

HISTORY OF PRESS IN ORISSA

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In the glorious chapters of the history of journalism in India, Orissa with her history of over one hundred years of journalism occupies a place of pride and honour.

(In 1662 the first newspaper of London was published. The number of newspapers increased to 53 in 1970. The London Gazette was founded in 1665 as the official organ of the Government. The world famous 'Times' paper began its publication as the Daily Universal Register in 1785 and adopted the present title in 1788).

The First Newspaper of India

(In India the first attempt for the publication of newspapers was made by an Englishman William Bolts in Calcutta in 1776. But he could not succeed due to official restrictions and obstructions. James Augustus Hicky another Englishman started the 'Bengal Gazette' in 1780. In Madras in 1785, the first newspaper the 'Madras Courier' was published by an Englishman named Richard Johnson with official support. The paper was edited by Boyd. Bombay's first newspaper, the 'Bombay Herald' came into existence in 1789.)

Orissa came to the newspaper map of India, about 70 years later in 1862 and offered resistance to the British rule which could only be fully established in this part of the country in 1848. Thus the history of journalism in Orissa is little over a century or to put it more precisely it would now be just 138 years old.

Oriya journalism played an important role in moulding socio-political within of the province several and in awakening the people's consciousness in particular. In those days the great men who had pioneered this noble profession in this part of the country were solely inspired by the spirit of social service and missionary zeal.

The First Oriya Magazine

In 1861 five years before the catastrophic famine of Orissa of 1866 the first Oriya Magazine of Orissa 'Bodha Dayini' was published from Balasore. The main object of this magazine was to spread the Oriya literature and to point out the administrative lapses. Then the most powerful and influential Oriya paper. 'The Utkal Deepika' made its appearance in early 1866 under the able editorship of late Gourisankar Ray with the patronizing helps of late Bichitrananda Das who was the Seristadar of then Revenue Commissioner, T.E. Ravenshaw, who enjoyed the honour as the founder of the historic Ravenshaw College of Cuttack. 'Utkal Deepika' played a significant role for the amalgamation of outlying Oriya-speaking areas which remained scattered under different provincial administrations. The Utkal Deepika carried on a vigorous campaign for bringing all the Oriya-speaking areas under one administration, development of Oriya language and literature and protection of Oriya interests. In 1869 late Bhagavati Charan Das started 'Utkal Subhakari' to propagate Brahma faith. Another weekly paper 'Sambad Vahika' was published from Balasore in 1868.

The Utkal Society of Cuttack published 'Utkal Hiteisini' in 1869. In the last three and half decades of the 19th century a number of newspapers were published in Oriya, prominent among them were 'Utkal Deepika' 'Utkal Patra' Utkal Hiteisini from Cuttack, Utkal Darpan and Sambada Vahika' from Balasore, Sambalpur Hiteisini (30th May, 1889) from Deogarh.

The last named Oriya weekly continued for 34 years under the patronage of Sir Sudhal Deb, Raja of Bamra. In 1879 an Oriya fortnightly newspaper called "Mayurbhanj Pakshika Patrika" was published from Baripada being edited by Haraprasad Das with the financial help of Maharaja Krushna Chandra Bhanja Deo. It was said that the main objective of the paper was to review the political matters of Mayurbhanj in simple 'Oriya' language. (source Mayurbhanj Gazetteer). In April 1891 a literary magazine titled 'Utkal Prabha' was published from Baripada with the financial help of Maharaja Sri Ramachandra Bhanja Deo. In 1880 Dina Banerji edited a paper called Bideshi from Cuttack. After 1866 Famine some English journals were also started publishing in Orissa. In 1868 "Cuttack Standard", Argus' and an English Weekly 'Orissa Patriot' edited by Kalipada Banerji were published from Cuttack and another English weekly named 'Orissa Students' edited by Laxmi Narayan Dasgupta was published from Kendrapara during that period.

The publication of these papers during the last part of the 19th century, indicated the desire and the determination of the people of Orissa to uphold the right of freedom of expression and the freedom of the press with a view to ultimately fighting for the freedom of the country from the British rule.

