CHAPTER XII
THE GREAT TRIO

FAKIRMOHANA SENAPATI

TILL the other day modern Oriya literature was lovingly spoken of as the Age of Radhanatha in contrast to the Ages of Sarala Dasa, Jagannatha Dasa, and of Upendra Bhanja. It was a spontaneous tribute to the inexplicable magic of poetry over other forms of literature. But the facts and movements of the sixty years, from about the sixties of the last century to the twenties of this, having become more readily available in recent years, have brought about a change of values in literature in the minds of readers and critics, and the consensus of opinion in Orissa now accords the place of eponymous pride to Saraswati Fakirmohana Senapati.

As a matter of fact, three men of genius ushered in the modern period in Oriya literature, working together round about 1866. This brilliant trio, with harmonious intellectual and spiritual affinities, and on excellent social terms with one another, is Fakirmohana Senapati, Radhanatha Ray and Madhusudana Rao. Of the three, Fakirmohana was the oldest and Madhusudana the youngest. Fakirmohana was the real inspirer of the group. He had absolutely no ambition to blossom out as a poet or a writer. He dared not entertain such aspirations vis-a-vis the other two who were well versed in English and bore the hall-mark of higher education. Senapati had no more than a primary school education. But he was a born patriot and humanitarian and was determined from his early days to do whatever lay in his power to raise the prestige of his fallen compatriots and lift them from the morass of sloth, despair and exploitation. He adopted literature as an experimental means to that great end. His extraordinary creative powers were revealed only as he went on writing miscellaneously. The actual creative contributions on which stands his immortality belong really to the 20th century, and were written long after Radhanatha and Madhusudana had
exhausted themselves. His long life of over eighty years was a blessing to the nation. Radhanatha and Madhusadana, born after him, died earlier. It was in his peaceful garden-house (Santikanan) at Balasore, in the golden twilight of his mature years, that all unexpectedly, Senapati gave to the nation great works year after year almost till his death, putting into them the quintessence of experience and observation of a brilliant mind during a long life.

Down to the sixties of the last century, Balasore was an important port of call and entrepot on the east coast of India for the sailing ships of the East India Company. Round about the middle of the century a semi-literate, sickly lad of twelve years or so, with a quill-pen tucked behind his right ear, might often have been seen walking up and down the quayside of this port, his hometown. Orphaned at the age of a year and a half, this lad, the impecunious scion of a once-noble family whose landed fortunes had changed hands with the departure of the Marathas and the advent of the British in Orissa, was being looked after by his doting old grandmother. He had been withdrawn from the village primary school on account of extreme poverty and made to earn his living by watching the repair of sails and rigging on behalf of his uncle who was one of the many contractors for such jobs on the quayside.

The penniless, orphaned, unpromising, semi-literate and sickly boy was Fakirmohana Senapati. He was born in 1847 and is now accepted as the Father of modern Oriya literature. As poet, novelist, administrator, scholar, social reformer, printer, journalist, businessman, and patriot he had a romantic career that appears stranger even than the grand fiction with which he has so abundantly enriched his language. This genius had only about two years' formal education to his credit, but became later an erudite scholar in at least four or five Indian languages, including Sanskrit. He acquired also an excellent working knowledge of English, all by his own efforts. Through sheer mental brilliance, efficiency and other outstanding abilities, this semi-educated man made intimate friendships with Britishers of the highest rank and became the Dewan of several of the ex-native states of Orissa. Born and brought up in a medieval environment, he was
remarkably receptive to modern ideas. Unassociated with
the Government in any way, Fakirmohana, all by himself,
was the pioneer in propaganda for the co-operative movement
which was just reaching this country from the West. He was
the first among the Oriyas to set up a printing press and
publish a journal as a private enterprise and that too on
modern jointstock basis, taking the then British Commissioner
of Orissa Division as one of the shareholders. He says in his
autobiography that on the day his printing press began to
operate at Balasore, the entire bazar closed down and half
the Government officials took casual leave to see the miracle.
For many days, rich folk from the countryside came in palan-
quins to see Senapati’s printing press in action—the first
in the whole of Orissa outside Cuttack.

Wherever he was, Senapati made a mark as an ad-
ministrator also, cleverly tackling many a knotty problem
of revenue administration, inter-state disputes, personal
problems of the chiefs, even quelling revolts and rebellions.
When he was Assistant Manager of Keonjhar State (now
Keonjhar district, celebrated for its extremely rich minerals)
the Bhuyans, an ancient tribe peculiar to the State, rose
in rebellion. The Raja fled to Cuttack, leaving his family
in the state capital to shift for themselves. But Fakirmohana,
always lion-hearted though physically weak, stayed on in
the interest of the Rani and other ladies in the palace. To
forestall attacks on the palace by the tribals that were expected
every day, Senapati, true to his family surname which means
‘general’, collected a ragged battalion of the State militia
that had long forgotten warfare, and marched with them
on an elephant to meet the rebels in their jungle hold-out.
But betrayed by the scout he had relied on, he was entrapped
in a mountain pass by the rebels, numerically far superior
and with superior dispositions on both sides of the mountain.
He was taken and imprisoned in the jungle headquarters
of the rebels and might easily have lost his head but for his
mother wit. He told the silly-headed rebel chief that he was
sure to win and that he, Fakirmohana, would assist him in
the administration when he got the gaddi of Keonjhar.
After winning the rebels’ complete confidence he obtained
the chief’s permission to send a message to his personal
servant asking for a supply of pan and areca nut, which was not easily available in that deep jungle and to which both Senapati and the rebel chief were addicts. The letter was ingeniously worded like this:

'This is to inform Bholanath, my agent, that he must somehow despatch at least one hundred leaves of betel and two hundred pieces of betal nut. He should also have a ditch cut from the north to irrigate the sugarcane field, otherwise the sugar crop will be lost altogether.'

This letter, coming from the missing Assistant Manager, soon reached the hands of the authorities. Fakirmohana had closed the letter with three bits of wire. That was interpreted as a suggestion to send wires to Government. The ditch from the north was understood correctly as a request to bring Government forces from the district of Singhbhum in the north. The betal leaves were understood to be soldiers and the betel nuts to be bullets or guns. Action was accordingly taken and the rebellion was quelled in a few days.

*Senapati’s Autobiography*

Much of this highly romantic and exciting career would have remained completely unknown to posterity, had not Fakirmohana, yielding to the persistent persuasion of his friends and admirers, consented to write his autobiography during the sunset of his life at Balasore. This *Atmacharita* is as interesting as any book of fiction. It may safely be taken to be one of the few really great autobiographies in the whole of Indian literature. Here are a few lines from an early chapter in which he describes the golden age of India that is lost for ever in spite of Bapuji’s life-long struggle to restore it.

'In those days, the salary of Government officers in the Collectorate ranged from three to ten rupees only. But with that the people lived happily. Goods in daily use were cheap indeed. Here are some instances: Rice, 1½ maunds per rupee; Moong dal 10 as. per maund; oil, 7 seers per rupee; ghee 3 seers per rupee; fish 1 to 2 seers for just one payasa. Only the rich and the upper class officers wore the fine cloth that was being manufactured at Balasore. People in the moffusil used rough home-spun, spinning their own yarn. Only those
who had no ladies at home to spin purchased clothes from the market. In the countryside everybody had a small cotton plantation in their backyard and everybody in the family possessed a charkha. The yarn was handed over to local weavers who made the required cloth at the rate of a pice per cubit.

Fakirmohana lived up to the good old age of eighty, honoured by all sections of the people. As a mark of gratitude for his deathless contributions to the nation, he was elected President of the Utkal Sammilani at its second session. This was an unusual and unique honour for a man of letters. His well-planned garden house at Balasore is now a place of pilgrimage for Oriyas. He died in 1918.

His Works

As has already been said, Fakirmohana seems to have been quite innocent of the ambition for literary fame. He acted according to the exigencies of the occasion. Authorship for him was far from a planned career.

