

Transition from Feudalism to Democracy: A Study on Role Played by Odia Literature

Mili Sahu

Ph.D. Research Scholar, Ravenshaw University, Cuttack, (Odisha) India

Abstract

Colonial Odisha associated with strong feudal ties. That system brutally crushed the rights, dignity of indigenous people by the might of uninterrupted power enjoyed by Garhjat rulers on one hand and all kinds of exploitative measures adopted by colonial government on the other way around. Distress, apathy, unjust suffering of people helped in kindling the fire of revolutionary situations in Garhjat Odisha. In the narrow street of feudal system initiation of democracy gradually made its headway. Emergence of political organization and pivotal role of capable leaders, different political movements, growth of education and development of literature etc were few factors acquainted people with sense of democracy and to workout progress from feudalism to democracy. This paper, hence, pertains to study how the literature played a pivotal role in its own multifarious manifestation, through historical phases, in the transition from feudalism to democracy, i.e., De-feudalisation.

Key Words: feudalism, garhjats, literature, democracy, transition

The contemporary world has replaced feudatory system long ago with changing socio-economic structure. The feudatory form of government, with its own functional unique model, owed its origin back to long past, especially to medieval Europe while in India to early medieval times. However, it was shifted to democracy, which is popularly poised as an antithesis to most of the structural form of governance in modern times. Democracy is a form of governance model, as everybody knows; with people's sovereignty vociferously espoused with plethora factors like different revolutions, movements, policies, literary works and spread of awareness etc.

Within Time continuum model, feudalism began to manifest in different forms and configurations in early medieval India which lasted till late twentieth century with varied intensity. If closely analyzed from governance model, it was profoundly flourished during Gupta period in northern India. It slowly and steadily got modified

and consolidated during Chola rule in peninsular part of India. Albeit above facts, Feudalism as an established form of social stratification with economic bearing got consolidated during the Mughals and subsequently during British rule. Odisha, as a territorial segment of greater Indian subcontinent, too witnessed identical development during those above mentioned periods, although cross timing might have been there. When feudalism is seen as an alternative governance model counterpoising centralization of authority and power, it was oblivious that various parallel movements were bound to surface challenging it's very basis and characteristics. Out of all counter movements that were going on-movement for national independence, demand for Odisha as separate province, Prajamandal in Garhjat many of them were visible with its own footprint. Garhjat movement restructuring through understanding of exploitative practices like bethi, beggars etc.

The Afghans in 1568 invaded Orissa, with subsequent enforcement of its own

institutional and administrative framework and deteriorated Orissa politically and culturally. Next to Afgans, it was Marathas that ruled Orissa which led to deep and wide economic deterioration because Maratha exploited, exhibited anarchy, and showcased misrule and violence. The gradual economic deterioration and age old inherited institutional paralysis got multiplied with the conquest of British East India Company when English trader Cartwright got permission to trade in Odisha. Subsequently, British gradually took possession of different parts of Odisha at different times. Baleswar, Puri and Barbati Fort were captured on 1803 and gradually the entire Odisha came under the grip of colonial power. The Mughal captive states were merged into Odisha through the British Reign. Different Garjats like Sambalpur Garjat group, Patna Garjat group were united in the small Nagpur division and were being governed as a debt state. By 1855, the entire Odisha, as of today, was under English rule, either directly or indirectly.

Orissa, by that time, had no constructive political identity as it was fragmented into different parts. Because colonial government acquired Orissa and its structural administrative arrangement with colonial administration; they dominated Odia people and that led situation of Odia quite peculiar, marginalized and distracted.

Identity formation

Identity, as per vocabulary parlance, is a physiological overbearing of unified or fragmented socio-political community to feel being unified as distinct from other identical counterparts in some or other ways Odias, since teething with political

dismemberment, socially segregation as well as, intellectually demoralised, started the feeling of oneness amid socio - economic and political awakening that came after continuous efforts within or without Odia community. In the process of identity formation, language movement among the odia speaking people constructed unified identity. Influence of unified language constructed Odia identity and selfhood. Language formulated imagined community. It formed their own narrative and imagination.

