

Professor Krishna Chandra Panigrahi and Odishan Historiography

Kailash Chandra Dash

I

Professor Krishna Chandra Panigrahi has lasting contribution to the growth of Odishan historiography from the 40s to the 80s of the 20th century A.D. His methods, approaches and interpretations along with his narratives deserve notice by all the scholars and writers of Odishan history in India and abroad. Panigrahi started his research career in the tumultuous decades of the formation of the separate province of Odisha when there was a powerful articulation for Odia identity and for distinctiveness of Odia culture. The need of a history for the Odias was strongly felt by the enthusiastic Odias who wanted the projection of an imagined glorious race and there was a paucity of reliable source materials for it. A host of writers in Odisha through Odia newspapers and magazines projected the past of Odisha which despite its rich and colourful description was not supported by scientific analysis. Panigrahi was of course not free totally from the nationalistic temper of the time, but he was free from bias and unwarranted historical analysis. He saw the spectacular past of Odisha in a new image which was shared by the celebrated epigraphists and the archaeologists of his time. In his approach and style he definitely followed a scientific and rationalist trend which began revising the colonial and nationalistic historiography in Odisha. He must

have read the nationalistic narratives of Jagabandhu Singh and Kripasindhu Mishra along with others which appeared in the powerful Odia magazines like Mukura, Sahakara, Satyabadi, Utkala Sahitya as well as in the weekly newspapers in Odia-the Samaj, Asha, Sambalpur Hiteishini and Nabeen. But he started to debate his contemporary ideas and projected an analytical study on Odisha history culling information from archaeological store-house as well as from the vast literary traditional accounts. One may accept or refute Panigrahi's thesis on Orissa's past; but none can deny an extra-ordinary historical consciousness in his narratives which were more or less free from inventive histories and exaggerations. Therefore there is now a need to read Panigrahi with a scientific spirit which can help us in presenting a comprehensive history of Odisha in the faster moving twenty-first century.

II

Before Panigrahi in colonial Odisha there was discussion and debates on the past of Odisha on the basis of traditional accounts and archaeological evidence. The colonial historians like Andrew Stirling, J.Princep, Brijkishore Mishra, Bhabani Bandopadhyaya, W.W.Hunter, John Beames, Rajendra Lal Mitra, Pyari Mohan Acharya and Sitanath Ray presented a study of

the history of Odisha mainly on the basis of their interpretation of traditional accounts in literary and historical texts like Madalapanji and sometimes on a casual reading of extant archaeological details. This trend was justified considering the nature of interpretation of the past then appreciated and followed. But with the march of time in the beginning of the 20th century A.D. there was a remarkable historical consciousness in Odisha with the discovery of a large number of copper plate and temple inscriptions, with the exploration of many archaeological sites and temples which convey new messages for the reconstruction of a comprehensive past of Odisha. By this time in Odisha large number of Odia periodicals and magazines were published and in Bengal the famous Journal of the Asiatic Society and the Indian Antiquary were published which contained the new message for the history and historians of Odisha. Also Epigraphica Indica containing a decipherment and interpretation of the epigraphic records of Odisha helped a lot to unravel the darker aspects of the past of Odisha. The outcome was the brilliant rise of a host of historians like Man Mohan Chakravarti, M.M.Ganguli, N.N.Vasu, R.D.Banerji, R.P.Chand and many others. They were more or less appreciated by the Odia historians then. The first three decades of the 20th century A.D. in Odisha witnessed a brilliant group of writers who utilised both traditional accounts and archaeological source-wealth for the reconstruction of the history of Odisha. They were Pandit Arttrana Mishra, Mrutyunjaya Rath, Jagabandhu Singh, Kripasindhu Mishra, Brajabandhu Das, Brajabandhu Pattnaik, Mahendra Patnaik, Tarini Charan Rath, Kedarnath Mahapatra, Satyanarayana Rajaguru, Rudranarayana Sarangi, Paramananda Acharya, Birupakshya Kar, Chandra Mohan Maharana, Gopabandhu Vidyabhushan, Phakir Sahani,