His fame now solidly rests on his novels. But for thirty years before his first novel, he wrote poetry incessantly. The prose that he wrote in this period was confined to a few text-books. To meet the lack of text-books in Oriya when the first few schools were started, young Senapati busied himself to save the prestige of his mother-tongue and produced biographies, a highly entertaining History of India in two volumes, even a book on arithmetic, getting sumptuous rewards from Government for all. Barring these, however, his literary output during the three decades, from 1866 when his first text-book appeared up to 1902 when his first full-length novel was published in book form, was an enormous amount of poetry. Not to speak of numerous other pieces, Senapati translated single-handed the whole of the Ramayana and the Mahabharata from the original Sanskrit into Oriya verse, just to beguile the melancholy hours of his second wife after the loss of their first child. This is indeed an amazing feat of both physical and mental labour for one man to perform—labour that is generally the lifework of an entire team! The Senapati Ramayana and four of the 18 Parvas of the Mahabharata were published and were
very popular with the educated people of Orissa of those days. Efforts are now afoot to reprint these translations.

Besides these epics, he made special verse translations of the Chhandogya and other Upanishads, of the Bhagavad Gita and the Hari-vamsa also and wrote out in popular verse the fundamental principles of the co-operative movement. He wrote, late in life, an epic as well on the Buddha.

His first original poem Utkala Bhramanam (Tours of Orissa) appeared in 1892. It is not a travel-book really but an unusually unorthodox and humorous survey of the contemporary personalities in Orissa’s public life, with praise, admiration, satire and condemnation distributed duly to each. It was written at a stretch while the poet was travelling on elephant back on an official journey and, when published soon after, took Orissa by storm. The authorship was kept anonymous at the beginning but discerning readers easily discovered who the author was. Fifty years after it still remains as entertaining as it was to contemporary readers.

His other original poems published in different anthologies are ‘Pushpa-mala’ (The garland), ‘Upahar’ (Gifts), ‘Abasarbasare’ (Days of idleness), ‘Pujaphula’ (Flowers of worship), ‘Prarthana’ (Prayer) and ‘Dhuli’ (Dust grains). Numerous as they are, these poems seldom reach great heights, but their naive simplicity, flowing felicity of versification and their depth of sincerity cannot fail to touch the hearts of readers. Their variety and range, considering the poet’s lack of formal education, is indeed amazing. They include excellent story-poems for children, satires on dead customs, poems on natural objects, hymns and prayers, poems on the eternal questions of life as also on famous personalities, and incidents of international history. The excellent short and long poems in these collections, those on Josephine, Jesus Christ, the Rape of Lucretia, Cleopatra, Tukaram and on the Russo-Japanese war of 1905 clearly display an unusually liberal mind. His friends, Radhanatha and Madhusudana, in spite of their western education which Fakirmohana lacked, have not dared to go beyond Orissa or India for subjects for their literary creations. They stuck to ‘poetic’ topics only. But Senapatii lifted all manner of subjects under the sun into the charmed sphere of poetry. If he is the greatest novelist of
the common man in Orissa he is also the greatest poet of the common thing.

In this motley poetic crowd, however, the poems written in memory of his second wife, the virtuous Krishnakumari for whose beguilement he translated both the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, clearly stand out as great, warm with the tears of a devoted, admiring and disconsolate husband. The dedicatory piece to Pushpa-mala (The garland) may kindle noble passion in the hearts of true lovers anywhere in the world. Here are the first few lines.

Beautiful Krishnakumari, the queen of my cottage,
Eternal sweetheart, dear as life and my constant 
companion!
You, the apple of my eye, have departed from me,
Leaving your virtues intermingled in the blood of my 
heart.

Never have I come across a more virtuous Lady than 
your good self
Never a wife more faithful to her lord.
The full moon have I often watched in the blue heavens,
The pearls of dew on roses and lotuses in full bloom,
But these are not so beautiful as were your tears
That I saw flow when you were in communion with the

Divine.

I feel now as though that peaceful face and those quiet 
closed eyes of yours

Have spread over the firmament.
At night, when the world was quiet and we two
Sat on the terrace or in the garden,
And saw the moon and the stars up above
Float away in the sky, shedding heavenly light all
round,

I felt that we two
Were like twin Stars up in the sky above.

The poems ‘She departed with smiles but left me dis-
consolate with tears’, or ‘Shall I see that smiling face again?’
or ‘Can anybody tell me where my companion is gone?’
are vibrant with the deep-felt emotion and the great love 
that only a poet’s soul is capable of.

The poet has said in so many words that after the passing
away of this great woman who happened to be his second wife, life was a desolate desert for him and he bewails that he survives her—which he did a good number of years.

*His Novels and Stories*

During his long and chequered career Senapati used to write short stories off and on and publish them in periodicals. They are not many, but each is a gem and reveals a strange new world. Two of them, relating to sea-trade at Balasore, are without parallel in Oriya. Born at Balasore, Fakirmohana was familiar with the sailing ships in his boyhood days, so that we feel the tumult of waves and smell the brine in these stories. In others we meet just simple country folk, or those upstarts who, under the false light of westernism, started hating all that was native and came to grief. His first short story ‘Lachhmania’ was published in a local magazine at Balasore in 1868 and is supposed by some to have been among the first modern short stories in Indian languages. The story ‘Patent medicine’ provides rollicking fun by describing how a good lady brought her erring husband to his senses with her broomstick, as a desperate measure. ‘Ananta, the widow’s spoilt darling’ is a fine story of the only son of a virago of a widow. Through the indulgence of his mother he turned out a nuisance to all and sundry in the village, the village teacher not excluded, but when the village was menaced with flood it was he, the loafer, that threw himself into the breach of the river embankment with a hastily wrenched-off door on his head, and inspired the assembled villagers to throw sods of earth as quickly as possible round about him. The villagers, in their enthusiasm, worked like blind furies, the bund was restored, but it was discovered too late that the widow’s only son had quietly allowed himself to be buried alive in order to save the village. The mother swept to the scene like a storm and disappeared into the swirling river.

All the other stories of Senapati, like these two, have a unique character of their own, each revealing an unsuspected dark corner of society. The stories, on the whole, are not personal so much as social, coloured with humour and dignified with a subtle moral.
Senapati's novels appear as the natural development of his story-writing. The strong individualistic style which made him unique among contemporary writers and popular with the general reader, was fruitfully developed in his stories through a long period. This style Senapati used spontaneously while dealing with the common folk. But his pen was also capable of writing in as grand a manner as any, if and when the occasion arose. The way he put the speech of the common folk to unexpected and effective use will forever remain a literary miracle. That Senapati did not have a good formal education was a great blessing to him as well as to his language. Nobody could have even imagined the folk speech of Orissa to be worthy of literary use if Senapati had not used it successfully. Compared to the over-Sanskritised style of Bankimchandra, the Bengali novelist and almost a contemporary of Fakirmohana, his adoption of the scorned common speech as a literary vehicle was certainly a daring literary adventure.

Like his style, Senapati drew the characters for his stories and novels also out of the common depressed multitude. This undoubtedly entitles him to be called the first proletarian writer in modern India. He anticipates Premchand's Godan, for example, by more than half a century, in his Chhamana athaguntha\(^1\) (Six acres and eight decimals). This novel is a masterpiece of realistic fiction, depicting the sad victimisation of an innocent couple of weavers by the village money-lender. The story in outline is this:

Ramachandra Mangaraja was a poor orphaned boy of the village Sarsandha in the district of Cuttack. Entering into petty business in his childhood he determined, as a sort of revenge for his misfortunes, to be rich at any cost. His village belonged to an estate whose Moslem landlord was living a dissipated life in distant Bengal, never visiting his rural estate but demanding regular payments to maintain his luxury. The wily Mangaraja succeeded through subterfuges in becoming the sole rent-collector of the estate, a very important office in a rural area. And in a few years, he completely outwitted his master, and got the estate for

