

## The Unfinished Task of Orissa Formation

*Dr. Anil Mohapatra*

“Why should we accept a spelling that gives a wrong pronunciation of the name of our State?” – it might be the sole justification behind the proposal of the Government of Orissa submitted to the Central Government in 2008 to change the name of the State from Orissa to Odisha and of the official language of the State from Oriya to Odia. Since the cause was genuine involving the deeper emotions of the people of Orissa, the resolution passed by the Orissa State Legislative Assembly got an easy nod from the Lower House of Indian Parliament on 9th November 2010 in the shape of passing of the Orissa (Alteration of Name) Bill, 2010 and the Constitution (One Hundred Thirteenth Amendment) Bill, 2010, by it. And such a formality of changing of names is in the process of being completed in the near future. However, this event reminds us how we had once fought successfully for a separate province for the Oriya-speaking people uniting Oriya-speaking tracts as situated initially in Bengal, Central and Madras provinces and from Bihar-Chhota Nagpur-Orissa province afterwards. The State was finally crafted on April 1, 1936 and it is acclaimed as “the success of the first linguistic movement in India” for Statehood. It was a period during the British Rule but we came victorious in face of the vehement opposition from Bengalis who once said “ Oriya was not a

separate language”. We did not stop there. We made all possible attempts to bring into our fold all the regions in our vicinity which was home to a large chunk of Oriyas. Like all such movements elsewhere, we could not secure the integration of all such areas. Some areas were naturally left behind and the concerns for the leftovers still haunt us till today as an unfinished task of our State formation.

We know that the creation of the new province of Orissa unifying the Oriya-speaking people living in different nearby provinces was an arduous task. From the formation of the Utkal Sabha in 1877, Orissa Association in 1882 till the launching of the Utkal Sammilani in 1903 were important steps in that direction. Those organizations had played a crucial role in mobilizing people in that regard. The Montague Chemsford reforms in 1919 gave a proposal for granting of Constitutional and Provincial autonomy to the Oriya speaking tracts. The Sinha Resolution on 20th Feb.1920, proposed to the Governor-General in Council to appoint a committee to formulate a scheme for the amalgamation of the Oriya- speaking tracts that were controlled by the Governments of Madras, Bengal and the Central Provinces with existing Orissa Division of the Province of Bihar and Orissa. Accordingly

a committee consisting of C.H Phillip and A.C. Duff was formed in 1924. The Commission visited the places like Vizagpattam, Paralakhemundi, Manjusa, Icchapuram, Chikiti, Sorada, Khalikote, Berhampur, Rambha in order to ascertain the desire and opinion of the people on getting amalgamated to Orissa Proper. On the recommendations of that committee the Government of India announced in September 1931, the formation of a Boundary Commission under the chairmanship of Samuel O' Donnell to examine and report on administrative, financial and other consequences of setting up a separate administration and demarcate the boundaries of the proposed Orissa province. The other members were 'T.R. Phockun, H.M. Mehetta, Raja of Paralakhemundi, Sachidananda Sinha and Ray Bahadur C.V.S. Narasingha Rajaguru'<sup>2</sup>. The Commission visited respective places such as Jamsedpur, Chaibasa, Sambalpur, Raipur, Midnapur, Gopalpur, Waltair, Kakinada, and Cuttack and met and interviewed different persons. While determining the boundary of the proposed province factors like, language, race, geographical position and the economic interests were taken into consideration. The Orissa province that thus came up was to include Orissa Division, Angul, Padmapur, Khariar, Vizagpattam agency tracts. That proposal was further recommended by the Joint Select Committee under the leadership of Lord Linithgow. As per this Committee Berhampur town, Jeypore eState Report, about 30% of Paralakhemendi State including Paralakhimendi town, Jalandara were included in the proposed Orissa province. However, the Samuel O' Donnell committee 'excluded Midnapore and Bankura in Bengal, Singhbhum, Manbhum and Ranchi from Bihar and Khariar, Phuljhar and Padmapur in Central Provinces and Ichhapur, Manjusa, Budarsingi, Jаланter, Tekkali and Tarala from Orissa'<sup>3</sup>. Taking

all recommendations into account the new province of Orissa was created along with Sindh vide the Section 289 of the Government of India Act, 1935. 'On 26<sup>th</sup> January 1936 the Order was issued to the Indian Orders Committee'<sup>4</sup> and accordingly on 1st April 1936, the new province of Orissa came into existence on linguistic basis during the British rule in India. Cuttack was its capital and it became 'one of the eleven Governor's Provinces in India'<sup>5</sup>. Thus came the culmination of a long cherished dream of Oriya people who were separated over centuries. However, that was the 'first phase of the Oriya Movement'<sup>6</sup> since the territorial amalgamation of the Oriya-speaking areas were not complete as 26 Orissa Garhjats (feudatory States/ princely States) still remained free and thereby remained outside the administrative jurisdiction of Orissa. After the independence of India, these princely States were amalgamated with Orissa to give Orissa the present form. The Maharaja of Mayurbhanja signed the instrument of merger on 1st January 1949 and he was the last of the princely States that joined Orissa. However, the exception was of Seraikela and Kharsawan(now, one of the twenty-four districts of Jharkhand State in eastern India) which did not join Orissa. 'Thus the final merger of the Orissa Feudatory States in 1949 marked the close of the second phase of the Oriya Movement.'<sup>7</sup> And 'nobody ever imagined that the end of the princely India would come so soon and that too the integration of States will begin in Orissa and gradually spread over the whole of India.'<sup>8</sup>

