

SOME ASPECTS OF CULTURAL LIFE IN PARALAKHEMUNDI ZAMINDARI : A STUDY

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Paralakhemundi, the most important ancient zamindari situated in the western part of the undivided Ganjam district (presently included in Gajapati district), stands as a treasure-house of Orissan historical heritage since its inception¹. Paralakhemundi, one of the eighteen ancient zamindaries of the undivided Ganjam, has a place of significance in Orissa for its rich historical heritage. It was the largest and the most populated zamindari in the Ganjam district of south Orissa.

The contribution of Paralakhemundi zamindari to the Orissan culture is widely known. It was the centre of medieval Kongoda kingdom². The land gave birth to a galaxy of eminent poets and writers who enriched the Oriya literature by their valuable contributions which the people of Orissa can never forget. The amazing fertilization of their intellect, imagination and creation received the benevolent patronage of the royal house of Paralakhemundi³.

The rulers of Paralakhemundi zamindari always took pride in patronizing the writers, scholars and poets. Paralakhemundi, therefore, became a centre of religious, literary and artistic activities. The writers and poets of Paralakhemundi like Gopal Krushna Patnaik, Apanna Parichha, Gopinath Nanda, Raghunath Parichha, Simadri Patnaik, Shyam Sundar Rajguru and others have occupied a prominent place in Oriya literature. It is important to note that Paralakhemundi, under the royal patronage, gave enough boasting to the writers and scholars in order to enrich the Oriya as well as the Sanskrit literature⁴. Since the contribution of Paralakhemundi zamindari to the literary activities of Orissa deserves a separate study, we have not discussed this in the present paper. The main concern of this paper is to throw light on the other aspects of the cultural life, like feasts and festivals, *mathas* and temples, arts and crafts, music, drama, education etc., that flourished in Paralakhemundi zamindari.

Feasts and Festivals

Feasts and festivals constitute an inseparable part of Oriya culture. The most important feature of Paralakhemundi is that there is apparent Telugu influence upon almost all aspects of its culture. Like language, dress and food habit, in the sphere of festivals also there is marked influence of Telugu festivals. The Oriyas are influenced by the Telugu culture and vice versa. There is a curious blend of two cultures apparent in some of the festivals of Paralakhemundi.

In addition to the common festivals of the Oriyas, the people of Paralakhemundi observe the following additional festivals.

Khandasadhaka

On the auspicious day of Durgastami, during the '*Dushera* festival', the arms and ammunitions of the royal house were worshipped in front of Goddess Durga. The *Dushera* festival is celebrated in the month of '*Aswina*' and goddess '*Manikeswari*', the '*Ishta Devi*' (Family Goddess) of the royal house is worshipped with wide rejoicing⁵. The *paiks* in the Paralakhemundi town known as '*Baxi*', '*Bhujabala*', '*Nayak*', '*Gantayat*', '*Rana Simha*', '*Paikray*', '*Dandasena*' etc⁶. also worshipped their swords, spears, arrows, bows, war-drums and other instruments of war in several *akhadas* of the town and displayed their knowledge of war-tactics before others who have been popularly called as '*khandasadhaka*'.

Janhi Osha

It was very common among the unmarried girls of Paralakhemundi. It was observed from *Bhadra purnima* to the *Aswina purnima* or *Kumara purnima*. On the evening of the full moon day of Bhadrabha, the girls install a tulsī plant. They decorate the plant with various flowers, which they worship as Goddess '*Brundabati*'. They believe the deity to be present in the plant and worship it with offerings. Worship goes on each evening for one month and comes to an end on the day of *Kumara purnima*. The fruits of the Osha are believed to be the blessings of the goddess for getting suitable partner as well as wealth and happiness in the future married life.

Bhogi

The day falling before the month of '*Pousa Makara Sankranti*' is celebrated as bhogi festival. It is said that on this day Rama killed Ravana. In memory of it the people burn a big wood considering it as Ravana on the roadsides. On the day of '*Makara Sankranti*', people wore new dresses and pray for the right path for the departed souls of their ancestors.

On this day the tribals from all the neighbouring *Maliahs* come to Paralakhemundi town, dance in joy playing flute and drums and collect money, rice etc. from various streets and neighbouring villages. On the third day, they return to their villages and conduct a grand feast out of the money and rice collected. Once in a year they beg like this during the festival of *bhogi*, which is a significant part of it.