There are different contested forms of Odia's identity owing not only to social, political, historical events but to distinguish cultural groups that formed the atoms of composite Odia culture. Because there was presence of numeric caste people, different class antagonism, regional disparities etc so were diverse literatures. On deep anatomization of the then diverse literature, it is observed that literature of odisha then was flourished with diverse intent. In addition to all other intents, some literary works outlined the historical context of social interaction to mobilize readers to participate in the anti- colonial struggle.

Transformation of Societies are going on, with new pattern of variables have seen constantly coming out paving way for modernity. More interestingly, such flourishment of literature acts as social forces for bringing social revolution. Literature is the one that tap the pattern of change through selective subjects in noting down new meanings and direction for transition of society. Narrative , novels , poems , essays , texts , short stories are the literary works that recreate values , represent different aspects of society , symbolize act ,

raise consciousness and transmit cultural values. Literature is helpful for building of cultural process and making identity from everyday issues. It intensifies the discourses of self - definition. It is helpful for establishment of separate identity as it catalyzes the consciousness. The role of literature in the formation of a healthy society has been recorded for a long time in all Oriya literature, especially, in the process of negation of older pattern of socio - political and administrative framework and onset of renewed pattern with far reaching effects.

The literary flourishing induced a cohesive environment by providing a political and literary background in the context of upheaval of Oriya identity emerged then. There were certain literary works that depicted politically significant Oriya social situations and nationalism, in addition to acknowledging the role of powerful representatives of Oriya literature.

Print Media, Formation of Identity and Phases of Modern Oriya Literature

Literatures prepare informed Citizenry where as Media facilitates free flow of opinion, ideas and called for collective life. Gangadhar Meher, Fakir mohan, Radhanath Roy etc initially led the growth of Oriya literature.

Growth of colloquial language significantly reconstructed the identity of local people like peasants culture, lower caste groups. The peasant discourses brought about structural transformation. It had a tendency to represent reforms. Newspaper was the important one which in vernacular language was published.

New severs were prompting national consciousness among readers. In early nineteenth century onwards it brought many changes in the life of the people, made the people aware on different aspects of the evil rules of British Government, and developed the sense of nationalism.

James Augustus Hickey's Bengal Gazette in 1780 was the first newspaper in India which played pivotal role for raising consciousness and to awaken the people. "Bodha Dayini" in 1861 was believed to be the first Odia newspaper to enrich Odia literature. *Prabodha Chandrika* was started by missionaries, which later on proved to be Native to ensuing mass consciousness and feeling of Odia identity in to.

Newspapers and the literatures just had born then, highlighted major agony, policies of the government, and associative aspects of the day to day incidents. The most important incident, amongst all, was the Nanka Durviksha which too influenced the literate to write on aftermath of the famine and its consequences. The major aspects of Garhjats were reflected was by the Orissa Patriot after the 1866 famine. Gouri Shankar Ray 'The Utkal Deepika' in 1866, had significant role in the campaign for amalgamation of Odia speaking areas coupled with the development of Odia language and literature. Nava Sambad ' and ' Utkal Deepika' were the most famous during Swadeshi Movement.

Another significant newspaper was Bhagavati Charan Das's ' Utkal Subhakari ' in 1869. In addition to above, Hiteisini, the Utkal Darpan and the 'Sambada Vahika' from Balasore, "Mayurbhanj Pakshika

Patrika" ¹ ; were some of the literary magazines that played pivotal role in bringing about intellectual revolutions and simultaneously creating odia identity side by side. Especially, the Utkal Prabha² in 1891 stood most influential in this aspects. Political leader Nilamani Vidyaratna's paper 'Praja Bandhu' from Ganjam and 'Sambalpur Hiteisini'³ played most significant role in development of Odia literature because it encouraged Gangadhar Meher's literary works.

