

History of Modern Odisha

By **Brajabandhu Mahanta** • February 28, 2017 • Updated October 9, 2026 • 13 min read

HISTORY OF MODERN ODISHA

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Period guide · 1803 – present

History of Modern Odisha: *from conquest to a state of its own*

A source-based guide to Odisha since 1803 — British conquest, the Paika Rebellion and tribal risings, the Na-Anka famine, the Odia movement that created the first linguistic province in 1936, the freedom struggle and the merger of the princely states — with direct

links to every in-depth article on this site.

By **Brajabandhu Mahanta**, MA (Gold Medalist)Updated **October 2026****18 min** read

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- **1803**British conquest
- **1817**Paika Rebellion
- **1 Apr 1936**separate province
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01 · Overview

What is modern Odisha?

Modern Odisha in 60 seconds

- The East India Company conquered Odisha from the Marathas in **1803**; Odia-speaking lands were split between Bengal, Madras and the Central Provinces.
- Resistance came early — the **Khurda rising (1804)**, the **Paika Rebellion (1817)**, tribal risings and **Surendra Sai** in 1857.
- The **Na-Anka famine of 1866** killed roughly a million people and shook Odia society awake.
- Led by **Madhusudan Das**, the **Odia movement** won a separate province on **1 April 1936** — the first created on the basis of language.
- Odias joined the national movement from **Non-Cooperation** to **Quit India**; in the princely states the **Prajamandal** movement fought feudal rule.

- The **princely states merged** with Odisha in 1948–49, giving the state its present shape.

The **history of modern Odisha** begins with the British capture of Puri and Cuttack in 1803 and runs to the present. It is the story of a people divided between three provinces who rebuilt their identity through language, literature and politics, and won a state of their own.

For most of the 19th century Odisha was a neglected corner of the Bengal Presidency. Revenue pressure, the salt monopoly and the catastrophe of 1866 brought misery, but also new schools, newspapers and a generation of reformers and writers. Their work produced the Odia movement, the province of 1936, and the modern state completed by the merger of the princely states after independence.

- Period **1803 - present**
- Colonial rule **British conquest, 1803**
- Great uprising **Paika Rebellion, 1817**
- Separate province **1 April 1936 — Utkala Dibasa**
- Key leaders **Madhusudan Das, Gopabandhu Das, H. K. Mahtab**
- Present shape **Merger of princely states, 1948-49**

02 · Timeline

Timeline of modern Odisha

The main turning points from the British conquest to the merger of the princely states. Gold markers show the milestones most often asked in exams.

1. 1803

In the Second Anglo-Maratha War the Company takes Puri and Barabati Fort; the Treaty of Deogaon confirms the **British conquest of Odisha**.

2. 1804

The Raja of Khurda rises against the British; his minister [Jayi Rajguru](#) is captured and executed in 1806.

3. 1817

The [Paika Rebellion](#) under [Buxi Jagabandhu](#) spreads from Khurda across coastal Odisha.

4. 1830s – 1860s

Tribal resistance: the [Ghumsar rising of Dora Bisoi](#) and the [Kandha rising of Chakra Bisoi](#).

5. 1857 – 1864

[Veer Surendra Sai](#) leads a long guerrilla war around Sambalpur.

6. 1866

The [Na-Anka famine](#) devastates coastal Odisha. The same year *Utkal Dipika* begins publication.

7. 1868

Ravenshaw College is founded at Cuttack, a landmark in the [growth of modern education](#).

8. 1867 – 1893

[Bhuyan risings](#) in Keonjhar under Ratna Naik and later [Dharani Dhar Naik](#).

9. 1903

Madhusudan Das founds the **Utkal Sammilani** (Utkal Union Conference) to unite all Odia-speaking tracts — the heart of the [Odia movement](#).

10. 1912

Odisha is separated from Bengal and joined to the new province of Bihar and Orissa.

11. 1920 – 1942

Odisha joins the national movement: [Non-Cooperation](#), the salt satyagraha at Inchudi in the [Civil Disobedience movement](#), and [Quit India](#).

12. 1 April 1936

The [separate province of Odisha](#) is created — celebrated every year as Utkala Dibasa.

13. 1937

Provincial elections bring [non-Congress and Congress ministries](#) to power.

14. 1938 – 1939

The [Prajamandal movement](#) spreads through the princely states — Dhenkanal, Talcher, Nilagiri, Ranpur.

15. 1948 – 1949

The [princely states merge](#) with Odisha; Mayurbhanj joins on 1 January 1949.

03 · 1803 – 1900

Company rule, famine and a changing society

After 1803 the coastal districts of Cuttack, Puri and Balasore were governed from Bengal, while southern Odia lands lay in the Madras Presidency and the western tracts in the Central Provinces. Short-term revenue settlements, the loss of the salt trade to a government monopoly, and the auction of old estates hit Odisha hard.