In the villages of Paralakhemundi, the peasants bring their crops to home from fields during the month of *pousa*. The *Kaibartas* of the villages dance in joy and happiness with a horse made of bamboo sticks. He is associated by two singers and the players of flute and drum.

The *Dhoba* (washermen) of Paralakhemundi worship their Goddess on the banks of rivers, tanks, and ponds known as *tutha-pathara*. It is popularly known as *ballapandugu*. They celebrate it by drinking liquor and making feasts of goat meat.

In the '*Makara Sankranti*' the *Bisoyees* used to present *bhetis* to the *Raja*. They similarly received presents from the *Savara* Chiefs or *Gomangos* in terms of fire-wood, yams, pumpkins, etc.

Siva Ratri

Siva Ratri festival is celebrated in Paralakhemundi as a great popular festival. Thousands of people from all over India visit the temples of Kunti, Bhima and Judhistira on the Mahendragiri. Dance and music programmes throughout the night make Mahendragiri a lively place. Prayers were also offered in other famous Shiva temples of Paralakhemundi like Rama Lingeswara, Pancha Lingeswara, Mukteswara, Sidheswara etc. During the night popular folk dance and music programmes like 'bhuta-keli', 'dasa-kathia', 'hari-katha' etc. were demonstrated for the entertainment of the people.

Gaja Muhan Puja

On every Tuesday of the month of *Chaitra*, worship of the Deity, 'Adi Mata' or 'Adi Shakti' is done by the female folk of Paralakhemundi. During night they worship *Gaja Muhan*. The deity is believed to be in the *Gaja Muhan*. It is made of *Khaee and gudd paga* on a wooden plate. It's height is from 3 feet to 5 feet. It is decorated with coloured papers and the photo of the goddess is also placed on it. The flower of the coconut tree is tied on its top. They keep the *Gaja Muhan* on the head and dance throughout the night in joy and happiness. In the morning they perform the *Bisarjan* (immersion) ceremony of the *Gaja Muhan*.

Gamha Purnima

Gamha Purnima is celebrated on the fullmoon day of the month of *Sravana* as the birthday of Lord Baladeva, the elder brother of Lord Sri Krishna. It is celebrated elsewhere in India as the famous *Rakshi Purnima*. In Paralakhemundi the birthday of Lord Baladeva is celebrated through a popular game known as *Gamha-Diyan* (The *gamha* jump).

Before the auspicious day, the *Gamha* (platform) is made of bricks, mud and grass. The middle of the platform is filled with stones to make it strong enough. It is made high upwards and low downwards making the shape of a spur. It's top looks like a tower. A short distance from the top of the *Gamha*, two poles are dug in opposite direction, which are connected with a bamboo stick tied to both the poles. In the bamboo stick various fruits like oranges, bananas, coconuts etc. are tied very , carefully. The people one by one come with a run from the downward of the *Gamha*, and on reaching the top, give a jump to catch the fruits. One who touches a fruit gets an attractive prize.

Dahi-handi Jatra or Dahi-bhanga Jatra

The birthday of Lord Krishna on the eighth day of *Krushna pakshya* (dark fortnight) of the month of *Bhadrava* is popularly celebrated throughout India as '*Janmastami*' On the

ninth day. Lord Krishna along with his friends (*sakhas*) had broken the curd-pot in the house of the Nanda king. This tradition is maintained in Paralakhemundi as *Dahi-handi-Jatra* (curd-pot festival) or *Dahi-bhanga-Jatra*.

On the ninth day or *Nabami*, the people tie a curd pot with a bamboo and place it between two poles. Traditionally, a *Gouda*-boy (cow-herd boy) as the representative of Lord Krishna breaks the curd pot. The other boys throw the coloured water from a hand pump called *pichakari*. Then the people place the Lord Radha Krishna on a stage called *'kunja'* and take a procession around the town.

Mahalaya Amabasya

It is observed on the dark moon day of *Aswina*. On the day, people collect rice and vegetables begging from seven houses. The women folk prepare several dishes and worship the deity, Maha Kali. They believe that by this the 'Maha Kali' who is the 'Adi Shakti' gets pleased and gives blessings to their husbands and children.