Lakshminarayana Jagadeba of Tikkali, Vinayak Mishra, Bhagaban Pati, Chintamani Acharya, Jogesh Chandra Ray, Sadasiva Mishra, Ghanashyam Das and others. They were motivated to write the history of Odisha with the discovery of archaeological sources and they were guided by the nationalist forums like Utkala Sahitya Samaj at Cuttack as well as the Utkala Sammilani. Under the patronage of Odisha Research Anusandhan Samity of 1917 which was the brain child of the Utkala Sahitya Samaj many of these writers became active to see the past of Odisha. The publication of English Journals like the Journal of Bihar Orissa Research Society, Prachi and in Odia magazines like Sahakara, Mukura, Utkala Sahitya and others fostered their ideas. Some of them were nationalist writers eager to articulate the identity of the Odia race by presenting a connected account of the past which was also in many respects imagined. There were also others who wanted to view Odisha history in the light of scientific thought and recent archaeological evidence. But they were limited in number. With this background one has to see the workshop of Panigrahi. Panigrahi came to the focus in the 1930s when some of his Odia articles were published in Nava Bharata which was edited by Nilakantha Das. They were on Kavisurya Granthavali, overseas trade and colonization of ancient Kalinga, the position of women in Rig Veda and Brahmana and Kshatriya.. (See Nava Bharata, Sala-1343, 1346). But he was definitely watching carefully the development in Odisha and abroad on history and culture of Odisha and was trying to map it. But with his brilliant training in Calcutta University under the inspiration of the great historians there and with his association with Rama Prasad Chand he began to look at Odisha history with a scientific temper. His scientific temper was fostered first at Ahichhatra, the capital of South Panchala in the years from 1944 to 1946

when he was associated with the archaeological excavation of this zone. During this phase he was trained to be an archaeologist and found archeological sources as a very valuable tool for scientific historical thought. Working as an archaeologist in different zones in North India he got a scientific mind for writing a comprehensive history of India. The report of K.N. Dikshit, Director-General of Archaeology in India in 1943 established the fact that for six years from 1937 to 1943 Panigrahi had a brilliant formative career necessary for a scientific historian. His original researches on the subject of the evolution of Indian pottery from the earliest time to the present day in which he had acquired for himself an unrivalled knowledge led him to the path of scientific historical analysis. He had worked in various capacities as a lecturer in History, as a curator and as an archaeologist which enabled him to have a fresh look at Odisha History.

His first work started with debate and controversy. The book was Political Status of the Feudatory States of Orissa and Chhattisgarh which was a documentary study of the status of the Princely states of Orissa and the book was published under the patronage of K.C. Niyogi, the ex-Dewan of Mayurbhanj state. The underlying motive in the publication of this text was to encourage the states for the formation of an Eastern States Union consisting of the Princely States of Odisha. But with the merger of the princely states the book was well known and Panigrahi was bitterly criticised. The work however was a very important source book on the Princely states of Odisha before merger for the historians and it contained Panigrahi's skill of codifying and documenting historical facts.

From the 1940s Panigrahi saw a lack of proper historical consciousness in Orissa which

can be well known from his articles in Odia in Samaj. On 25th October and 15th November 1952 he had two articles in Samaj on the history of Odisha and historical sources in which he strongly presented the lack of proper method in the study of Odishan history despite the availability of many historical records about it. He had criticized the historians of Odisha for using unreliable fake documents and for the lack of real research in it. There was great reaction on his focus; but Panigrahi had well marked the trends in Odishan history for the last four decades and he was convinced about the unscientific and bitter nationalistic outlook of the Odias then while projecting the past of Odisha. For thirty years from 1940s Panigrahi cogently argued against the spread of fake documents in Odisha about the glorious past of the Odias. Before 1950s he did not speak on the circulation of fake ideas for the compilation of Odisha history. It was probably due to his pre-occupation in archaeological works and his preparatory training to face the imagined historians of Odisha. In fact the trends of Odishan historiography as presented by the famous Odia historians in the phase from 1910-40 was guided by nationalistic temper for the construction and articulation of Odia identity-the claim of Jayadeva's birth place and that of Buddha and Kalidas were two important examples. The historians in Odisha then projected the past of Odisha without verifying the documents necessary for them and with poor decipherment of epigraphic records and careless theorizing. Sometimes history was imagined and constructed on the basis of fake documents. The glorification of the Odias of the past on the basis of fake and useless documents was a prominent trend of this phase. Panigrahi strongly protested against this trend from 1950s and demanded a scientific approach and method for the comprehensive history of Odisha. In the two interesting narratives

