

The Evolution of Odia Language :

An Introspection

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In the beginning were the people. They lived their lives always in relationship with one another. They thought, they worked, they manufactured and they also created - they shared their creations and ideas. They grew as they shared. This process of sharing gave them a language which evolved into a definite shape as the people themselves evolved. A language is spoken pretty long before it came to be written down and recorded. All peoples had a literature; before the language could be written down. Thus, everywhere, an oral tradition preceded the so-called literary tradition.

The contribution of Chandra Mohan Maharana, Ganapati Das, Mani Mohapatra, Gopal Chandra Praharaj, Madhusudan Das, Abhiram Bhanja, Nandakishore Bal, Madhusudan Rao, Fakir Mohan Senapati, Gopabandhu Das and Radhanath Roy, Gouri Shankar Roy, Ramshankar Roy, Pyarimohan Acharya were represented Odia educated communities. The contribution of this elite class of Odisha to the progress of Odia literature was as significant as their contribution to the growth of Odia nationalism.

The present period of Odia language is the result of the continued evolution of a definite speech style of Old Indo-Aryan language. All those regional languages (middle-Indo-Aryan language) are known as 'Prakrit' and 'Apavramsa' in early and later stages respectively. The three main dialects of Odia are (a) coastal dialect (modern standard language) (b) western dialect (Sambalpur and Laria) (c) South Western dialect (Desiya, Bhatri, Jharin) of these the kind

of affinity that the first has with Bengali, the second has with Kosali and Chhatisgarh and the third has with Halbi provides strong evidence of the systematic expansion of Aryan language.

Like other sister literatures of modern Indo-Aryan languages Odia began its literary career with the composition of religious and social reformers- followers of Buddhist, Shaiva and Vaisnava sects. Odia was transformed into a finished and forceful literary language in the works of Sarala Das's 'Mahabharata' and other works. The medieval period of Odia literature during the 15th, 16th and 17th centuries may be called the golden period. Modern Odia literature like other language and literatures emerged in the Nineteenth century. Odia prose, fiction, essay, drama modern poetry were rich and varied. The words in the voices of Jagannath Das in 'Bhagabata' and text books of Madhusudan Rao was the medium of self-expression of the Odias as a people and was the universally accepted standard of Odia language.

Odia language, like its sister languages Bengali and Assamese is classified as a part of the Magadhi Subgroup of the Indo-German Group of language. This language area adjoins Bhojpuri language area in the North and Telugu language area in the south. L.S.S. O' Mally in his Puri district Gazetteer (pages 75-76) has discussed the peculiarities of Odia language and script. Odia language is written as it is pronounced. According to him, Odia script owed its origin to writings on dry-palm leaves with an iron stylus.

Scholars on the origin of languages and the historical development of the language have felt that Odia, Bengali and Assamese, perhaps had a common origin in some historical times. This point of view has originated from the discovery of a group of Buddhist poems from Nepal State library by Sri Haraprasad Sastri which was published as 'Boudha Gaan O'Dohan.' This very important manuscript throws a lot of light on the growth of languages in the whole of eastern India.

Historians of Odia literature have examined the similarity in the language structure and ideas in Sarala Das and other earlier writers.

The script in the Ashokan edicts at Dhauli and Jaugada and the inscriptions of Kharavela in Hati Gumpah of Khandagiri give us the first glimpse of possible origin of Odia language. From the point of view of language, the inscriptions of Hati Gumpah are near modern Odia and essentially different from the language of the Ashokan edicts. A point has also been made as to whether Pali was the prevalent language in Odisha during this period. Hati Gumpah inscriptions, which is in Pali, is perhaps the only evidence of stone inscriptions in Pali. This may be the reason why the famous German linguist Prof. Oldenburg mentioned that Pali was the original language of Odisha.

The stone inscription of Ananta Varma Bajrahasta Deva which is put against the year 1051 AD is generally regarded as the first manifestation of Odia script and language. There were other stone inscriptions at Bhubaneswar in 13th century which point to the gradual evolution of Odia script and language. Odia language perhaps received its final shape by 14th century and this is available in Markanda Das's lyrics 'Kesaba Koili', Sarala Das' 'Mahabharat' and Abadhuta Narayana's epic in prose Rudrasudhanidhi, Sishu Veda and Saptang written by Nath Sanyasis are treated as some of the earliest available works in Odia language.

Many talented writers born in different periods of past enriched this language. The

outstanding works of Sudramuni Sarala Das, Balaram Das, Sishusankar Das, Tribikram Bhanja, Upendra Bhanja Dinakrushna Das, Brajanath Badajena and Abhimanyu Samanta Singhar, lyrical works of Bhakta Charan Das, popular writings of Jadumani Mahapatra, lyrics of Baladeb Rath, Gopal Krushna and Bhaktakabi Madhusudan Rao, Radhanath Roy, Fakir Mohan Senapati and many others added glory, beauty and gracefulness to the texture of Odia language. The works of Upendra Bhanja, Kalidas and Sriharsa also added to the enrichment of the progress of Odia literature.

The explosion of knowledge has become possible on account of the remarkable progress of science in the modern age. It has a great impact on our life style. We have to keep in touch with the progress of English and other major progressive languages and the different countries of the world to ensure further enrichment of Odia language - its word power and its vocabulary, in this age of science and technology.

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