not be achieved was not due to the lack of zeal or determination or even the governmental efforts, but primarily due to the paucity of funds, the government was grappling with.

1. 'Often, Biswanath's suavity was marked by lack of quick decision. His attempt to reach all estranged many". See, Patnaik, Lal Mohan in 'Resurrected Orissa', Cuttack 1941, p. 24.
Soon after the War broke out in 1939, the Indian National Congress gave the call for individual Satyagraha throughout the country. Das, soon after resigning as the Premier of Orissa, participated in the national politics as a Congress volunteer. He courted arrest in 1940 in the first batch of the Satyagrahis to be released soon. By the time, Gandhiji gave the call to the British to Quit-India on 8th August 1942. By the time (in between his release in 1941 and 1942), he was making whirlwind tours throughout the state addressing public rallies, giving the message of Gandhi and the Indian National Congress of Satyagraha and 'Quit-India' and appealing the people to dedicate through participating the 'Quit-India Movement'. For his anti-war speeches, he was again put behind the bars on 30th June 1942. He suffered the sentence for three years and was released in 1945 with the war coming to close.

2.(C). Das : as Nation-Builder :

(i) Membership of the Constituent Assembly :

Soon after the war, the Provincial legislatures went to poll. Das did not contest
suffering a court ruling. In 1946, he was nominated to the Constituent Assembly of India and got the opportunity to shape the future destiny of the motherland through making of the Constitution. His participation in the Assembly was lively, fruitful and noteworthy. Taking part in almost all the important aspects of national life—the Objective Resolution Moved by Pandit Nehru and the discussion thereon, the Fundamental Rights to the citizens, the Minority Representation, the Universal adult Suffrage etc provided him the opportunity to express himself frankly.

After giving shape to the form of administration Das, under the situation, was required to operate the same machinery for the service of the people.

(ii) Membership of Parliament:

The life of the Constituent Assembly came to a close on 26th January 1950 after India became a Republic. Two years after, in 1952 the first-ever general election was held to bring the National
Parliament to life. In 1954, Das was nominated to the Council of state, the Upper Chamber of the Parliament. His tenure as Councillor (Membership of Parliament) terminated in 1960.

(iii) Governorship:

In 1961, Das was elected to the Legislative Assembly of Orissa. At this time Pandit Nehru, the Prime Minister of India, thought that the Assembly membership was not the proper position to exploit the talent of Das for the national cause. Not to be surprised, he recommended to the President of India to appoint Das as the Governor of Uttar Pradesh, the largest of the Indian States. Just one year before his tenure as Governor (1962-67) terminated he was elected as the All India President of the Lok Sevak Mandal (Servants of India Society) in 1966, after the death of the Prime Minister Sri Lal Bahadur Sastri. This society was founded by the renowned freedom fighter - Gopal Krishna Gokhale - to dedicate for the services to the poor. Naturally, therefore, Das during the period (1967-1971) made extensive tours throughout the mainlands of India assessing the performance of the society.
(iv) Chief Ministership:

But in 1971 after the mid-term poll was over, he had to attend the call of a completely different kind. Under political compulsions, the two Ex-Chief Ministers of State (Biju Pattnaik and R.N. Singh Deo) could not break the political fluidity and could not reach an accord between themselves to form the government. Since these two leaders were anti-Congress and they decided not to allow the Congress to form the government, agreed among themselves to look for a compromise candidate. They approached Biswanath Das. As an experienced politician, Das could read the facts between the lines. He did not hesitate to tell them that, if in future any of them would try to play foul with him, he would not hesitate to throw resignation. Thus, conditionally he accepted headship of the government of Orissa and, in fact, was moving with "the letter of resignation in his pocket". The government was short lived and Das had to resign as the Chief Minister just after a year when Biju Pattnaik became crazy and restless after power.

1. See, Nanda, Dr. S. "Coalitional Politics in Orissa".
When Das felt that Biju was becoming day by day irresistible for the office of the Chief Minister, he felt bored and out of disgust, finally resigned on 9th June 1972.

2.(D). **At the last leg of life:**

With his resignation from the office of the Chief Minister, Das also closed the chapter of political life after an inning spanning over a period of more than half a century. The long innings gave Das a life of fulfilment and contentment. He was one of the founding fathers of Orissa as a separate state and in course of time, utilised his official positions to make it a self-sufficient state. He remained to be one of the architects of Orissa's progress and prosperity.

Soon after retirement from politics, he returned to his native place - Berhampur. How would he live the remaining period of twelve years (He resigned in 1972 as Chief Minister of Orissa and died in 1984)? He had no specific works either for himself or for his
children or even for the family.¹

If Das had even least consideration for affluence, he could have returned to the bar and resumed his legal practice. But a true Gandhian, he had practised throughout living a simple and an auster life. Himself a Gandhian and brought up and trained in the rigorous Gandhian tradition, Das lived the typical Gandhian life till to the last. Earnestly believing in the Gandhian principles of bread-labour, he thought, he had no right to consume without work whatsoever. Keeping with another Gandhian principle of voluntary poverty, Das even hesitated to enjoy the property earned

¹. Das became a widower during his early youth at 35. By the time his wife, Gouri Devi died in 1924. Das was left with only two sons, still in their teens. Elder of the two - Harihar Das, a bachelor decided to settle in the village and to take care of the paternal property during the absence of his father. The other son, Bhikari Das, had, by the time Das returned to Berhampur, established himself in business at Cuttack. Since Das had a joint family and both the sons, by the time were already established, there was no immediate source of engagement for him.
Under the circumstance, he had no other option than to dedicate the remaining few years of his life for the benefits of the needy, as a sincere, devoted and dedicated volunteer of the servants of India Society and, also as its President, he toured all over the country to place his services whenever required, for the uplift of his country men.