The Ganjam News from Parlakhemundi, was published to fight for the formation of Odisha province simultaneously to advance the freedom movement. Satyavadi⁴ founded by Pandit Gopabandhu Das was published 'The Samaj' in 1919 in which promoted relentless freedom struggle. In Cuttack Madhusudan Das edited 'The Oriya', The Niankhunta' in 1938 was started by Godavarish Mahapatra; 'Krusak' in 1938, Sarangdhar Das edited Odia weekly, 'Prajatantra' fostered by Dr. H.K. Mahatab. 19th century literature focused primarily on issues of women like evil practices of satire, widowhood, early child marriage, pollution, chastity, predicament of patriarchy etc, besides contemporary political and administrative issues. Charan Panigrahi's 'Matira Manisha' had narrated degraded place of women, the forms of patriarchy. Rama Devi's 'Jeevana Pathe' elaborated the threshold limits of women, rid of daily domestic activities, purdah system. It brought women the ideal to get out from

¹With the patron of Maharaja Krushna Chandra Bhanja Deo.

²From Baripada with Maharaja Sri Ramachandra Bhanja Deo as patron.

³Help of the Raja of Bamra, sudhal press.

⁴From Asha Press, Berhampur.

daily chores and to struggle for own rights, for liberation, for nation's freedom.

Literary writings constitute the significant part of this study. There are certain literary books, novels encompassed landless, poor, dejected peasants, working class, women and all other sections who were politically socially economically, physically exploited garhjat system.

Experiences nationalism

Satyabadi School established in 1909 to awaken, raise consciousness, create group of educated and dedicated youth, led another phase of Oriya literature. Important Satyabadi members were Gopabandhu, Nilakantha, Godabarish. They were not only writer or intellectual but also they were intellectual elites who contradicted position of feudal elites. They had western ideas, paved way for social transformation. Godabarish Mishra's 'Ardhasatabdira Orissa' projected the aggravated situation of Odia speaking in contrast to Bengali.

Literary works also focus on the basis of those different movements and their character. Gopabandhu spirit of national movement work was manifested in the writing of Gopabandhu which was quite laudable. Political context was there. His poem "Bandira Swadesh Chinta" to demonstrate banishment, concealed patriotism, impels and passion for *swarajya*, dreaming for freedom which people deprived.

In his poem 'Misu mora deha e desha matire'⁵ Gopabandhu concern for *swarajya*, demonstrates ardent patriotism and selfless service to the nation.

Utkalmani in his poem '*Dharmapada*', defined through the *Dharmapada* character, others to represents nationalism, and to take *stand for* national pride. He glorified sacrifice of *Dharmapada*'s to symbolically motivated, to inspired masses to join in the freedom movement.

Literature reinforced people to experience and experiment with nationalism. It is an image of real life. Various initiatives were also started for the propagation and dissemination of independent ideas in the villages. Attempts were also made to recollect revolutionary sentiments in the minds of the masses by reciting written poetry. Public discontent was rising against the tyrannical regime. The people's movement in Garhjat region was aimed at changing the system. At this time, it was seen that the metaphor of selective realism in the mass movement was seen in the literature.

The initial part of 20th century was a remarkable period for change and growth of literature and politics. But the effect of this change in Oriya literature was slow. At this time, some young people like Anant Patnaik raised his voices against the prevailing system. Revolutionary or biplabi kabi Anant Patnaik's family was a noble landlord family of that time. Despite being a well-known landlord family, the family was the main supporter of the Swadeshi movement. He

⁵ "Misu mora deha e desha matire, Desabasi chalijaantu pithire. desara swarajya-pathe jete gada, puru padi tahin mora mansa hada".

