



## Kantakabi: The Poet of Odisha State Song

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In Odia literature now 'Kanta' seems to signify the names of two poets - Sitakanta and Ramakanta. Like these two 'Kanta' poets, Laxmikanta was neither an I.A.S nor entitled to the awards Padmabhusan or Padma Bibhusan. Major awards like 'Jnanapitha' and 'Saraswati' were also not conferred on him. But in Odisha, if the name 'Kantakabi' comes to mind, he is non other than Laxmikanta Mohapatra.

The *Jeevan Sangeet* is considered as the masterpiece of his poems. In one of its poems he mentions- 'fruits fell from its branch, why then the branch is so heavy ? The harp is broken and its string has been disconnected, why then its dying voice murmurs again ?

His life was like a harp whose string cut off 60 years ago. The baby who was born 125 years ago in Dhuanpataria Lane of Cuttack City, in no way was attached to worldly affairs. In 1953, he breathed his last but strange enough that the voice of his songs yet enchants us.

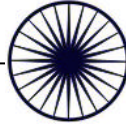
There are differences of opinion that who glorified him with the honour "Kantakabi" ? Professor Shyamsundar Mishra wrote in 1984 about the contributions of Laxmikanta Mohapatra. He prepared a thesis on this and submitted to Utkal University for D.Litt. Degree but it was considered for Ph.D. The entire thesis was published in 2003 in a book form. In its 5<sup>h</sup>

chapter Dr. Mishra describes how Laxmikanta became "Kantakabi".

But another researcher Dr. Shricharan Mohanty says that Laxmikanta was widely known as "Kantakabi" in Odisha. Similarly Rajanikanta Sen was known as "Kantakabi" in West Bengal. He has established many resemblances in both the poets' creations. Prof. Mishra also agrees to this opinion.

Well-known Odia novelist Prof. Shantanu Kumar Acharya rightly describes that in past Laxminarayan Sahoo, an eminent writer and social worker in a meeting in Bhadrak felicitated Laxmikanta and "Kantakabi" title was conferred on him. He also mentions that his friends in Ravenshaw College used to call him "Kantakabi". But his poems and songs not only attracted everybody for its simple and lucid style, but also made him "Kantakabi" from Laxmikanta. In the post Gopabandhu era, Laxminarayan Sahoo was respected like Gopabandhu and the honour he conferred on "Kantakabi" is still remembered even today.

During Kantakabi Memorial lecture organised by the Fakir Mohan University of Balasore at Bhadrak on February 20, 2004 where Mr. Acharya satirically mentioned in his speech that in the recent time the value of the title "Kantakabi is not so important like that of Doctorate or Padma awards. But he justifies that



value of Vyasakabi or Kantakabi is much more important for the people of Odisha. He reiterates that nobody remembers about the Ph.D or D.Litt. conferred on the research scholars every year. According to him, Gandhiji was known as the Father of Nation but nobody can say who had given this honour to Gandhiji. When a 10 years old girl Aiswarya Parasar asked this question to Govt. of India, the officials could not find this in the official documents. Even then nobody will deny that Gandhiji is not the Father of Nation. Crores of Indians fervently pay respect to Gandhiji as their Father. We have to admit that Sarala Das was “Adikabi”, Jagannath Das was “Atibadi, Upendra Bhanja was “Kabi Samrat, Fakir Mohan was “Vyasakabi”, Radhanatha was “Kabibara”, Gangadhar was “Swabhab Kabi” and Laxmikant was “Kantakabi”, says Mr. Acharya. But Kantakabi to me is with two different appearances. One is youthful vigorous who was born in an aristocratic Zamindar family of Choudhury Bhagabat Prasad Samantaray Mohapatra. Dressed as a tennis player who had been playing tennis with a racket in Ravenshaw College tennis court. All his aristocracy, vigour and style were attracting everybody.

