

# Prof. Gokulanand Mohapatra

## Doyen of Odia Popular Science Literature Passes Away

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**P**ROF. Gokulanand Mohapatra (1920-2013), the doyen of Odia popular science literature with more than one hundred books to his credit passed away on 10 July 2013. As a student of the Calcutta University, he was greatly influenced by Prof. Satyendra Bose's idea of teaching science and developing popular science literature in one's own mother tongue that can create an interface between science and the common man in order to build a modern society free from blind belief and amenable to scientific and technological developments.

He institutionalized his dream in 1948-49, soon after he joined the Ravenshaw College (now Ravenshaw University), Cuttack as a lecturer in chemistry, when he along with some of his like-minded friends such as Prof. Kulamani Samal, Prof. Gadadhar Mishra, Prof. (Dr) Gopal Chandra Pattanaik, Prof. Basant Kumar Behura and others established the Bigyan Prachar Samiti. Since then, it has been serving as the prime forum for most of the prominent scientists of the state interested in popularizing science and as a hatchery for juvenile science writers for the last three generations.

*Prof. Mohapatra was a gifted research worker and a brilliant teacher. He was the first researcher to obtain a PhD degree under the guidance of Prof. Mahendra Kumar Rout, who led the foundation of extensive research in Chemistry in Odisha.*

The Bigyan Prachar Samiti, whose office and library are still functioning in the freely provided house of Prof. Mohapatra and without any government aid, is serving as the role model for a number of such institutions that have sprung up all over the state. Even the Odisha Bigyan Academy, a wing of the Department of Science and Technology of the state government is no exception. As a result, Odisha can now boast of having more than 300 popular science writers, who have been enriching Odia science literature and bringing science to the common man.

The Bigyan Prachar Samiti also brought out the first popular science magazine in Odia in the 1960s with Prof. Mohapatra as the Chief Editor and Prof. Kulamani Samal as the Editor. Now, the state has six such magazines including one published by the Odisha Bigyan Academy. The Bigyan Prachar Samiti is also the first to undertake the publication of popular science books, written by many prominent scientists and science writers of the state, which has enthused private publishers to bring out such books in large numbers.

Many distinguished institutions and organizations have decorated Prof. Mohapatra, the acknowledged father of Odia popular science literature, with awards and honours. The list includes the Odisha Sahitya Academy, the Odisha Bigyan Academy, the Kalinga Foundation and many others.

In fact, he himself instituted a number of prizes to encourage and accord recognition to students with aptitude for science, dedicated science teachers, popular science writers and scientists, with purely private donations most of which have come from his

admirers, friends and his family members and from his own savings. He was a known philanthropist. Sometime back he financed the entire cost of renovation of the aging Mayurbhanj Chemical Laboratory of the Ravenshaw University.

Prof. Mohapatra was a gifted research worker and a brilliant teacher. He was the first researcher to obtain a PhD degree under the guidance of Prof. Mahendra Kumar Rout, who led the foundation of extensive research in Chemistry in Odisha. Then he went to the US as a post-doctoral fellow and worked in a number of renowned institutions. His field of research extended from the chemistry of nucleic acids (then a very new and promising subject) to synthetic drugs and dyes and natural products.

He guided 20 researchers to obtain PhD degree. The number of his research publications in national and international journals has crossed the one hundred mark. After his retirement as the Professor and Head of the Department of Chemistry, Ravenshaw College in 1978, he devoted his time to popularization of science.

Today, Prof. Mohapatra is no more with us. The vacuum created by his death will be felt not only by the community of scientists, science teachers and popular science writers but also by the common people of the state for a very long time to come.

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