was also influenced by the philosophical ideas of Poet Bhagwati Charan Panigrahi, the founder of 'Navyuga Sahitya'. On November 29, 1935, the opening song of the first session of Navyuga Sahitya was composed by poet Anant which was sung by Malati Chowdhury. During this period, the prajamandal started in Dhenkanal. Anant joined the movement with his friends. His efforts were being to encourage praja movement and took active part in movement. He used to compose many poems to promote the revolutionary mind of the people. His poetry '*Asichhi mu asichhi*', had raised the tone of rebellion against social injustice, promise, establishment of new values and reconciliation. His writings are meant for the poor, peasant workers, exploited people. He dreamt of a healthy and beautiful society where will no places for bigotry, the common people will not be exploited and oppressed.

Sachchidananda Rautray was a poet, novelist and author all in one. In the field of poetry, poet Satchidananda Rautray is a prominent genius. He holds a special place in literature as a socially conscious progressive poet. Staying in Odisha gave him the opportunity to be directly associated with the Garjat movement and student movement. After being inspired by Kanika Prajameli, the movement gradually spread in different Garjat areas. The background of the poet's literary work was the picture of the movement that appeared at that time. His remarkable creation was '*Bajiraut*'. In 1938, the compilation '*Bajiraut*' was published. The poem '*Bajiraut*' evokes memories of the 1938 Dhenkanal people's movement. The general public vows to put an end to the tyrannical and unjust regime. The British government made every effort to suppress

the popular movement that appeared in 1938. Bloody police forces opened fire in Bhuban village of Dhenkanal. At midnight, the police return from Bhuban village. A boat is required to cross Brahmin River in front. Bajiraut was a twelve-year-old boy. That boatman boy replied that he should not leave the boat without the permission of the people or not be carried out without the 'prajamandal order'. Bajiraut bravely faced the police firing and immediately hit by a police bullet. Prajamandal's other workers reached the place in a while, all of them stand holding the rope of the boat. 'Bajiraut' character in the beginning and the end of the poem, only that person is not special. In the eyes of the poet, Bajiraut is not just an ordinary youngboy but also the biggest institutions of this pre-independent India. The work 'Bajiraut' was created as a protest against the heinous incident. Bajiraut's selfless courage and nationalism were hidden in this statement. 'Bajiraut' is one of the most successful creations of poet Sachidananda.⁶ He aimed to reawaken this memory of a conscious history and inform the readers about freedom fighting for odisha, from Odisha.

Dominance of Bengali and Situation of Odia Language

Bengal had encountered modernity from very beginning with advent of colonialist, they got westernised. Bengali projected odia language as dialect or subordinate to Bengali. However, Odia language has its own evolutionary history. Starting from natha sahitya, koili chautisha to Jagannath Das epic work, Sarla Mohabharat are all

incarnated historical identity of odia literature.

Newspapers, literary magazines gave birth to essay writing and development. Literary articles developed primarily by journals are found on the early newsletter pages. In 1869, during the introduction of textbooks in the Odia language, the use of Bengali mixed language was criticized. As a result, many essays had born out of to make the Oriya literature as a rival of Bengali language.

Besidestradiation, indigenous unique temple architectural edifices, independent, glorious history etc, Odia's have rich literary resources which alone can prove it's independent and sustain existence. 19th century period was the catalyst for Odia intellectual and writer. Growth of education drives middle class exposed to new thoughts of outside world like rationality, projection of identity, internalization of contradictions.

Language movement

Utkal deepika edited by Gourishankar Roy forged the sense of demands for Orissa as separate province from the language front. It played prominent role for odia language and facilitated primary amalgamation of odia speaking track.

On December 30, 1903, through the establishment of the Utkal Conference, attempts were made to keep the Oriya speaking region within a geographical and administrative boundary. From that day till April 1936, the people who were initiated nationalism kept various things in front of the readers about the past history and achievements of leader. Gopbandhu, Nilakantha, Godabarish etc were the main pioneers tended to compose articles based

⁶Baji Rout, Sachidananda Routray
Granthamandir, New Edition 2020, Cuttack

on social reform, devotion, national awakening and history.