\(^1\) Selected by the Sahitya Akademi for translation into all other Indian languages.
himself by paying the arrear rent at an auction. Not content with that, Mangaraja in his mad craze for aggrandizement started acquiring land and other properties from all sorts of people by fair means or foul. He became the biggest money-lender in the area and the hardest-hearted at that. In a village close to Mangaraja’s, there was an old settlement of weavers. They had as hereditary headman one Bhagia, a simple soul, who had some six acres and eight decimals of land for his honorarium. Simpler still was his wife Saria. They had no children and the object of Saria’s intense love and devotion was Neta, a lovely black cow. Mangaraja’s evil eyes fell on Bhagia’s six acres and eight decimals of land, the most fertile and consolidated piece of paddy fields in the area, now adjacent to his own ever-increasing fields. Champa, a devil of a woman, was Mangaraja’s maidservant and conscience-keeper. Engaged by Mangaraja to bring simple Bhagia and Saria under his control so as to get their fertile land, this woman made overtures to childless Saria, raising hopes in the simple woman of having a child if she persuaded her husband to build a small temple to the village goddess (who was lying beneath a banyan tree). Champa easily caught the simple weaver couple in her net. They mortgaged their six acres and eight decimals of land to Mangaraja to obtain the funds needed for the temple. But soon came demands for repayment of the loan. Saria’s dear little cow was snatched away to pay interest alone. Saria, in despair, went to Mangaraja’s house and lay down on his back verandah, refusing to take food. This did not move the stony heart of the money-lender and Saria died of starvation. And Bhagia turned mad in these tragic circumstances. The police came to investigate Saria’s death and arrested Mangaraja. After a trial he was sentenced to hard labour. But one day mad Bhagia somehow got out of the asylum which, in those days, was inside the jail and, catching sight of Mangaraja, tried to bite off his nose and limbs. Mangaraja was seriously hurt and developed high fever. He was released from the jail to die ultimately in the courtyard of his own empty and deserted house, repeating over and over again these last half-articulate words: ‘Six acres, eight decimals’, ‘Six acres, eight decimals’.
During the absence of Mangaraja in jail, Champa, the wicked maidservant, having cleverly secured the keys from her master as he was being led away by the police, collected all the money and jewels she could carry and, taking Govinda, a barber servant of the house as her escort and the sharer of the loot, left for an unknown destination. At a lonely wayside inn, they stopped for a night and started quarrelling about which of them most deserved the loot. Govinda was no match for Champa in a battle of words. He sat sullen outside, refusing food. At midnight he took out his razor and murdered sleeping Champa and taking the bundle of money and jewellery ran to the river ghat to escape in a ferry boat. While the boat was in midstream, dawn came and the boatman’s eyes fell upon the blood stains on Govinda’s clothing and he began to question him closely. In the meantime the postal runner was seen on the opposite bank. Apprehending certain arrest Govinda jumped into the river, with all the ill-gotten money and valuables of Ramacanhdhra Mangaraja, never to rise again.

His *Prayaschitta* (Expiation) is a picture of the tragedy that came upon a new-fangled English-educated youth through his nonchalant defiance of the old order of things in India. His *Mamu* (Uncle) is another picture-gallery illustrating the battle of good and evil and the ultimate redemption of a fallen soul through repentance. His *Lachhma* is a historical novel bringing to life the horrors of Maratha depredations in Bengal and Orissa in the 18th century. In and through the political and military manoeuvres of the opposing war-lords in this book, Senapati has cleverly woven the romantic career of lovely Lachhma, an up-country girl, who lost her entire family at the hands of the Bargi highwaymen, while on pilgrimage to Puri. Her trials and tribulations fill the reader’s mind with deep compassion and when at last, at a strategic moment which she had contrived, she kills the notorious Bargi leader Bhaskar Pandit, the reader’s mind fills with admiration for her.

Taken as a whole, the novels of Fakirmohana cover about a century of pre-British and post-British Orissa. The gradual metamorphosis is clearly visible in his pages to
any student of sociology. But its value is not merely chronolog-
ical. Senapati had the rare gift of great writers, that of
blowing life into his characters. Objectively judged, his
novels must appear to any discerning reader to suffer from
looseness of construction. The plots were not very well-knit
and the building-up shows signs of hurried and even hapha-
azard work. But all that is amply made up for by the extraor-
dinarily clever and creative sculpturing. In the arena of his
story we see men and women marvellously alive, as they
move—men and women just like ourselves or like those whom
we have so often met in our day-to-day life. That speaks
well indeed for the perennial charm of his novels and their
verisimilitude to life, although nearly half a century has
already passed since they were written.

The novels of Senapati have an appeal also for their high
spiritual quality. They were written in the author’s mature
years. So, we miss in them the youthful romance that is the
core of many masterpieces in world literature, but they are
splendid love stories all the same. We also come across
terrible crimes. In Chhaman athaguntha there is the murder
already mentioned and its trial. The depiction of both is so
graphic that when the novel came out serially in the monthly
magazine ‘Utkala Sahitya’, people from the countryside
ran to witness the supposed trial with their own eyes in the
law-court at Cuttack. There are similar crimes in other
novels too. But these novels are not merely crime and punish-
ment, but error and redemption. The personalities err,
realise their mistakes and try to expiate through repentance
and grace. Senapati never misses an opportunity to bring
to our notice the presence of the Divine in human affairs.
At appropriate places and situations in both Mamu and
Prayashchita, he arranges illuminating discussions on the
eternal verities of life, which immediately raise the mere
stories to the level of the great life of which the world’s
masterpieces in literature are made. And like all other
master-minds Senapati, even in the presence of the Divine,
could also laugh heartily. He had an uncanny awareness
of the hypocritical, the sham and the absurd in life.
People in Orissa generally read his novels and stories
to have a hearty laugh, besides, of course, to enjoy the
story. His novels are sublime through the common humour of life.

**Thomas Hardy of Orissa**

With his masterly handling of rustic speech, his dealing mostly with the common folk, closely attached to nature and the soil, but making the universal real to us even through these illiterate ragamuffins, Senapati reminds us, among western novelists, of Thomas Hardy whose part-contemporary he was. Like Hardy Senapati was both a poet and a novelist and like Hardy he wrote masterpieces of fiction using genuine low characters from the rural and urban areas. But the big difference between Senapati and any other important literary hero is that here was a man who both saved a language and enriched it like a master-craftsman, although he at no time in his life entertained any ambition for fame as a great writer. His only dream, throughout his life, was to serve the people among whom he was born.

For having translated both the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* single-handed, and also for his versatility in the world of letters, readers in Orissa dubbed Fakirmohana as Vyasa-Kavi. Later on, the Durbar of Bamanda State, famous for literary culture, also conferred on him the enviable title of Saraswati. Hence he is generally known in Orissa as Saraswati Fakirmohana. Few indeed deserve such a title as much as he did. His only shortcoming was that he was born with terrible handicaps for a writer, and that too in a backward state.

**RADHANATHA RAY**

**His Life**

Radhanatha was born of cultured parents in the village of Kedarpur in north Balasore in 1848. He was sickly all through his life and had to give up advanced studies in Calcutta, away from home, for that reason. He was the first boy to pass the Matriculation examination of the newly established Calcutta University in the whole district of Balasore and when, so says Fakirmohana in his autobiography, the wonderful news reached the Balasore Collectorate
where his father Sundara Ray was a clerk, the latter's semi-literate colleagues started whispering among themselves that if that sickly boy of Sundara Babu could pass the Matriculation examination, then it was not as wonderful a feat as they had imagined it to be! Radhanatha entered life as a teacher in a Government School and on account of his efficiency rose up and up in the official hierarchy, retiring as a Divisional Inspector of Schools. In his private life Radhanatha was a prince among men, humble in spite of great learning and still greater literary fame, unobtrusive and quiet. He was almost deified by contemporary society for his innumerable secret charities and his other great qualities of head and heart.

Late in life the poet suffered a moral lapse, and its reaction on his sensitive mind, till then uncontaminated, was so violent that he almost outraged social decency by making it a public affair by the distribution of a confessional tract. He has left hot tears of remorse and repentance also in his poem, 'To a faithful wife from a faithless husband'.

Radhanatha was very well read in several languages and was admired both for his scholarship and his poetic talents by many of his famous contemporaries in Bengal. The Bengali poet Nabin Chandra Sen, and Bhudeva Mukhopadhyaya, the famous educationist and thinker, have left fine eulogistic poems on him.

When Radhanatha was about 20 and was at Balasore as Deputy Inspector of Schools, Madhusudana Rao, his former student and favourite at the Zilla School of Puri, came also to Balasore to work as a teacher in the Government High School there. Fakirmohana was already there, the restless leader of all sorts of movements for the uplift of his people. The three together ushered in the new era in Oriya literature round about 1866.