Malli Jhulana and Malati Jhulana

The *Jhulana Jatra* is celebrated in pomp and joy in the 'Bada Radha Krishna Matha' and the 'Sana Radha Krishna Matha' in two parts known as *Malli Jhulana* and *Malati Jhulana*. From the 10th day of the month of 'Chaitra' to the full moon day it is celebrated as *Malli Jhulana* and from the 10th day of the month of *Sravana* to the full moon day the celebration is known as *Malati Jhulana*. On the last day of *Malati Jhulana*, Radha is dressed as Lord Krishna. Because on that day, Sri Radha, in order to meet Lord Krishna comes out from her parents' house in the disguise of Lord Krishna. As per the tradition, the festival of *Malli Jhulana* and *Malati Jhulana* is being celebrated at Paralakhemundi with much happiness among the people.

Ghata Jatra

Ghata Jatra or *Thakurani Jatra* is celebrated in the three months of *Chaitra*, *Baisakha* and *Jestha*. The festival runs from three days to fifteen days. On the opening day the people in a large procession of dancing and music install such number of painted earthen pots as the festival is proposed to continue on a specific altar. Worship goes on three times a day with pomp and joy. On every evening the Goddesses, which are meant to be present in the pots taken in large procession to each street of the town on all days.

During the fast called *brata* they collect money and rice. On the end of the fast they worship the deity with the rice and money collected. They believe that by this the Goddess gets pleased and relieve them from pains and sorrows of the world.

The Cult of Vaishnavism in Paralakhemundi

Orissa is known far and wide as the land of Lord Jagannath. The Oriya culture and civilization has developed revolving around Him. In different times, many religious teachers

and preachers had come over here for the recognition, inspiration and propagation of their religion. So there is a marked influence of Jagannatha cult or Vaishnavism on other religions and vice versa.

Paralakhemundi is the citadel of Vaishnavism in south Orissa. It occupies a place next to *Sri-kshetra* (Puri). Along the streets of Paralakhemundi town one can notice the existence of more than seventy *mathas* and temples. In all these *mathas* and temples the dual idol of Lord Radha Krishna is worshipped.

In the first half of the 16th century, Sri Chaitanya, while making his tour to south from Puri, came to Paralakhemundi and inspired the people with a new religion called 'Goudiya Vaishnavism'⁷. This religion received the royal patronage and is the main religious thought of Paralakhemundi.

In Vaishnavism worship is made to Lord Vishnu. There are two branches of Vaishnavism; one branch is worshipping to Lord Rama and the other branch is worshipping to Lord Krushna. The worshippers of Lord Krushna are again divided into two groups of thought i.e., *Sudha Bhakti* and *Gyana-misra Bhakti*.

Sudha Bhakti group of people found in Paralakhemundi are the followers of Goudiya Vaishnava religious thought whose main chanting is centred around Sri Radha and Sri Krushna.

Mathas and Temples of Paralakhemundi

Mathas and temples are the religious institutions, which create religious thinking in the minds of the people and enforce them to observe *dharma*, which in turn enable them to get *mokshya*. The rulers of Paralakhemundi in order to drive the society in the path of religion had constructed various temples and *mathas* in and around Paralakhemundi. The *mathas* and temples of Paralakhemundi can be divided into four parts. They are *Saiva pitha* or Siva temples, *Shakti pitha* or Goddess temples, *Vaishnava pitha* or the temples of Rama, Krushna and Narayana, and *Mahabira pitha* or the Hanuman temples.

During the early period of the establishment of the zamindari, the royal house of Paralakhemundi constructed the Siva temples.

Apart from the royal house some local people of Paralakhemundi have also constructed some temples.

1. Purunapatana : Nilakantheswara
(on the bank of river Mahendra Tanaya) (or Panchalingeswara)
2. Rama Sagara : Ramalingeswara
3. The road of Purunapatana : Ardhanariswara
(near modern hospital)

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|--------------------------------|---|----------------------------------|
| 4. Gundichabadi | : | Dhabaleswara |
| 5. Badadanda | : | Mallikarjuna (or Ekamreswar) |
| 6. Sita Sagara | : | Madua Mahadeva (or Mallideswara) |
| 7. Dolabandha | : | Mallikarjuna |
| 8. Raj guru Street | : | Gopeswara |
| 9. Hata padia (market ground) | : | Chandrasekhara |
| 10. Korana Street | : | Bhusaneswara |
| 11. Patnaik tank | : | Balunkeswara |
| 12. Kampa Street (on the hill) | : | Tarakeswara |

