Inventing Odisha

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I

The origin of the term *Odisha* and its use in and outside Orissa in the medieval phase need a proper investigation before we plunge deep into the study of Odia identity of the colonial phase. This is more necessary because the geographical shape and name articulate the identity of a race. So far our investigation goes,*Odisha* in this pure form appears in the following sources of medieval phase.

1.   *Shams-i-Shiraj Afif* towards the end of the 14th century. A.D. refers to the country of *Jajnagar-Udisa*(Sahu 1964:152-153).

2.   *Tabaqad-i-Nasiri* also mentions *Udisa.* (Ibid.)

3.   *Sarala Das* in the 15th century A.D. in his *Adi Parva* of *Mahabharata* refers to *Odrarastra* as *Odisha*. (Ibid:154)

4.   Suryavamsi Gajapati king Kapilendra's inscriptions of his *anka* 4 in Jagannatha and Lingaraja temple refer to   *Odisha Rajya.* (Tripathy, 1962:252-253)

        Till the period of Kapilendra Deva there was the use of the terms like *Odra, Odradesa* and *Odra-Visaya* in Orissa. (Sahu, 1964:139-154). Many historians think that Uddiyana of the Tantric texts of the medieval phase was identical with *Odisha* (Sahu 1958:142-155; Panigrahi

1981:308-310; Mishra 1991:41-72) This identification by the historians can now be appreciated because *Uddiyana* existed as a Tantric centre in India in the 8th century and inside it there were Sambal and Lanka-two other Tantric centres. If Sambal is identical with Sambalpur and Lanka with Sonepur as has been advocated by N.K. Sahu and R.P. Mishra   *U d d i y a n a* would then   cover the areas of Sambalpur-Sonepur. Both Sambalpur and Sonepur were in Kosala in the 9th century A.D under the control of the Panduvamsi kings. Most probably in the 8th century A.D. these areas were in the land of Uddiyana during the rule of the early Bhauma Kara kings. Hence *Uddiyana/Oddiyana* may represent a part of Orissa which was then known as *Odradesa.* Thus *Uddiyana* may have been a wrong pronounciation of Odradesa by the outsiders and we should cannect it with *Odisha.*

        According to K.C. Panigrahi the geographical work *Ibn khurdadhbih* of the 9th and 10th century A.D. refers to *Orshfin* which is Odisha. (Panigrahi 1981:87) But this term does not represent *Odisha*.It is most likely pronounced from the original term *OdraVisaya/Odradesa.* (Sahu 1964: 148-149) Taranath, the Tibetan historian refers to *Odivisa* which is a corrupt form of *Odra Visaya* and it is not derived from *Odisha.* Thus our sources point out to the use of the term

Odisha in the Ganga-Gajapati phase. Hence in this paper the emphasis is on two important points;

1.   How was *Odisha* known in the pre-Suryavamsi phase and how was it used in the Suryavamsi phase ?

2.   The use of *Odisha* in the pre-colonial phase till the British conquest.

II

The records of the dynasties before the Suryavamsi kings (A.D.1435) refer to *Odra, Utkala, Kosala, Kalinga, Kongoda* and *Toshali,* but they do not refer to *Odisha.* The Ganga kings from the period of Anangabhima III had described their kingdom covering present Odisha as *Purushottama Samrajya* in which *Odra, Utkal, Kosala and Kalinga* were constituent parts. (Kulke, 1978:150-153: Dash 1997:220-243) They wanted to weld together multi-religious and linguistic groups and so *Purushottama Jagannatha Samrajya* was the fitting term from the standpoint of social context. Yet we know in the Muslim accounts of the Ganga phase the popularity of *Odisha*. (Sahu 1964:152) As *Odisha* is a term derived from the *Odra Visaya* or even *Odra Desa* the Gangas probably did not use it for their internal link with the Telugus and they did not call it *Odisha Rajya* for they did not like the dominance of *Odra* over Telugu Kalingas. Even if they had *Varanasi Kataka* as their capital seat, they did not accept *Odisha Rajya* conceptually which would not help in the control of the Telugus of Kalinga and Vengi. But then Odia language and script were growing during their period as we find Odia portions in the copper plate records of this period. The Gangas declared the name of their kingdom as *Purushottama Samrajya* in order to satisfy both Telugus and Odias. They did not call it *Kalinga Samrajya* or *Odia Samrajya*. The *Odisha Rajya* did exist then in name ; but it was only indicative