Swadeshi Movement

In the early part of twentieth century we find that "Swadeshi" movement in Bengal had gained momentum and it had great impact on Orissa's political and social life. At that time another paper named 'Nava Sambad' also appeared from Balasore. Both 'Nava Sambad' of Balasore and 'Utkal Deepika' of Cuttack gave strong support to the 'Swadeshi' movement and in their writings of 30th August 1905 and 2nd September 1905 respectively those two papers expressed the views that the Swadeshi movement would give impetus to the production of "Swadeshi" goods in Orissa.

In 1903 the Oriyas of Ganjam under the leadership of Raja of Khallikote, Raja Harihar Mardaj and with the guiding inspirations of Late Pandit Nilamani Vidyaratna a veteran journalist, social reformer and a political leader of that time formed Ganjam Jatiya Samiti to demand for the unification of Ganjam (then in Madras) with other Oriya areas. Vidyaratna started an Oriya weekly paper 'Praja Bandhu' from Ganjam to espouse the cause of the Oriyas and the amalgamation movement. He also joined the 'Sambalpur Hiteisini' in the last decade of nineteenth century and gave a new fillip to the cause of amalgamation movement and development of Oriya literature with the help of the Raja of Bamra, the great lover of culture and literature. Pandit Vidyaratna had encouraged the great poet Gangadhar Meher and Radhanath Ray by publishing their literary works through the columns of the paper which he edited.

This period was also marked for the spread of journalism in different parts of Orissa and publication of more papers from Ganjam and Cuttack.

Star of Utkal

In 1905 Babu Khirod Ray Choudhury published an English newspaper named "Star of Utkal" from Cuttack. The paper was highly critical of the then Bengal Government's Food Policy and held the Government responsible for the large scale starvation deaths of 1907-1908 in the districts of Cuttack, Puri and Balasore which then constituted the 'Orissa Division' under the Bengal Government. The Lt. Governor of Bengal demanded Rs.2000/- as security deposit from the press. The editor refused to pay the security deposit and in protest stopped the publication of the paper.

During this decade the enterprising Oriya journalists of Ganjam published a number of papers. An English weekly named "Ganjam News" was published from Parlakhemidi, the great seat of Oriya

culture, literature and music to support the cause of Orissa. The other papers of Ganjam of that period were Oriya Weekly, "Oriya Hitavadini" from Berhampur, "Ganjam Guna Darpan" from Digapahandi and 'Utkal Vasi' from Ichhapur (now in Andhra Pradesh) which were published to fight for the formation of Orissa province based on language, culture and literature and also to advance the cause of freedom movement.

New Phase of Journalism

In 1913 a new phase of journalism began in Orissa under the adventurous leadership of the great Journalist, late Mr. Sashibhusan Rath. On 13th April, 1913 he published the weekly 'Asha' which soon held the public opinion of the district under its influence.

Though, Mr. Rath started his weekly without any capital money, he was able to attract the support of the stalwarts of that period like Pandit Gopabandhu Das, Pandit Nilakantha Das, Pandit Godavarish Mishra, the great freedom fighters and scholars, who later became editors of powerful newspapers. They were also the writers in this new weekly, till 1917 this group which was more popularly known as the Satyavadi Group maintained very intimate contacts with 'Asha' by regularly writing in its columns. Pandit Gopabandhu, the founder of Orissa's influential Oriya newspaper, the Samaj published his first monthly magazine "Satyavadi" from Asha Press of Berhampur. During this period the publication of 'Asha' by Sashi Bhusan had kindled new hopes in the minds of the people of Orissa and particularly the people of Ganjam who were zealously agitating for the formation of a separate Orissa province and development of Oriya language and literature. 'Asha' soon attracted many leading writers and leaders of public opinion of that time and became the powerful vehicle of public opinion. The other prominent writers and leading men who had enriched the columns of 'Asha' were late Gopal Chandra Praharaj (author of Oriya Encyclopaedia-*Bhasakosh*), the great social reformer Ananta Mishra, Appanna Panigrahi of Paralakhemidi, Gadadhar Vidya Bhusan and Sadasiva Vidya Bhusan of South Ganjam, the great Oriya novelist and writer Fakir Mohan Senapati, the poet and writer Ramchandra Acharjya and many others.