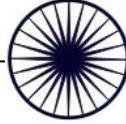
Another Kantakabi had a different appearance, who suffered from leprosy and his handsome body lost its charm and glamour in the same Cuttack City. He was crippled with the disease and unable even to move. He was carried on someone’s back, his fingers were disfigured. Someone will provide him a pen and with much difficulty he holds the pen and writes soft and touching poems.

Kantakabi Laxmikanta Mohapatra thus has two different appearances which were contradicting and this had tremendous impact on his literature. Well-known critic Mr. Dasarathi Das has rightly mentioned about him that he was born with a silver spoon. Subsequently he was entangled with various legal disputes. Besides,

though he was suffering yet he crossed all hurdles and took shelter in a literary world. But his literary message was very powerful. His *Jeevan Sangeet* considered as the masterpiece is powerful with different tastes of dismay and ecstasy. He is patriotic in one hand and a Vaishnab devotee on the other. His writings are lively, full of emotions and joy with sorrows together.

If we compare with Bengal’s Kantakabi Rajanikanta Sen, Laxmikanta of Odisha remains much ahead with his widespread multi dimensional creativity. Look at Laxmikanta’s children literature, plays, poems, prose and parodies. This children’s literature consists of poems, fictions which can attract our children. His Pathasala and Sahitya Sudhakar could be best text books for our children. His plays have different angles, like mythological, political and social plays. There are also one act plays and comedies. His poems are Bibidha Kabita, Kallol, Jeevan Sangeet, Patriotic songs, humorous songs and parodies i.e. Chatak Chandra Hasa Champu. Equally his prose is also powerful. He has written essays, sixty seven short stories and novels like Kanamamu in prose. His parodies, were unique humorous songs based on Kishore Chandranana Champu of Kabisurya Baladeb Rath. Kantakabi’s caption was Chataka Chandra Hasa Champu.

It is to be noted that Kantakabi’s complete work consists of two volumes. It was published many years ago and the 3<sup>d</sup> volume could not be published probably because of the publisher’s negligence. Finally it was lost. Besides, “Omar Rubaiyat” which Kantakabi translated from original Parsie as well as from English is yet to be published. The manuscript is learnt to be with his family members. Kantakabi would have been immortal for his collection of songs i.e. “Jeevan Sangeet”, one short story i.e. “Budha Sankhari” or the only novel i.e. “Kanamamu”. Many critics have evaluated “Jeevan Sangeet” at par with ‘Geetanjali’ of Tagore. Dr. Krushna



Charan Behera has nicely compared both the books and is of the opinion that “Jeevan Sangeet” stands equal with “Geetanjali” in standard. He speaks high of “Jeevan Sangeet” which cost only 12 paise containing 47 pages whereas the Nobel Prize awarded “Geetanjali” was of 180 pages costing 1½ rupees.

Rabindranath Tagore’s name and fame was much widespread than Katakabi. Even Katakabi deserves the same distinction as Tagore, opines Dr. Behera. One of the mass and class songs of “Jeevan Sangeet” may be Sabuthiru Banchita Kari (depriving of all). This song is also compared with Poet Baikunthanath Pattnaik’s “Jeevan Patra Mo Bharichha Ketemate” (Giving utmost satisfaction to the pot of my life). But Prof. Dasarathi Das compares the song as unique and justifies that in “Sabuthiru Banchita Kari” the life becomes young lady who surrenders before the God with devotion and emotions while in solitude. No doubt the Poet was a staunch Vaishnav but this is not reflected on “*Jeevan Sangeet*”. The songs are simple, lucid but powerful with emotion, sorrows and helplessness. The impact of Upanishad might have been reflected on “Jeevan Sangeet” like “Geetanjali” and “Geetimalya”. The poet’s sorrows have been transformed into spirituality. Besides, the “Jeevan Sangeet” is the voice of the sufferers who are passing days in distress.