Shakti pithas

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| 1. Anka Street | : | Manikeswari (Kanakan Durga)
(Ista Devi of Parala Raj family) |
| 2. Purunapatana | : | Minakshi |
| 3. Main Road | : | Nilamma Thakurani |
| 4. Katika Street | : | Kadamba Khandi |
| 5. Bata Gouda Street | : | Grama Devati |
| 6. Teli Street | : | Bai Thakurani |
| 7. Patnaik Tank | : | Santosimaa |
| 8. Irrigation Colony | : | Tara Tarini |

Vaishnava Mathas

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|---------------------------------|---|----------------------------|
| 1. Bada Radhakanta <i>matha</i> | : | Radhakanta - Bada Danda |
| 2. Devi <i>matha</i> | : | Sri Rama - Deo Street |
| 3. Chaitanya <i>matha</i> | : | Rasikaraja - Katika Street |
| 4. Nrusimhanatha <i>matha</i> | : | Gopinatha - Karana Street |
| 5. Sadara <i>matha</i> | : | Rasikaraja - Patnaik tank |
| 6. Chaitanya <i>matha</i> | : | Rasikaraja-Gundichabadi |

Vaishnava temples

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| 1. Badadanda | : | (a) Sri Jagannatha temple
(b) Sri Ramaswami temple |
| 2. Anka Street | : | Sri Rama Chandra temple |
| 3. Bebartta Street | : | Sri Venkateswara temple |
| 4. Karana Street | : | (a) Sri Syama Sundara temple
(b) Sri Radha Krushna temple |

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| | | (c) Sri Rasikaraja temple |
| 5. Baxi Street | : | (a) Sri Gopinatha temple
(b) Sri Radhakanta temple
(c) Sri Radhakrushna temple |
| 6. Gopini Street | : | (a) Sri Gokulananda temple
(b) Sri Laxmi Narayana temple
(c) Sri Govindajiu temple
(d) Sri Trinath temple
(e) Sri Krushna Chandra temple |
| 7. Bada Brahmana Street | : | (a) Sri Radhaballava temple
(b) Sri Ramaswami temple
(c) Sri Radhagovinda temple
(d) Sri Krushna Chandra temple
(e) Sri Govindajiu temple
(f) Sri Gopinatha temple |
| 8. Teli Street | : | Sri Pathara Babaji temple |
| 9. Sunari Street | : | Sri Rasika Raja temple (Parichha <i>matha</i>) |
| 10. Rajguru Street | : | Sri Rama temple |
| 11. Srikarana Street | : | Sri Radharamana temple |
| 12. Katika Street | : | (a) Sri Madana Mohana temple
(b) Sri Radha Ramana temple |
| 13. Elakala Street | : | Sri Satyanarayana temple |
| 14. Sinki Street | : | Sri Rama temple |
| 15. Market Main Street | : | Sri Rama temple |

There are many temples of Lord Hanuman at Gundichabadi, Railway Station, Katika Street, Devi *matha*, Hatibadi and Ramalingeswar.

Thus, the *matha* and temples of Paralakhemundi being the centre of study and worship of Hindu society played an important role in shaping the society of the region. All these religious institutions adequately throw light on the past glory, rich cultural heritage and high spiritual life of the people of Paralakhemundi. These institutions played a vital role in producing a galaxy of eminent scholars in the field of Orissan art, literature, music, dance, drama etc. elevating Paralakhemundi to the highest pinnacle of glory.

Nilakantheswara and other temples

The Nilakantheswara temple stands on the bank of the river Mahendra Tanaya. Mukunda Gajapati of the Ganga line of kings of Paralakhemundi built it in the later part of the 17th century A.D. ⁸The *Jagamohana* of the temple was, however, added during the time of Gajapati Narayana Deva in the closing years of 18th century A.D. The ruling dynasty greatly revered this deity. An inscription on the temple is noticed.

Raja Jagannatha Narayana Deva granted the village Jagannatha Narayanapur to 31 *brahmanas* at the time of his coronation ceremony. This presupposes that the temple of Jagannatha of Paralakhemundi was built much before him. He ascended the throne in 1745 A.D.⁹

The Nilakantheswara temple built in 13th century at Gudari is an example of fine art of medieval period. The Siva temple at Mukhalingam is another piece of fine architectural work. The mother of Parala Raja, Gajapati Purushottama Narayana Deva, built the Raghunatha temple of Meliaput in the last part of the 18th century. The construction style of this temple throws light on the modern viewpoint of the artists of Paralakhemundi.