The worst blow came in **1866**, when failed rains and official neglect produced the **Na-Anka famine**: roughly a million people — about a third of the coastal population — died. The inquiry that followed exposed the indifference of the administration, and the crisis pushed Odia leaders towards education, journalism and public life.

- [Administration](#)[British Administration in Odisha](#)[Revenue settlements, courts and the shape of Company rule](#).[Read article →](#)
- [Conquest](#)[Anglo-Maratha Conflicts in Odisha](#)[The rivalry that brought the British to Odisha](#).[Read article →](#)
- [1803](#)[British Conquest of Odisha](#)[How Puri and Cuttack fell to the Company](#).[Read article →](#)
- [1866](#)[The Famine of 1866 \(Na-Anka Durbhiksha\)](#)[Causes, scale and consequences of the great famine](#).[Read article →](#)

- [EconomySalt Trade in Odisha during the British PeriodHow the salt monopoly ruined a coastal industry.Read article →](#)
- [SocietySocial and Cultural Changes in 19th-Century OdishaReform, religion and new ideas.Read article →](#)
- [EducationGrowth of Modern Education in OdishaMissionary schools, Ravenshaw College and beyond.Read article →](#)
- [PressGrowth of Press and Journalism in OdishaFrom *Utkal Dipika* to *The Samaja*.Read article →](#)
- [ReligionMahima Dharma: History and TeachingsThe 19th-century faith of Mahima Gosain and Bhima Bhoi.Read article →](#)
- [Heritage125 Years of the Paralakhemundi Light RailwayA princely railway and its legacy. Read article →](#)

04 · 1804 – 1864

Early resistance to British rule

Khurda, whose kings were the hereditary servants of Jagannath, resisted first. In 1804 Raja Mukunda Deva II and his minister **Jayi Rajguru** rose against the Company; the Raja was deposed and Rajguru executed. In **1817** the *paikas* — the traditional militia of Khurda, stripped of their lands — rose under **Buxi Jagabandhu**, attacking government posts across Khurda, Puri and beyond before the revolt was crushed. In western Odisha, **Veer Surendra Sai** of Sambalpur fought the British from 1857 until his capture in 1864.

!

A debated label: many in Odisha argue that the Paika Rebellion of 1817 should be called India's "first war of independence", forty years before 1857. Historians agree it was a major organised rising; whether it deserves that title is still argued. The news reports on this debate are listed in the article index below.

- [1804Khurda Rebellion and Jayi Rajguru](#)The first armed challenge to the Company in Odisha.[Read article →](#)
- [1817 · Main articlePaika Rebellion, 1817](#)Causes, course and suppression of the great rising.[Read article →](#)
- [LeaderBuxi Jagabandhu](#)Chief architect of the Paika Rebellion.[Read article →](#)
- [1857Revolt of 1857 and Surendra Sai](#)Sambalpur's long war against the British.[Read article →](#)

05 · Hills & forests

Tribal risings

In the hill tracts, British attempts to impose revenue, police and control over customs met fierce resistance. The Kandhas of Ghumsar fought under **Dora Bisoi** in the 1830s and later under **Chakra Bisoi**; in Keonjhar the Bhuyans rose under **Ratna Naik** (1867–68) and **Dharani Dhar Naik** (1891–93).

- [Kandha · 1830sGhumsar Rising under Dora Bisoi](#)Resistance in the Ghumsar hills.[Read article →](#)
- [KandhaKandha Rising under Chakra Bisoi](#)A decades-long struggle in the Kandha hills.[Read article →](#)
- [Bhuyan · 1867–68Bhuyan Rising under Ratna Naik](#)Keonjhar's first Bhuyan rebellion.[Read article →](#)
- [Bhuyan · 1891–93Bhuyan Rising under Dharani Dhar Naik](#)The second Bhuyan rising in Keonjhar.[Read article →](#)

06 · 1866 – 1936

The Odia movement and the province of 1936

In the late 1860s attempts to replace Odia with Bengali in schools provoked a spirited defence of the language. Out of this grew organised politics: the **Utkal Sabha** (1882) and, in **1903**, the **Utkal Sammilani**, founded by **Madhusudan Das** to unite all Odia-speaking tracts under one administration. Rulers such as **Sriram Chandra Bhanja Deo** of Mayurbhanj supported the cause.

In 1912 Odisha was separated from Bengal but placed in the new province of Bihar and Orissa. Two more decades of campaigning, commissions and negotiation followed until the **separate province of Odisha** came into being on **1 April 1936**, bringing together the Odisha division, Koraput and parts of Ganjam from Madras, and Khariar and Padampur from the Central Provinces.

