

Linguistic Movement of Odisha : A Brief Survey of Historiography

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In the 19th century the medium of instruction in education was enforced in the schools of Odisha as Bengali, and Bengali language was one and only medium to be used in the Odia schools mainly in 1868 and 1870 AD. The agitation started against the effort of introducing Bengali language in place of Odia as medium of teaching in school played an important role to uprise a new spirit of the movement in the later part of the 19th century.

The scholarship was started about the movement in 1916 by Fakirmohan Senapati. In his autobiography "*Atmajivana Charita*"¹, he has mentioned how the Odia movement was started. Some Odia intellectuals as well as Odia-loving English well-wishers of the then time also started writings on Odia language in the form of books, newspapers and articles. Besides it, *Karmavira Gourishankar Ray*, the colleague of fakirmohan senapati, and some other rajas of Odisha tried hard for the survival of odia language by all possible means. The efforts were also made in "Satyabadi" a literary journal published by the "Satyabadi Group of Thinkers" entitled "A Chapters of Old Fakirmohan's Autobiography" (*Bruddha Fakiramohananka Atmajivnara Eka Adhaya*)². In this easy he elaborately discussed the origin and development of the odia linguistic movement. He and some other Odia people were opposed to the Kantichandra's

book, which had stated against the Odia language. For the self identity a group of Odias voiced against Bengali language to be used as a medium of instruction in Odisha. They started agitation against them and passed memorandum for the colonial ruler and administrators. The search of Odia self-identity also merged in the language movement, after the great famine occurred. In this chapter he clearly mentioned about the scarcity of Odia books for the education in Odisha then. He also described how piteous was the situation of Odisha when so called *Sanskrit Pandits* were unable to read and write the Odia and the *Chahalli* system of education, a medium of the teaching in every village in Odisha. He discussed every angles of the movement and how it became an issue for the self identity of every Odias. He addressed every issue except the nationalistic approach for the struggle and the movement. Besides it, he also discussed the necessity of Odia language for the Odia people. Fakirmohan Senapati was a pioneer scholar in the linguistic movement of Odisha. Further Senapati discussed some personal problems of his latter part of his life. But he praised the King of Bamanda, Basudev Sudhal Dev, in this chapter because he was awarded the "*Saraswati Fakirmohan*" for his outstanding contribution to the Odia literature, language, culture and the Odia language protection movement.

In 1925 another outstanding work by Mrutyunjay Rath entitled "*Karma Jogi Gourishankara Ray*"³ a biography of Ray; detailed description of the development of the linguistic movement is found especially in the seventh chapter entitled "*Utkal Bhassara Swataraksha*". In this chapter Rath virtually discussed how the movement against Bengali domination was started as a medium of language in the schools and offices in Odisha at the time of later part of the 19th century. The outstanding contribution of Ray to this Odia movement was remarkable. This movement created due to the establishment of press, introduction of the Odia books for school children, spread an enthusiastic idea about language among the Odia speaking people, and thus made the involvement of the Odia language in every Odias. He published numerous books in Odia in the form of prose and poetry for the re-establishment of nationalistic approach, and thus made huge contribution to the Odia linguistic movement during the period. Gourishankar mainly contributed to this movement by preparing a huge number of Odia text books for the elementary and university level as there was deficiency of these books then. He established a printing press at Cuttack in 1866 for publishing these Odia books. The establishment of the press is not only meant for publishing the Odia books but also giving a new light to the development of Odia magazines, journals, newspapers, prose's and poetries, and elementary books for the school children in the print format in Odisha during this period of the movement, which has been discussed in the biography of Ray. The development in printing press primarily served three purposes, that is, printing of journals, preparation of text books and printing of books towards the development of literature. Gourishankar also started a weekly, entitled *Utkal Dipika* (1866)⁴, from Cuttack, which he continued to edit till his death, but which survived even after him till 1936,