of the central part of the Purushottama Samrajya. Hence the view of Subhakanta Behera that by the 15th century A.D. when the Suryavamsi dynasty was established the macro-region of Orissa had been well established as one geographical unit and was given the precise expression through the use of the term *Odisha* is correct though it is speculative in nature.(Behera 2002:10) The Muslim writers of the medieval phase did not like to use the term *Purushottama Samrajya* for Ganga kingdom in their accounts for obvious religious reasons. They had used *Odisha,* the Central part of the *Purushottama Samrajya* under the Gangas in their accounts. The circumstances leading to the formation of *Odisha* during this phase need a proper study.

Odra Visaya was well known in the grants of the post-Gupta phase. (Sahu 1964:139-147: Ganguli 1975) In my opinion it was a part of ancient Toshali which appeared from the period of the Mauryas. Prabably during and after the period of the Maurya king Ashoka Toshali was a provincial kingdom and later on during the Gupta phase it became a big kingdom. It consisted of many forest areas (*Atavirajya*).(Sircar 1950:329) During the post-Gupta phase *Odra* formed a significant part of Toshali and it constituted the plain and the agrarian tracts. Probably some of the forest lands were converted into agrarian tracts by means of cultivation–a process peculiar to the inhabitants of the area and this process of cultivation was unknown to any other part of India. In popular parlance *Oda chasa* and *Do Odachasa* are used in Odisha–all typically connected with agriculture. In all probability the term was invented from the method of conversion of the forest areas into agrarian (plain belt) of the Toshali kingdom in the post-Ashokan phase, by some of the inhabitants and it was known as *Odra Visaya*. By the time of the Bhauma Kara kings *Odra Visaya/Odradesa* covered areas of Baud-

Phulbani, Nayagarh, through Khurda, Cuttack, parts of Puri and parts of Balasore. Toshali and Odra and later on Utkala created out of those constituted forest areas and agrarian belts while Kalinga bordering on the Eastern Sea represented the areas near the Sea on the boundary of Toshali. Between Odra and Kalinga some parts became known as Kongoda in the post-Gupta phase. In this way *Odra Visaya* and *Odra Desa* became famous in the early and medieval phase. The significance of Toshali was gone for the dominance of Utkala and Odra. Odra and Utkala represent two race groups having some distinct occupations within Toshali. In the medieval and the modern phase both these terms have become popular. Thus between Vanga and Kalinga Odra was the main fertile area and later on this led to the creation of *Odisha* (probably after Odra desa). In the Ganga period a definite group of people had known and used Odia script and language and this would indicate that *Odisha Rajya (desa)* was well known in the Ganga period. The popularity of Odia language in the Ganga period can be well known from the Urujam inscription. (Tripathy, 1962:222-224) Urujam is a place in Chicacole Taluk of Ganga Kalinga kingdom. The prevalence of Nagari script and Odia language in this Telugu region during the Ganga phase indicates that the Gangas had encouraged Odia language. From the existence of this inscription we cannot assert that Odradesa was extended to that part of Kalinga. The writer of the inscription would have been an inhabitant of Odradesa and there might have been a settlement of Odia people in that zone. It definitely indicates the recognition of Odia language in the Ganga Kalinga kingdom even in the 11th century A.D. Also the existence of several Odia inscriptions of Kalinga, Utkala and Kosala during the Ganga phase indicates that the script and the language of Odra people had attained a recognised

position with other languages like Telugu and Sanskrit. The Sonepur stone inscription of Bhanudeva I and Narasimhanath stone inscription of Vaijala Deva of Patna can be taken as important evidence of the wide popularity of Odia language and script during the Ganga rule in Odisha. (Rajaguru, 1976:1038-40;1975:176) It suggests that Odisha and Kalingas were the two distinct race groups under the Ganga kings. Odisha and Kalinga constituted two parts of the *Ganga Purushottama Samrajya. Odisha was a Rajya within Purushottma Samrajya.* Toshali lost its geographical name during this phase.