- [Main articleUnderstanding the Odia MovementWhy Odias fought for one province and how they won it.Read article →](#)
- [MovementThe Rise of the Odia MovementA struggle for unity and identity.Read article →](#)
- [LeaderRole of Madhusudan Das in Making Modern OdishaUtkala Gourav and the Utkal Sammilani.Read article →](#)
- [LeaderSriram Chandra Bhanj Deo and the Language MovementMayurbhanj's ruler and the Odia cause.Read article →](#)
- [1 April 1936Creation of the Separate Province of OdishaCommissions, boundaries and the birth of the province.Read article →](#)
- [1936Just after the Birth of Modern OdishaThe first steps of the new province.Read article →](#)
- [AnalysisOdisha's Formation DebateRegional grievances or political strategy?Read article →](#)

07 · 1905 – 1947

Odisha in the freedom struggle

Odisha's leaders carried the national movement into villages and schools. **Gopabandhu Das**, founder of the Satyabadi school and the newspaper *The Samaja*, led Odisha into **Non-Cooperation**; in 1930 the salt satyagraha at **Inchudi** in Balasore made the district a centre of **Civil Disobedience**; and during **Quit India** the firing at **Eram** and the execution of **Laxman Nayak** of Koraput became symbols of sacrifice. In 1937 the province had its first elected ministries.

- [Overview National Movements in Odisha](#) The freedom struggle in Odisha from start to finish. [Read article →](#)
- [1905 Swadeshi Movement in Odisha](#) Boycott and swadeshi in Odisha. [Read article →](#)
- [1920–22 Non-Cooperation Movement in Odisha](#) Gopabandhu Das and the first mass movement. [Read article →](#)
- [1930–34 Civil Disobedience Movement in Odisha](#) Salt satyagraha at Inchudi and beyond. [Read article →](#)
- [1942 Quit India Movement in Odisha](#) Eram, Koraput and the last great movement. [Read article →](#)
- [1942 Quit India Movement and the Women of Odisha](#) Women leaders and volunteers of 1942. [Read article →](#)
- [1937–47 Non-Congress and Congress Ministries](#) Odisha's first elected governments. [Read article →](#)

08 · The Garjats

The princely states and their merger

Twenty-six princely states (*Garjats*) covered much of inland Odisha under British paramountcy. From the late 1930s the **Prajamandal** (people's association) movement challenged forced labour and feudal exactions — in Dhenkanal the boatman boy **Baji Rout** was killed by state police in 1938. After independence, under pressure from the people and

from **Harekrushna Mahtab** and **Sardar Patel**, most rulers signed merger agreements, and the states joined Odisha on **1 January 1948**; Mayurbhanj followed on **1 January 1949**.

- [ParamountcyBritish Relations with the Princely StatesHow the Garjats were ruled under the Crown.Read article →](#)
- [1930s–40sThe Prajamandal Movement in OdishaPeople’s movements against princely rule.Read article →](#)
- [1948–49Merger of the Princely States of OdishaHow Odisha took its present shape.Read article →](#)
- [MergerPrincely States and their Merger with OdishaThe states, their rulers and the merger process.Read article →](#)

09 · People & literature

Makers of modern Odisha

Modern Odisha was shaped as much by writers as by politicians. Fakir Mohan Senapati created modern Odia prose, Radhanath Ray brought new forms to Odia poetry, and Gangadhar Meher wrote from western Odisha in a voice of his own.

- [LeaderUtkala Gourav Madhusudan DasLawyer, reformer and father of the Odia movement.Read article →](#)
- [WriterFakir Mohan SenapatiThe father of modern Odia fiction.Read article →](#)
- [PoetGangadhar MeherThe poet of nature from Barpali.Read article →](#)
- [RulerSriram Chandra Bhanja DeoThe reforming Maharaja of Mayurbhanj.Read article →](#)

Classics of the Odia renaissance

- [Radhanath RayChandrabhagaThe legend of Konark’s river retold.Read article →](#)
- [Radhanath RayChilikaThe great lake in Odia verse.Read article →](#)
- [Radhanath RayMeghadutaKalidasa’s cloud messenger in Odia.Read article →](#)

- [Gangadhar Meher](#)[Tapaswini Sita's exile in Meher's epic poem](#).[Read article](#) →

10 · Since independence

Odisha after 1947

Independent Odisha built a new capital at **Bhubaneswar**, which replaced Cuttack in the late 1940s. The **Hirakud Dam** on the Mahanadi, inaugurated in 1957 and one of the longest earthen dams in the world, brought irrigation and power, and steel and mining transformed the north and west. The super cyclone of **29 October 1999** killed close to ten thousand people; the disaster-management system built afterwards has since saved many lives through large-scale evacuations during later cyclones. In **2011** the state's official name in English changed from Orissa to **Odisha**, and in **2014** Odia was recognised as a **classical language**.

