

## Dr. Krishna Chandra Panigrahi : A Master of Modern Odia Prose

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Dr. Krishna Chandra Panigrahi is an eminent prose writer of twentieth century. He has given a new shape to modern Odia Prose. He has popularized Odia essay and criticism among the readers. He has dedicated himself to the study of History, Archaeology and Literature. He played a vital role for about half a century (1936 to 1986) for the development of twentieth century Odia Prose.

He was born in a very poor family on the 1st December 1909 in Khiching, a famous cultural place and the ancient kingdom of Bhanja Dynasty. His father Sagar Panigrahi was a priest of Kichakeswari Temple.

He was educated in the village school at Khiching, then at Karanjia. He passed the Matriculation examination in the year 1931 from Baripada. Then he joined at the famous historic college 'The Ravenshaw College' and passed his B.A. Honours Degree from there. In 1937 he completed his M.A. Degree in Ancient Indian History and Culture from the Calcutta University. With his M.A. Degree he joined as a researcher in the Archaeological Survey of India. There he did excellent work on the evolution of Indian pottery. During those days he impressed his Director Mr. K.N.Dikshit by his research. He wrote about him; 'Besides working in various investigations connected with the prehistoric

aspect of Archaeology, Mr.Panigrahi has been able to make his contribution to a hitherto neglected line of Indian Archaeology, viz; the study of Indian Pottery. By working in the excavations at Ahichohhatra which I have carrying for 3 years, he has been able to make original researches on the subjects of the evolution of Indian pottery from his earliest time to the present day in which he had acquired for himself an unrivalled knowledge in this branch. (Mo Samayara Odisha -2nd edition 1987-Page-66) In 1944 he started his new career as a Lecturer in History in Orissa Educational Service. In 1947 he came to Orissa Museum as a curator and worked there up to 1951. Again; he came back to teaching and he got his Ph.D. degree in 1954 from the Calcutta University for his scholarly work entitled 'The Archaeological remains at Bhubaneswar'. From teaching he further joined Asst. Superintendent of Archaeological Survey of India. He lastly retired as a Professor of History. He died on 25th day of February 1987.

From his young days he had special fascination towards literature. During his college days he attended several literary meetings organized by the East Hostel of the Ravenshaw College. He had also contributed articles to the 'Jagarana', the magazine of the East Hostel. During his College days in the year 1936, he

published his first essay '*Rig Vedare Narira Chitra*' in an established journal 'The Naba Bharat' edited by Pandit Nilakantha Das'. From those days till his death he has written more than one hundred essays. He wrote his essays mostly on history, Culture and Archaeology. The language and the theme of his essays are very forceful and evocative. Judging from theme and style his essays may be divided into three categories, (a) Cultural essays (b) essays popular in nature but related to historical research (c) Literary essays.

Dr. Krishna Chandra Panigrahy has probed into the roots of our culture in his essays relating to culture. He has tried to discover the basic idea behind Odia culture from the religious beliefs, literature, arts, architecture, etc. of this land. He held a similar view of sycophants. In his essays, he has explained at length how these publicity seekers bent on getting fame overnight have hindered the progress of our culture. In this connection, he has written in his essay 'Swarnadrire Swapna', "The values of the past will no longer hold good. Publicity would be known as wisdom, pride as acknowledged to be a religious person, loquacity would be the yardstick of efficiency, and the sycophant would rule over everyone. The scholars would turn mute and the industrious would be frightened into inaction. Exploiters would move around in the grab of servants. The farmer would only toil without any gain. He would be able to save himself only by running away to some foreign land. Educated people would only shed crocodile tears for him. But tears would roll only from his eyes.") Prabandha Manasa, 1972, p.178). The essayist has made it plain in these lines that the basic thought process, perseverance, work, lifestyle centre around publicity.

Krishna Chandra Panigrahi has often assumed the role of a reformer through his essays.