the longest period for any journal established in the 19th century. The immediate provocation for *Dipika* was of course the famine of 1866, but it provided much needed leadership to the social, cultural and intellectual life of contemporary Odisha. A similar effort was made by Fakirmohana at Balasore, who started a monthly journal entitled *Bodhadhyaini O Baleswar Sambad Bahika* (1869), which subsequently became a weekly from 1872. Both the journals were no doubt spurred by the printing presses which Gourishankar and Fakirmohana had already started, but they became the rallying points for new, forthright ideas at two most important urban centres of Odisha. They also became the starting points for other new journals to emerge, particularly under the support and patronage of feudatory kings and rich *Zamindars*. Due to the effort of Ray the journals played important role in the movement. It provided a strong background to the contemporary socio-cultural ferment, as well as a strong defense for Odia language and literature.

Natabar Samantray (1918-2000), a substantial critic and whose critical discussions related to early writers of modern Odia literature viz., Radhanatha, Fakirmohan, Gangadhara, Nandakishor etc. as well as to ancient authors such as Upendra Bhanja, Avimanyu etc. published in the fifties and early sixties. As a result it created a stir in critical studies in Odisha. His most important work *Odisha Sahityara Itihasa*⁵, 1803-1920 (*History of Odia Literature*, 1803-1920, in 1964) was a pioneering work based on extensive research; a mines of information by itself not only highlighted the context and achievement of authors of early the modern Odia literature, but also remained as a potential source for subsequent critics to work upon. Samantray, it may be pointed out, established the norms of study for early important authors of the modern period

for many years to come. In his monumental work he mainly highlighted the history of Odia literature during 1803-1920. Here he described in the chapter fifth of this work the Odia linguistic movement. In this chapter he added some new significant and rare data of this movement collected from contemporary Odia, Bengali, and English newspapers, the speeches in writing format published by Asiatic Society of Bengal and some valuable statement about the formation of newly states on the basis of language. The language should be main identity of a nation he was first to mention in his work. He discussed the importance of Odia language, its origin and development through the ages. He also discussed the main issues behind the movement like economic interest. The linguistic movement started by him played a vital role for the formation of language based state. He addressed many more angles of the movement and sometimes supported the views of Rajendralal Mitra. However he did not pay any attention to the nationalistic approach to the movement. Because he mainly highlighted the period from 1803 to 1920 when nationalistic movement started in Odisha due to the intervention M.K Gandhi in national politics and his follower started new campaign in every movement and every incident was discussed happened with colour of nationalistic approach. He did not concentrate on his work from the nationalistic point of view.

With the appearance of "Utkal University History of Odisha" Vol.VI⁶, under the Utkal University Project published in 1964 edited by Prabhat Mukherjee, a new movement started taking momentum in Odisha. He did his job well by throwing light on unknown and forgotten Odia nationalists, who became martyrs in the 19th century. The book covered the political history of Odisha in 19th century which focused on British conquest and administration, the Paik Rebellion

of 1817 and the famine of 1866, Surendra Sai of Sambalpur and Raja Arjun Singh of Porahat in Singbhum, the growth of education and political consciousness, and the language agitation. He mentioned here how the Odias had been in existence as a distinct society with a separate culture and identity of their own. In the Indian Constitution, regional languages have been given due recognition. Linguistic provinces have been given political identity and autonomy. Each region can develop its culture and language befitting to the glories of history. In this work he dedicated few pages for this movement in pages between 426-432. He elaborately discussed the struggle and movement in the two regions of Odisha-Cuttack by Gourishankar Ray and Balasore by Fakirmohan Senapati and Madhusudan Das, which were nearer to the non-Odia state where the seeds were ripped against the Odisha and Odia Language. How the agitation happened in this location was discussed in this volume. But in his work Mukherjee did not address main issues behind it. Further he did not address issue behind like nationalistic approaches and the way of thinking on nationalistic spirit for the movement.