For today's issues — governance, education, environment and heritage policy — see our [Contemporary Odisha](#) and [Editorial](#) sections.

11 · Complete index

All articles on modern Odisha

Every article on modern Odisha on this site, grouped and in reading order. Type below to find one quickly.

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3. [Buxi Jagabandhu, Architect of the Paika Rebellion](#)
4. [Revolt of 1857 and Surendra Sai](#)

Paika Rebellion in the news

1. [Odisha Seeks “First Freedom Struggle” Tag](#)
2. [Demand to Declare 1817 the First War of Independence](#)
3. [National Recognition to Paika Revolt](#)
4. [Paika Rebellion in History Textbooks](#)

Tribal risings

1. [Ghumsar Rising under Dora Bisoi](#)
2. [Kandha Rising under Chakra Bisoi](#)
3. [Bhuyan Rising under Ratna Naik](#)

4. [Bhuyan Rising under Dharani Dhar Naik](#)

Odia movement & 1936

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6. [Just after the Birth of Modern Odisha](#)
7. [Odisha's Formation Debate](#)

Freedom struggle

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6. [Quit India Movement and the Women of Odisha](#)
7. [Non-Congress and Congress Ministries \(1937–1947\)](#)

Princely states

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2. [The Prajamandal Movement in Odisha](#)
3. [Princely States and their Merger with Odisha](#)
4. [Merger of the Princely States of Odisha](#)

Makers of modern Odisha

1. [Utkala Gourav Madhusudan Das](#)
2. [Fakir Mohan Senapati](#)
3. [Gangadhar Meher](#)
4. [Sriram Chandra Bhanja Deo](#)

Odia renaissance classics

1. [Chandrabhaga — Radhanath Ray](#)
2. [Chilika — Radhanath Ray](#)
3. [Meghaduta — Radhanath Ray](#)
4. [Tapaswini — Gangadhar Meher](#)

No article matches that search. Try “Paika”, “Odia” or “Quit India”.

12 · For OPSC & university exams

Quick revision: points to remember

1. **1803**: British conquest of Odisha in the Second Anglo-Maratha War; Barabati Fort captured in October.
2. **1817**: Paika Rebellion of Khurda, led by **Buxi Jagabandhu**.
3. **1866**: Na-Anka famine; *Utkal Dipika* founded the same year by Gourishankar Ray.
4. **1903**: Utkal Sammilani founded by **Madhusudan Das**; **1912**: Bihar and Orissa province formed.
5. **1 April 1936**: separate province of Odisha — the first created mainly on a linguistic basis — celebrated as **Utkala Dibasa**.
6. **1 January 1948**: princely states merge with Odisha; **Mayurbhanj** follows on 1 January 1949.

Frequently asked questions about modern Odisha

When did the British conquer Odisha?

The East India Company conquered Odisha from the Marathas in 1803, during the Second Anglo-Maratha War, capturing Puri in September and Barabati Fort at Cuttack in October. See [British Conquest of Odisha](#).

What was the Paika Rebellion?

The Paika Rebellion of 1817 was an armed rising of the paikas — the traditional militia of Khurda — against British rule, led by Buxi Jagabandhu. See [Paika Rebellion, 1817](#).

What was the Na-Anka famine?

The Na-Anka famine of 1866 was a catastrophic famine in coastal Odisha in which roughly a million people died. It exposed the failures of British administration and spurred Odia public life. See [The Famine of 1866](#).

Who led the Odia movement?

Madhusudan Das, known as Utkala Gourav, led the Odia movement and founded the Utkal Sammilani in 1903 to unite all Odia-speaking areas under one administration. See [Understanding the Odia Movement](#).

When did Odisha become a separate province?

Odisha became a separate province on 1 April 1936 — the first province in British India formed mainly on the basis of language. The day is celebrated as Utkala Dibasa. See [Creation of the Separate Province of Odisha](#).

What was the Prajamandal movement?

The Prajamandal movement was a popular movement in the princely states of Odisha in the 1930s and 1940s against forced labour, heavy taxes and autocratic rule. It paved the way for the merger of the states. See [The Prajamandal Movement](#).

When did the princely states merge with Odisha?

Most princely states merged with Odisha on 1 January 1948, and Mayurbhanj joined on 1 January 1949. See [Merger of the Princely States of Odisha](#).

Sources & further reading

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4. Das, Manas Kumar. *History of Odisha*, Vols. I–III.
5. Sahu, Y. K. *History of Odisha*, Vols. I–II.
6. Report of the Commissioners appointed to enquire into the Famine in Bengal and Orissa in 1866.
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