The success of the Odias in re-establishing the Odia language in the language abolition movement started in Baleswar was repeated in Sambalpur. On behalf of the Odisha Association, Madhusudan Das sent a memorandum to Lord Curzon, about filed petition against the order of the Chief Commissioner of Madhya Pradesh to remove the Oriya language from Sambalpur as the official language. And through Sambalpur Hiteishini, the political and cultural events happening in Odisha were published and created a new political awakening in the Sambalpur region. As a result of which in Sambalpur from January 1903, Oriya language was introduced again.

Odia Literature and Construction of Identity

All the tenacities of growth of education, press, newspaper, literary work have constructed reference points and taken into consideration for subject of investigation. Because, literature is acting as agent for communities for the transformation of systems, particularized phenomena and considerably helpful for further change of system.

The imagined Odia had multiple communities, regional variances with different identities. However Odia language had played eminent role in negotiating those differences.

Colonial educational policies brought vernacular education which led to public sphere formation and that public sphere provided the platform for growth of nationalism, shaping cultural milieu, generate nationalism. The interface

between state and people was established by public sphere. Because public sphere facilitates people to form public opinion, act as avenue to challenge the system. There were *bhagabata ghara*, *bhagabata tungis* were public sphere.⁷

Feudatory states and literature

Feudalism was that kind of a system which created turmoil, discontentment for odias. Different Odia novels, texts have communicated, narrated the repercussions of the feudalism. Nonetheless, the paper seeks to examine and analyze how far literature have preferred to articulate, formulate identity and interconnected to the shutdown of feudalism.

The 19th century, literatures entail how feudalism and colonial system caused for tension in Oriya society. Because both the colonial system one hand and feudatory system too strive for masculinity, promoted patriarchal property rights which led to gender indifference.

The creation of a new English-educated mass led to the emergence of a new class in social life. That groups were more interested in new government jobs, they were more likely to be close to the center of government for city life. The rural civilization of Odisha, which was the center of villages and traditional agriculture, turned towards urbanisation. The Naanka Famine and the Paika Rebellion and other regional rebellions created fear and insecurity among the people. The common man within the confines of various states gradually became

⁷ Public sphere is an arena available and accessible for all, it is forum for intellectuals, writer to exchange views, ideas. It is space to formulate and transfer public opinion.

acquainted with the larger phenomena, expansion of human geographical knowledge through newspapers and literature.

It has created opportunities for advancement. The establishment of English High School in Nilgiri, the provision of primary education in Ranpur, Baleswar School and letters from various places were published in the newspapers and public opinion was created. In courts, news related to Odiya language, various cultural programs of Utkal conference and news of events happening abroad. The news of the Garjat area was being published very excitingly on the pages of 'Sambalpru Hitishini'. Sambalpur education system, landlord education, provincial council, Garjat education details, lack of text books, students' Conference, Sambalpur language crisis, provincial connection, garhjat state related news was published.

'Chhamana Athaguntha' written by Fakir Mohan depicts the discourse of feudal set up, targeted zamindars, consequences of feudal system upon village life, anomalies etc. It depicted the caste system, class pattern, different forms of women, women's subdued sexuality.⁸

In the milieu of the awakening, prose language is very useful for the expression of the realist, life-views and ideal. In the 19th century, literary prose was clear in Sambalpur Hitishini (1889), poems and literary criticisms of many poets were published, establishing themselves as forms of modern literature. Fakir Mohan's 'Aam Jeevan Charit', the historical letter issue of

the sedition episode of Keonjhar, was published in Sambalpur Hitishini.