Oriya Weekly "Samaj Mitra"

In 1917 another Oriya weekly paper 'Samaj Mitra' was published from Cuttack. But it was proscribed by the British Government for its publication of an article under the caption 'Hindu Dharmar Gourab' in which he strongly criticised certain disparaging remarks of some foreign Christian missionaries against Hindu scriptures and the Hindu deities.

Madhusudan Das's Oriya Weekly "The Oriya"

During the same period late Gopal Chandra Praharaj edited "Satya Samachar", Utkal Gourab Madhu Sudan edited 'The Oriya' and Dibyaprasanna Roy Choudhury edited 'Navya Bharat' from Cuttack. Another weekly 'Swaraj' which became a daily in 1932 was also published in 1921-22 from Cuttack.

Publication of "Dainik Asha"

In 1928 Sashi Bhusan Rath took another bold step and started the Oriya Daily 'Dainik Asha' from Berhampur on the Oriya New Years Day (Mesha Sankranti). This was really a great day for the people of Orissa and was a turning point in the history of the State as it had helped the people of Orissa to launch their struggle more effectively and vigorously to secure the unification of the outlying Oriya areas under one administration. This paper also spread the message of freedom movement of the country in the rural areas of the State. With the publication of Dainik Asha many public spirited youngmen got the opportunity to receive the practical training in daily newspaper work and journalism. Some of them who got training in the editing of these newspapers helped for the production of other daily papers in the state during later periods.

East Coast English Weekly

After the publication of 'Dainik Asha' Sashi Bhusan also published an English weekly, 'The East Coast' and entrusted its editorship to Pandit Godavarish Misra whose love for the freedom of the country and the people had brought for him poverty and many difficulties in life. In 1930 an Oriya newspaper "Prabhat" was also published from Cuttack.

First English Daily Newspaper "New Orissa"

On 5th May, 1933 the first English daily of the Province 'The New Orissa' made its appearance from the Asha Press of Berhampur under the Editorship of Sashi Bhusan ably assisted by Mr. Sharma and Mr. K.N. Acharya who came from Madras. Mr. Acharya who was the colleague of Mr. Rath later became the Editor of 'New Orissa'. The management of the paper was looked after by Mr. Hadu Raiguru who was a trusted Assistant and colleague of Mr. Rath. Sharat Mahapatra, a brother of Sashi Bhusan was an Asst. Editor in Dainik Asha who later became the Editor of weekly 'Asha' and continued it for a long time even after the death of Mr. Rath. (It may not be out of place to mention here that for the proper growth and development of Oriya journalism and development of language and literature, necessity for the invention of Oriya type-writer was greatly felt and a brother of Sashi Bhusan late Ranganath Mahapatra of Surada, Ganjam invented the first Oriya type-writer in early forties. The Oriya type-writers were manufactured in Germany and were put to use in some of the offices soon after the formation of the separate Orissa Province on 1st April, 1936. The Zamindars of Ganjam and also the Rajas of some of Garjats were greatly encouraged to use the Oriya type-writers. But after the outbreak of Second World War the British Government did not allow further manufacturing and use of these type writers. Ranganath did not get any recognition for his great work even after the independence of the country and he died in poverty fighting his lonely battle to gain what was legitimately due to him. But he lost his fight.

End of a Chapter

During the time of Second World War in 1942, Daily Asha changed hands with its sister publication the English daily 'New Orissa' which was purchased by a businessman of Calcutta, Mr. M.L. Jajodia who later settled down at Cuttack. These two papers gave effective support to war efforts of the British Government and were also recipients of Government's aid. Both were closed down in 1951 marking the end of a great chapter of the pre-independence era journalism in Orissa. However, the "Dainik Asha" resumed publication from Berhampur being controlled by a "Trust" set up by late Brindavan Nayak in the Seventies.