In 1970 the great novelist and literary person Surendra Mohanty wrote a book on Madhusudan Das entitled "*Satabdira Surya: A Biography of Madhusudan Das*"⁷. In this noble work Mohanty discussed mainly previous information mentioned in the Fakirmohan's *Atmcharit* and Gourishankar's *Biography*. In the fourth chapter he covered the struggled life of Das and linguistic movement in few lines, and the conversation between Senapati and Das. The role of first Odia high educated participated in this movement, when he was appointed as a third teacher in Balasore School against the Kantichandra's statement was prominent when the medium of instruction was Bengali. Initially he participated with Senapati, Bichhandcharan

Patnaik, and Bichitrananda same time at Balasore. He after returning from Calcutta in 1880, himself joined in Cuttack Bar Association and started legal practices. In 1882 he created Utkal Sabha which became a strong and well organized forum of the Odias to ventilate their feeling and grievances. Utkal Sammilani, a premier organization to promote the movement under the guidance of Das finally achieved the goal with the spirit of nationalism. Here Mohanty mentioned how the first educated man generated the nationalism in the mind of Odias and to achieve their ultimate objective.

Jaykrushna Samal originally received his Ph.D. degree for the work on “*Odisha under the British Crown*”⁸ in 1977. He discussed the movement in few pages (pp. 297-303) of his work. He tried to re-locate the issues of the movement and described how this movement came through the Odia intellectuals to a successful achievement. But he did not discuss the main theme of the movement and highlight how the nationalism played a vital role in the scenario of the linguistic movement. Samal in his work published some authentic data collected from the archival materials, but in some places few data collected from other side seems to be doubtful. And finally he failed himself to prove the main factors like nationalism, spirit for the formation of the linguistic based state.

In the late of the 20th century, specially, from 1986 to 1992 a series of articles were published in the reputed journal “*Jhankara*” by Gaganendranath Dash of Odisha, which were edited by historian and politician Harekrushna Mahtab. He wrote only three essays which were published later in a book form in 1993 with the title “*Odia Bhasha Suraksha Andolana*”⁹. These three essays pointed mostly the main issues following the movement and its historicity. Besides it developed mainly the self interest of both the

groups in the economic interest, and criticised Natbar Samantaray’s work basically for his friendly attitudes towards Rajendralal Mitra. The financial interests of both the groups in selling school text books in the region of Odisha were also mentioned in the work of Dash. Because the purpose of the business of the Bengali elementary books in the state of Odisha was an effort to totally remove the Utkal or Odia language from the state. There was a discussion in the first essay of the G.N. Dash “*Odia Bhasha Suraksha Andolana: Eka Simhabolokon*” appeared in the *Jhankar* in November and December issues of 1986¹⁰. In these essays he discussed same issues like agitation against the plan of non-Odia’s and a group of Odia’s demand that the teaching medium should be regional language. Basically he mentioned the work of previous scholars and criticized Natabara Samantray’s work for his friendly attitude to Rajendralal Mitra and other Bengali intellectuals. He mainly focused on the matters which are documented and published in Utkal Dipika newspaper, and the pioneer works for the restoration of Odia language in Odisha. In the second essay he clearly discussed the statements of John Beams and R.L. Mitra, the supporter and oppose to the existence of the Odia language respectively and how Mitra failed to give accurate information to prove his statement in a meeting held at Calcutta Asiatic Society in 1870, in Calcutta. In this essay “*Odia Bhasa Andolona: Eka Drustipata*” he also discussed the incidents such as views of Mitra and other English men as to the existence of Odia language about the newspapers that supported the views of Mitra and Bhattachary; and those are published from Calcutta like “*Indian Mirror*” edited by Keshaba Chander Sen and “*Rahashy-Sandarva*” edited by Mitra for the campaign for the spread of Bengali language in Odisha. In his third essay “*Odia Bhasha Suraksha Andolona: Purnasimhabolokona*” mainly based on the

controversial statement against the pioneer scholars like Samantaray, he himself defined his views to be right. Sometime he claimed that he was the new theorist for the movement, but he finally failed to touch the movement itself in three essays. He did not even pay attention to the issues like nationalistic approach of the movement.