It is needless to mention here about the popular story “Budha Sankhari” and novel “Kana Mamu”. The Kana Mamu character appears to be foolish and innocent who is also physically strong but he is having qualities of good heart and wisdom. Moreover, the pathos revealed in Fakir Mohan’s “Rebati” is equally reflected on Katakabi’s “Budha Sankhari”. It is a matter of regret that without going deep into the short story “Budha Sankhari”, very few critics have depicted it as Freud’s impact which is not true.

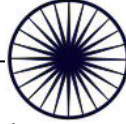
Dasarathi Das has divided Katakabi’s poems into two parts, i.e. poems and songs. Most of his poems come from the heart whereas his parodies are more humorous. “Bande Utkal Janani” is considered as masterpiece among all his poems. Of late, our State Government is on the anvil to give it the status of a State Song, which is praiseworthy. Other States of the country have made their own State Songs. This is also a very powerful song to eulogize mother Odisha.

It should be remembered here that Katakabi started writing during his heyday which was the beginning of Odishan awakening period. He was born during the fag end of the nineteenth century in 1888 and the entire nineteenth century was a period of narrow infighting among various linguistic sects of India in the name of nationalism. As the British colonialism was set up first in Bengal province, the Bengali employees got the opportunity of learning English first and from that point of view they considered themselves as civilized and qualified and thus looked down upon both Odisha and Odia language. The plot for extinction of Odia language was an inevitable step in that direction.

Against this plot or attack on Odia language there emerged the Utkal Sammilani in 1903. Therefore Madhusudan Das sang,

*"Ehi Sammilani Jati Prana Sindhu  
koti pranabindu dhare  
tora pranabindu mishai de bhai  
dein padi sindhu nire."*

In this context, the renowned critic Janaki Ballav Mohanty (Bharadwaj) in his book 'Nabajugara Kabi O' Kalakar' has revealed that in order to bring all Odia-speaking tracts into one rule, debate, appeal and request began in the last decade of nineteenth century. The Constitution of Utkal Sammilani and merger of states got wide acclaim across Odisha. This was the real impetus to the composition of national song.



It may be mentioned here under the auspices of Nilamani Bidyaratna, the convener of 'Ganjam Sammilani' and the editor of the magazine 'Prajabandhu' the first poetry book on nationalism of Odisha was compiled during this period. The poems of about 25 poets like Madhusudan, Gopabandhu, Nandakishore, Ramashankar, Chandramohan, Brajasundar, Sashibhusan and Mrutyunjaya etc. were compiled in that book. The thought process of all those poems was : - the description of Utkala in the form of mother, the past glory of Utkala, the salutation to Bharat Mata, the glory of self-sacrifice and dedication for patriotism, service to motherland and awakening of unity and brotherhood throughout Utkala. Prof. Janaki Ballav Mohanty (Bharadwaj) has further written all the poets of the then Utkala were inspired by the message of 'Utkala Sammilani'. All of them have urged upon the countrymen to be keen on the merger of States. It is needless to say that all these words have contributed a lot to the political movement of Odisha.

In this background, Kantakabi's love towards Utkala and national feeling may be taken into account. Citing an example of Rabindranath Tagore's creation, Gurukalyan Mahapatra, the grand son of Kantakabi in one of his English writings has expressed that a creative writer is always in the quest of love and freedom in his writings beyond the prevailing situation and that was his nationalism or patriotism. Taking this idea, the compilation of Kantakabi's patriotic songs was once published. The same has been compiled in volume II of 'Kanta Sahityamala' in the later time. 'Bande Utkala Janani' belongs to it.

When asked about the inspiration for composition of 'Bande Utkala Janani', two sons of Kantakabi Gouracharan and Nityananda said that it was only due to the inspiration of God. The natural beauty of Utkala Janani (Mother Utkala) mesmerized his state of mind which was reflected on that poem.

A number of lyrical poems were composed centring round Odisha and its heritage and glory during the period of emergence of nationalism in Odisha as well as India. Radhanath's 'Sarbesang no Janani Bharata', 'Madhusudan's Maa Maa boli kete mu dakili', Bhikari Charana's 'Je jatire jata Markata Jajati Kapilendra narabara', Brajasundar's 'Maa Maa boli dakuchhi mote aare modukha pasora', Godabarish's 'Tunga Sikhari chula' and 'Utha Kankala' etc. are among those created during the period.

