

MARTIAL TRADITION OF ORISSA

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Orissa known as Kalinga in the pre and early Christian era, had not only flourished and prospered in art and architecture, but also took a lead in spearheading martial tradition through the ages. The early history of Orissa holds out the saga of great warriors whose valour and military skill, expanded Kalingan empire from the river Ganga to Godavari.

The Hathigumpha inscription of Udayagiri near Bhubaneswar reveals that Mahameghavahana Kharavela was the emperor of Kalinga in the 1st century B.C. The powerful army of Kalingan Emperor Kharavela, defeated Satkarni of Satavahana dynasty in the south and reached the River Krishna. This victory was achieved by emperor Kharavela in the second year of his rule. He further extended his kingdom to the west by defeating kings of Rashtrakas and Vojakas, belonging to Maharashtra region. In the 5th regnal year, Kharavela conquered Magadha and brought back the *Jinasana*, (Jain image) which was plundered away by the Nanda king from Orissa. In his 8th ruling year, Kharavela conquered Mathura and Rajagiri. The kings of Magadha, Bruhaspati Mitra, had to accept the suzerainty of emperor, Kharavela. The victory of Ashok in Kalinga War in 3rd century B.C. was thus avenged by the mighty king Kharavela. The powerful army of Kharavela consisted of cavalry, *Hastisena* the infantry and the valiant charioteers. The Hathigumpha inscription further throws light on the magnanimity of emperor Kharavela, whose military campaign never exhibited cruelty and mindless destruction. His rule was also full of benevolent acts and welfare measures for the people. In the words of reputed historian Dr. M.N. Das. "The military career of this emperor was one of the rare examples of oriental valour. His twelve years of warfare in all corners of India was real manifestation of a true *Digvijaya*, yet the name of the *Digvijaya* had never been associated with any act of wanton cruelty, such as the execution of the defeated kings and misery of the conquered people." Thus the military glory of Kalingan people, during the reign of Kharavela startled the minds of many kings of both Northern and Southern kingdoms of India. If we survey military history of Orissa, we find that after Kharavela the people of Kalinga exhibited their valour in establishing and flourishing maritime trade in Java, Sumatra, Borneo, Sinhala and Indonesia during rule of the Sailodbhaha and Bhaumakar and Ganga dynasties. During the rule of Ganga dynasty (1068 to 1435) Kalingan empire was spread from Ganga to Godavari. Chodaganga Dev, Ananga Bhima-II and Narasingha Deva, were great warriors, whose military might threatened the Mohammedan rule of Bengal. They did not dare to invade Orissa. During Ganga period, Orissan art and architecture reached their zenith and the famous Konark Sun Temple was constructed during the golden rule of Ganga king Narasingha Dev.

The military strength of Orissa was further strengthened during the rule of Suryavamsi Gajapati king Kapilendra Dev (1435-1466) who was known as second Kharavela of Orissa. He extended his empire up to Vizagapatnam. He conquered Vijayanagaram, Rajmahendri and other nine forts. The mighty Kapilendra Dev was known as "*Gajapati Navakoti Karnatak Utkal Kalavargeswar.*" He also conquered a part of Bengal. Thus Kapilendra Gajapati was the ruler of Eastern Ghat, Bay of Bengal and Southern plateau. After a long reign of 30 years, Kapilendra Dev died on the 15th of November 1466. In the military tradition of Orissa, Kapilendra Dev had shown exemplary courage in invading territories and suppressing revolutions and rebellions. After Kapilendra Dev, the military tradition of Orissa got a setback during the rule of Prataprudra Dev, (1497 to 1534 A.D.). The mighty and vast Kalingan empire lost her independence in the year 1568 after the death of Gajapati Mukunda Dev.