Besides these temples, the palace of Paralakhemundi, built after the model of the royal palace of England, is a superb example of excellent art and architecture. The 'Basanta Nivas' on the bank of the river Mahendra Tanaya is another example of fine art exhibited by the artists.

Arts and Crafts of Paralakhemundi

Harekrushna Maharana (18th century) of the Chitrakara Street of Paralakhemundi was an expert in the construction of temples and idols. The Gopinath temple of Lihuri' was built under his supervision during the time of Maharaja Jagannath Deva.

Brundabana Chandra Patra (19th century) of Karana Street was a great artist of woodcraft. He built the full idol of poet Gopala Krushna in wood.

Ganjapa Sara

The artists of Chitrakara Street prepare wall painting and playing cards called *Sara*. As the artists of Paralakhemundi made the playing cards, they were called as *Ganjapa Sara*. The *Ganjapa Sara* was so famous that the Britishers took away to England and kept it in their museum.

Ivory and Bone Works

The artists of Paralakhemundi used to carve out beautiful works like throne, *khatuli* (cot) etc. out of ivory and bone. Forests in which a large number of elephants lived surrounded Paralakhemundi. Hence, ivories were plentifully available in Paralakhemundi. Surendra Maharana and Bhaskara Maharana were experts in the field of ivory works during the British period.

Horn Works

The horn works of Paralakhemundi were one of the important products of cottage industry¹⁰. The horn works of Paralakhemundi got a special place amongst the works of Calcutta, Punjab, Kakinada and Trivendrum. The horn works were made chiefly out of the horns of cattles which were supplied from the neighbouring *maliahs* of the zamindari. The artists of Paralakhemundi first of all used to prepare birds from the horns. Gradually they prepared combs, elephants, horses, prawns, idols of Lord Jagannatha etc. They were being exported to the places like Vizianagaram, Rajamahendry and Kakinada. These horn works were also highly popular in the international market.

Jae Khadi Works

The *mederi* caste of Paralakhemundi used to make beautiful pieces of household articles out of the sticks of a plant called *Jae*. This plant is found in abundant in the region of Mahendragiri. The *Jae Khadi* works like bags etc. were highly in demand at that time.

Wood Works

The artists of Paralakhemundi called 'Maharana' used to prepare beautiful works from specific woods. Generally insects do not eat those woods. From that particular wood they made the idols of Radha-Krushna, Garuda pillar etc. which is still seen in various *mathas* and temples of Paralakhemundi.

Oil Painting

The artists of Paralakhemundi were experts in oil painting. The painting on the old walls of the royal palace, the paintings found in several *mathas* and temples of Paralakhemundi bear a clear testimony to it. The artists of Paralakhemundi got the royal patronage for this. During the time of Maharaja Goura Chandra Gajapati Narayana Deva, the oil paintings of Parala became very much popular. The artists migrated from Bisama Cuttack area (presently included in Rayagada district) and after getting the royal patronage settled in the Chitrakara Street of the town.

The artists used to make idols, oil paintings, and hand paintings during several festivals of Paralakhemundi. The most significant among them were *Ganjapa Dasabatara Sara*. It is the playing card in round shape. On the back of the cards the ten incarnations of Lord Vishnu were painted.

One can still notice the beautiful paintings of different animals, birds, dancers and the paintings of several Gods and Goddesses depicted on the walls of royal *darbar* and also the *Rani Mahal*. Various wall paintings of Manikeswari temple at Anka Street are still attractive.

Music

The contribution of Paralakhemundi in the field of music is highly significant. Jagannatha Narayana Deva (1739-1800) had composed several classical songs in Sanskrit language and published them in the book called '*Sangeeta Narayana*'.

Gopala Krushna (1785-1862) was the 'Bhakta Kabi' and his work '*Sangeetabali*' was very much popular in Orissa.

Gourhari Parichha (1794-1884) and Raghunatha Parichha (1794-1884) had composed '*Sastriya Sangeeta Granthabali*'. Padmanava Parichha (1817-1895), the son of Raghunath Parichha had composed a text called '*Geeta Ratnakara*'.

