

The modern state of Odisha known in ancient times as Kalinga, Utkala, Odra and Koshala, is a land with a hoary past. In the Kapila Samhita, a Sanskrit text composed in the 15<sup>th</sup> century AD, the ancient Odisha or Utkala Desa is referred to as the most glorious region of India or Bharatavarsa:

“Varshanam Bharatah Shresthah  
Deshanam Utkalah Smrutah,  
Utkalasya Samo desho  
Deshah nasti mahitale”

(Of all countries India is the best and of all States,  
Utkala (Odisha))

before Ashoka but it is evident that two merchant of Kalinga namely Tapasu and Vallika were converted by Goutama Buddha to his faith at the Uruballa forest and they happened to be the first Buddhists of the whole world.

It was in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century B.C that Kalinga came to the limelight of Indian history when Ashoka, the greatest emperor of ancient India defeated Kalinga after a fierce war. The enormous bloodshed and suffering caused by the war changed his heart and he was converted to Buddhism, a religion preaching non-violence and peace, and it was the land of ancient Odisha or Kalinga from which Buddhism spread to other parts of India and South East Asian countries



## A Glimpse of Odishan History

*Balabhadra Ghadai*



Kalinga being the most ancient historical name of Odisha, some scholars are of opinion that it was a vast territorial entity extending from the Ganges in the north to the Godavari in the south. The Vanaparba of the Mahabharata narrates, “This is the Country of the Kalingas where flows the river Vaitarani”. In the Sixth century BC Kalinga had established herself as a very powerful state in Eastern India. The Jaina Harivamsa Purana records that Mahavira preached his religion in Kalinga. It is doubtful whether Buddhism existed in Kalinga in any form

giving birth to vibrant civilizations. Kalinga made a name as a maritime power and so great was her fame in this regard that Kalidas has referred to the king of Kalinga as the ‘Lord of the Sea’. She had established commercial contact with South East Asia, Ceylon, (Srilanka), Burma, China, Tibet, Thailand and Cambodia. Through this contact she could spread Indian culture to all these countries.

During Kharavela’s reign the empire of Kalinga extended up to the river Ganga in the north and the river Godavari in the south. He was

on the throne for 14 years but these memorable years placed him high in Indian history. With his invincible army Kharavela brought under his domain a number of kings from north and south India. He had crushed Magadha, the traditional enemy of Kalinga and brought back Kalinga Jina which had been carried away by the Nanda King. Though short lived, Kharavela's empire in the 1<sup>st</sup> century BC appears to have covered nearly one third of the Indian sub-continent. As a patron of Jainism he built the superb monastic caves at Udaygiri and Khandagiri. A lover of music, art and dance, Kharavela organized various performances for the people of Kalinganagari.

The history of Kalinga for about seven centuries after the Chedi monarch Kharavela is obscure. With the advent of the seventh century AD, the history of Odisha emerges from darkness to light. The Sailodbhava dynasty ruled over Kangoda, roughly comprising the present Ganjam and Puri districts. Its historical significance lies in the fact that from this period we get a regular dynastic history of Odisha. The Sailodbhava period was an age of creativity in Odishan art and architecture. A number of Saiva temples of Bhubaneswar, such as Parsuramesvar, Satrugnesvar, Bharatesvar, Lakshanesvar can be assigned to this Sailodbhava period. During this period strong cultural influences from the North as well as South came to Odisha and it was a period of cultural fusion. It was during the reign of Sailodbhavas that Kalinga's overseas trade flourished largely and personages of the royal house launched their colonial adventure in Suvarnadwipa i.e. Burma, where the Sailendra empire came up by the 8<sup>th</sup> century AD,

In the first quarter of the eighth century AD, Bhaumakaras ruled over the coastal belt of Odisha historically called Odisha proper. The

Bhauma rulers were sovereign rulers and they gave to Odisha a sound and well-organized administration. This dynasty is marked by enthronement of as many as six illustrious queens. It was in the early phase of Bhaumakara rule that phenomenal development of Mahayana and Vajrayana or Tantric Buddhism is noticed in Odisha. Besides this, they also followed a policy of magnanimity and tolerance towards all religious sects.

