

Medieval Odia Literature and Bhanja Dynasty

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Medieval Odia literature is dated between 1650-1850. Akbar the Mughal emperor conquered Odisha in 1592. The suffering of the people during Aurangzeb (1658-1707) was intolerable. The most sensitive issue was the destruction. Common people were morally depressed, economically ruined and politically disturbed. After 1761, the Bengal Nawabs ruled a portion of Odisha, but the major part passed to the Marathas. Odisha was occupied by the British in 1803. During this period Odisha lost its freedom in the sphere of art and culture. At this juncture the Odia literature was in trauma. During this period extraordinary poets were Dinakrushna Das, Upendra Bhanja, Bhupati Pandit Lokanath Bidyadhara. However in the present context the literary contribution of Bhanjasa, Balbhadra, Tribikram, Ghana, Upendra is discussed. Although all of them have contributed significantly, manuscript records of some poet are not available much to focus their creativity.

Characteristics of Medieval Literature

Literature of all ages is distinguished by their specific characteristics. Medieval literature possesses some remarkable properties such as musical ability, natural beauty, aesthetics, conjugal love and conversation with Sastras.

i) Musical ability

Music has multidimensional definitions. Sri Aurovindo, the great poet and critic defined music

as the thrill of divine laughter. Swami Prangyanananda opined in his book 'Historical Development of Indian Music' that music can be said to be the sweet and soothing sounds that vibrate and create an aesthetic feeling and beauties of the nature. Also he added 'Music is recognized as the greatest and finest art that brings permanent peace and solace to the human world'¹. The poets of the medieval age could realize and recognize their poetic creation in the same vibrancy. Such creation in Odisha carried a specific importance due to its musical excellency, which was hardly found at that time in any other neighbouring language literature of Indo-Aryan family such as Bengali and Assamese etc. at that time. This implied the interest of people in music and song for their common entertainment. It is also confessed that song and music of that period was the influence of south Indian proficiency on the traditional Odia music. Such impact is also continued among the common people of Odisha.

II) Natural beauty

Nature is the visible aspect of invisible power. Early man lived in nature and enjoyed nature. He emitted nature by body gesture and movement. Over the ages Nature exhibits prominent relevance with literature. It is equivocally admitted that where there is literature there is Nature. Medieval Odia literature is immensely accommodated the Nature. In many

of those themes Nature itself acted as catalyst to express the poet's view. It is also used as an imagery to magnify the inner feeling of the characters. The romantic as well as tragic act of the key characters were expressed with symbolic inclusion of the nature.

III) Aesthetics

Aesthetics has its own precious influence on human life. It is originated from the special consciousness, which values the earthly life. It is the inseparable element of literature that attracts the reader's attention time and ages. Sometimes it takes human thoughts and feelings to certain sophisticated level of consciousness. As a result one can visualize the eternal beauty through the window of mortal world.

IV) Conjugal love

Though not a new phenomenon, conjugal love has enriched the top-most level in the mediaeval literature, which made them more popular among common people. The imaginary characters and symbolic characters from different mythological background were successfully placed in the poetry to describe the romance and tragedy.

V) Conversation with Sastras

A light can lit other lamps. A knowledgeable person can effectively impress upon the society for its all-round improvement. Writers of this period gained sufficient knowledge from different Sastras viz. Vedas, Upanisadas Ayurved, Jyotirved Dhanurved, Kamsastra, Sangitsastra etc. and suitably incorporated in most of their literary expression.

The royal family of Bhanja was patron of art and literature. Balabhadra Bhanja, the king of Kulada composed Kavya 'Bhababati' which was unique for its emotional expression. Ghana Bhanja, one of his successors had two Kavyas to his credit named as 'Trailoka Mohini' and 'Rasanidhi' which were imaginary mimic of the

royal family. Tribikram Bhanja, another successor of that family also reserved his poetic talent in the kavya 'Kanakalata' and some popular verses.

The present communication throws some light on the medieval literature with special reference to Dhananjaya Bhanja and Upendra Bhanja.

Dhananjaya Bhanja

Dhananjaya Bhanja born on 1611, adorned the throne on 1636 and passed away as a king on 1701. During his reign for 65 years he proved himself a good ruler as well as a great poet. It is accepted that Dhananjaya Bhanja is the pioneer poet in the medieval Odia literature, known as Raj Kabi as he was the king of Kulad and a poet. His poetic creations are full of a different taste such as musical excellency, word jugglery, adoration of natural beauty. Culture of Odisha is reflected in his literary expression. The social rituals like celebration of marriage ceremony, birthday ceremony, and different festivals as well as the glory of Lord Jagannath is well described by him. He consciously narrated the conjugal love (Swakeeya Prema), as it was the warrant of that age to create a social awareness against the polygamy. The idealistic approach for social discipline is another quality of his personality, which is placed in his Kavya 'Ratnamanjari' when the queen has given advices to her daughter at the eve of marriage departure.³ Out of his manuscripts some are yet to be published. The poetic works of Dhananjaya can be categorized in to three major groups viz,

i) Kavyas, ii) Choupadi and Chautisa

iii) Mangalgeetika.

i) Kavyas: Raghunath Vilasha, Krushna Krida, Ananga Rekha, Itchabati, Madana Manjari, Ratnamanjari, Hanshaduta.

ii) Choupadi and Chautisa : Chaupadibhusan, Maruta Chautisha, Pandita Bodha Choutisha, Bangalashree Choutisha,

Anuchinta Choutisha, Unhu Choutisha, Kelikalpadruma Choutisha.

iii) Mangalgeetika.