Apart from this, the news related to anti-drugs, eradication of prejudice, education reform and government affairs have graced the pages of Sambalpur Hitishini. In terms of cultural and political instability, Garjat's condition is very deplorable. The sad news of Garjat area like how the kings of Garjat spend money on the Chandanjatra, Ramnavami and other festivals rather than spent on the development of region has been published in the page.

Literary works internalize the problem of particular period, manifested the sufferings of exclusionary system. There was certain literature which was basically protest led works with revolutionary and reactionary orientation.

Poet Kuntala Kumari Sabat in 'Garhjat Krushak' not only suggested ideas of exploitative sections but also the conditions of people, explained how much difficulties garhjat people were facing in fulfilling fundamental necessities⁹.

In 1919 Gopabandhu started a newspaper 'Samaj' in the context of the national movement, tried to understand the needs of the rural people. Gopabandhu wrote against the existence of inhuman practices like *bethi*, bonded labour, the exploitation by Dhenkanal raja who hired thousands of people to build his palace. He appealed to the people of Orissa to participate in freedom movement and to be sacrificial for nation, to motivate Prajas for advancing towards a responsible government and inducing mode of political participation.

⁸ 'ChhaMana AthaGuntha' novel by FakirMohan Senapati

⁹Garhjat krushak, kk sabat, Bharti Publishinghouse and Book Depot, Cuttack, 1993

Concluding Remarks

As colonialism has made its inroads into the scattered Odisha province, various exclusionary policies it had taken. Colonialism coupled with feudalism have restored peculiar structures towards exploitation, marginalization became the main affairs. However with colonial modernity, introduction of print media Orissa witnessed identity construction with widespread newspaper, literary writings. Literature of 19th century basically fostered sense of new aspirations, nationalism and realization of self.

Language became unified force owing to use colloquial language and that profile of language turned into Odia language Agitation in last part of 19th and early 20th century. That Agitation not only for language, rather it was for nation, it was for permanent identity and that manifested into transform of feudal system to democratic one.

The main objective of the paper figure out the role of literature and education helpful for contested identities of Odia during colonial period formulate distinct identity by moving towards democracy.

Odisha is unique for its robust lineage of educationist. They documented literary works to create educational frameworks that meet the question of Garhjat population. The collective works create the fabric of development, familiar enough to create confidence in the readers, leave readers satiated, informed, motivated to participate in movement.

This study have successfully tried to highlight how Odia literature mapped different shape of fracture and fragmented Odias. It also analyzed construction of identity with different phases of writings. The paper has noted the different public sphere facilitated social visibility of verge group, digged ground for political representation.

References:

Pati, Biswamoy. *Situating Social History: Orissa, 1800-1997 (New Perspectives in South Asian History)*, Orient Blackswan, 2001.

Sabat, K.K. *Garhjat krushak*, Cuttack, Bharti Publishing house and Book Depot, 1993.

Routroy, Sachidananda. *Baji Rout*, Cuttack, Granthamandir Binod Bihari, 2020.

Das, Gopabandhu. *Dharmapada*, Cuttack, Satyabadi Press, 1954.

Senapati, FakirMohan. *ChhaMana AthaGuntha*, Cuttack, Sriharanath Press, 1964.

Mahtab, Harekrushna, *Sadhanara Pathe*,

Das, Gopabandhu. *Kara Kabita*, Cuttack, Gopabandhu Sahitya Mandir, Satyabadi Press, 1953.

Mohanty, Surendra. *Madhusudan Das*, New Delhi, National Book Trust, 1972.

Mahatab, Harekrushna. *The history of Orissa*, Vol.I, Vol II, Cuttack, Revised edition, Prajatantra Press, 2000.

Darda, R. S. *From feudalism to democracy- a study in the growth of representative institution in Rajasthan*, New Delhi, Rajendra printers, 1971.

Menon, V.P. *The study of the integration of Indian states*, Madras, 1961.

Bailey, F.G. *Politics and social change -Orissa in 1959*, London University, California Press, 1963.