After the decline of the Bhaumakara dynasty Odisha was ruled by the Somavamsi kings for nearly two centuries. At the height of their power the Somavamsis ruled over a kingdom which roughly corresponds to the present day Odisha. The king Janmejaya, Yajati, Dharmarath and Udayta Keshari of this dynasty are mostly renowned for their conquest. Besides it, the Somavamsis left their imperishable legacy in the field of art and architecture. Out of the numerous temples, built by the Somavamsis four are most significant – Lingaraj, Brahmeswar, Mukteswar and Rajarani. Each of them is a masterpiece of Odishan architecture.

Ganga rule spanning nearly three hundred & fifty years (1112 to 1435 AD) produced fifteen rulers, of whom three : Chodaganga Deva, Anangabhima Dev and Narasingha Dev, were men of exceptional abilities and were outstanding rulers. They extended the frontiers of Odisha from the river Ganga to Godavari. Narasimha Deva, the builder of the Konark could be able to crush the Muslim army of Bengal and capture Lakhnauti, the then capital city of Gauda. The art and architecture of Odisha reached the zenith of glory in the unceasing and strenuous building activities of the great Ganga monarchs. They built two peerless monuments- the Jagannath temple of Puri and the Sun temple of Konark.

After the downfall of the Ganga, another glorious dynasty known as Suryavamsi or Gajapati dynasty assumed the reins of administration of Odisha. Three of its illustrious emperors namely Kapilendra Deva, Purusottam Deva and Prataprudra Deva made their mark in the history for their military exploits. Of them Prataprudra's reign forms a landmark in Odishan history for cultural achievements, particularly in the fields of religion, literature and Philosophy. It was during his reign that the noted champion of Bhakti cult, Sri Chaitanya came to Odisha, spent the major part of his life, and passed away in Puri. There was a great efflorescence in literature during the Gajapati rule. Five luminaries appeared during this period in the literary domain of Odisha with the popular name, the Panchasakha.

With the demise of Gajapati Mukunda Dev Odisha was annexed by Suleiman Karani, the Sultan of Bengal in 1568 AD. The independent existence of the Hindu Kingdom in Odisha came to an end and a long gloomy chapter began in the annals of Odisha. The rein of the province went into the hands of alien rulers- the Afghans, the Mughals, the Maratha and finally the British. Soon after the British occupation of Odisha in 1803, freedom movement began in different parts of the province in the form of armed resistance, protest and rebellion against the alien authorities. Mention may be made of the Khurda Rising of 1804 under the leadership of Jayi Rajguru, Paik Rebellion of 1817 under the leadership of Buxi Jagabandhu and Ghumsur Rebellion of 1835 under the leadership of the Kandh leader Kamal Lochan Dora Bisoyee.

The Great Revolt of 1857 known as Sepoy Mutiny or the First War of Independence which broke out at Meerut on the 10<sup>th</sup> May had its shadow cast in different parts of India including

Odisha. Of those great patriots who actively participated in it, special mention may be made of Ramakrushna Samanta Singhara, Chakhi Khuntia, Surendra Sai, Madho Singh, Hati Singh and a few others.

From 1903, the political activities centered round the demand for amalgamation of Odia Speaking tracts and formation of a separate Odisha Province. The Utkal Union Conference (Utkala Sammilani) founded by Madhusudan Das not only waged a relentless struggle for unification of Odia speaking areas, but also worked for revival of the lost cottage industries, setting up a process of industrialization, revitalization of agricultural economy, spread of technical education and above all the cultural and political resurgence of Odisha. Finally on April 1, 1936, the long cherished dream of Odia-speaking people became a reality and a new province was constituted bringing together tracts lying in Bihar, Odisha, the Central provinces and Madras Presidency. The province was inaugurated at a **darbar** held at Ravenshaw college Hall in Cuttack. Justice Courtney Terrell, Chief Justice of the Patna High Court, administered oath of office and allegiance to the governor- designate, Sir John Austin Hubback.

Odisha played an active role in India's freedom struggle when Gandhiji's Non Co-operation movement reverberated throughout India, its echoes were felt in Odisha too. Under the inspiring leadership of Pandit Gopabandhu Das, the movement aroused great enthusiasm throughout Odisha.

The Civil Disobedience Movement, specially the Salt Satyagraha, proved to be very powerful movement in coastal areas, perhaps only next to Gujurat where Gandhiji himself had started the movement. Firing at Inchudi in Balasore district