

Odia Language and Literature

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A linguistic survey of the world confirms to the total number of 6912 (six thousand nine hundred twelve) dialects all over the world, out of this 516 (five hundred sixteen) have either perished or about to perish. Similarly, 1652 (one thousand six hundred fifty two) dialects are there in India and some of its scheduled tribe languages are about to be dead. The UNICEF has given a very crucial report apprehending six thousand dialects may vanish by the end of 21st century.¹ No doubt it is a serious concern. The death of a language is as good as the death of a human being for one can't be imagined excluding the other. Hence language and human beings are inter-dependant. In the present context Odia language is much more progressive and promising one.

On the 23rd July 2013, the language expert committee appointed by *Sahitya Academy* on behalf of the Culture Department of Central Government recommended for the classical status of Odia language. On the 20th February 2014 the council of ministers has approved the said proposal. Now Odia language is the 6th one in achieving such milestone. Except Sanskrit, Odia is the only Indo-Aryan language to achieve such magical status and other four languages (Tamil, Telugu, Kannada and Malayalam) belong to Dravidian language group.

The benevolent efforts by some great litterateurs from hundreds of years back to till date, the fate of Odia language and literature dazzles and it has its special identity in the language map of the world. The origin of this language and literature can be traced back to no less than 12th century A.D.

Odia language and epistle is special, independent and unique one. It has been introduced by the *Ganga* kings after 1110 A.D. The reign of the dynasty is the tenure of not less than four centuries. By that time their kingdom is called *Utkal*. Odia language has got a morden shape in 15th century A.D. during the rule of *Gajapati* king *Kapilendra* Dev. None but *Sudramuni Sarala* Das a soldier of his regiment has written the great epic the *Mahabharat* and needless to mention that the *Prakit* and *Apabhramsha* Odia language has been polished. *Sarala* Das is the great architect of giving a new dimension to it.

Language is the cultural realisation of a nation. It flourishes keeping space with the development of civilization. So the language of a civilization is more polished and progressive. In qualitative assessment of the cultural heritage of a nation, language plays the key role. This is a naked truth for all nations including Odisha.²

Without a language the existence of a nation can't be dreamt of because language and literature are inseparable. Hence the art form of language is literature. Thoughts, feelings, imaginations are expressed through language either orally or in written shape, then it becomes literature. A nation is also admired for its lofty, advanced literature. In this regard Odisha never lags behind. From *pre-Sarala* Yuga to till date some noted writers have enriched the literary treasure house of Goddess *Saraswati* and the vast Odia literary horizon has impressed many scholars of country and abroad.

Once upon a time the Sanskrit pundits and poets have kept the literature in their safe clutches. Nobody has ventured to cross the iron bars of restriction for writing in Odia language was just like a punishment of being beheaded. Poet *Sarala* Das has never cared for the same and exhibited bravery of excellence by presenting the Odia *Mahabharat* in 15th century. It is not the exact translation of the Sanskrit *Mahabharat* of *Vyasadeva* but to the maximum extent of an original creation. No doubt it has created havoc in literary sphere and paved the path for leading Odia literature in future. Next to *Sarala* Yuga, *Pancha Sakha* Yuga has been prominent for some wonderful *Vaisnava* literature.

Balaram, *Jagannath*, *Achutananda*, *Yosabanta* and *Ananta*, the five *Vaisnavas* have accepted themselves as servants of Lord Shree *Jagannath* and made their surnames Das irrespective of their castes. They are the worshippers of Shree *Jagannath* and of same religious ideology. So they are called the *Pancha Sakha* (five friends). The valuable contributions of those poets are the *Dandi Ramayan* of *Balaram Das*, the *Bhagabat* of *Jagannath Das*,

Haribansha of *Achutananda Das*. Besides those they have some important religious literature to their credit. Thus just after the *Sarala* Yuga, *Pancha Sakha* Yuga is a landmark in Odia literature. Then starts the important and precious Yuga called *Riti Yuga/Madhya Yuga/Kabya Yuga/Vakti Yuga*. This period is of two hundred years called the golden arena in Odia literature.

