

## A Tale of Two Luminaries

*Er. Gobardhan Dora*

They are two brothers namely Biswambar Bidyabhusan and Gobinda Ch. Mahapatra who in 19<sup>th</sup> century Odisha, made significant contribution to the re-establishment of Odia literature and culture.

Krushna, Panda father of the above duo was a man of Jagannathpur Sasan in Bayan Paragana under present Jajpur district. He shifted to Calcutta and began living with his family in the house provided by Gopi Khilar. Gopi Khilar was man of cowherd community whose forefathers were palanquin bearers of British people. His ancestors had hailed from Bhadrak. By this time Gopi Khillar became a Sardar and was employed to supervise the works of others. He now wanted a Brahmin Purohit (Priest) for his temple worship. So he made necessary arrangements for Krushna Panda to stay in a house provided by him. Krushna Panda's first son was Biswambara who was born in 1811.

Krushna Panda was reasonably well off. He provided a traditional education to his son at home. Biswambar studied under tutors. Later he attended Calcutta Sanskrit College and was awarded the degree of Bidyabhusan. In the meantime Krushna Panda lost his wife and he came to Bhadrak to marry again. By this time Biswambar was married. Gobinda was born on 28.04.1845 from Saraswati, second wife of

Krushna Panda who subsequently changed his surname from Panda to Dev Mahapatra.

### **Pundit Biswambar Bidyabhusan**

Biswambar found that Odisha was quite backward in education. Until 1835 there was only two schools in Odisha - one at Puri and the other at Medinapur (Medinapur was in Odisha in 1847) started by the East India Company. In 1822 an Anglo- vernacular School had been established at Cuttack by the Baptist Mission, but the Mission had run into financial difficulties by the early 1840. In 1841 the running of the school was taken by the East India Company with the active cooperation of Commissioner A.J.M Mills. Biswambar Bidyabhusan was appointed as a Pundit on 22.08.1841 on a monthly salary of Rs.20/-. Besides him there were two other teachers on monthly salary of Rs.50/- (Second Master) and Rs.10/- (Asst. Pundit). The commissioner also appointed one Headmaster with monthly salary of Rs.150/- In 1841, the nos. of students attending the Cuttack School was 86.

There was no proper Odia books then. The managing committee wrote for Govt. approval to write some Odia books by Rev. Sutton whose knowledge in Odia language was good and which can be rectified by Pundit Biswambar Bidyabhusan. Until 1841 only two text

books were published written by Sutton and Lecey. Biswambar Bidyabhusan was the first Odia to publish text books in Odia (*Ooryah grammar published in 1841*). Later he published '*Elements of Arithmetic*' in 1846. The grammar book was 60 pages and the arithmetic book was 104 pages.

Dr. Roer, Inspector of Schools for South-West Bengal thanked Biswambar and Madhusudan Pattanaik, Deputy Collector, Khurda for promoting education among Odias in a public speech. In 1850 Biswambar resigned from his post to practise Law at Cuttack Bar. Around this time an English Officer wrote to the East India Company '*Only two persons of Cuttack Bar know how to write legal petitions, one is Biswambhar Master and the other Sidheswar Das, an inhabitant of Banka Bazar, Cuttack*'. After from practicing Law for two years, Biswambar succeeded in the examination of the Law Committee and in 1853 the Company appointed him Munsif at Dhamnagar on a monthly salary of Rs.100. Later he was posted in the same capacity to Jajpur, Dantun, Kendrapara, Kantai, and other places. While at Jajpur, he established a Middle English School which was later upgraded to a High School.

Commissioner Cockburn in his Report for 1858-59 wrote: - "Jajpur – the Munsif of his place Biswambhar Bidyabhusan is one of the best "*Oorya*" scholars acquainted with Bengali and Sanskrit."

For rendering service with distinction the Government posted him as "Sadar-Allah" or Sub-Judge at Medinapur where he was much loved and respected.

After his father died in 1865, Biswambar returned to Bhadrak and performed Shraddha for his father, and set out to perform the immersion ceremony of the holy ashes of his late father in

the river Ganga in Calcutta. During his journey, at Dantun, he was suddenly struck down by cholera and died at the age of 55.