His essay titled 'Jagannath Sanskruti' (Jhankar, 1979, Puja Issue) is relevant in this connection. In the essay, he has vehemently opposed the immorality, corruption, depravity, gimmicks and commercialization that have been going on in our literature in relation to Lord Jagannath. He believed that the superstitions prevalent in the name of Jagannath culture are responsible for our moral and religious degradation. Dr. Panigrahy says, "It is a historical truth that the Jagannath culture has made us great. But it is also a historical truth that our downfall became inevitable when the culture was debased." (Jhankar, 1979, Puja Issue, P.639). He has expressed his opinions fearlessly about the perverseness and immorality prevalent in the name of Lord Jagannath in the Jagannath Temple. He believed that religion and culture are not about clinging to the past. He could not appreciate the fact that the Odias believed this to be the essence of culture. He knew very well that a race bragged about its past when it could not face the present. He ridiculed Odias' excessive love of the past in the following words in the same essay. "The mental state of most of the Odias is such that if a dry cake of stool was put inside an envelope with the inscription that it contained a piece of ancient Odia cake, many would sniff at it and taste it to exclaim, 'Ah ! what sweet and fragrant cakes were made indeed by our ancestors!'" (Jhankar, 31/7, p.635). He has not forgotten to point out in this essay that the Odia Vaishnavi literature had corrupted our social life. Like Pandit Nilakantha, he has also denounced the vulgarity and illicit affairs contained in Vaishnavi literature. In this connection, he has written, "The vulgarity that is present in Odia Vaishnavi literature is not seen in any other Vaishnavi literature. Chanting of hymns finished the Odias ultimately. No race could sustain itself with watered rice in the stomach, deceitful religion in the head and love songs on the tongue." (Jhankar, 31/7, p.637). He has not forgotten to

take a dig at our women for their indifference towards culture. Jestfully, he has said, "One is amazed to observe the role of the modern Odia women in the field of culture. They have their associations. But they don't even bother to voice their opposition when Odia women are sold like cattle in other states or are maligned without reason, vulgar songs are broadcast over the radio. It is also reported at times that they listen to discourses by 'sadhus' and some of them meet political leaders with bouquets in hand."(Jhankar, 31/7.p.637).

Dr. Krushna Chandra Panigrahy has analysed our culture in a larger background. He has made us understand that Odisha's culture is a part of the Indian culture. He has also discussed the distinctness of Jagannath culture. One can feel the fragrance of the soil, water and air of Odisha in his essays relating to culture. He has cited examples from the history of Orissa in order to tell us how to maintain the originality of our culture. 'The New Shape of Odia Culture' is a strong pointer towards this.

His autobiography 'Orissa of My Time' may be regarded as the cultural history of Orissa of the twentieth century. One can find a balanced view of the cultural events of the time in his autobiography. He has discussed certain unpalatable truths about the state of Odisha's education, literature, morality, cultural life and social life in this tome. His opinion about the contemporary lifestyle and culture of Odias was expressed thus, "There is no place on earth like Orissa. If anyone tries to take any initiatives, on the cultural front, all others combine to thwart his efforts. Falsehood has to combine with culture in this place in order that it may be appreciated." (Orissa of My Time, 1998, p.171). People may not like this comment of the essayist. But he never balked at stating the truth. He had lots of regrets

because the dishonest dealings in the cultural field, plagiarized research works, shallow writings and moral degradation had become a way of life with the Odias. He has expressed his reactions to the above in the following words, 'It may be observed that most of the famous authors of Orissa are researchers. However, many of them have no idea what research is all about. They have turned into researchers only on the strength of the fame they have achieved in the society. Research relating to Odia literature and the history of Orissa seems to be open to all like Sankirtans on the streets and anyone is free to join the party. The Pandits who are engaged in research for a long time do not have the ability to write a book or an essay in Odia or English. Their language and logic are of such low order that it is not likely to be appreciated anywhere else except Orissa. The newspapers of Orissa are also responsible to some extent for the sorry state of affairs in research in Orissa. There is no such topic which may not be published in the newspapers and magazines of Orissa in the name of research. Many believe that they achieve immortality if such pieces are republished along with the names of the authors. This could be excused if such beliefs were held only by young people. Unfortunately, such ideas are held even by old men with one foot in the grave. These people are responsible for creating such ideas are held even by old men with one foot in the grave. These people are responsible for creating such impressions in the minds of the young'(Orissa My Time, 1978, pp.157-58).