The eldest poet of *Riti Yuga* is Dina Krishna Das and his most attractive creation is the *Rasakallola*. It is most popular for its love lineless of poetic flavour. During language crisis in 19th century the great linguist John Beams has had appreciated its literary value and championed the cause of originality of Odia language. The other successful *Riti* poets are *Kabi Samrat Upendra Bhanja*, *Abhimanyu Samanta Singhar*, *Kabi Surya Baladeva Ratha*, *Gopal Krushna* and some others who have decorated their lucid writings with ornamental language, devotional feelings and amorousness painting. Some important poetic works of the same time are the *Vaideisha Vilas*, *Bidagdha Cintamani* and *Kishore Chandranana Champu*. Undoubtedly *Riti* literature is an augmentative in developing Odia language and literature.

The 19th century A.D. witnessed an unwanted struggle of Odia language to save its status from the intentional attack of some self-centred Bengalis. They have advocated that Odia is a sub-language of Bengali language. This unhealthy language conflict has occurred just after the occupation of Odisha (1803 A.D.) by the Britons. Most of the British rulers in Odisha have been pre-occupied that Odia and Bengali are the same language without going to the root and replaced Odia, introduced Bengali (1848-1849) as the official language in the courts of Odisha. It

is pertinent to mention that after British occupation of Odisha, the *Odias* had no interest to learn English and developed a hatred feeling for the foreign language. Out of greediness, many English knowing Bengalis have rushed Odisha and managed occupying important government official posts and many of them were dishonest. It is piety to mention that to get a job under British government *Odias* qualified in 1848 A.D. For this the Bengalis remaining in government service not less than hundred years, cunningly became the landlords but not a single protest was against them.³ Taking the advantages the Bengali *Zamindars* in Odisha have unnecessarily tried to introduce Bengali language instead of Odia in their jurisdiction. Even then the Bengali *Zamindar; Mandal Babu* of *Balasore* had gone to the extent to establish purely a Bengali school in his area in the remote *Mofussil*. Similarly some Bengali officers of coastal districts of Odisha have involved themselves in the conspiracy of abolishing Odia language.⁴

Odia is a dialect of Bengali, this statement already given by *Bouring Sahib* earlier has been negated by Commissioner *Goldsbury*.⁵ *Kanti Chandra Bhattacharya* and some other Bengalis antagonistic to Odia language have become silent after the strong arguments given by John Beams, *Goldsbury* and *Rangalal Bandopadhyaya* (familiar with Odia language) that Odia is an original language.⁶ During the language conflict, Odia loving nationalist and a great writer *Fakir Mohan Senapati* is ever remembered for his unforgettable sacrifice of establishing a vernacular press at *Balasore* in association with *Shyamananda De* and it facilitated the process of printing text books, newspapers and periodicals.

The role of newspapers in safeguarding the interest of Odia language and literature is a vital one. In this respect the *Utkal Deepika*, *Utkal Hiteishini*, *Sambad Vahika*, *Utkal Darpana*, *Sambalpur Hiteisini*, *Nava Sambad*, *Cuttack Argos*, *Cuttack Star*, *Cuttack Standard* and the *Cuttack Chronicle* are some of the leading newspapers that rendered yeoman service for the growth of the Odia nationalism during language conflict and after.⁷ Besides some eminent and permanent domiciled Bengalis have had tremendous support for Odia language and their sacrifice is beyond mention. Among them the names of *Gouri Sankar Ray* (the distinguished editor of the *Utkal Deepika*), *Raja Baikunthanath De*, *Radhanath Ray*, *Ramsankar Ray*, *Rammohan Ray* and *Pyarimohan Acharya* are worth mentionable. The domiciled Bengali elite class remained completely aloof from the language conflict. Above all Odia language has got assent (1869) as a special language by the British government and it was no mean a blow for the crooked Bengalis opposed to Odia language.