in Odia Panigrahi wanted scientific and comprehensive study of Odisha history and he had condemned the trend of using fake and artificial documents for the history of Odisha. He had appreciated the trend of historiography in R.D.Banerji's History of Orissa, although he was also conscious about some shortcomings in it. Then Panigrahi strongly stated that the use of fake documents like Bhandara Panji and inscriptions on Raktabahu deter in the reconstruction of the past of Odisha on scientific basis. He could not appreciate the protesting note of Chakradhara Mahapatra on his article because Mahapatra had an emotional outburst having no logic in his thought and language. Panigrahi started his tirade against the profuse use of fake inscriptions and copper plates like palm leaf manuscripts in Odisha from this period for about thirty years. According to Panigrahi in the reconstruction of history the attachment to easy ways, dishonest and untruthful methods are always harmful to the moral backbone of any nation. During the thirty years from 1950 to 1980 Panigrahi had strongly denounced the use of fake documents like the Panji on Indrabala-Indradyumna, inscriptions on the homeland of Jayadeva and Gautam Buddha, the letter of Jhansi Rani Lakshmi Bai to Chakhi Khuntia and Baya Chakada on the making of Konarka temple. He had put the blame for this artificial trend of historiography in Odisha on the newspapers who published all interesting archaeological and historical discoveries without verifying their nature and on the historians of Odisha who could not appreciate any scientific standard in their study of history which was then followed in other parts of India and abroad. An extra-ordinary desire for glorifying our own race without proper method was according to Panigrahi the great hallmark of Odisha history in the phases from 1950 to 1980. The self-styled approach in Odisha on the narratives of the past, speculative attitude on all

gaps in history without proper reason and logical interpretation, careless theorizing and biased interpretation with unbridled imagination could not support scientific and sober history at any time-it was Panigrahi's remark.

III

The greatest contribution of Panigrahi to Odisha history in the 1950s was his magnum opus-Archaeological Remains of Bhubaneswar. It was the brilliant outcome of his decade long archaeological training and research in Odisha and abroad and was a D.Phil thesis of Calcutta University in the 1950s. One can mark in this thesis Panigrahi's extra-ordinary command over language which was clear and cogent, his comprehensive ability and his scientific method. It was the lasting contribution of Panigrahi to the political and cultural history of Odisha. The manuscript of the book was completed in the year 1952 and nine years after it was published by Orient Longman in the year 1961. The aim of this work was to assign the numerous monuments of Bhubaneswar to the broad political epochs, but not to fix their dates, which in many cases was precluded by the nature of the data available at that time. The manuscript in final stage was thoroughly revised by S.K.Saraswati, a silent devotee in the temple of learning and a profound scholar of ancient Indian History and Archaeology whose valuable paper on Odishan Temples as a formal paradigm for temple study was published in the Orissa Historical Research Journal(Vol.I). Panigrahi with his vast archaeological knowledge for two decades and his thorough study of the temples of Bhubaneswar presented a cogent and connected study of Odishan temple art and architecture in a precise manner. He had taken into account all the traditional accounts on the temples of Bhubaneswar like The *Ekamra*