**Orissa's Lyrical Ballads**

Contrary to the dreams of a section of Bengali officials, the Government, as a result of the popular agitation organised by Gourisankara Ray (brother of Ramasankara Ray, the pioneer novelist and dramatist) at Cuttack and by young Fakirmohana Senapati and the now forgotten Govinda
Chandra Patnaik at Balasore, ordered the discontinuation of the study of Bengali in all schools and its replacement by the compulsory study of Oriya all over the Orissa Division. But there were no text-books in Oriya available at that time. The three friends at once set about removing the deficiency. Fakirmohana wrote and published books on history and arithmetic and Radhanatha and Madhusudana tried their hands at literature.

Their co-operative product, *Kabitabali*, is comparable to the ‘Lyrical Ballads’, produced jointly by Wordsworth and Coleridge, which ushered in a new age in English literature in the late 18th century. In this slender volume, the majority of the small poems were from the pen of Madhusudana, but there is no doubt that in this adventure both the teacher and the pupil suddenly discovered themselves as original poets. Before this, Radhanatha had only published the Oriya translation of Kalidasa’s *Meghadutam*. A finer and more musical translation of that great Sanskrit classic it may be difficult to find in any Indian language. And in *Benisamhara*, a long narrative poem on a well-known incident from the *Mahabharata* which appeared in *Kabitabali* as one of Radhanatha’s three contributions, we see clearly the budding of the fine narrative poet that he ultimately became.

*Great Narrative and National Poet*

Radhanatha is essentially a narrative poet, a *kavya*-maker *par excellence*. He, in fact, may be taken as a modernised Upendra Bhanja whose superior he is supposed to be by his admirers. As a matter of fact, stormy controversies raged for a time in Orissa’s literary circles round this imaginary poetic rivalry between dead Upendra and living Radhanatha. Radhanatha, in true humility, made a public statement that he himself was a student and admirer of Upendra’s poetry.

For over half a century Radhanatha’s *kavyas* were definitely more popular in Orissa than even the novels of Fakirmohana Senapati. The secret lay in the fact that Ray’s *kavyas* were also highly entertaining fiction, presented in the magic casket of alluring poetry. He wrote like Upendra
Bhanja and his followers but with significant departures and innovations. While the kavyas of Upendra and his followers were dictional and metrical exercises and displayed conventional sentiments, those of Radhanatha had the galvanism of genuine young love and warm lyrical quality. The tales he introduced were absolutely new, much closer to reality than those of the medieval kavya-makers, and yet no less romantic. The background to these new tales was modern and familiar to the educated, and in and through the narration the poet touched, at appropriate moments, the new chords of patriotism in the hearts of the Oriyas—something the ancients and the medievalists had not cared for, except Sarala Dasa in a rough sort of way. And with all the delights of a medieval romance as abundantly provided in a kavya of Radhanatha as in any of Bhanja’s, the reader was spared the bother of constantly referring to a glossary or a dictionary to get the meaning. Radhanatha wrote his romantic poems like Scott and Tennyson, for the common reader, unlike Bhanja and his followers who expressly wrote for the ‘learned, the élite, and those who could understand’. These were the new qualities that made Radhanatha as popular in modern Orissa as any great medieval poet. He became the darling equally of the dry-as-dust pandit and the fresh young bride behind the purdah. Perhaps no other modern poet in India has had the popularity that has been enjoyed by Radhanatha with the exception of Tagore in Bengal.

Radhanatha took his stories from many sources—the mythologies of Greece and Rome, the Puranas, and the oral tradition as well as the history of Orissa. The way he metamorphosed the foreign tales into Orissan stories is indeed a marvel. Practically all his kavyas have the Orissan landscape as their stage. Though Orissa is one of the most picturesque states in India, the Oriya poets in old and medieval times had no eye for the natural magnificence on their door-step—the sea, the romantic hills of Meghasana, Mahendra and Malyagiri, the broad rivers, the primordial forests, and the lovely lakes of their own land. Engrossed with ‘holiness’ only, as derived from Rama and Krishna stories, they sang ad nauseum of the places and objects of nature associated with
those divine heroes which they had never seen with their own eyes—the river Yamuna or the Govardhana hill or Naimisaranya for example. For the first time in the whole history of Oriya literature, nature in Orissa spoke and became an integral part of Orissa’s national consciousness through the modern romantic poetry of Radhanatha. As a poet of nature Radhanatha has done for Orissa what Kalidasa did for India, putting the geography and the topography of his homeland to splendid poetic use. As the Greeks did in respect of the Hellenic world, Radhanatha peopled the whole of Orissa with living gods and goddesses who took as lively an interest in human affairs. He endowed innumerable little spots in Orissa with significant living personalities of their own. He made Orissa, in short, a land of superb poetic beauty, a theatre for supernatural beings, a land of myths and legends, of handsome fighting heroes and lovely heroines. There is not a single celebrated mountain, river, lake, or historic or religious monument in Orissa which has not had a magical poetic baptism from Radhanatha’s pen. Almost anywhere a sensitive, educated Oriya moves, a few lines of Radhanatha’s poetry come naturally to his lips, aptly revealing the essence of the place he finds himself in. Radhanatha was almost worshipped in his time as the true national poet of Orissa, most deservedly.

The Story of Chandrabhaga

As an illustration of his eclectic craftsmanship and his extraordinary talent for myth-making, I would like to describe here the story of Chandrabhaga, one of the smallest but most charming of his early poems. It is the story of Apollo and Daphne, completely Indianised and based on the ruined temple of the Sun-god at Konaraka.

On the full moon day of the month of Pausha, all the heavenly as well as the terrestrial gods and goddesses came to the shrine of Jagannatha to pay their homage to the ‘Lord of the Universe’. They found Kamadeva, the Hindu Cupid, standing at the gate. They all kowtowed to him, for who was not afraid of the silly pranks of that mischievous boy? The last to arrive was the Sun-god ‘Surya’, with his nine planets. Completely ignoring the presence of Kamadeva
at the gate, he went straight in. This infuriated Kama, who decided to take vengeance on the haughty Surya, who had the false self-confidence, perhaps, to think himself immune from Cupid's shafts.

Not far from the temple of Surya at Konaraka, there lived a saint named Sumanyu in a lonely hermitage on the seashore. His only child was the daughter Chandrabhaga—a beauteous maiden who, in the innocence of youth, freely roamed about the sandy solitude. Under the spell cast by Cupid, the poor Sun-god, while getting out from his magnificent temple one day on his daily aerial journey, saw Chandrabhaga playing on the beach alone, and unable to control himself, ran after her in the form of a handsome human youth, appealing for her love. The girl, used only to the company of her saintly father, fled in fear from this strange suitor. Pursued by the Sun-god, she ran on and on, until, realising an escape to be impossible any longer, she plunged into the sea and disappeared. Disappointed and repentant, Surya returned to his temple, but was aghast to find his magnificent shrine in ruins, as a result of a curse for his crime, from Sumanyu, Chandrabhaga's hermit-father who in the meantime had come to know all that had happened.

This is the charming little story of the enchanting little lyrical-narrative poem of Chandrabhaga by Radhanatha. Actually the river Chandrabhaga (now silted up) once flowed past the Sun temple at Konaraka. The action of the Sun's rays on the water-surface of this river as it merged itself into the sea, might have been the basis also of this beautiful legend. Anyway, this clearly indicates how sensitive Radhanatha's imagination was in humanising nature myths or legends of far-off lands and times, absorbing them into romantic and colourful Orissan scenes.