Haribandhu Bebartta (1876-1896) composed some prayers (*bhajan*s), which are cited by the people till now in Paralakhemundi. He was a very good player on guitar and was a great singer.

Tankadhara Subedar alias Muga Apanna (1860-1925) was famous for his *shastriya sangeeta*. The '*Talasarbasara Sangraha*' of Padmanava Gajapati is a monumental work in music. Kamakshi Prasad Panda (1873-1934), the great devotee of 'Adimata', had composed a text on classical music called '*Sri Kamakshi Bhajana Sangeeta Mala*'. His adopted mother was Sunamani Devi who composed '*Sri Kamakshi Sangeeta Ratnamala*'.

Karunanidhi Patnaik was well known in the villages of Paralakhemundi as a great singer. His '*Sangeeta Sikshya*' and '*Sri Radha Krushna Milana*', are the best pieces of classical songs. Apanna Parichha and his nephew Simadri Parichha composed many songs.

Drama

In the whole-of Orissa, Paralakhemundi played a pioneering role in the development of dramas and theatres. The poets and dramatists of Paralakhemundi had enriched the art and culture of this land. The Padmanava Rangalaya built in 1896 is the first stage in Orissa¹¹ for display of dramas of various kinds. When Maharaja Shri K.C. Gajapati took charge of the administration of Paralakhemundi he decided to make it a model town. He renovated the Padmanava Rangalaya. The stage was decorated with door curtains. Moreover, costly dresses and several instruments were procured under the supervision of R. Govindam of Bombay to meet the requirements of the society. '

However, before the construction of Padmanava Rangalaya, there existed a temporary thatched stage constructed in 1883 with the help of the donations made by the people. That continued upto 1902. It was known as '*Sri Sri Rasikaraja Prasadeika Sugyajana Manoranjana Natya Sangha*'. The organizers of this stage were, Balabhadra Nanda, Apanna Parichha, S.S. Rajguru, Apanna Prasad Das and Nilamani Parichha. In 1913, on the coronation of Sri K.C. Gajapati attempts were made for a permanent stage.

In 1905, Padmanava Gajapati died. In order to keep his memory, the stage was renovated to a permanent one and was renamed as 'Padmanava Rangalaya' after the name of Padmanava Gajapati. There was a committee for its management with S.S. Rajguru as its President. Later when Apanna Parichha became its President, both Telugu and Oriya dramas were staged.

In 1927-28, a temporary stage was established in the Palace complex for the convenience of the people of the harem.

There was no partiality with regard to Oriya and Telugu dramas. The actors of the stage used to get donations and scholarships for their study upto college. The donations and scholarships were obtained from the interest of Rs. 80,000 kept in the Bank for, this purpose.

The Sanskrit dramas staged on these stages were, 'Abhigyana Shakuntalam', 'Meghadutam', 'Basabadatta' etc. The actors were Bankupalli Mallaya Sastri, Basa Suryanarayana Sastri, etc.

The Oriya dramas that were staged on the stages were, 'Dhruba' of Goura Chandra Gajapati; 'Seeta Banabasa' of Gopinatha Nanda; 'Ahalya Sapa Bimochana' of Padmanava Gajapati. etc. Besides these, 'Chandragupta', 'Shiva?' of Satya Narayana Panda; -Kalinga Vijay', -Samrat Ashoka' of Satyanarayana Rajguru; and 'Pruthiviraj'; 'Anangabhimadeva', 'Jajati Keshari' of Simadri Patnaik were successfully played. The actors of these dramas were Hiralal Vardhana, Chakrapani Patnaik, Rama Shankar Patnaik, Jugal Kishore Panigrahi, Sitaram Panda and others.

The Telugu dramas that were staged on these stages were 'Rana Pratap', 'Rasaputra', 'Bijaysa', 'Peshbar Narayan Rao', 'Pratapa Rudriyam' etc. The actors of the Telugu dramas were Kotilingam, Master Babu, Welanki Kurmanatham, Aarna Pantulu etc.

The stages of Paralakhemundi used to give whole time entertainment to the viewers by showing them Sanskrit, Oriya and Telugu dramas of richest composition and action. The artists of Paralakhemundi spared no pains to put Paralakhemundi on the map of 'arts, dance and drama' of India. The students of the Maharaja's Sanskrit College received year after year great acclamation from the public throughout the province of Madras for the high standard of histrionic talent displayed in staging Sanskrit dramas in the city of Madras and other important places of Sanskrit culture.