What could be the unfinished task then? Here, an eminent historian Prof. Atul Chandra Pradhan's observation is quite relevant. He States that 'Orissa in its present shape came into existence on 1<sup>st</sup> January 1949 after the integration of princely States but linguistically and culturally,

Orissa covers a wider area than its present territorial boundary. Oriya language and culture can be traced in the Midnapore district of West Bengal, Srikakulam district of Andhra Pradesh, Raipur district of Madhya Pradesh (now in Chhatisgarh) and Chakradharpur and Singhbhum districts of Bihar(now in Jharkhand)'.<sup>9</sup> Professor S.C. Patra, another historian too has given a vivid description regarding the Oriya –speaking people staying outside the purview of Orissa in his book the “Formation of the province of Orissa”. He writes how “there remained still some Oriya-speaking pockets inside the neighbouring provinces. They were, Danton, Narayangarh, Contai, Mohanpur, Kesiari, Jhargram, Gopiballabhapur, and Nayagram in the district of Midnapore in Bengal; Singhbhum, Saraikella and Kharaswan in Bihar; and Phuljhar, Bindra-Nawagarh, Chandrapur and Deobhang in the Central Provinces; (i) Ichhapore including 60 villages of Udyankhand, Budarsingh, Jalantar, Manjusa, Tarla, Tekkali, and those portions of the Zamindaris of Chikiti and Parlakhemundi EStates, (ii) Sujankota Mutha, Madgole, Padwa, Arku and Parvatipur, Salur and Palkonda Agencies of the ex-Vizagapatam Agency, and (iii) Viravali and Srungavarapukut Agency areas in Andhra Pradesh.”<sup>10</sup> The data and observations of Prof. Pradhan and Prof. S.C. Patra remind me of two incidents how Oriyas in a large number are found beyond the territory of Orissa and their concerning problems. This author was traveling one day in a train from Bhubaneswar to Vizianagaram (in Andhra Pradesh). After Ichhapuram few passengers got into the train and to my surprise they were speaking in fluent Oriya. That captured my attention. I was curious about knowing their place of domicile. From them I came to know that they were the inhabitants of some villages in the Srikakulam district of Andhra Pradesh. I asked whether they had Oriya medium schools or not in

their locality. Their answers dismayed me. They said that such schools could not be run as no appointment of Oriya Teachers was made over decades. Telugu language has been imposed on them and they and their children were gradually losing touch with the Oriya script. When asked regarding their affinity to Oriya and Orissa their eyes were filled with tears. What they said and expressed may not be true cent percent but it was a fact that they were members of an Oriya-speaking and loving community in Andhra Pradesh. Similar experience once came to me in a cricket match played in the bordering village nearer to Lakshman Nath Road. The players were from West Bengal but they were speaking in Oriya dialect. They too had shared and expressed similar problems. Besides we know the issue of Seraikela and Kharsawan where a large chunk of people speak Oriya. They too have similar problems.

The purpose of this essay is not either to instigate them to mobilize politically to demand for the inclusion of those areas in Orissa State or to find fault with our Government. On both the counts it would be just like opening the ‘Pandora’s Box’. This author is aware of the fact that it is an age of multiculturalism. And, we too have a sizable Telugu, Chhatisgarhi and Bengali-speaking community in Orissa. However, our Constitution provides for ‘Cultural and Educational Rights’<sup>11</sup> to the minorities as fundamental rights. Under Article 29, it protects the interests of minorities that any section of the citizens residing in the territory of India or any part thereof having a distinct language, script or culture of its own shall have the right to conserve the same. And under Article 30 it provides that all minorities, whether based on religion or language, shall have the right to establish and administer educational institutions of their choice.

Here comes the role of our State as a promoter and facilitator for the cause of its own people who have been distanced on political considerations. They are its own people as they are still socially and culturally linked with the people of the mainland. Therefore, it would have been appreciable if our Government takes any initiative to facilitate the promotion of Oriya language in those areas outside the State where Oriya-speaking people in a good number are staying. However, it is a matter of policy decision. There must be an inter-State understanding over the issue. Our Government could supply Oriya books free of cost while offering to bear the expenses for appointing teachers to teach Oriya language over there and vice versa. That would fetch mutual benefits to both the States. The policy should be on mutual give and take basis. As we have inter-State bus services between Andhra Pradesh and Orissa the origin of which could be found in the concern of each State for its own citizens; so also we can have an understanding on educational and cultural promotion too.

In this context it is heartening to note that our Government is encouraging and patronizing Inter-State Cultural Exchange Programmes. This has been an initiative taken by the Information and Public Relations Department, Government of Orissa. Under this initiative, Malayalam films have been screened with a cultural festival at Bhubaneswar followed by Oriya films and cultural programmes at Thiruvantapuram in Kerala. The Department too has organised Oriya film and cultural festival at Mumbai under Inter-State Cultural Exchange Programme. This is an encouraging step in this direction. In the same vein we could also include and encourage the sharing of books in native languages, exchange of students, opening of language centres and the appointment of the language teachers in each others territory

for the interest of respective people staying beyond ones own border. One loves his mother-tongue very much and it is through his mother-tongue one understands and expresses better. In the end, this author remains optimistic that nobody would be deprived of his culture and mother tongue. The State should take the responsibility of becoming a facilitator and collaborator in the development of individuals from his culture point of view.

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Dr. Anil Mohapatra is the Assistant Professor in P.G. Department of Political Science, Utkal University, Bhubaneswar.