"Samaj", the Oriya Daily of Cuttack now edited by Madam Manorama Mahapatra was founded by late Pandit Gopabandhu Das as a weekly in 1919 to support the cause of freedom struggle of the country. Pandit Das continued his relentless struggle against the British rulers through the columns of the paper and never yielded to any pressure and temptations of the British Government.

In 1931 it was made daily by Pandit Nilakantha Das, Pt. Godavarish Mishra, Pt. Lingaraj Mishra and others. But Pandit Gopabandhu was not there to see this eventful beginning of the new life of "Samaj".

After the outbreak of the Second World War in September 1939, the Orissa Congress Ministry headed by Mr. Biswanath Das resigned on 4th November, 1939. A non-Congress coalition Ministry headed by Maharaja of Parlakemindi K.C. Gajapati Dev was formed by the end of 1941 with the active support of Pandit Nilakantha Das, Pandit Godavarish Mishra and others. Pandit Nilakantha who was the chief architect of the said coalition Ministry started an Oriya daily called "Navarat" to support the Ministry and the war efforts of the Government. He was also having a monthly magazine 'Nava Bharat'. This paper continued as long as it enjoyed official support and after the fall of the Ministry and the end

of war it closed down. Pandit Das's daily and the monthly however, greatly enriched the Oriya literature through valuable literary contributions. Some of the writings of the old Nava Bharat were reproduced by "Samaj" in its weekly literary columns. During this period another Oriya paper named 'Lok Mata' also came into existence, but it disappeared after a short period.

In the early pre-independence period two English weeklies, 'The Orissa First' edited by Mr. K.N. Acharya and 'Observer' by Mr. M.S. Mahanty, and an Oriya Weekly named Janata by Surendra Mohanty published from Cuttack had influenced public opinions in their own respective ways. Mr. K.N. Acharya's 'Orissa First' commanded respect and prestige in official and enlightened circles of the State.

Another Oriya monthly magazine which commanded great influence through out the State for its critical writings was 'Niakhunta'. It was more popular for its satirical writings and poems. This was first started in 1938 from Berhampur by late Godavarish Mahapatra and later shifted to Cuttack. 'Krusak', another Oriya weekly also started its publication in 1938 from Cuttack under editorship of Sarangdhar Das.

The Post-Independence Era

In the Post-Independence Era journalism in Orissa assumed new attitude and direction. From its missionary character of old times it has gained a new momentum for trade unionism. It has attracted many ambitious youngmen who accepted journalism as avenue for employment. Dr. H.K. Mahatab's "Prajatantra" offered this opportunity to employment seekers in journalism and also to the young aspirants for building political careers. Dr. Mahatab's 'Prajatantra' which first started publication as a weekly from Balasore on 2.10.1923 and ceased publication on 28th December, 1930 in protest against the Press Ordinance of British government again made its re-appearance on the 8th August, 1947 as an Oriya Daily with renewed vigour and strength under the fostering care of Dr. Mahatab who was the first premier of the State on the eve of the transfer of power and also became Chief Minister after independence. The 'Prajatantra' played its role effectively during the crucial period of the integration of the Princely States of Orissa with the province under the guidance of Dr. Mahatab who was not only the Premier of Orissa but was one of the right-hand men of Sardar Patel, the Chief Architect of new India who secured the merger of the princely states. As a matter of fact, "Prajatantra" was the training centre for many journalists who occupied important positions in politics and in public life. Another sister paper of the Prajatantra, English Daily, "The Eastern Times" was also published on the 1st of April 1948. The 'Amrit Bazar Patrika' of Calcutta published an edition from Cuttack from the Tulasipur residence of Mr. Biju Patnaik. But it also discontinued its publication after two years.

'Matrubhumi' which was started as a weekly in 1947 was made a Daily by its founder Editor Mr. Balakrushna Kar in 1951 on the eve of First General Election in 1952 with the financial help received from Maharaja of Balangir Patna, late R.N. Singh Deo.

In 1956 an Oriya Daily called 'Ganatantra' owing its political allegiance to the opposition "Ganatantra Parishad" of the ex-Garhjat rulers of Orissa was published by the Gana Prakasani Trust Board. This paper continued for about five years.