The efforts of Biswambar for promoting English education among Odias at that time has no parallel. In 1872, Sir William Hunter wrote in his book "Orissa" (Volume II, page 146)

*" x x x The first Uriya Brahman who accepted service under the English Government tried hard to overcome this national prejudice. Himself a subordinate Judge, he offered to prepare other Uriya Brahmans gratuitously for official posts. But it was with the greatest difficulty that he could get a single one of them to listen to his proposal"*

#### **Gobinda Ch. Mahapatra:**

Gobinda was reared from the age of five to sixteen by his elder step brother Biswambar who had at that time no son of his own. While Biswambar was Munsif at Kendrapara a son was born to him. Soon Gobinda began losing affection and care from his foster mother (wife of his step brother). The Landlord of Kendrapara, Radhashyam Narendra was noted philanthropist in the area then. Numerous mendicants from all parts of India knew him to be very hospitable and thronged in his house and given blankets and utensils. Gobinda joined such a group of mendicants at the age of 16 and went to Calcutta on foot. By this time he was married. In Calcutta he collected address of Gopi Khillar and met him. Soon arrangements were made for the education of this son of the family priest and given a tiled roof house to live in. He was admitted then to Hadow School later renamed to Scottish Collegiate School. In 1864 he passed entrance examination in first division and was awarded a merit scholarship of Rs.15/- a month. In 1865 when Gobinda was in second year of FA, final

examination was not far away, his father died. He returned to Bhadrak.

This was the time of terrible dreaded Nank famine. The entire burden of Gobinda's extended family rested on his young shoulders. In the tragic situation he was not able to return Calcutta to complete his F.A examination, but went to Cuttack to seek a job. Soon thereafter a Normal School was opened and Gobinda joined as a school teacher. During his stay at Cuttack Gobinda took parts in activities concerned with public welfare. He joined in the few institutions and engaged in uplifting Odia life and culture and promoting education amongst Odias. **Utkal Dipika**, an Odia daily was being published then. The Utkal Dipika of 26<sup>th</sup> May of 1867 figured the following item:-

“On 19<sup>th</sup> May 1867 a meeting was held at Cuttack to revitalize the Oriya language presided by Baboo Rangalal Bandopadhyay and attended by Baboo Jagamohan Roy, Baboo Chandra Sekhar Banerjee, Bibarta Chandra Sekhar Mahapatra, Baboo Jagamohan Sen, Baboo Harekrusna Das, Baboo Gobinda Chandra Mahapatra, Pundit Kapileswar Vidyabhusan, Baboo Balaram Bose, Baboo Jagamohan Lal, Baboo Rajkumar Banerjee, Baboo Kailash Chandra Palit, Baboo Haradhan Ghosh and Baboo Gouri Shankar Rai.”

On 10<sup>th</sup> August 1867 the paper stated that on 28 July, at the meeting held by the Committee for the up-liftment of the Oriya Language, eight members were present for carrying out the aims of the Committee out of which Gobinda Chandra was one. It was determined in the meeting that: “A list of Oriya books in the State shall be made out to indicate names of books, names of authors, the subject matter or main contents of the book and brief history of the author. A subcommittee for this was formed with the following members like Pundit

Artatran Tarka Panchanan, Pundit Kapileswar Bidyabhusan, Baboo Banamali Singh, Baboo Gobinda Chandra Mahapatra, Baboo Gouri Shankar Ray”. For the university entrance examination it was necessary to compile one book. Therefore Gobinda along with Banamali Singh was requested to select best poems from Bhasa Bhagabata.

In 1869 Gobinda was posted to Puri as Sub Inspector of Schools. There he found the Brahmins hated the education introduced by the British. He went round Brahman villages explaining and persuading them to send their boys to the Govt. School. He was able to win their arguments and during his six years tenure of service in the Puri district he was able to establish as many as 120 schools.

In the chapter on Inspections in the Education Report of 1872-73, it is stated:-

“... There are now at the end of the year in Orissa 388 schools under inspection with an attendance of 10,315, against 150 schools and 6,277 at the commencement of the year. The increase is chiefly due to the establishment and control of 212 village schools subsidized and aided under the new system with an attendance of 4,471 pupils”

In 1873 Govt. promoted Gobinda to the post of Deputy Inspector. Bhudev Mukhopadhyaya C.I.E. (1827-98) was Inspector of West-Bengal then.

In 1874 John Beames (1837-1902), Collector inspected the office of the Deputy Inspector Gobind. After he left, the staff of the office purified the table and chair with cow dung water. Beames was very much angry to know this and terminated Gobinda's services forthwith. Gobinda was aback by his dismissal. But there was no way for him to appeal. Thereafter he served under Bhagirath Mahendra Bahadur,

Maharaj of Dhenkanal. The Maharaja was a Sanskrit scholar of high order. He had deep learning in literature, grammar and philosophy. Gobinda grew to be a favourite in his court. Here Gobinda wrote a book named 'Bhagiratha Kirti-Kalap', a history of Dhenkanal published in 1877. During his stay in Dhenkanal he published a text book named 'Hita-Patha'. The book was welcomed as a useful text book in Odia. 'Sambad Bahika' a newspaper from Balasore by way of critiquing this book published on 1<sup>st</sup> January 1875, states:-

“xxxxxxx Now-a-days, the schools of Orissa expect to have this kind of book. Such a hope can be fulfilled by Gobinda Babu. We consider 'Hita Patha' is a good text book”.