He has exposed the immorality, corruption and depravity in the field of culture in his autobiography. He had a great deal of fondness for the culture of Orissa. He could not put up with false emotions, regionalism and superstitions in the name of culture. He was a true and unswerving personality. He desired that the

uniqueness of Odisha's culture should be maintained in order that it may be acclaimed in national and international circles. In this connection, he has written in his autobiography in an emotional vein, "I lost my parents in my childhood and accepted Orissa as my mother. I have loved Odisha intimately. I have studied its history and architecture intensively. I have grieved for the recent downfall of this glorious ancient land. I have been extremely pained by the easy ways adopted in the name of religion and culture. I firmly believe that the moral and religious degradation of Odias is responsible for the downfall of Orissa." (Orissa of My Time, 1978). His commitment towards Odishan culture is clearly indicated in these lines. Continuous struggle for truth, strong self-confidence for fruitful work, respect for principles, independent thought and original viewpoint are also seen from his essay on culture.

Dr. Krushna Chandra Panigraphy has shown his excellence in writing essays based on historical facts. He was a competent essayist who collected historical facts from contemporary legends, literature, Puranas, manuscripts, rock inscription and archaeological remains, and presented them in the form of essays. He was a historian himself, and hence, he knew how to collect historical facts. He knew very well that one had to be impartial and judicious in writing history. It is important that one should be truthful while writing history. Ramesh Chandra Mazumdar, the eminent historian, has also conceded as much. He has said, "The compiler of history must be a man of trust, veracity and impartiality. If he records the virtues of a kind or a celebrated personality, he should not hide his vices and weakness. The historian must, on the basis of religious belief and truth and conscience, be a recorder of truth and truth alone." (Historiography in Modern India, Heras Memorial

Lectures, 1967, Asia Publishing House, 1970, p.25). Going by this yardstick, Dr. Krushna Chandra Panigraphy was a historian in the true sense of the term. Apart from this, he had a great deal of knowledge in archaeology too. He had provided a new dimension to historical essays by comparing our history with the archaeological remains. He has also set guidelines for historians to follow. In his opinion, "The modern historian has to ensure that all discussions on history have to be based on facts and that nothing can be fabricated from the mind. The second basic rule is that the historian has to examine the facts carefully. The third rule is that one cannot chronicle something which cannot be substantiated. Fourthly, one cannot argue a point on the basis of an opinion expressed by something. It is inexcusable on the part of a historian to violate any of these golden rules." (History and Legend, 1964, p.53-54). 'History and Legend' is a research publication based on historical facts. Dr. Panigraphy has made a wonderful analysis of the historical facts ingrained in the legends prevalent among the people of Orissa. The tome is divided into two parts. In the first part, he has discussed about 'Jajpur Cuttack', 'Chhatia Cuttack', 'Chaoudwar Cuttack', and Cuttack and Sarangagarh' apart from providing an introduction. In the second part, he has discussed the Madala Panji, which is believed to be based on historical facts.

'Jajpur in Orissa's Culture and History' is another research-based historical tome of Dr. Panigraphy. He has analysed the Puranic history, geographical details and archaeological wealth of Jajpur in detail in this book. This book is an example to show how history could be written based on the Puranas, legends and archaeological remains. This is a top class book dealing with the cultural and geographic history of the Biraja

Mandala. Other important historical essays written by him include 'Raharani', 'Nataraj', 'Rajguru', 'History of Orissa and Historical Materials', and 'Discovery of the Ashoka Pillar of Bhubaneswar'. He has compared our national life with our history in these essays in order to make us aware of our past. He has strongly countered conflicts relating to Puranic beliefs, conducting oneself according to set principles, and prevalent customs in these essays. All these essays are research-based and full of historical facts. And yet, they do not lack in literary merit.