1. Das once commenting on himself, said, "I love my Indian way of life. My needs are few and, hence, there is no strain on my honesty, nor any need of compromise. My way of life is cheap and economical and is free from exploitation of any kind. The wealth of my father was not meant for my personal luxury. It was meant for helping the needy and improving the desirable." Commenting upon a servant of the masses, he believed, "A minister, in order to be useful to the state and loyal to his conscience should carry a letter of resignation in his pocket".

See, Nanda, Dr. S. "Coalitional politics in Orissa", Sterling Publisher, New Delhi, 1979, p. 47.

2. For most persons it becomes a major goal to achieve an actual self which is as similar as possible to the ideal self. To the extent that the gap between the actual self and the ideal self picture is small, the individual feels a sense of enhancement for self-esteem.

Still the life of a devoted social worker, that was of Das's could not be contented. A non-agenarian by the time, Das felt as if he had still to do something for the religious contentment of his life. Just at the moment, he got an amount due to him as the erstwhile Governor of Uttar Pradesh. How should he spend the amount? He felt as if his life was closing and still he had a considerable sum to enjoy. What enjoyment would give him satisfaction of the last resort? Not to be surprised, Das as natural to every human being, took shelter under spiritualism. He invested the amount and established Chaturdham Ved Bhawan Nyasa (Trust) at Puri and remained its founder trustee to the last of his life. The Trust was established for the purpose of disseminating the Vedic Philosophy and spiritualism among the people.1 Das was

1. It is unfair to impute motive to the activities of a person just to make one's own argument strong and presentable. The activities of a person may be appreciated differently according to the time, situation, person and place but there should be honesty in appreciation. It does not seem convincing that Das withdrew into Vedantic Research towards the end of his life only when he realised that whatever he did as the Premier of Orissa for agricultural reforms and upliftment of status of the Rayats became barren and fruitless. See, "Beginning of a New Era" by Tripathy, Dr. P.K. in 'Biswanath Das - A Study' Ed. by Nanda, Dr. S., Published in Deptt. of Pol. Sc., S.U. 1990, p. 38.
strictly a vegetarian because he was spiritual and deeply religious.¹

Today, people may be crazy to know how could Das in spite of so much strain and pressure, both Physical and mental live to the age of 95. One possible

1. Two incidents to be cited in support of the views:
"As Chief Minister, he used to write 'HARI HARAYA NAMAH' (I pray Lord Krishna and Lord Shiva the ultimate destroyer) on each file that was put before him first when he starts office work". The Second "In 1937, when the Legislative Assembly was meeting in the Revenshaw College, Hall, he was then the Premier and Mukund Prasad Das was the Speaker. There were veteran legislators like Mandhata Gorachand Patnaik and Godavarish Mishra. One important debate was going on and the Premier was to reply at the end. The last speaker was Mandhata Gorachand Patnaik. Before the turn of Biswanath Das came, he just wanted a glass of water and was seeping the water with eyes closed. Mandhata took this opportunity and abruptly ended his speech. The speaker immediately called upon the Premier to reply. But the Premier with closed eyes was busy in his prayer. There was a vacuum in the House. All these happened in the Premier's presence but he was so engrossed in his prayer while drinking water that he hardly was aware of these developments. The speaker thumped the table and loudly asked the Premier to reply. He, of course, by the time had drunk the glass of water, and rose to speak saying 'Sorry Sir'. See, 'Bate Biswanath Das A Devout Hindu And Valiant Fighter' by Dwivedy, Surendranath in 'Biswanath Das: Personality and Politics' ed. by Baral J.K., B.U., Berhampur, 1990.
explanation may be given. He was an ordent believer of Ayurveda (the Science of life and a technique of treatment) and Naturopathy. Never during his life, he has been to a doctor or has taken allopathic medicines for him.¹.

As an Indian Das was proud of his Indian tradition and he was honestly committed to it till to the last². Even he did not hesitate to preserve a negligibel symbol associated with the Hindu tradition³.

2. Once the Viceroy (the administrative head of the British India) was scheduled to visit Orissa. The Governor told Das, the Premier, to meet the Viceroy in sophisticated dress (by which he perhaps meant the dressed of Western Style). The Premier listened to the Governor but received the Viceroy in his typical Indian dress of Dhoti (loin cloth) and kurta.
   See, Ibid. p.3.
3. Once the administrative v.I.Ps of Orissa hosted the Premier in bankquet and the dishes were prepared in the same VIPs in his village near Berhampur. The items were served on the banana leaves and they had to take it sitting on the ground.
   See, Dash, Dr. S.C. op. cit.
After enjoying a long contented life, a life of struggle and mere achievements with little failures, a life of dedication for the downtrodden and the society at large and a life filled with spiritualism. Das finally passed away at the ripe age of 95 on 3rd June 1984. With his death Orissa, may India, lost a dedicated freedom fighter, an honest social worker, a reputed scholar, an spiritualism and Vedanta, a forceful debator, a seasoned administrator, a disciplined legislator and, after all, a lovable gentleman always wearing a soft smile in his face but an iron determination within.