Purana, Svarnadri Mahodaya, Kapila Samhita and *Sarala Mahabharata* and could follow them with proper interpretations. He was profitably benefited by the works like *Orissa and Her Remains* by M.M.Ganguli, *History of Orissa* by R.D.Banerji, *Canons of Odishan Architecture* and many other texts on Odishan antiquities and archaeology then available to him. He started with the earliest monuments of Bhubaneswar in the Tosali-Dhuli-Sisupalagarh-Khandagiri zones and ended his project with the study of the temples of Bhubaneswar in the 14th-15th century A.D. In course of his study of the evolution of art and architecture of the temples of Bhubaneswar Panigrahi has presented an account of the political and the cultural history of Odisha in the early and medieval phase on the basis of a careful interpretation of epigraphic records as well as the traditional accounts. His interpretation of traditional accounts on Bhubaneswar was based on his appreciation of the significance of legends and traditions containing the past of Odisha, but he was not careful then on the formation of all traditional accounts—a trend which appeared with the study of German scholars and historians in Odisha like A. Eschmann, Hermann Kulke, H.von. Stietencron in collaboration with Professor Gaganendranath Dash and Gaya Charan Tripathy in the 1970s and 1980s. The functional paradigm of traditional accounts was absent with Panigrahi, although he was the greatest scientific historian to recognise the historical value in them. In his study of Bhubaneswar temples he had given considerable attention to the interpretation of Yayati tradition, Kruttivasa legend, Raktavahu tradition in Madalapanji and other traditional accounts which provide valuable insight to our comprehensive study of Odishan history in early and medieval phases.

In the 1950s and 1960s Panigrahi wanted to place the Odia Mahabharata of Sarala Das of 15-16th century A.D. in the analysis of Odishan past. As a matter of fact his study of Sarala Das and his Mahabharata provides an addition to our ideas on Odishan historiography. His papers in the forms of debate on the time and theme of Sarala Mahabharata first appeared in the well known Odia Monthly magazine like *Jhankara* in the 1950s and 1960s and then they were presented in the form of books in Odia and English. The text *Sarala Mahabharatara Aitihāsika Chitra* published by Prajatantra Prachara Samity under the patronage of Harekrishna Mahatab in 1976 was major landmark of Panigrahi in his study of Odisha History. The *Sarala Mahabharata* was written in the 15th century during the reign of Suryavamsi king Kapilendra Deva (A.D.1435-1467). K.C.Panigrahi in his book and papers on Sarala Das presented that some contemporaneous historical events and/or pictures of contemporaneous socio-cultural, politico-economic conditions, directly or indirectly, had crept in and found places in it. Panigrahi also suggested that Sarala Das was no doubt inspired by the stirring events happening in the reign of his contemporary Kapilesvara and thus his *Mahabharata* can be a great source for the study of Odisha History of medieval phase. In fact there is a fine combination of Cyclic Time and Linear Time in the *Mahabharata* of Sarala Das and he was aware of Linear Time for which he had used a part of the socio-economic and political aspects of the past of Odisha in his study in the form of traditional accounts. But in this context a great literary and historical critic G.N.Dash has not accepted his viewpoint. (Eshana-17, 1988; also Nirvachita Prabandha Sankalana, 2005, Vidyapuri, Cuttack, p.1-31.) According to Dash,

it is highly improbable and unlikely that Sarala Das knowingly and deliberately incorporated the past and contemporaneous historical events and/or descriptions/pictures of earlier socio-cultural and politico-economic conditions in it in the garb of episodes of the Mahabharata. He further stated that K.C.Panigrahi has attempted to claim and establish that which betrays his nationalistic sentiments and tendency to write nationalistic history. In this context we like to state that Panigrahi has used the traditional narratives of *Sarala Mahabharata* in an artificial manner without considering the nature of the texts, the nature of additions and revisions in the subsequent period. Considering the extant texts of *Sarala Mahabharata* its free use in the study of early and medieval phase can now be challenged. But Panigrahi out of his regard for an old Odia literature could use it for his narrative of the History of Odisha. Although his evaluation of *Sarala Mahabharata* is very interesting, it is not very useful in the scientific reconstruction of the medieval past of Odisha.

