

CONTRIBUTION OF EUROPEANS IN ORISSAN HISTORIOGRAPHY

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Orissa was virtually a *terraincognita* to the historians of the nineteenth century. During this period Orissa was far behind the main stream of historiography. It was obvious that Orissa was territorially scattered and distributed among the neighbouring provinces. Thus a politically fragmented Orissa remained backward and neglected all through the British rule. Obviously the spread of English Education was much delayed in Orissa. During this period Orissa neither possessed historians nor any scope for historical research. Obviously the task of unfolding the history and culture of Orissa was left to the Europeans and the neighbouring scholars.

The Urge and initiation to write regional history particularly of Orissa began with British military commanders and civil servants as historians. By the middle of the Nineteenth century considerable progress has been made in the field of research and exploration pertaining to the early history of Orissa. Interestingly Orissan historiography first began in the form of some stray articles in the *Journals of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*. The Journal did not bring out any systematic history of Orissa. Col. Pearce and Col. Machanji were two foremost contributors of such articles in the *Journals of Asiatic Society of Bengal* and their important article on Orissa were "Sphinx of Egyptian at Puri" and "Saptamatrukas of Jajpur, Konark and Puri" respectively.¹

After British occupation of Orissa the first systematic attempt on writing the history of Orissa was made by Andrew Stirling. In the *Journals of Asiatic Society of Bengal*, Stirling contributed a series of works entitled; *An Account (Geographical, Statistical and Historical) of Orissa proper or Cuttack*. Subsequently his articles on Orissa took the shape of a book under the same title in 1825². Thus Stirling took the first step towards a systematic exposition of the Orissan history and culture.

In his work Stirling's main sources were the legendary and fabulous *Puranas* and referred to *Hatigumpha Inscription*, but like other scholars, Stirling failed to interpret correctly. According to Dr. B. C. Ray; "Stirling's work was not the result of any research. It was merely a report after investigation into the causes of the Orissa Rebellion of 1817. Therefore, it was principally meant to serve as a guide book to the British Administration of Orissa in later period"³. However, with this defects Stirling's contribution to Orissan historiography stands very significant and he was the first scholar, who attempted to present a systematic history of Orissa.

Sir William Wilson Hunter, a British Administrator turned historian made some important contributions to the Orissan historiography. He produced historical writings on Orissa in two volumes and a volume on *Orissa in his Statistical Accounts of Bengal*. But like Stirling, Hunter's writings about the history of Orissa tended to be incomplete, unreliable and inadequate. Like all other Western scholars, Hunter had not the advantage of the knowledge of Indian language and thus could not utilize the source materials in giving many truthful accounts of Orissa's past. But it is true that in the absence of any comprehensive and systematic history of Orissa, Hunter's books are regarded as valuable contributions to Orissan historiography.

During this period another British Administrator of East India Company, George Toynebee also made some contribution to Orissan historiography. His work entitled; *A Sketch of the History of Orissa from 1803 to 1828*, published at Calcutta in 1873⁴, gave a vivid picture about the political, military and administrative arrangements of company's Government and to a certain extent the economic condition of the people of some parts of Orissa.

Another famous Oriental scholar was John Beams, who did valuable research on Orissa, when he was for sometime the Collector of Balasore and also the Commissioner of Orissa Division.⁵ He was highly appreciative of Orissa's rich cultural heritage and language. He made valuable contribution to Orissan historical studies. With a great zeal, he brought many palm-leaf manuscripts and monuments particularly the Buddhists remains of Orissa into the lime light. However, in regular interval, he wrote articles on different aspects of Orissa in the *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*. He also wrote many articles like, "Buddhist remains in Orissa"⁶, "Ruins of Kupari"⁷ and "The History of Orissa under Muhammadan, Maratha and English Rule"⁸. Unlike his predecessors, Stirling and Hunter, Beams did not underestimate the Oriyas and genuinely tried to utilise all known and available historical data and evidences, especially monuments, inscriptions and literary sources.

Besides these important scholars, there were also other European scholars, who enriched the Orissan historiography by their scholastic writings on Orissa's various aspects. Among them Ewer's "Khurda Settlement Report of 1818" threw new light on the economic condition of the people of Orissa. Two famous archaeologists M. Kittoe and Beglar brought to light various important antiquities of Orissa by painstaking exploration. During this period M. Kittoe wrote valuable articles likes, "A Report Tour in the province of Orissa"⁹, and G. Hartwell wrote, "A list of the Forts in the district of Cuttack."¹⁰

According to Binod S. Das, "Military commanders like Captain S. C. Macpherson in 1842 and Major General Campbell in 1864 left accounts of their military operation in the Khondmals of Western Garhjat Orissa. Christian Missionaries like J. J. Peggs and W. F. B. Lawrie had written their treatises attacking the superstitious beliefs of the

people. As their work revolved round preaching and distributing sacred Christian pamphlets to civilize the people they ruled their work throw side light on the socio-econo-religious life of the contemporary Orissa.”¹¹

Though these foreign scholars played the pioneering role to explore the dark, obscure history and culture of Orissa with a stipulated motive, but failed to extract the true facts based on bias and prejudice and their treatment to the subjects is highly superficial. Despite all these drawbacks, these European scholars built a platform in which the further exploration, study and research on Orissan history and culture advanced into positive direction by gaining overwhelming support of native scholars. By the influence of foreign scholars, some native scholars especially the neighbouring scholars contributed a lot to enrich the Orissan historiography by the begining of the twentieth century.

References :

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