Kapilendra usurped the Ganga throne but he did not represent in the beginning as the deputy (*Rauta*)of *Purushottama Samrajya.* He called *Odisha Rajya* in the beginning inscriptions of his time in Puri and Bhubaneswar because then the Ganga Kalinga was not under his control. His inscriptions in Kalinga were dated in the later part of his reign. This indicates that his *Odisha Rajya* represented only a part of the Ganga kingdom which did not include the Telugu Kalingas. Even under the Gangas there was a feeling of Odias and Kalinga-Telugus (Telengas) which was more evident in Jagannatha temple. The priests of Jaganntha temple did not accept the Ganga authority after the construction of the big temple and the arrangement of the Bhogas for the deity for their Telugu affinity and culture. Traditional accounts in Puri as stated in *Madalapanji* and other texts refer to this conflict in one and many forms. (Dash, 1978:164-166) Even from the names like *Languda Narasimha, Abata Akata Bhanu, Ekajata Kamadeva* given to the Ganga kings we can easily notice the Odia-Telugu conflict in the Ganga Purushottama *Samrajya. Thus Odisha was invented in the Ganga phase to represent/ locate a dominant group under the Ganga kingdom. The Muslim historians did call this important part of the Ganga*

Purushottama Samrajya as Odisha thereby articulating its importance under the Gangas. They also had called it as Odisha for the domination of the linguistic/racial group within that kingdom.

Although Kapilendra was a devotee of Lord Jagannatha, he did not call Purushottama Samrajya in the beginning because he wanted to strengthen the base of his political authority first. When the base was strengthened by many strategies (of which the declaration of *Odisha Rajya,* was one) he started his brilliant career of conquest and later on called *Gaudesvara, Gajapati, Nabakoti Karnata Kalavargesvara.* Hence Kapilendra's *Odisha Rajya* was to be interpreted as the Odia-dominated areas. Professor G.N.Dash and Hermann Kulke stated that the Gajapati empire at its best containing heterogeneous elements was the Odishan empire where several Aryan and non-Aryan Languages were spoken. (Dash, 1978:359:Kulke 2001:212) But we have seen that *Odisha Samrajya* was absent in the records of the Ganga-Gajapatis and *Odisha Rajya* as stated in these records may only refer to the central part of the empire which was the seat of the *Rashtradevata Jagannatha.* In course of the Ganga settlement in the Odia area many Telugus might have been converted into Odias and by the time of Kapilendra Gajapati Odia conception had grown despite Ganga affinity to Telugu culture. The presence of *Odisha Rajya* in the inscriptions of Puri and Bhubaneswar and not in the inscriptions of Kalinga-Andhra Zone in the Gajapati phase clearly emphasize the establishment of Odia identity during the last phase of the Ganga rule and in the first phase of the Suryavamsi Gajapati rule. The name of the Samrajya of Kapilendra or Purushottama was not specifically stated as *Jagannatha Purushottama Samrajya* or *Odisha Samrajya* in their inscriptions. *Odisha Rajya* of their inscriptions can only articulate the regional part of the vast multi-cultural kingdom of the Suryavamsi Gajapatis.The term *Odiana Galabai* as stated in Vijayanagar inscriptions may indicate a composite army (containing Odias and Telugus but the Telugu identity was totally lost due to the domination of the Odia army) and so the term can better explain the establishment of Odia regional identity even in the 15th century.