Similarly, his other vivacious narrative poem 'Usha' is the story of Atalanta and the three golden apples, and the romantically pathetic 'Kedargauri' is that of Pyramus and Thisbe, both so naturally and artistically merged into Orissan society and landscape as to look as though they had actually happened here originally. Places have by now become celebrated in Orissa, because Radhanatha made them the sites of his romances.
The Nature Worshipper

But it is not as a poetical story-teller only that Radhanatha's special contribution to Oriya literature has to be judged. He was innately a devoted admirer of nature for her own sake. This element in him gave a real, precious novelty to Oriya literature, this love of nature for her own sake, a great spiritual quality, absolutely different from man's love for a woman. In the latter an elemental passion for possession and pleasure lies always hidden. Most oriental literatures practically overflow with it. Radhanatha introduced an illuminating and ennobling quality into a literature that was earthly with the desires and consummation of the sensuous, possessive, physical delight, except for a few rare pieces such as in the poetry of, say, Gopalakrishna. As Inspector of Schools, Radhanatha travelled widely and came in close touch with the wild, unharnessed and grand natural scenery of Orissa. He was shaken to his soul in wonder and admiration. To satisfy this keen new-found appetite for nature's charms, he also travelled all over India from the Himalayas down to Cape Comorin, taking long leave from Government work. When he returned with all that wonderful experience and saw the Chilka lake—the lake of beauty and wealth in Orissa—he burst into ecstatic poetry. It was as though he had never seen anything more beautiful before. So he says, in Chilka¹ his loveliest nature-poem; and compares the lovely little Chilka to a coy maiden companion, in contrast with the vast seas and the mighty Himalayas, in whose overpowering presence one feels one's individual entity practically lost. And not in Chilka alone, but in his other poems also, big and small, we find similar heartening and intimate touches of nature in illuminating word-pictures. Radhanatha is undoubtedly Orissa's greatest landscape painter in poetry.

But Radhanatha was not only a story-teller or a word-painter of nature or of beautiful women, though these are not very common powers in poetry even if detractors think any poetaster could have them all—and all through his life Radhanatha had some persistent detractors in Orissa from

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¹ Already translated into all other Indian languages by the Sahitya Akademi. 'Chilka' is the anglicised form. Radhanatha's poem is named 'Chilika' which is the Oriya form.
motives other than literary or aesthetic. This is most regrettably. Almost alone in the long history of Oriya literature, Radhanatha had the courage of genius to defy privilege and ruthlessly whip the powerful with his pen for their shortcomings. He is to be saluted for the fact that behind his quiet, cultured, humble and gentle exterior he kept the holy fire of righteous indignation burning. He aimed fiery arrows at the perpetrator of any human indignity that came to his notice from any quarter. This, I think, is integral—this holy fire—to all true genius. Radhanatha has revealed it in all his books, but in a concentrated form in the Durbar, where through satire, taunt, and direct condemnation he has torn to pieces the contemporary Rajas, Maharajas and such other glorified nincompoops who dominated society in his time as they do in all ages. He sets off against them the poor, indebted and sickly genius of the great Oriya astronomer, Samanta Chandrasekhara Simha.\(^1\) He was the only one worthy of admiration, in the whole durbar of padded nothings that temporary beaurocrats and dignitaries often are. The soulful tribute that the poet pays to the great astronomer should be the envy of any genius, and in the dignity of its diction, the width of its vision, and in the whole heartedness of its praise, this encomium rises to the heights of great poetry, becoming much more than a personal topic.

**The Mahayatra**

Radhanatha’s *magnum opus* is (or was to be, as he planned it) the epic *Mahayatra* (the Great Journey). It is the journey to heaven of the Pandavas, on which they set out after all was over with them on this earth. Radhanatha planned to complete this epic in thirty cantos, but there are now only seven cantos available. Rumour has it that the poet had actually finished twenty-one cantos, but (in spite of his being a Government servant) there was so much anti-British sentiment in the last few cantos, that the matter somehow came to the ear of the British authorities. The poet thereupon burnt the suspected portions and published the present incomplete

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\(^1\) Mentioned in the chapter on Oriasa's contribution to Sanskrit literature (Chap. XV)
version. Like Milton in the *Paradise Lost*, Radhanatha takes the Pandavas from Puri to the heights of the Sahyadri, the Western Ghats, in their itinerary of holy places in India; before they ascend the Himalayas, and there, through the divine vision provided by Agni, the fire-god, he unfolds before them the panorama of Indian history. The deterioration of the Aryans as a race under the spell of Kali, leading to the occupation of India by Moslem invaders, is the main theme of the epic in its incomplete form. It ends in the midst of the first battle of Panipat. The stirring speech of Amarsi, the Hindu General, to his wavering army is unforgettable:

Is this the land of the Aryas? And are you the sons and inheritors of the land of that noble race? Does the blood of those who refused to part with as much land as can be covered by the point of a needle, without fight, flow in your veins? . . . Alas, who can say why God entrusted this noble land, so wonderfully protected by nature with these gigantic Himalayas, to the hands of cowards like you? Alas, can it be possible that the jackal enter the lion’s den, snatch food from the lion’s mouth and go away after kicking him, and the lion stand it?

The whole epic is written in the finest of grand manners; in vigorous and sonorous blank-verse. The descriptions of battle engagements and of the different aspects of nature and the plight of degenerate Indian society are in the true epic style. Even in its incompleteness, this book is as grand as Konarak in ruins.

**RADHANATHA’S PROSE**

Radhanatha wrote prose also in a style all his own, clear, precise, yet colourful and full of keen observation. His *Viveki* (the Man of Conscience), in spite of its archaic style, is the finest book yet in Oriya, of day-to-day ethics. His *Last part of the Parvati* (which he could not complete in verse and finished in prose) is pure poetry. The present writer has read the book times without number for sheer aesthetic enjoyment, and he cannot resist the temptation of presenting here
just a little of the medieval pageantry of Orissa described in it when the tyrant-king Gangesvara Deva returns victorious to Puri after a scandalous expedition. The faithful palace eunuch (Kanchuki) shows the feudal notables of the empire to the noble Queen who, the same night, is to murder her immoral husband with her own hands. This is the Parvati kavya of Radhanatha, a powerful poem, with overflowing pathos of the deepest kind, and a soul-stirring romantic medieval atmosphere. It centres round an incestuous crime by an immoral king. Now for the pageantry—

Old Kanchuki and the Queen stood behind the topmost window of the palace and saw that as far as their eyes could travel, the main street of Puri glittered like gold with the reflections of the shields and coats of arms of the soldiers. And Kanchuki started to point out, one by one, the feudal chiefs who had joined in the procession from distant parts of the empire.

"Look, your Majesty, he who is the first in the procession and is seated in the howdah with the golden cupolas, on an elephant whose head is decorated with gold tassels, is the Brahmin king of Baudh. His fort lies in dense bamboo forests on the banks of the Mahanadi and is resonant with the ceaseless music of the waters of that great river as they strike against rocks in the river bed. In front of him goes his famous battalion of Khonds brandishing bows in one hand and hatchets in the other and dancing to music. They hail from valleys green with turmeric plantations, deep inside primordial forests. After him comes the Raja of Angul who resides in a hill-fort surrounded by elephant-filled forests. His country is famous for horses and his army consists mainly of cavalry and infantry. After him is the Chief of Talcher, the steps of whose forest-clothed palace are washed by the waters of the picturesque Brahmani river. Look at his banner, your Majesty, and see how it is painted with the picture of the fiery goddess Hingula. His bearded infantry are noted for skilful wielding of the spear. After him rides the Raja of Malyagiri, the highest mountain in the empire. When we invaded his fort he took shelter in the cloud-capped heights of the great mountain. And now see, your Majesty, there comes along the Raja of Banapura whose
soldiers have painted bodies and heads decorated with the red feathers of the flamingoes of the Chilka lake. He is the Lord of Chilka, the lake that abounds in fish and whose waves are furrowed day and night by his innumerable ships. He divides his days between his hill-forts and his water-forts beside the Chilka.