The Christian priests with an intention to preach Christianity have published books in regional language. As a result the provisional and regional languages have come to the limelight in printing shape. Keri, Marsman, Ward, those three missionaries have published the religious scriptures in provincial language; undoubtedly it helped the progress of Odia language.⁸ At last the language conflict (1841-1870) has collapsed by the mid of 1870.

The best prophet of the future is the past. It is applicable for the educated *Odias* of 19th century. Nothing but language crisis has brought a dramatic change in their mind-set. They not only have

contributed to Odia literature by writing in plenty but also they were determined for amalgamating of Odia-speaking districts that were disintegrated for the whimsical mentality of the Mughal and Maratha rulers. For this Odisha is conquered by East India Company in a piecemeal manner. The Odia nationalism basing on language ultimately makes a safe way for political movement relating to the geographical territory of Odisha. In the long run the nationalists have been successful in achieving their goal. Odisha was declared a new province (1st April 1936) by British government. The long cherished desire of Odia-speaking people to remain in one province became a reality.

The 19th century is quite eventful from many angles. Language conflict, introduction of English in educational curriculum, fascination to learn the language by a group of enthusiastic youths and morden trend in literature are some of the eye catching happenings that brought a radical change in Odishan life. Odia language has gained a lot. Due to the adoptability of language some English words are included in the colloquial and written Odia language. Besides, the contemporary world phenomenon and literary trend have been gladly accepted by the western educated youths.

Morden trend in literature began in Kolkata just after the battle of Plassey (1757A.D.) whereas in Odisha after the British occupation (1803A.D.) literary stalwarts like *Fakir Mohan Senapati*, *Radhanath Ray*, *Nanda Kishore Bal*, *Madhusudan Rao* and some others have decorated Odia language in different styles. Especially *Fakir Mohan* is the pioneer of morden prose writings. His masterpiece novel the *Chhamana Athaguntha* is of world class, based on Odisha life trend. He has raised a sensitive

issue that prevailed between *Rama Chandra Mangaraj*, a greedy landlord and exploited *Saria* and *Bhagia* the weaver-cum cultivators. *Radhanath Ray* has introduced the Morden trend in Odia poetry following world literature; the European, Roman and English. *Nanda Kishore Bal* popularly known as *Palli Kabi* has concentrated on rural life and beautifully pictured the village scenery very artistically in his poems whereas *Madhusudan Rao* is a successful poet of narrating the relationship between soul and super natural soul.

The 20th century has historic importance of freedom movement. It has influenced the Indian literature to the largest extent and some freedom fighters also became writers from the prison cell. In Odisha Pundit *Gopabandhu Das*, *Dr. Harekrushna Mahtab* and *Nityananda Mohapatra* are the noted writers sprouted from behind the prison cells.

During *Swadeshi* movement many students influenced by national leaders had left English schools and studied in national schools. *Gopabandhu Das* established a national school, *Satyabadi Bana Bidyalaya* at *Sakhigopal* near *Puri*, imparted education to the mother land loving students. High educated and eminent moralist teachers, *Gopabandhu Das*, *Pundit Nilakantha Das*, *Godavarish Mishra*, *Lingaraj Mishra* of *Satyabadi* group involved themselves in freedom struggle. They are also writers of patriotic literature. Hence *Satyabadi Yuga* in Odia literature is best known for promoting patriotism and nationalism.

After *Satyabadi Yuga*, patriotic literatures have been plentifully written in Odia language. The freedom struggle has influenced

many novelists. *Dr. Harekrushna Mahtab, Surendra Mohanty, Nityananda Mohapatra, Ram Prasad Sing* are the famous in this field. But *Nityananda's* supremacy in this area is of high praise. He has decorated most of the important aspects of literature. He achieves immense success in the field of journalism. His novels have brought eye catching name and fame for this great freedom fighter *Nityananda*. Odia novel literature is just incomplete without his novels. In the post-independence period, Odia language has developed a lot. It is a very good sign for the nation.

Language is an eternal flow. It flourishes day by day. In this respect, Odia language and literature has a rich cultural heritage. It has got the sanction of a 'classical language'. No doubt it is a spectacular achievement.

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