Dr. Krushna Chandra Panigrahy has displayed original thinking in his essays relating to literature. He has eschewed triteness, false values and superstitions in these and has shown new directions in the field through his intellect, vision and judiciousness. He is very much aware of the contexts in his literary essays. One such discussion is 'Historical Portraits of Sarala Literature'. He has analysed the geographical references and descriptions of war in Sarala Mahabharat and has tried to provide a historian's view. He has exhibited the qualities of a scholar-critic in this discussion. The opinion of F.W.Bateson is pertinent in this regard. "A successful interpretation requires both scholarship and criticism, each modifying the other, a minute and comprehensive factual accuracy interacting with stringent and distinguished evaluative criticism." (The Scholar-Critic, 1972, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, p.101). Essays like 'Kabibara Radhanath's Chandrabhaga', 'The Commercial Value of Modern Odia Literature', 'Green Style', 'Influence of Geet Govind on Odia Literature', 'To which Place Does Sarala Das Belong?', 'Kabisurya Granthabali', etc. are literary discussions of the highest order.

He has made use of history and his own analytical prowess in literary discussions in order

to seek the truth. He has refused to blindly accept what is generally believed to be true and has proposed new truths. He was the first to claim that Bhima Bhoi was not blind. His literary discussions are mostly research-based and point at his analytical bent of mind.

Dr. Krushna Chandra Panigrahy was a distinguished scholar in History, Sanskrit, English and Archaeology. He was well-known as a researcher. On the basis of these two traits, he became an eminent scholar-critic. F.W.Bateson may be recalled in connection with his literary discussion. Bateson says, "The scholar-critic must be a scholar, a researcher, before he can become a competent critic." One can see an amalgamation of scholarliness, ability to conduct research and an analytical viewpoint in his literary discussion.

The special attraction of the essays of Dr. Krushna Chandra Panigrahy is his style of writing prose. His style was extraordinary. He could present a matter in such a way that it touched the chords in the heart of the reader. His prose was ornamental in some places. He made use of pictures and verses to drive his point home. His prose was in a class of its own because of his adroitness in the use of adjectives and the use of popular Odia dialogues.

He had been inspired by Sanskrit literature to write ornamental prose used by him at one place, "The mango trees had stretched towards the village. Some of these were young and others were ancient. All of them were laden with numerous flowers in the spring and they bowed with the burden of fruits in the summer. I have not forgotten the cooing of the cuckoo, the humming of the cricket and the fear of witches on the mango trees. I can still recall the cloudy days of the rainy season, the distant hills covered with

the clouds, the strike of the lightning, the sound of thunder, incessant rains, pitch dark nights, the greenery of the forests, the dense fog, the shivers of the winter, the smoky horizon, the golden crop and so forth.” (Orissa of My Time, 1978, p.3-4).

Use of adjectives was another speciality of his prose. He could use adjectives in a way which could bring characters alive. An example may be seen. “As we went on the road to Puri, we stopped for a while in the whitewashed residence of Sakhigopal. A short, bearded, lachrymose man had set up a cottage at this place and had dreamt of a developed Orissa. He was the Pole Star in the unending nights of Utkal, or he was an emaciated and helpless person in a lonely, dense forest, or the image of a helpless person in a lonely, dense forest, or the image of a helpless, mortified mother. He donated his bones like Dadhichi and died prematurely. His ashes are still warm. Has his ideals passed into oblivion? (Prabandha Manasa, 1972, p.158). His mastery over words may be seen from his description of various temples. Look at the use of adjectives again. “Some are entwined by wild weeds and they are staring at the degeneration of Utkal.” (Prabandha Manasa, 1972), He had a prodigious control over words.