MADHUSUDANA RAO, THE POET SAINT

If a traveller happens to stop at a school in any part of Orissa, he will hear prayers recited and hymns sung by the boys in the hostels after they have lighted their meagre oil-lamps in the evening. And sure enough he will find that one of the hymns ends with:

Lead me on the path of truth and piety, Oh Lord,
Bathe me with the showers of Thine love,
    Be my Refuge great,
And accept the complete surrender of this life of mine
    At Thine feet:

That is by Madhusudana Rao, Orissa’s great modern spiritual poet, in the line of Jagannatha Dasa, Arakshita Dasa, and Bhima Bhoi. His songs, lyrics, odes, sonnets and essays have exercised an excellent purifying influence on the minds of young pupils of Orissa for the last 60 years or so. Passages of his poetry and prose are part of the make-up of the average cultured Oriya. Whatever Madhusudana wrote, from little couplets and quatrains in children’s primers—a line in which he was most successful, born teacher that he was—to much more serious, literary and patriotic odes, hymns and sonnets, has a feeling and an atmosphere of purity and loftiness, breathing the air of high idealism and life divine. Because of this inherent dignity, even the A.B.C. Primer in Oriya (Varnabodha) that he compiled has become a classic of its kind. No change in methodology and no amount of new-fangled substitutes have been able to affect the popularity of Madhu Rao’s Varnabodha, which has sold by the thousands every year for the last sixty years or so, initiating millions of Oriyas, decade after decade, into the
mysteries of the letters. And even in this A.B.C. Book the poet-saint puts lines as highly elevating as these into the mouths of the tiny tots:

The great Lord of the world sees, every moment,
Whatever I do and say—and even think—
I shall forever worship Him:
He than whom there is no greater
Is always with me:

Madhusudana was born in 1853, into a devout Hindu family in Puri. In early youth he became a Brahmo and, for about half a century, was not only the finest representative of that non-conformist faith in Orissa, but was associated with all the social and religious reforms in the land. He studied up to the First Arts examination of those days and started life as a teacher in a Government School, retiring as a Divisional Inspector of Schools, like his guru Radhanatha. He died in 1912. It was he who founded the Utkal Sahitya Samaj, now the only literary institute of Orissa with a house and office of its own. Two high schools, one at Cuttack and another at Bhubaneswara, the new capital of Orissa, are named after him.

We have already learnt before how, out of the physical proximity as well as the spiritual interaction of the three friends, Fakirmohana, Radhanatha and Madhusudana at Balasore, the new era of Oriya literature was ushered into existence and how in 1873 Kabitabali (Lyrical ballads), containing poems from both Radhanatha and Madhusudana, was published. The majority of the poems in this collection were by Madhusudana. Even these early poems indicated the nature of the poet’s mind—he was not meant for the common soil, but for heavenly flights.

Madhusudana had no poetic ambition as such. He never attempted anything planned or voluminous. His works consist of a large number of small pieces, all written in response to the call of the occasion. He was essentially a preacher and a teacher, who made use of the literary vehicle for publicising his ideas, reflections and visions. Naturally, true inspiration is lacking in many of his poems, their main features
being high dignity of expression and the impact of a pure soul. But at times, the inspired mood did come. These were the moments when the saint's soul experienced its unity with the Divine it was searching for. In these rare moments the saint burst into magnificent poetry. His 'Rishi prane devavatara' (Descent of the Divine into the soul of a saint) and 'Himachale Udayoschhava' (Festival of sunrise in the Himalayas) are illustrations of such creative intuitions.

In the first of these two poems, for instance, the poet describes the workings in the mind of a Vedic saint who comes down to the river Satadru (Sutlej) for ablutions in the small hours of a full-moon night. The whole world is mystical with the fading moonbeams. A faint glimmer of the dawn is rising on the eastern horizon. Behind the saint tower the snowcapped, eternal Himalayas. In this world of mystic light and enveloping whiteness the saint, standing on the bank of the holy Satadru, has a mystic experience, the beatific vision of the world-soul interpenetrating his own, and the whole universe. And he bursts into a grand hymn, of which here are only a few lines in indifferent translation:

Who indeed art Thou, Oh Lord,
That are greater than the greatest,
And revealest Thyself in filling this my soul
And this vast universe with immortal light?
Art thou the Lord of this Earth and the Heavens
Whom the worlds worship in joy ecstatic?

The days, nights, seasons and years
And moments too all worship Thee.
Thou art the blazing fire of glory, and
He at whose command these white Himalays stand,
And he at whose impulsion the saints of yore
Worshipped nature as the symbol of thy power.

I percieve now that Thou art Lord of this soul too,
And Father and Mother as well, of the myriad creations.
Victory to Thee, All-beneficent God of Gods.
Source and embodiment of Truth and Beauty!
Welcome to Thee that radiatest immortality!
Penetrate Thou mine heart and let this mine soul entire
Resound with Thine holy words!
But Madhusudana was not a mere walker in the clouds. He was a practical teacher and educationist and was the maker of a host of good teachers in Orissa; as Principal of the Secondary Teachers’ Training School at Cuttack for about two decades. Living in the spacious days of Queen Victoria, he believed in the progress of man, and he worked for it. His words, uttered at the start of this century, have not lost their value and significance in this still bungling world of ours:

O Humanity, listen to the New Message of the New Times,
Of the One Great Creator and His one human family,—
Asia, Europe and Africa are now linked with America,
Forming the Assembly of the World in accordance with
the law of our Lord.

Listen to words of amity and friendship,
Uttered by the East and the West and the North and the South.

All this is written in a splendid, grand manner. When it was translated into Bengali, Tagore felt he heard the true Vedic accent in the lines of ‘Rishi prane devavatara’. All Madhusudana’s famous odes, ‘To the Sky’, ‘To the Earth’, ‘To Sound’, ‘To the River’, etc., possess the same dictional and spiritual loftiness. The first few stanzas of his ode ‘To the Sky’ strongly remind us of the Creation Hymn of the Rigveda:

When this picturesque world was not,
Nor the sun, the moon, nor the stars,
Nor this Earth, the home of multiple life,
And All was clothed with darkness,

When Eternity had no ripples on it,
And there was no happening in the sea of Time
The creation was formless, without even the Idea,
Merged in dense, total darkness;

When the creative drama of life had not yet started,
And the causeless Cause alone was awake,
Beyond Time and Space and Mind and Speech,
Thou endless Ether, spread in vast expanse,
However, didst exist that time
Surrounding the all pervasive Primeval Darkness,
Coeval with the First cause,
To think of which vastness, this mind gets stilled indeed!

That is how the poet-saint generally sang—like an oracle, speaking the language of scriptures. For the purity of his life, scholarship and religious enthusiasm, Madhusudana was generally spoken of in Orissa as Bhakta-kavi and was almost worshipped in his time by the educated masses in Orissa.

Madhusudana was also the only sonneteer in Oriya in his times. All his sonnets were published together under the title of Basant-gatha or the ‘Vernal Songs’. Technically they are all in the Petrarchian pattern, though no Laura is there to cast her magic spell on the readers. The subjects are reflections on nature and panegyrics to celebrities. Only a few give a glimpse of the poet’s soul. The most celebrated of them all contains the following inspiring idea:

He who has not lost anything precious
Is indeed the destitute in this world,
And poorer still is the wretch
Who forgets the dear thing he has lost.

Wretchedest of all is he who,
Having lost something precious, tries to forget it.
But he is rich beyond measure who
Keeps burning the lamp of love
In the midst of the thick darkness of bereavement
And remembers the beloved in night-long vigils.

Madhusudana’s prose, mostly to be found in the essays in his text-books (these were the only literary Readers in Orissa for generations) was once accepted as the norm for good literary style. But now it has been discarded as antiquated and stylised, though its old-world elegance and dignity are beyond dispute in the cultural world.

Madhusudana has left an excellent translation of Uttararamacharita of Bhavabhuti. His other important books are all collections of poems: Kusumanjali, Utkala-gatha (songs and poems on Orissa), Brahma-Sangita and Basanta-gatha, the book of sonnets.
CHAPTER XIII

OTHER LIGHTS IN POETRY

The brilliant trio, Radhanatha, Madhusudana and Fakirmohana, had a host of followers in prose and poetry. Among them the following alone are important, for having made individual contributions of their own, in spite of carrying in their works marks of deep influence of their masters.

Chintamani Mohanty

He is the most prolific author in the whole period—maybe in the entire Oriya literature. There are about one hundred books to his credit and these too on all manner of subjects including even tracts on the cultivation of groundnut and red-pepper. He composed kavyas and ballads and short poems in any number and on all imaginable subjects and wrote novels, short stories and travelogues too. Starting life as a primary school teacher, he spent the best part of his life as the court poet of the Raja of Surangi in Ganjam district, making the very best use of his leisured occupation.