Education

Paralakhemundi had played an important part in the field of education and learning in the pre-British days of Orissa. Many of the important writers of Oriya literature had hailed from this area. They were Gopal Krushna Patnaik, Raghunath Parichha, Gourhari Parichha, etc. who by enriching Oriya literature had contributed immensely to the development of education in Orissa.

The contribution of Paralakhemundi for the spread of education in southern Orissa is significant. In fact by the end of the nineteenth century the Gajapati Press at Paralakhemundi had printed and published a number of Oriya textbooks. This was a great step for spreading Oriya education because so far the Telugus used to argue that Oriya language did not have sufficient number of books and therefore, schooling in Oriya was difficult and almost impossible ¹².

The Rajas of Paralakhemundi in order to educate the people had taken the spread of education as a social duty. The Maharaja's Boys' High School was the first educational institution in this regard. It was started in 1857 as an Upper Primary School. Today St' is thejargest educational institution of south Orissa. The present Women's College was its boys' hostel. Before that till 1954 the ancient Sanskrit College of Paralakhemundi was functioning there. Students from Orissa, Andhra Pradesh, Madras and even from Madhya Pradesh used to get education from here. The character building of the students and the development of mind, body and soul was the aim of this institution.

The Maharaja Krushna Chandra Gajapati College was established in 1884. In 1896 it got the affiliation of the University of Madras as a second grade college. At that time M. Srinivas Rao was its Principal. In the beginning it was started with few arts subjects but later on few science subjects were also opened.

The Lecturers of this college were the wise scholars from England, Bengal, Madras, Andhra Pradesh and Orissa. The Maharaja High School of present time was functioning as College at that time. In 1947, after independence, government took over the charge of this college and the famous Chemistry Lecturer Guru Charana Mohanty became its Principal. During this time the college was transferred to Morrison Building. It was a custom that the lecturer should enter the classroom by putting coat on kurta with dhoti and turban on head. The students used to show their talent not only in study but also in games and sports. In 1936, by the personal efforts of Maharaja Sri K.C. Gajapati it became a first grade college of the University of Madras. When the separate state of Andhra Pradesh was established, it came under Andhra University. In November 1943, it came under the Utkal University. On 2nd January 1967, Berhampur University was established. Since then it came under the Berhampur University.

The Sanskrit College of Paralakhemundi got its birth in 1912 in form of a 'ToP. In 1915 it got recognition as a college. Upto 1954, it was functioning in the present Women's College. At present it is situated in its own building near Patnaik Tank of Bada Brahmana Street. IL runs the classes from 'Prathama' to 'Sastri'. It is affiliated to Sri Vihar at Puri.

Thus, the Paralakhemundi Raja's Sanskrit College was another outstanding educational institution in the whole of the East Coast. Almost all the students received monthly stipends and it is a matter of pride to see many *Pandits*, both Oriyas and Telugus, products of this institution, serving in High Schools and Colleges. The Sanskrit College

was the shining example of the love of this enlightened and cultured Zamindar family for the preservation and spread of oriental learning in the land.

With the hope of spreading Women's education, in 1939 the Girl's Primary School was established. In 1943, it became Girl's High School. The Girls' High School of Paralakhemundi has one of the most imposing buildings. The Maharaja's house is the pioneer in the spread of female education in this part of the province. The institution, which was then not a High School, came into being at a time when *purdah* was one of the most respected customs in the society.

Maharaja Krushna Chandra Gajapati had donated one lakh of rupees for Nutrition Research at Koonoor (Madras Province). He also contributed liberally for higher studies in Agricultural College at Coimbatore (Madras Province). He established an Industrial School at Paralakhemundi and many youngmen received training in different branches of art and craft.

Maharaja K.C. Gajapati constructed a new hostel building for the benefit of the College and High School students. He awarded every year many free scholarships and free boarding to poor deserving students. The institution of these scholarships and free boarding is a unique thing and perhaps Paralakhemundi Zamindar stands first among his class for his generous contribution to the development of education in Orissa. His efforts for the spread of higher education and his munificence will be long remembered by innumerable beneficiaries. The future generations of Orissa would always gratefully think of this noble family for rendering selfless work for the cause of Oriyas and the uplift of their cultural life.

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