The Suryavamsi Gajapati kings had fostered diverse cultural groups within their vast kingdom. It is true that the Brahmanical elite group did not recognise Odia language in the Gajapati kingdom as we have seen that there was strong opposition to *Ramayana, Mahabharata* and *Bhagabata* in Odia form during this phase. (Dash, 1978:360:1988:149:-164) Kapilendra had also patronage for Sanskrit literature and language. But this does not indicate that Kapilendra had neglected Odia language and script. On the other hand despite his adoration for Sanskrit language and literature, the Odia *Mahabharata* of *Sarala Das* got an expression in his phase which pronounced *Odisha* as a separate identity in the multi-cultural kingdom of Kapilendra. Supposing that Kapilendra was of Telugu origin as stated by D.C. Sircar and later on supported by G.N. Dash and Berkemer there is no evidence of his wide patronage to Telugu literature in Odisha and Andhra under his control. (Dash, 1978:360: Berkemer 2001:259) On the other hand most of the inscriptions in the temples of Odisha and Andhra of this period were either in Odia or in Nagari script and language. Odia language had also made great headway from this period. Hence the Suryavamsis had used *Odisha Rajya* as a significant part of their kingdom (both Kapilendra and Purushottama had used this term *Odisha Rajya* in their inscriptions in Puri and Bhubaneswar only) and thereby they had

presented Odia identity(a geographical identity) which continued till the advent of the British.

III

The downfall of the Suryavamsi dynasty was followed by the rule of Mukunda Harichandan who was branded as *Telenga Mukunda Deba. (Madalapanji,* 1969,p.61*)* It no doubt articulated the Telugu identity of Mukunda Deba whose rule had no great support from the regional group- the Odias.There was difference between the two races -Odias and Telugus during the Suryavamsi Gajapati phase. The Odias no doubt had dominated the multi-lingual kingdom during that phase. Some Telugus had even been grouped with the Odias. Despite this composite nature the Odia identity was in tact. The Odisha Rajya of the Gajapati kings had such a deep root that even after the Muslim occupation of the Barabati fort in the 16th century the idea had remained very firm and was used by the Khurda Gajapati for the solidification of their political authority. Hence although the Gajapati kingdom was partly occupied by the Muslims and Mughals the Khurda Gajapatis were regarded as the rulers of Odisha Rajya. G.N. Dash in this context has stated that after A.D. 1568 the Odia-speaking tracts were divided into several political and administrative units and beneath this apparent disunity a feeling of unity was taking place in the hearts of the people of the Odia-speaking tracts in the late 16th,17th and 18th centuries. (Dash, 1978:360) They started feeling that somehow they were very close to each other and awareness of unity was much more stronger than compared to their loyalty to the political/ administrative units or even religious sects to which they belonged.(*Ibid*) Contrary to this view of G.N.Dash I would like to state that feeling of unity had already appeared in the Suryavamsi Gajapati phase and that the Bhoi Gajapati phase had

witnessed its intense continuation. We may not call it a nationalist temper but a strong affinity to the group called Odia. The group temper of oneness may be interpreted as an articulation of identity. Hence *Odia Rajya* of the Suryavamsi phase represented a core part of the vast multi-lingual kingdom and this core part had maintained its unity as it was clear in the rapid development of Odia language and literature. The feeling of oneness had already grown from the Suryavamsi phase and the Bhoi Gajapati phase had seen its final shape. In order to substantiate his view G.N. Dash has stated that Lord Jagannath during this period became closely associated and symbolised the feeling of oneness. (*Ibid*) Hermann Kulke has also suggested that Lord Jagannath was only known as *Odisha Rajyara Prabhu* in the 17th and 18th centuries. (Kulke, 2001:213) But since Jagannath's land was within *Odisha Rajya* and since Jagannath was the lord of the great Ganga Gajapati Samrajya consisting of diverse linguistic groups the Odias felt it more appropriate to describe Lord Jagannatha as the *Prabhu* of their *Rajya.*Despite regard for Jagannatha the Telugus did not acknowledge his overlordship any longer after the empire was divided. Hence the declaration of the Ganga phase about the overlordship of Jagannath was accepted in the *Odisha Rajya.* We may say that this declaration of Jagannath as *Odisha Rajyara Prabhu* in the 16th and 17th century was intended to consolidate the Odias within a definite geographical boundary against the rapid spread of Islam and its conversion process in Bengal and Odisha.Lord Jagannatha was the emperor of the Ganga kingdom of which *Odisha Rajya* was a significant part. The Suryavamsi Gajapati kings had declared themselves as the Sevakas of Lord Jagannatha although they did not call their kingdom as Purushottama Samrajya. In this background the declaration of Lord Jagannatha as the *Odisha*