The general feeling about him is that his pen lacked that divine spark which is true poetic talent. His poetry was just readable and tolerable verse and is valued today for having taken under its wing men and matters that no other poet ever touched. He has, for instance, written kavyas of considerable length on Ghumusar, the taluk where Upendra Bhanja was born and on Surangi, the estate of his patron. There is a good deal of such poetised geography or descriptive writing on particular spots of beauty or historical or political units to his credit, such as Mahendragiri, Simharaj, Udayana Khanda, etc. His long descriptive poem on Mahendragiri, the picturesque mountain, celebrated in the Puranas as the hermitage of Parasurama, bears, however, the imprint of a sincere love of nature and moments of deep feeling. Divided into several cantos and written in blank-verse, it makes, for a nature-poem, excellent reading, as interesting
as a narrative. A teacher by profession, he tried to set up worthy ideals for the younger generation by placing before them poems on the ‘Seven Satis’, the ‘Aryan Heroines’, the ‘Seven Heroes’ and the like. His Visva-chitra or ‘Pictures of the world’ is a collection of story poems aiming at the exposition of the vanities of life.

The most important of his kavyas, however, are those on Vikramaditya, India’s greatest legendary monarch and on Mukunda Deva, the last Hindu king of Orissa. In these his poetic imagination and expression rise to quite respectable levels. Both works, almost epical in size, are written in vigorous blank-verse. In Vikramaditya he indeed rises to Olympic heights, perhaps because of the very nature of the subject, and gives his readers the vision of a noble soul and a noble king engaged in war and adventures. In one of his adventures the poet makes the Indian monarch even sail up the Red Sea and the Mediterranean Sea to give battle to the Romans!

The poet’s works are now available collectively in six enormous volumes.

_Nandakishor Bala, the Poet of the Orissa Village_

Like Radhanatha and Madhusudana, Nandakishor Bala also started life as a teacher and retired as Inspector of Schools. Born in the village Kusupur in the district of Cuttack, he came of a class that is closely attached to the soil and the village. This and his early upbringing in his native village made an indelible impression on the sensitive mind of the poet. For the first time in Oriya literature, a country-bred poet, in spite of his University education and residence in urban areas for the most part of his official career, sang of the village and the village folk, and wrote lyrics, lullabies, odes and ballads. He had a genuine spiritual and mental affinity with, and the true ring of, the folk-songs of Orissa. Like Fakirmohana’s adoption of rustic speech in literature, Nandakishor’s adoption of the metres, materials and imagery of folk-songs for modern lyrics was a definite innovation and an excellent artistic contribution, bringing the smell of the soil and the village into the sophisticated atmosphere of modern poetry. Nandakishor’s _Palli-chitra_ (Vignettes of the
village) is a real pageant of Orissan village life, enchantingly and nostalgically worked into a befittingly slow-moving narrative metre, and in simple, elegant diction. It is a small volume, but a great poem. The procession of the old chhatsala (village school) with its cane-wielding Abadhan (schoolmaster), the terror of the village children, the bluffing, talkative village barber, the village minstrel who sings, to the accompaniment of the mono-stringed kendra, the ballad of the Yogi-prince Govindachandra, bringing tears to the eyes of soft-hearted housewives, the village haberdasher whose visits are keenly looked forward to by the womenfolk, the village priest who was once completely identified with the village, the village burning ghat, and other familiar scenes such as those of agriculture, pass before our mind’s eye with such vividness, creating such situations of humour and pathos, that they make this little poem a treasure in the memory of every cultured Oriya. Nandakishor wrote innumerable other poems and a few kavyas also on the lines of Radhanathya. But all of them are considered no more than second-rate imitation. He is gaining the singular estimation that he so richly deserves among all modern Oriya poets for his children’s poems and the poetisation of the Orissa village, in the spirit of Orissan folk-lore.

Here is a sample of his village-scape in poetry from Palli-chitra:

The Village Barn

At the end of the village are the barns where the harvest is gathered for threshing. The farmer guards the harvest at night, sleeping away from home in a temporary loft in the barn. He freely spins yarns about his experiences in the night, when he meets other folk next morning.

Close to the common barn lies the large village tank with red water-lilies in full bloom. The melodies and colours of the various water-fowl add to its enchantment.

The village folk generally gather here in the mornings for a full dose of gossip. Some smoke, some relate stories and others listen; some sneeze with the snuff they put into their nostrils and some wash their teeth at the water-side.

The barber, busy with his craft, tells stories of all lands;
the old talk of sastras and ethics; others talk only of matters
domestic, while some come to blows over trivialities.

The harvest lies scattered on the ground in sheaves still
half-wet. The poor farmer worries as he looks at them, for
they are the meagre source out of which he must support
his wife and children, meet the demands of the Mahajan,
and pay rent to the Government as well.

Nandakishor wrote also innumerable short poems on all
sorts of subjects, some reflective, some satiric, some patriotic,
but all with the deep stamp of a lyrical heart and a scholarly
and observant mind. His novel Kanakalata is also of the same
quality as his poetry—radiating the quiet, romantic aroma
of the village. The heroine, Kanakalata, blooms before our
eyes like a charming water-lily of the cool pellucid waters
of a village pond. Over all the works of Nandakishor, prose
or poetry, hangs a thin cloud of subtle melancholy—another
aspect of Indian village life. Thus this poet, in all that
he wrote, was the very embodiment of life in rural
Orissa.

Gangadhara Meher—The Classical Star

The popular poet Gangadhara Meher (1862-1924) is in
a class by himself. Mehers are the hereditary producers of
the famous Sambalpur textiles. He was born in one of such
poor Meher families in Barapalli in the district of Sambalpur.
Though he had very little formal education, he managed to
acquire an excellent knowledge of Sanskrit, Hindi, Bengali
and some amount of English also, all by his own efforts. For
a living, till very late in life, he had to follow the hereditary
vocation of weaving cloth and selling it personally in the
local ‘hat’. But he became famous all over Orissa after the
publication of his very first book Kichaka-vadha and therea-
fter his life became a little more comfortable, mainly because
the patriotic zamindar of Borasambar, living not far from
his village, became his life-long patron.

What distinguishes Meher from all other poets in Orissa
is his super-excellent craftsmanship. He turned whatever base
metal he touched into the finest gold through his alchemic
touch. He was not very original in his plots and patterns
and followed the usual forms of his predecessors; what distinguished this poor self-educated weaver from all of his fellow-writers was the way he excelled them in the singular and unprecedented artistry of his execution. The way he tackled the old metres and made them serve modern needs, the rhythmic elegance and aptness of his diction, his happy, faultless rhymings, the serene classical dignity that runs through his entire performance and above all, the rare insight he displays into the mind and soul of his characters, make him stand out among the whole galaxy of poets in Orissa. All aspects considered, Gangadhara may be taken as a miniature Kalidasa in Oriya literature. Kalidasa borrowed not only the characters but also similes, metaphors and descriptions from many of his predecessors and yet turned all that borrowed material into pictures of wondrous beauty, a beauty that had not been there before. Exactly the same process is discernible in the working of the poetic genius of this simple weaver of Sambalpur. An enormous quantity of poetry has been produced in Oriya on the portrayal of Sita, the ideal woman. But nothing in the whole of Oriya literature can surpass the beauty, charm and grandeur of Sita as she comes to life in Meher’s famous kavya, Tapasvini. This precious gem is set in such exquisite and delicate verbal jewellery as to make it impossible to translate without destroying the original artistry altogether. I have heard Pandit Lochana Prasad Pande of Raigarh (M.P.), the well-known Hindi litterateur, recite rapturously the sweet, sonorous lines from poet Meher, whom he knew personally. He even attempted translating Meher’s Kichaka-vadha as his brother Mukutadhari Pande had attempted translating Bhaktacharana Dasa’s Mathuramangal: but each found that the beauty and music of the Oriya original could not be carried into Hindi.

Meher not only wrote kavyas on right classical models, but also wrote odes, sonnets and lyrics on modern lines. As a matter of fact his originality finds truer expression in the shorter pieces than in his classical productions, the kavyas. In them we find that his vision and imagination touch all aspects of life, like nature, God, nationalism, the people, the wrongs of current society and what not. In spite of his
life-long poverty and hard struggle for existence, he sang:

Ye fellow-travellers, fail not to see
How beautiful this world of ours is!