The southern region of Orissa was occupied by the ruler of Vijayanagar and Bahamani Sultan of Golkunda. The Sultan of Bengal also attacked coastal regions of Orissa. Thereafter Orissa became the battleground between Mughals and Afghans. The Afghan power of Bengal could not consolidate its rule in Orissa. The Mughal ruled Orissa for more than a century. After a treaty with Afghans, Akbar appointed Raja Mansingh consolidate to Mughal sovereignty over Orissa. But with the death of Aurangzeb, rapid decay of the Mughal empire started. Thereafter Orissa passed under the rule of the independent Nawabs of Bengal. During this period the rise of Maratha power destroyed the Mughal empire. In 1741 the army of Raghuji Bhonsle under Maratha General Bhaskar Rao fought with army of Alivardi Khan, the Nawab of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa. Orissa again became the main battleground for rival forces for nearly ten years. The people of Orissa had no powerful king to face this onslaught of rival forces. Alivardi Khan, acceded Orissa to the Marathas whose rule lasted for more than half a century till British occupation of Orissa in 1803. It is an irony of history that the local Raja of Khurda, Ramachandra Dev, succeeded the title of the last Hindu king of Orissa, and his claim was confined to the management of the temple of Jagannath at Puri only.

It is note-worthy to introspect the causes of the decline of glorious military power of the Kalingan people who laid the foundation of superiority and sovereignty over many territories of Northern and Southern India for more than 2000 years. Some historians are of the opinion that king Prataprudra Dev diverted his goal from good governance to extreme devotion to Vaisnavism of his spiritual preceptor Sri Chaitanya. The king's utter neglect for strengthening and nourishing martial tradition of Orissa was the main cause of the gradual decay of military power of Orissa. But there are other factors such as internal fratricide and rebellion among small chieftains for power, caused schism in civic society for which neighbouring power-hungers, like Afghans, Mughals and Marathas struggled for supremacy. That caused immense sufferings to the people of Orissa. Some historians cite other socio-economic reasons. The climatic changes leading to silting of prosperous ports of Orissa, severely hampered the growth of maritime trade. The recurrence of devastating floods and famines also added to the misery. The economic backbone of Oriya merchants in particular and people in general made people fatalist.

But in course of time, history repeated itself. The resurgence of valiant Oriya Paikas - "peoples of militia caste", raised hopes and aspiration of people. After 1803 the British started experimenting with stiff revenue system which caused hardship to the farming community (peasants) of Orissa. The Paikas, the hereditary militias were denied of their hereditary rights over the land. On account of British misrule, one valiant Oriya named Bakshi Jagabandhu Bidyadhar the then military chief of Raja of Khurda, revolted on 2nd April 1817. Puri was captured by Jagabandhu Bidyadhar with his Paikas. The British soldiers retreated from Puri and Cuttack. It was the Paikas of Orissa who constituted the standing army under the leadership of Bakshi Jagabandhu. This rebellion of Paikas of 1817 is known as the "*Paika Bidroha*" of Orissa. In March 1817 nearly four hundred Khonds marched from Ghumusar in Ganjam to Khurda where, Paikas joined with them. They attacked the *thana* of Banapur and set fire to the government buildings. They killed nearly one hundred persons and carried a treasure of Rs.15,000/-. When these Paikas entered Khurda, all the government officials fled away. The English commander of one detachment was killed by the Paikas during fighting at Gangapada. The then Raja of Khurda, Mukunda Dev joined these rebels when they entered Puri Sadar and declared the fall of the British. The entire region of South Orissa was under possession of the rebels. This Paika Rebellion posed serious threat to British authority. About five hundred fifty English soldiers were sent to Khurda to crush this revolt. The Paikas were defeated and King Mukunda Dev II was captured. Some of Paika rebels fled to jungles and continued their fight till 1826, but ultimately they were subjugated and many were sent to prison. Raja Mukunda Dev died in prison in November 1817. This Paika Rebellion of Khurda was torch-bearer to similar type of anti-colonial movements in Orissa.