Rajyara Prabhu in the 16th and 17th centuries had only served to express the unity of the Odias at a crucial phase. The intention was to present Odia identity on this important basis.

The kingship of Purushottama Jagannatha was established during Ganga Gajapati phase and the Bhoi Gajapatis did not initiate this kingship. The traditional accounts of 17th and 18th century Odisha had only used this part of kingship for a special message (the legitimation of *Chhera-pahamra* by the king). G.N. Dash has admitted that the Odia-speaking tracts remaining united under one Government during the Suryavamsis prepared the ground for the birth of such nationalism and probably the attitude of the Brahmins towards Odia language might have sown its seed. (Dash, 1978:360) But the concept of *Odisha Rajya* being invented in the pre-Suryavamsi phase and the Suryavamsis having fostered the idea a type of regionalism which had existed during the phase of Brahminic opposition to Odia literature.At least it was an indication that a geographical identity(Odisha Rajya) found an articulation during the Suryavamsi phase.This articulation was strengthened by the spread of Odia literature in the 15th and 16th century A.D.But the spread of Odia literature was not a cogent argument for the rise of Odia nationalism in the Suryavamsi phase.Language based identity or nationalism appeared in India in the 19th century A.D.As stated by V.Narayana Rao in the context of Telugu identity there is no evidence of language serving as symbol of national identity before the 19th century. This is confirmed by V.Narayana Rao in the context of Andhra regional identity and Kunal Chakrabarty in the context of Bengal regional identity. (Rao, 1995:25; Chakrabarty 2001:297) But the declaration of Odisha Rajya during the period of the Suryavamsi king Kapilendra Deva was definitely a pointer to the geographical identity of a race, although there

lived the Odias and Telugus. G.N. Dash has taken the Odishan Empire of Kapilendra as a multi-linguistic kingdom.But in that Odisha Rajya the dominant cultural group was Odia and not Telugu..The concept of *Odisha Rajya* was sustained during this phase from (16th to18th century) despite political changes due to the vast growth of Odia literature and script. The *Jagannath Charitamrita* of *Dibakara Das* of 17th century A.D. refers to *Odia Vipra* in the context of *Jagannath Das* of 16th century and describes him as superior in knowledge to the *Gaudiya Vaishnava* followers of Sri Chaitanya. It indicates the growth of Odiaism in that crucial phase. The relevant verse can be quoted for an understanding of the context:

Odia Brahmanamku Pai
Boile atibadi yehi
Ajiparyanta sebakalu
Samasta sana padegalu

(Jagannatha Charitamrita, Dibakar Das, p.387-89)

There was no doubt an advent of Persian and Arabic literature in Odisha but Odia literature found the real field for expansion. The development of Kanchi-Kaveri tradition (which was presented in a poetic form by *Purushottama Das* in the middle of the 17th century A.D.) helped in the sustaining of *Odia Rajya.* (Dash, 1979:78)

Thus the concept of *Odisha* was invented in the Ganga phase against Telugu domination and the Suryavamsis had fostered it and led the way for its existence for centuries. Although *Odisha Rajya* existed in the pre-colonial phase it lost its identity when under the British administration it was kept under four provinces.In the last phase of the 19th century and in the first phase of the 20th century *Odisha* needed to be re-invented. This re-invention was due to the efforts of many elites and institutions through print-literature.

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