Another interesting aspect of the historiography of K.C.Panigrahi is his use of traditional accounts in the literary texts for unravelling the past of Odisha. It was in fact a colonial endeavour and the nationalist writers in the 1920s and 1930s wanted to write history on the basis of traditional accounts. Panigrahi followed them but there is considerable difference in the treatment of the traditional accounts of the earlier phase and that of K.C.Panigrahi. Besides Puranic literature in Sanskrit and Odia, Madalapanji and other traditional accounts in Odisha were thoroughly studied to find out a connected and systematic account of the past of Odisha by Panigrahi. Besides *Sarala Mahabharata*, Panigrahi found in the 1950s and 1960s Madalapanji as a store-house of traditional

accounts on Odisha. He wanted to utilise the different versions of Madalapanji for a comprehensive study of early and medieval Odisha and his endeavour in this respect was a progress from the earlier colonial writers who had only used the text without considering the context. For the first time we find a contextual study of Madalapanji by Panigrahi in a scientific manner. He discussed its time of composition and further compilation, additions and omissions and could find a real image of the early and medieval Odisha by the interpretation of the different episodes in it. In this respect his study of Yayati tradition and the story of Raktabahu need special consideration although there are also different sides of them. Panigrahi wanted to be free from bias and emotion while studying the various episodes in Madalapanji but he could not be totally free from it because he was not familiar with the study of traditional accounts particularly their formation and stages of growth for different missions in the society—a trend which appeared with the German historians in collaboration with G.N.Dash and G.C.Tripathy in Odisha in the 1970s. Despite that Panigrahi had earlier set the trend for these historians to give necessary emphasis on the traditional accounts like Madalapanji like all archaeological sources for the comprehensive study of Odisha history. His projections were further made free from nationalistic sentiments and tendencies with the study of Jagannatha temple and regional traditions by Hermann Kulke and his colleagues in Odisha. To-day on the basis of the foundational study of Madalapanji and the so-called Yayati tradition by K.C.Panigrahi numerous experiments have been conducted by the modern historians. In this respect his famous book in Odia-*Itihasa O Kimbadanti* (History and the traditional Accounts) published by the Utkal University, Bhubaneswar in 1962 deserves

scholarly notice. The forward of this book was written in 1954 when the author was a noted archaeologist at Patna and when he was at the height of his archaeological career. One can evaluate his historical potency from his forward which claims that a traditional account may not be history, but it contains historical facts. At the same time he also stated there that the fact contained in the traditional accounts needs to be verified by different historical processes and utilised for historical studies. He had accepted the traditional accounts as an unavoidable source, because the fact gleaned from the epigraphic and numismatic records are not sufficient for a complete and connected history. Hence he wanted to accept the traditional accounts as a supplementary source for the studies in history. In the text-*Itihasa O Kimbadanti* he had given considerable focus on the study of *Madalapanji* and the different episodes associated with it. Panigrahi made a scientific study of *Madalapanji* without pondering how it can be connected with an all-India aspect. It means in his interpretation of *Madalapanji* its connection with the political and cultural developments of the other regions of India of 16th and 17th century A.D. was prominently missing which we now-a-days find in the works of Hermann Kulke, Narayana Rao, Y.Salkia and others.

The most important endeavour of K.C.Panigrahi in his prolonged career of an archaeologist and historian for about forty years was his attempt to present a comprehensive history of Odisha at least upto the end of the period of Mukunda Deb which he called Hindu period. In fact his History of Orissa (Hindu period) which was published in 1981 by a noted Odia Publishing firm called Kitab Mahal (Cuttack) was the result of his endeavour in this line. Panigrahi articulated this great need of Odisha as