In 1960 another important Oriya Daily "Kalinga" was published by Mr. Biju Patnaim, the then Congress leader of Orissa. It was controlled through a trust. This paper went out of existence after 1967 General Elections during the time of "Swatantra-Jana Congress" Coalition Ministry. On 1st April 1966 another Oriya Daily "The Janasakti" made its appearance and continued for about four years. This paper owed its existence to Mr. Biren Mitra, ex-Chief Minister of Orissa. During its short span of existence it had been able to gain popular support and good will of the people.

After the Fourth General Election another Oriya daily the "Swarajya" owing its full allegiance to the Swatantra Party was published from Bhubaneswar under the working editorship of Mr. Rama Prasad Sinha, a well-known freedom fighter, writer and a veteran journalist. This paper was controlled by the ex-Maharaja of Balangir Patna, late R.N. Singh Deo as the Chairman of a new Trust Board.

On 24th November 1974 a new Oriya Daily "Dharitry" was added to the family of the Daily Newspapers of Orissa published ownership of under the Madam Nandini Satapathy a former Chief Minister of Orissa and members of her family. Mr. Tathagata Satapathy is its editor now. This was first published by Smt. Chandrika Mahapatra on behalf of "Samajwadi Society. A new English Daily the "News of the World" was also published from Cuttack by an enterprising press worker in 1976 under his managing editorship. Besides this, some Oriya and English weeklies were published from Cuttack. "The Orissa Times", an English Weekly was established in 1965 by Mr.R.P. Shastri a veteran journalist under his editorship. The Eastern Times Weekly which was edited by Dr. Mahtab is now closed down. The 'Kosala' of Sambalpur has become a small town daily, "Orissa Times" was made a daily newspaper in 1985 April and since then has been continuing its publication from Bhubaneswar.

Besides these papers, there were many other papers which were published in the early part of this century and went out of existence in Orissa. Utkal Sevak was published in 105-Sambalpur Frazer by Press and continued till 1914. The Oriya weekly "Sadhana" 1921, Sambalpur, Jagarana - Oriya weekly 1936, Praja Sakti and Subrati 1958, Jeeban- 1960, Squeeze English weekly - 1964, Khadyot - 1962, Panchamukhi - 1966, Katusatya - 1968 were published from Sambalpur.

The Mayurbhanj, an ex-feudal state which was under the administration of a Maharaja also played an active role in the field of journalism from 1879. That year in the month of April, the Mayurbhanj Pakshika Patrika made its appearance with the help of the ruler. Utkal Prabha - April 1891, Weekly Manorama - 1905 from Baripada, Mayurbhanja Gazetter in Oriya and English from the Baripada Printing Press, Calcutta Bhanja Pradip in October, 1934, Mayurbhanja Chronicle in October, 1935 were also published. The Mayurbhanj State Gazetteer in January, 1936 speak of the big role played by this state for the promotion and development of journalistic activities in Orissa. In post-independence period the following periodicals and journals were published from the Mayurbhanj district. "Mayurbhanj Jagarana - 1963, Janata-1963, Hint - (in English) 1963, and Bahni, Khabar (English), Anjali, Chalantika, Ramarajya in 1969.

In Bolangir "Patna Deepika" and Prajmitra were published before the merger of the feudatary State with Orissa and discontinued later. In 1959, a weekly called 'Dunia' and another weekly named "Swatantra" were published and in 1961 Abhijana, Ganatantra and Yugavarta weeklies made their appearances and faded out after sometime.

Koraput, a tribal district of Orissa has also made its contributions to the growth of journalism in the State. 'Jana-Sakha', Ajikali and Amakatha were published in Oriya from Nawarangapur a few monthly magazines like 'Dur mukha' and Achalapatra were published from Cuttack.

Though, there is a big scope and necessity for the development of small papers in the districts, in order to highlight the problems of different areas and to focus the public attention on the problems of rural Orissa, due to the high cost of production and lack of sufficient encouragement from various agencies enterprising journalists do not embark on such ventures. (Reproduced from "Orissa Times Special issue of 1978).

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