In the annals of martial tradition of Orissa and its resurgence in 1st half of the 19th century, chivalrous Oriya heroes of Rebellions against the British misrule are to be remembered and honoured

for their sacrifice for the cause of freedom of the people. The sacrifice of Dewan of Khurda Jayakrushna Rajaguru Mohapatra popularly known as Jayee Rajaguru who was publicly hanged to death in 1804 cannot be undermined. The heroic leadership of Krutibas Patsani in Banapur Rebellion in attacking police station of Banapur with Panchu Nayak and declaring independence in 1836 and finally facing death bravely, are really tragic episodes in the history of anti-colonial movement of Orissa led by great Oriya warriors.

Similarly the Ghumusar Rebellion of Kandhas under the leadership of Dora Bisoi and his nephew Chakra Bisoi in 1846 is an epoch-making event among tribals residing in remote villages, constantly fighting guerilla warfare for a decade before the uprising of First War of Independence of 1857. Chakra Bisoi led a life of fugitive. British ruler failed to capture him. Surendra Sai who raised revolt and waged war in 1827 fought with British for 37 years. He was accused of false charge of murder and was confined in the Asurgarh fort till his death. The glorious martial tradition of Orissa ended with the death of Surendra Sai, one of the greatest Oriya fighters of freedom movement.

It is the call of the time in this age of globalisation and unipolar world, to recall the memory of our national heroes of martial tradition, who fought relentlessly against the injustices perpetuated by alien rule. They sacrificed their lives for the cause of justice, liberty and freedom. By paying homage to these national heroes, we the Oriyas of great culture can arouse the patriotic zeal and fervour among the youth and re-establish Oriya identity and unity on the path of progress and prosperity of the state, which is still reeling despite her abundant mineral resources, enterprising, aspiring human resources and glorious cultural tradition. Here lies the relevance of study of history of martial tradition of Orissa.

Apart from arousing heroic feelings among the younger generation, this martial tradition has influenced our art, architecture and literature. If we minutely observe the beautiful carvings of Konark, we find scenes of heroic deeds, warfare, and friezes of innumerable elephants. The cave carved sculptures of Udaygiri Caves of Orissa also reflect the scenes of martial tradition. Some of the performing art of Orissa have also been greatly influenced by this glorious martial tradition. Chhau, Ghumura and Ranapa dances reveal the skill of martial art.

In the field of Oriya literature, we find many narrations on martial tradition of Orissa. In 15th century the martial tradition has been well-described in Sarala Dasa's *"Mahabharat"* the epic of Oriya literature. The Oriya poet Balaram Das (1470 AD) has beautifully rendered a narration of warfare education in his literary work - *"Jagamohan Ramayana"*. Kabi Bhaktacharan Das has vividly depicted the scenes of *Malla-Judha* (Boxing) in his poetry book entitled *'Mathura Mangala'*. The war-scenes depicted by Purusottam Dev (1725 AD) in his book - *Kanchikaveri* and Kabi Brajanath Bada Jena's (1750 AD) immortal creative works - *"Samara Taranga"* are glorious examples, as to how martial tradition of Orissa, shaped the language, imagination, theme and literary dimension of Oriya literature. The innumeral forts of Orissa, the farming community of Orissa having titles of *Bahu Balendra, Pahad Singh, Maharathi, Bahinapati, Mansingh, Gadnayak, Patnaik, Champati Ray, Ray Singh, Dakshina Kabat, Baghisingh* signify hereditary tradition of militia caste (Paik-Khandayats) of Orissa.

In our modern literature, Poet Laureate Sachi Raut Ray's poetry *'Baji Rout'*, the poetry of Godabarish Mishra, Godabarish Mohapatra, Mayadhar Mansingh, Radhamohan Gadanayak and rebel poet Rabi Singh have depicted the spirit of heroic martial tradition. Thus Orissan art, literature and culture bear the voices as well as tales of victories and tragedies of heroes of martial tradition of Orissa. These reminiscences of great warriors are lively, heart touching and inspiring to all of us.

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