His another remarkable work was “*Odia Bhasa Andolona*”¹¹, in which he mentioned that the Odia linguistic movement was a part of national history and it was a cultural revolution of Odia nation. This book also discussed the importance, origin and development of the movement. This movement was a gigantic chapter of the “History of Odia Nation”. He further discussed that the cross cultural impact and influence of others could not demise the culture of Odia and rather it became a strong pillar in the all Indian scenario. Mohanty further remarked the beginning of the movement like “*Tini Antia Kakudi Badi*” (three share cucumber land) in Odisha which was virtually separate from Bengal, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, and Madras Presidency before 1936. The collection of every tax was shared by them and nothing was given to Odisha. The great famine in 1866 demolished the Odia nation which was known as “*Naanka Druviksha*”. After 1866, Britishers considered Odisha as a poor land, and as a result our neighbour started planning to share the every part from Odisha between them and Odisha. They also tried to demise the one nation and one language which had a glorious past. These were the basic factors for the beginning of the movement from 1866 to 1870, January 4th for the language and Odia people. He further remarked here the importance of the “*Utkal Dipika*” one weekly which once raised voice against the Bengali language as a medium of education. In his work he discussed the importance of mother tongue and how its necessary statement was supported by national

scholar cum political thinker like M.K. Gandhi, Gopabandhu Das, Gangadhara Meher, and Madhusudan Das. He also mentioned the origin and development of the Odia script; how these scripts were different from neighbour states from religious and cultural point of view. He further discussed the Odia linguistic movement, its role and how it took to “*Odia Ekta Swantra Bhasa Naya*”, the success of the linguistic movement, John Beams and his contribution to the movement, coming of renaissance in Odisha and how far it was useful to Odisha. He for the first time discussed the issues like Sambalpur tract, its movement for Odia language, and development of Odia newspaper like “*Sambalpur Hiteisini*”¹². He also revealed the formation of linguistic state and its approval in the Indian Constitution. He discussed many angels of the movement but he did not reveal the issues behind the nationalistic thinker towards the movement. He discussed the significant role of the Utkal Sammilani for the linguistic movement, the role of Satyabadi Scholar cum Political thinkers and the nationalistic approaches for the movement. Besides it, he documented the main features of the movement and talked about some historicity behind the cause but not properly. He failed to clarify the movement and approach of nationalistic way of thinking.

Mohanty also followed the footstep of the previous scholarship but his statement some time is not acceptable. He did a good work by translating the work of Kantichandra’s original book; the statements are reprinted from Utkal Dipika in this book. Some information were bearing the authenticity but somewhere he failed to prove his book on the nationalistic point of view and the growth of movement how to make it success in the rhythm of nationalistic spirit.

It is this historical situation in the middle of the 19th century when S. C. Patra¹³ started his research on the amalgamation of the Odia-

speaking tracts and the formation of the province of Odisha, which he rightly called a “hitherto neglected” subject. This work appeared in 1979 entitled “*Formation of the Province of Orissa: The Success of the First Linguistic Movement in India*”. He discussed some significant achievements and newly discovered information in this voluminous work. He devoted three comprehensive Chapters on the “Areas inhabited by Odia-speaking people outside Odisha” especially in Bengal, Madras, Chota Nagpur and the Central Provinces. In each of these chapters he analyzed the “Linguistic affinity”, the “Linguistic affinity as known from Census Reports”, and the “social, cultural and ethnological affinity” of each of these “excluded areas” in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. His contributions to the second subsections are very instructive. They showed how under the influence of non-Odia census officers the “official” number of Odia-speaking people declined in various areas from census to census. This happened particularly in those southern tracts which were under the influence of the Telugu officers. The results of Patra’s work are therefore, important contribution to the discussion on the influence of the census reports on various levels of Indian society such as castes, languages, etc. On the basis of the evidences S.C. Patra continues his work with a separate chapter on the “Growth of Socio-political Consciousness in Odisha”. Here he emphasized the influence of education which played a double role in the development of an Odia consciousness. On the one side, modern education provided the intellectual means for the emergence of a new elite in Odisha which later on was to take up the leadership of the Odia movement, on the other side, however, it was the field of education where both the dominance of non-Odia (especially Bengalis) and the neglect of Odisha by the Bengal-centered British administration of Odisha were most obvious. The disadvantage of being a