In Raghunath Vilash, Lord Ramachandra is described as the avatary (source of incarnations) and Lord Jaganath is treated, as the Avatar. This ornate Kavya is unique for its devotional descriptions. The conjugal love of Lord Ramachandra and Seeta as well as other themes of Ramayana is focused. Verbal jugglery in medieval literature is initiated by Dhanajaya in this Kavya.

Krishna Krida is nothing but the description of Rasaleela of Bhagabata, which shows the popularity of the epic Bhagabata during those days. The Kavya is limited within only five Chhandas where Kalandi is described as the beautiful woman adorned with ornaments.⁴

The Anangarekha depicts the rural rituals related to the birth day ceremony and marriage ceremony.⁵ Assimilation of different fragments of Hindu religion such as adoration of Ganesh, Siva, Jagannath, and Durga has been congregated in this poetry.

Itchhabati is another conjugal love poetry where Sanskrit literature was reflected directly. Other poetries are also monotonous with little changes in characters.

The Kavya Hansaduta is known as pioneering Dutakavya for love transaction in Radha Krishna theme.

Chaupadibhusan is the cluster of thirty-four Chaupadis, which are initiated with a consonant in order. Such cluster - composition was taken as the initial record of this kind in Odia literature. Maruta Choutisa and Anuchinta Chautisa are the romantic expression where breeze and bee play as messenger respectively.

Mangalgeetikas are recited in groups in auspicious days especially during marriage

ceremony, mostly Mangalagitikas of Dhananjaya are composed with the description of marriage events of Ramachandra, Balaram, and also Sita.⁶

Upendra Bhanja

Upendra Bhanja has made significant contribution to enrich Odia literature. He is a preconscious poet having extra ordinary creative sensibility. He has left an ever lasting impression in Odisha's public life. He is remembered now and will be remembered by our future generation. In this context a stanza of Utkal Mani Gopabandhu comes to mind :

“Oh Upendra

The Pandits recite your lines at courts,

Gay travellers on the road’

The peasants in the fields and ladies in the harems,

And the courtesans too, while they dance”.⁷

(Translated by Mayadhar Mansinha)

Bhanja had great personal loss when his wife passed away in youth. The critics tell that in her remembrance he has composed many love lyrics. The nature is symbolically reflected in the characters of some of the poetry. In Prema Sudhanidhi, an unique piece where the enchanting love letter is a worthy example. Dr. Mayadhar Mansinha has rightly discussed the subject as ‘There are few educated Odias to whom at least the first few stanzas of this beautiful love lyric in Sankarabharana meter do not occur spontaneously when the bright autumn moon of Asvina fills this earth with romantic, fairy land atmosphere, recreated in this beautiful lyric.’⁸

Upendra is credited with nearly sixty manuscripts. Many of these are yet to be published. Some of the publications which readily available are listed as Lavanyvayi, Baidehisha-Vilash, Rasikaharabali, Rasalekha, Kotibramhan dasundari, Premasudhanidhi, and Chaupadibhusan. In Rasapunchaka he has tried to popularize the Kavya poetics narrating the types of heroes and heroines.

Devotion to Almighty in his poem is not seldom. Cantos of Upendra are mostly ended with symbolic dedication to the Supreme power. His deep sense of spirituality is also found in Baidehisha-vilash where the boat-man refuses to ferry Lord Ram Chandra without washing his feet. Lord Brahma is ever anxious to wash the feet but never gets the opportunity. Lord Siva is also sad not getting a drop of washing water of His feet.

Among the top listed ornate poets, Upendra Bhanja secured a special position in the medieval literature. His poetry is full of similes. Pandit Mrutunjaya Rath has rightly quoted him as the Samrat of similes. Sabdalankar is the other appreciation of Upendra's Kavya. In this context Dr. Mayadhar Mansinha, the poet and critic expressed his views that Upendra may be taken as most supreme master in this line of Sabadalankar (a recognized and respected element in literary art in Indian poetics) in the whole of Indian literature.⁹

Apart from the literary legend, historical facts are described in several instances. Kalinga during 8th century (AD) could prove itself as one of the important maritime power for its overseas trade. It is placed in one of his Kavya, Lavanyabati that sea craft reached in the coast Srilanka. The brides of Sadhavas togetherly celebrated boat-trading rituals as per the Hindu tradition.

Poets, golden link between past, present and future are the architects of human values, natural beauty, patriotism and spiritualism. What others cannot see, they can see with the help of their third eye, the inborn ability that is called poetic genius. Poets are different in taste, vision, feeling and sense different from even philosophers and social thinkers. In this context Sri Aurovindo speaks 'the poet - seer sees differently, thinks in another way, voices himself in quite another manner than the philosopher or the prophet'.¹⁰

Discussion and critical review of medieval Odia literature still is in progress. Research publications, review articles and criticisms are most invited to unravel many of our hidden talent of this period, which can enrich the knowledge of aspirants in this sector.

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