early as 1950 in his articles and although the famous and gigantic Utkal University History of Orissa was published in volumes in the 1960s they could not cater to the need of the scholars for methodological reasons. In fact, Panigrahi was very critical of the first volume of the Utkal University History of Orissa written by late Professor Nabin Kumar Sahu who stretched the period of study upto the end of the Mathara phase. It was printed in bold letters and was big in size and Panigrahi could not appreciate the unwanted description and unbridled speculation in it. Panigrahi made it clear that in the preparation of this early Orissa Nabin Kumar Sahu did not follow any pattern of the history books published in India and abroad and that the learned author used any information in his storehouse without proper verification for his history and thus the work remained a fragmented and mutilated volume. Panigrahi also argued that large volumes on Orissa History can be published like that of Utkal University History, but they cannot be readable for their size, price and expression. Panigrahi wanted the publication of a readable volume on Orissa History like the History of Bengal published by the Dacca University under the guidance of eminent historians like Ramesh Chandra Majumdar and others. He wanted the scientific application of archaeological information and literary texts without careless theorising. He wanted to examine all evidence before they are ready for use. He had boldly opposed the use of fake documents in the nature of palm-leaf texts and inscriptions. To Panigrahi History must be based on true fact and not on unbridled speculation and nationalistic passion. It is distressing to note that Panigrahi could not find proper associates for this venture and so his work History of Orissa which was designed to cater to the growing need of the students and teachers of Odisha and abroad

also failed in its mission. The book after publication was strongly criticised by Chittaranjan Das, an eminent Odia writer in a research journal called *Eshana* in 1981. (*Eshana, The Journal of the Institute of Odia Studies, Vol.III, 1981, p.83-86*). In the review of the book of Panigrahi, Das has strongly reacted to the growing nationalist and narrow horizon in Odishan historiography even after the end of its need. He was critical of the narrative pattern of the write-up of Panigrahi who also followed a trend of the colonial and nationalist phase. As Das has remarked History must be a theme on the sociology of the past. Historians should consider the past holistically and from the entire aspect of social life. He states that Panigrahi also followed the same traditional approach in his *History of Orissa*. This criticism is not absurd because the text of Panigrahi on *Orissa History* though may be considered as an addition to our study of early and medieval Odisha, does not possess the standard followed in the compilation of the *History of Bengal* published at least four decades before it. The narrative pattern of Panigrahi is no doubt very interesting from the point of view of presentation and style, but it cannot be a critical evaluation of the early and medieval past of Odisha from the standpoint of the analysis of the source materials. The author has not balanced his thought which sometimes follows emotional track. The learned author in his expression has become a literary writer with sufficient sentimental attachment to his old views. Some chapters are unusually large and some important chapters are unusually small. The author's note on the political and social set-up of early and medieval Odisha was too traditional and needs a revisit. There is no proper map or illustration, though it contains some known photographs of the temples. The work is of course more than a documentary history; as it contains

new insights on the theme of religious beliefs. But from the point of view of society and economy the work has not sufficient details and is in no way different from the colonial and other nationalist narratives.

Despite all his shortcomings in his treatment of a comprehensive history of Orissa, Panigrahi had an analytical mind which helped him in the study of the past of early and medieval Odisha. He was definitely an ardent admirer of Odishan culture and heritage; but he was not in favour of articulating blindly the glory of Odia race—like claiming Odisha as the homeland of Jayadeva and Gautam Buddha on the basis of unreliable and even fake documents. Even at the end of his career in the 1970s Panigrahi strongly denounced the unscientific method of the study of the past of early and medieval Odisha by the use of fake documents and he went to the extent of blaming all newspapers in Odisha who could publish such events of the history of Odisha without proper verification and scientific scrutiny. One can discover his scientific historian's mind in his autobiography—*Mo Samayara Odisha (Odisha of My Time)* which unravels all his reactions and feelings of his active career in Odisha and India. Panigrahi was throughout his life a seeker of Truth and a benevolent admirer of archaeological wealth. His independent assessment of the past despite their weak side is a great lesson for the historians of Odisha.

Kailash Chandra Dash, Former Reader in History, C-3/2, B.J.B.Nagar, Bhubaneswar-14, Email-dash.kailashchandra@rediffmail.com.