modern educated Odia was felt most deeply during the competitions for government posts, where usually Bengalis and Telugus had a much better chance due to their mother tongue being an “official” language in the respective presidencies. It was mainly this issue of unobtainable Government post which created in Odisha “sentiments of hatred, defiance and hostility”. In three further chapters he deals separately with the three other major factors which deeply influenced the further development of the Odia movement like the “Development of Communication”, “Growth of Printing Press and Journalism”, and the “Growth of Associations”.

The growing discontent of the Odias took a different shape after terrible “*Naanka*” famine in 1866 which revealed the backwardness of Odisha and its lack of communications with the surrounding provinces. The feeling of negligence was aggravated during the following years when Bengali officers and scholars endeavored to fight the backwardness of Odisha by substituting the Odia language by Bengali. When in the Ganjam district, in Sambalpur and in the Chota Nagpur areas a substitution of Odia by Telugu and Hindi was tried, respectively, the Odia Movement for the first time culminated in an organized language agitation. Patra’s comprehensive study on “The Formation of the Province of Odisha” has to be regarded as a major contribution to the history of the transformation of colonial British India to independent India, because “the demand for linguistic states, which became so conspicuous in India after independence, had had its genesis in the movement of the Odia-speaking people for a separate province on the basis of language during the latter half of the British rule”.

Nivedita Mohanty’s¹⁴ voluminous work “*Oriya Nationalism: Quest for a United Orissa 1866-1956*” has traced the evolution of the Odia movement in this thesis with great care and has

provided a detailed account of the reflection of the movement in the various tracts of Odia. The Odia newspapers which served as source material for this thesis are themselves harbingers of the awakening of Odia and thus deserve the attention which has been given to them in this pioneering work. The intensive study of the borderline areas between the core of Odia and the neighbouring provinces is of particular importance and should stimulate research in other regions. Bilingual tracts in which different regional traditions produce conflicts as well as a variety of interesting contacts are to be found in many parts of India. Their problems have rarely found the sympathetic and yet dispassionate attention which Mohanty has devoted to Ganjam, Sambalpur, Midnapur and Singhbhum. Further she opined on the colonial administrator and their activities for the movement co-operation with Indian National Congress. Therefore, eventually the British rulers made their decision so as to confirm the apprehensions of the Congress leaders thus holding the balance between Muslim and Hindu interests. For the Odia leaders this crucial period was one of trial and tribulation as they were isolated from the mainstream of Congress politics, but wished to continue to serve the national movement. Regional support of national leadership was an important feature of the Indian freedom movement. Gandhi had recognized this by redrafting the Constitution of the Indian National Congress so as to accommodate the aspirations of various regions. Odia had also been given its place in this constitution, and it had valiantly supported Gandhi in his national campaigns. The current of the Odia movement thus merged with the main-stream of nationalism and this fusion proved to be stronger than temporary isolation and alienation. Those leaders of the Odia movement who looked to the British for a response to their claims were replaced by younger ones who were attached to the Congress although the British creation of a

separate province of Odia in 1936 seemed to justify the attitude of the older leadership. Here, N. Mohanty concluded in her views that this movement only succeeds for the political mileage of Odia leader, influence of Gandhi and Indian National Congress, but this argue has not highlighted the origin, development and the nationalistic approaches for formation of linguistic states.

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