The touch of a poet may be seen in the prose of Dr. Krushn Chandra Panigrahy. He was different from the others in the sense that he was reading poetry. An example would substantiate this statement. “Huge mango and sal trees had been stand here and there in the front and various kinds of bushes had covered the fort overwhelmingly. Birds, flowers and fruits of various kinds could be seen here round the year. But they created a kind of magic in the spring. Banajuthi spread fragrance all around carrying numerous white flowers on its stem, Indra-jaba had bowed down with the weight of numerous

white flowers and seemed to be inviting one and all, Sunari looked like a wealthy woman laden with golden flowers, and a plethora of red clusters of the Kinshuka created the impression of a fire in the forest?” (Orissa of My Time, 1978, p.3)

Just as a speaker addressed the audience during the course of his speech, similarly, in writing prose, Dr. Krushna Chandra Panigrahy repeatedly addressed the readers. His prose was full of phrases like ‘Listen to me all you Odia brethren who believe in Lord Jagannath’, ‘My Jajpuri Brethren’, ‘My Brothers from North Orissa’, ‘My Brothers from Sambalpur’ and so forth. Look at his prose written in the form of speech : ‘Listen to me all you Odia brethren who believed in Lord Jagannath! Since when Orissa, this land of the Gods, has been suffering thus ? You will surely say that Odia-speaking areas remained fragmented as many of them became parts of Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, Madras and Bengal. The Bengalis grabbed the zemindaris of Orissa. Sri Chaitanya destroyed the military powers of Orissa. But if the actual events are analysed, these arguments are not acceptable.”(Orissa of My time, 1978, p.105). He has explained several complex problems to the reader by way of delivering such lectures through his prose.

Satire and sarcasm are seen often in his prose. He had a great sense of humour. Here is an example: “It has been said that Orissa was the pleasure garden of all Puranic and historical personalities. Mandakini River has been flowing near Jajpur, and Indra and Indrani have turned into stone at Chhatia. Thus, Orissa was the paradise one day. Varanasi was in Cuttack. A part of it is now known as Bidanasi. It has now turned into the pleasure ground of mosquitoes after Hara and Parvati deserted it. Gajapati Pratap Rudra Dev had rolled at the feet of Sri Chaitanya like a

donkey as the letter reached the Gadagadia Ghat.” (Orissa of My Time, 1978, P.101).

He has severely criticized the conceit shown by researchers of all hues. In this connection, he has written in his essay ‘Jagannath Sanskruti’ : “In spite of this, what could one say if someone says that Puri Jagannath Dham had been established one hundred and fifty six crore years ago?” He had perhaps discovered this information from some palm-leaf manuscript written with the help of obscure and unintelligible alphabets. No one could read such alphabets except for one or two Pandits from Puri.

Dr. Krushna Chandra Panigrahy had an intimitable style in describing natural scenery. He has described our heritage and contemporary lifestyle in his own typical style. His essays are adored by readers because of strong arguments in favour of his statements, sense of humour and theatrics. His peaceful, content, fresh and fearless personality becomes evident when one reads his essays.

It is almost an incredible achievement for a writer to leave his mark on the sand of time by writing only essays. It is an extremely difficult task to write essays if one did not have scholarliness, infinite patience, persistence, deep thought and varied experiences. Dr. Krushna Chandra Panigrahy had all these qualities in abundance. He has written his essays amid several adverse situations faced in his life. He has put forth his

opinions before the reader as an essayist. What he has said about his essays in his book ‘Prabandha Manasa’ assumes significance. He has said, “Many want to leave their mark on the sand of time. But only time would say whether these footmarks would be transient or eternal. It would be impudence on my part to say whether the essays would be transient or eternal. It would be impudence on my part to say whether the essays would be appreciated for a long time or would be obliterated in a few days. (An Appeal – Prabandha Manasa). Time has made his essays eternal.

There has been a lot of experimentation with the Odia prose in the twentieth century in the form of short stories, novels, autobiographies, travel stories, etc. It is indeed amazing that someone could earn laurels for himself and be appreciated by readers in the process of writing essays. Dr. Krushna Chandra Panigrahy has turned into a frontrunner in Odia literature through writing essays. He has analysed our culture, literature, history, soil, water and air in his essays. It would not be an exaggeration to say that Orissa’s culture, literature and history have received a new lease of life through his essays.

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