This is quite significant that Gopabandhu was the Adiguru of Kantakabi's poetic work. When Gopabandhu's Odishan nationalism was elevated to Indian nationalism Laxmikanta's Odishan nationalism was also promoted to Indian nationalism. Nevertheless, Kantakabi's political linkage with either Odishan or Indian Nationalism was not found in this poem. So the glitter of this poem was never diminished despite the end of a political necessity of a particular period. Because the origin of the inspiration of this poem was divine.

Of course, it is true that this poem of Kantakabi was recited in one of the sessions of Utkala Sammilani. Still differences prevail regarding the exact session in which it was sung between 1903 and 1919. Swami Bichitrananda Das has opined, in Kantakabi special number (9th, No.10,1953) of 'Dagara' magazine, that it was first sung in Puri session of Utkala Sammilani in 1908. But according to reliable sources, it was first sung during Balasore Session of Utkala Sammilani in 1912.

It doesn't matter in whichever session of Utkala Sammilani it was sung, this verse was not confined to the political necessity of any particular period of time. Eventhough Odisha came under the rule of the Marathas, Mughals and Britishers





in the past, this verse was the charming eulogization of magnificent Odisha beyond all the political variations. As a result, it crossed all the barriers of a particular time and became timeless. So just as it made the audience spell bound present in the Utkal Sammilani session 100 years back, even after 100 years it has enchanted and bewildered every one.

It is a matter of great pleasure to note that Government of Odisha has accorded the status of State song to this immortal creation of Kantakabi. Meanwhile, its abridged version and notation prepared under the aegis of Utkal University of Culture has received approval from the Department of Culture on December 16, 2012. Like the National Anthem of India 'Janaganamana' this has been approved to be presented with vocal song only in the absence of musical instruments and so also only through musical instruments without vocal note. The notation by which Sangeet Sudhakar Balakrushna Dash had sung in AIR, Cuttack during 90's of the twentieth century that form has been accepted. While the duration of Jana Gana Mana is 52 seconds, the duration of this song has remained 85 seconds. With the approval of Home Department in Government of Odisha this will formally be presented as State song of Odisha very shortly.

By now, a few States of India have selected their State songs. Assam's 'O mor Apanara Desh' / 'O' mor Sikuni Desh', Karnataka's 'Jaya Bharat Jananiya Tanujate' / 'Jayahe Karnataka Mate', Andhra Pradesh's 'Maa Telugu Thalliki Mallepudanda', Tamilnadu's 'Ni-Ra-Rum kat al utt neel mat anteika kelilolakum', Gujarat's 'Jaya Jaya Garbhi Gujarat' etc. are among those state's song. Out of the remaining

states, meanwhile Punjab and Bihar have also selected State songs for their own state.

In the backdrop of selection of State songs by other states, there is no need to have special discussion in respect of the State song of Odisha. But one thing can certainly be assumed that Kantakabi's 'Bande Utkala Janani' recognised as our state song is in no way less than other States' songs in terms of feeling, patriotism and music. This recognition accorded to 'Bande Utkala Janani' after 125 years of the poet's birth and 60 years of poet's death will make Laxmikanta immortal for ages to come. So long as this song shall be chanted and whenever the Odishan people shall be giving standing ovation to this song, Kantakabi's immortal soul will definitely be present there.

This is the best tributes to Kantakabi's immortal creation and lifelong perseverance. Although the highest civilian award of Govt. of India like Padmabhushan, Padmabibhushan or the highest literary award of India like 'Jnanapitha', Saraswati Samman were not conferred on Kantakabi - this sort of respect showered on him and his immortal writing - will never be received by anyone of this state at any time. From this point of view 'Kantakabi' will remain unique and extraordinary through the ages.

'Bande Utkala Janani.'

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