“x x x x x it is matter of regret that the author has been removed from service on account of a minor incident x x x x However, the benevolent Maharaja of Dhenkanal has appointed him to a good post in his State. This is very good news.”

Sadly, the Maharaja passed away in 1876. The State came under court of wards. Beames now was Commissioner as well as the superintendent of Feudatory States. He removed Gobinda from service, being the victim of earlier displeasure. Utkal Dipika on 10<sup>th</sup> March 1877 expressed its anguish on this matter.

By this time John Beames was transferred from Odisha and Mr Smith was in his place. Gobinda was posted in the rank of Sub Inspector in higher possible pay scale in the States of Mayurbhanj, Nilagiri and Kendujhar. When Krushna Chandra Bhanjadeo, Maharaja of Mayurbhanj requested Commissioner Smith to suggest a tutor for his son, Mr. Smith by now was so pleased with Gobinda's works in his new post suggested his name to the Maharaja. In 1880 Gobinda went to Baripada and lived in the royal

palace. The education of three princes Sriram Chandra, Srishyam Chandra and Harischandra was entrusted to Gobinda.

In 1891 Sriram Chandra Bhanjadeo became the Maharaj of Mayurbhanja State. He decided to publish a literary journal called 'Utkal Prava' from Baripada. This was published in 1891 by the Mayurbhanj state press. The first editor was Chaitanya Ray, the Headmaster of Baripada Middle English School. In the second year of publication the Maharaja granted Rs.300/- as reward to writers whose articles were selected by Baboo Mohinimohan Dhar, Baboo Gobinda Ch. Mohapatra and Baboo Brundaban Panda.

From the list of books prepared by Prof. J.F Blumhardt, to be found in the India Office Library, London, Gobinda Chandra appears to have published many books. Included in this list are:

1. "**Raghuvamsa**. Translated into verse from Sanskrit of Kalidasa by Govindachandra, Cuttack, 1874"
2. "**Hitapatha**. Reader in prose and verse. by Govindachandra. Pt I. Cuttack, 1874"
3. "**Varnabodhaka**. Oriya Premier by Govindachandra, Calcutta, 1874 and 1877."
4. "**Hararara riya pahil puthi**. A Santali-Uriya premier by Govindachandra. Mayurbhanj, 1881". Govinda's "**Bhagiratha Kirti Kalap**" was probably omitted from the list because it was printed in Dhenkanal.

The last work in Odia by Gobinda is the Odia translation of Vyasadeva's Sanskrit Mahabharata in prose form. He wrote in the introduction: "It would be no exaggeration to say that no real translation of Mahabharata exists in Oriya language x x x x my translation is different. The meaning of each sloka or part of a sloka is conveyed in simple yet chaste language according to its occurrence in either one or several sentences x x x x."

Gobinda completed the translation of the first five books of the Mahabharata, namely “Adi Parva”, “Sava Parva”, “Bana Parva”, “Birata Parva” and “Udyoga Parva”. While dictating his translation of “Bhisma Parva” to his son-in-law, Kapileswar Mishra, he suffered a heart attack and died.

This great work initiated by Gobinda was completed by his son, Manmohan, nephew Rajeswar and son-in-law Kapileswar Mishra. All the eighteen Parvas of the Mahabharata were originally printed by the Mayurbhanj State Press, and have recently been reprinted by the Odisha Sahitya Akademi, in order to preserve the Odia heritage and make the work available to a wider audience. These eighteen Parvas, in thirteen volumes, have 7,568 pages.

Many of Gobinda Chandra Mahapatra’s writings remain buried in various newspapers and

journals. Regrettably, till date no serious attempt has been made to collect and publish these.

In Mayurbhanja Gobinda was the most powerful Odia employee. During his 16 years of service in the State he was also appointed as Dewan. His efforts to encourage Odia Brahamins of Puri district to gain a formal education are without parallel. This great man passed away on his 62nd birthday on 28.04.1907.

**Reference :**

1. Two Pioneers of The Oriya Renaissance 1993, Kailash Chandra Mahapatra.

---

Er. Gobardhan Dora, L-184, Fakirmohan Nagar, (Baramunda), Bhubaneswar -3.