

A Movement for Restoration of Oriya Language

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In the time of British rule the Oriya speaking people were kept in different administrative units. There was lack of political unification among the Oriya speaking people. The Oriya speaking territories virtually became appendanges to four provinces - Bengal, Madras, Central Provinces and Bihar. The Oriyas were linguistic minorities in these provinces. So for this reason, the linguistic majorities of these provinces had neglected and dominated the Oriyas. They also had taken some steps to abolish Oriya language. After the spread of English education in Orissa in the second half of nineteenth century the Oriya people became conscious regarding their mother language. In this period the Oriyas showed interest for Oriya language and culture. Oriya speaking people started political movement for formation of a separate province, in which they will able to preserve and develop their own language, culture, tradition, and heritage. The Oriyas struggled for many years to achieve the said goals. Some British Officers at that time were the great lovers of Oriya speaking people and always were in favour of Oriyas interests. Henry Ricketts the Commissioner of Orissa Division proposed the merger of Sambalpur with the Orissa Division. In the year 1868 Sir Stafford Northcote the Secretary of the State for India also viewed that the Oriya speaking areas should be clubbed into a single administrative unit. The Bengalis occupied

many official positions in Orissa as they were educationally advanced people. Some Bengalis tried to abolish Oriya language and gave opinion for re-placement of Oriya by Bengali medium of instruction in the school of Orissa. Uma Charan Haldar, a Bengali, a Bengali Deputy Inspector of school advocated the replacement of Oriya by Bengali as the reason of the scarcity of text - books in Oriya language. Another reputed Bengali official named Sibadas Bhattacharya also viewed for introduction of Bengali language in the schools of Orissa. In the year 1870 Kantilal Bhattacharya a teacher of Balasore Zilla School published a book named "Odiya Ekta Swatantra Bhasanoy". He strongly described that Oriya was a dialect of Bengali language. His view insulted all Oriya speaking people. There after another notable scholar, Rajendralal Mitra of Bengal supported others view to replace Oriya by Bengali. Against this anti Oriya activities there were strong protests from Oriya elits. Fortunately some Bengalis strongly argued in favour of Oriya language. Renowned person Bhudev Bandopadhyay supported the cause of Oriya language. Gauri Shankar Roy, Pyari Mohan Acharya and Raja Baikuntha Nath Dey were the famous Bengalis who provided great support in the cause of Orissa language. W.T. Atkinson the Director of Public Instruction in Bengal during that period gave very bad remark and poor opinion regarding Oriya

language and literature. He proposed replacement of Oriya by Bengali in the schools of Orissa Division. Prominent English Officials like T.E. Ravenshaw the Commissioner of Orissa Division and John beams the Collector of Balasore were very favourable towards the cause of Oriya language and showed their love and affection for Oriya language. The Oriyas of Puri, Cuttack and Balasore were harassed by Bengalis and in Ganjam, Telugus tried to introduce their language in Oriya schools. Telugus dominated in all spheres of Government service. They misbehaved Oriyas in areas and criticized the culture, literature and traditions of Oriyas. Some vernacular journals at that period fought bravely for the survival of Oriya literature. Those are Utkal Dipika, Sambad Bahika, Utkal Darpan, Utkal Putra, Oriya Nava Sambad, and Sambalpur Hitaishini. Associations like Utkal Bhasa Uddipani Sabha, Utkal Ullasini Sabha, Utkal Sabha, etc. fought for the cause of Oriyas. Above vernacular journals and associations glorified our culture and tradition and appealed to people participated in the mass movement.

Another problem arised in Sambalpur when British Govt. tried to abolish Oriya language from offices. In 1895 the Chief Commission of Central Provinces decided to introduce Hindi as the official language in the Sambalpur district. The authority of British Govt. realized that it was difficult for Hindi speaking officers to carry out their official work due to ignorance of Oriya language. It was a harmful decision of the Chief Commissioner of Central Province, as it was against the interest of the majority of the Oriya speaking people. Hindi was introduced in the primary schools of Sambalpur and the Govt. Officials posted there were required to pass a

Hindi test. Not only the district of Sambalpur but also through out Orissa this act raised a storm of Protest. The people of whole Orissa strongly protested against this decision. The Utkal Sabha sent memorial to the Viceroy Lord Elgin on 20th June 1895 against the faulty decision. All protests were in vain and by the end of 1895 Oriya was abolished in the court of Sambalpur. The Sambalpur Hitaishini published under the editorship of Nilamani Vidyaratna from Bamanda, played an important role for the restoration for Oriya language. A memorial against the imposition of Hindi on the Sambalpur people by the Central Provinces Government signed by three thousand people was sent to the Viceroy Lord Elgin in June 1895. Some important Oriyas of Sambalpur met Andrew Fraser, the Chief Commissioner of Central Provinces regarding the restoration of Oriya language in Sambalpur. A deputation of prominent persons of Sambalpur consisting of Madan Mohan Mishra, Balabhadra Suar, Braja Mohan Pattanaik, Bihari Das Mahant, and Sripati Mishra also met the Governor General at Simla to apprise him about the language problem of Sambalpur. For this cause prominent poet of nature of Barapalli Gangadhar Meher fought bravely to achive the goal. After long struggle Oriya language was restored in Sambalpur with effect from 1st January 1903. Now it is a holy duty for all Oriya speaking people to do something for their mother language. On the occasion of the Utkal Divas, we should take a vow to develop our Oriya language.

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