Do not indeed a mother's affection, a wife's love,
The talk of friends and the counsel of the wise,
Drive away all the rigours of life that exist!
And do not the discoveries of perpetually new events,
Unveiling the mysteries of life,
Bring to light, for our benefit, myriads of fountains
Of delight in this earthly existence?

Ye travellers, look and admire this world of ours
That is so interesting!

This is only the first stanza of a charming lyric which can be set to soul-stirring music. Another lyric which has gained universal celebrity in Orissa is his poem ‘Bhakti’ or ‘Devotion’, in which he says:

Is it necessary for Thine worship, my Lord,
To count the beads of a rosary?
Who indeed can tell Thine rosary
Of which the beads are myriads of stars and planets?
And have I the strength even to carry the dust
Off Thine feet to my head?
For, are not millions of solar worlds
Contained in those tiny grains?

What I shall worship Thee with
Is indeed the problem of problems to me,
For what is there in this whole world
Which is not Thine?

The I-ness that I have, is perhaps the only thing that
is absolutely mine.
And I venture to surrender that at Thine feet,
Thou Monarch of all the worlds!

Meher, though classical in his mental make-up, was also keenly alive to the problems of current life. In Bharati-bhavana (Musings on Mother India) he attacked the British Govern-
ment as bitterly as any political leader of the time. In 'They too pass as Right Honourables' he has caustically satirised the corrupt dignitaries of officialdom. He has written an excellent poem on such a drab subject as 'Panchayat' and in his *Krishak-sangit* or 'Songs for the farmers', one discovers the agricultural and the social reformer in the poet—the messenger of new life in this New Age of science, in a garland of exquisite little ballads on such poetically contemptible subjects as 'Groundnuts' and 'Sugarcane', or 'How to eradicate plant diseases', or 'Cow-keeping', 'Cauliflower', or 'Jerusalem Artichoke', etc., etc.

Because of his lack of good education and his poverty, Meher was prevented from speaking of a wider world. He knew only his district and the people living there and their problems. And he knew the classical Indian literature through books. This limited world was the only source of his material. But the little that he knew he knew most intimately and saw that little world with the third eye of a genuine poet. What Jane Austen has done in English fiction, Meher did in Oriya poetry—making a miniature but highly finished filigree work of the little world in which he lived. He has sung of the natural beauties of Sambalpur, his native district, as was never done before. The small hill of Budharaja that overlooks the city of Sambalpur and the famous river Mahanadi that flows past it, the Hirakud Island now celebrated for the enormous hydro-electric project established by the Government of India—all these, besides other notable places of interest in Orissa, have been immortalised in the lines of this weaver. Like a true poet, he has charmed us with the exquisite music of his lines as well as with the high idealism that saturates all his works. No subject was contemptible to his pen, if it was likely to do a little good for the common man. In spite of his poor circumstances he protested against and satirised contemporary wrongs and tyrannies of the officials and of the foreign government with a fearlessness that is found only in men of real genius. In many a poem he also daringly exposes the shortcomings of the Oriyas, his fallen compatriots, and exhorts them to rise and march ahead following the footsteps of the more progressive nations. Thus by any criterion this poor, self-educated and simple
weaver of Sambalpur comes out triumphant as a great poet endowed with poetic talent not very common in any country.

In private life the poet was genuinely humble, ever anxious to do a good turn to others, feared by the corrupt and loved and respected by all. He never appealed to any Raja or rich man to get any of his books published. Manuscripts of his works lay with him for years together on that account, and were rescued only by his friends and admirers from the ravages of white-ants in his dingy ancestral cottage. He refused point blank a request from the Raja of Bamra State to be his court poet.

All told, Gangadhara Meher is one of the rarest personalities and poets in the whole range of Oriya literature.

The list of his works is: Tapasvini, Pranaya-vallari, Kichakavadha, Indumati, Utkala-Lakshmi, Ayodhya-drishya, Kavita-kallola, Arghya-thali, Ahalya-stava, Mahima, Bharati-bhavana, Padmini, Krishaka-sangita—all of them either anthologies or kavyas. His prose writings consist of his incomplete autobiography, essays on Nriparaja Simha, Purna Kavi Fakirmohana and the late Kashi Natha Panda. The first grade Government College at Sambalpur has been named after this brilliant poor local weaver and arrangements are afoot for celebrating his first birth centenary in a grand manner all over the Oriya speaking land.

Padmcharana Patnaik

Even though nothing original or significant was contributed by him, Padmcharana’s lyrics and poems are popular with all classes of readers for just a likeable poetic flavour in them all. There is discernible in each poem of his the living pulsation of the soul sensitive to external beauties, to the history of his people, and to the small, romantic exchanges of human hearts, one to the other, in day-to-day life. His ode on the Dhauli Pahad (which carries the Kalinga edict of Asoka) is a favourite recitation in Orissa schools. His poems are now available in two collections—Padmapakhuda (Lotus-petals) and Surya-mukhi (Sun-flowers).

Kuntala Kumari Shabat

The most sensational of the women poets of Orissa, the
Late Kuntala Kumari has become a legend which is a little out of proportion to her genuine worth as a poet or author. Born to Christian parents, she spent her entire childhood in Burma where her father served as a medical officer. Exiled by circumstances to distant lands, this precocious girl developed a fanatic enthusiasm for all that was Orissan, Indian and Hindu. Trained for the medical profession at Cuttack, she amazed all her boy rivals and teachers by standing first in every examination. She adopted Hinduism and had a sensational Arya-Samajist marriage at Delhi where she settled down to practice and where she died at the height of her professional as well as her literary prosperity.

She has to her credit five novels and five books of poems. The novels are already dated and so are also most of the poems, which were mostly either patriotic or devotional. The latter class reaches culmination in *Prema-chintamani* a lyrical drama on the divine romance of Radha and Krishna, written in a modernised pattern. But it is difficult for any modern poet to surpass the lyrical heights in the similar class of poetry left by the Vaishnava poets, such as Gopalakrishna, Dinkarshana and Abhimanya and so the lady poet need not be much blamed for her failure. But in most of her poems in general, the enthusiasm of an eager spirit, of a restless soul, out to express itself in as many ways as possible and the sensitiveness of a fine mind to all that was good and beautiful and noble in this world, are clearly visible to any reader, in spite of artistic shortcomings which the poet could easily have avoided if any of her friends and admirers had guided her to real excellence in literary craftsmanship. She had absolutely no training at all for it either at school or at home.

The little piece below from her *Archana* (Worship) is quite typical of her poetic productions:

Who says this world is merely illusion
And only the snare of Maya?
To my eyes this world is beautiful,
A paradise of endless love;
I am born to work here,
This world is my laboratory of good deeds;
Death will not be the end of my life
But the start of a new one.
This is neither end, nor misery;
Nor is it alien to me; in my own native land,
I shall climb up and up through action,
A dream, that will never be mere dream to me.

Lakshmikanta Mahapatra

Scion of an aristocratic family in the district of Balašore, in youth handsome as a Greek god, Lakshmikanta’s life is a heroic and heartening story of ceaseless struggle against an unkind fate. For, stricken with a fell disease, this bonny prince of a young man remained invalid for the best part of his life, his fingers losing the power even to ply the pen. Imagine the frustration of such a man. But the heroic soul of Lakshmikanta never yielded to disparage and he never gave the family or his friends a chance to pity him. In early youth he was rich as well as handsome; he was coveted in society for his musical talents, a dancer and actor and a fine composer. His marriage was romantic. Even as he was dying day by day of a hateful disease, he yet smiled on, laughed and made others laugh, sang and made the whole nation sing his songs. A finer soul it is not easy to meet anywhere.

Lakshmikanta never attempted anything ambitious—it was not physically possible for him to do so. He was, in body and mind, essentially lyrical, the ready charmer of the moment. And so his work consists of only scattered songs and satires, both in prose and verse, and excellent parodies. The satires, though entertaining in their times, particularly those aimed at the hypocrisies of the Congressites, are losing topical significance. Some of his devotional and patriotic poems have, however, come to stay. At any cultural or political gathering in Orissa which is peculiarly local, Lakshmikanta’s ‘Vande Utkala Janani’ (I bow to you, Mother Utkal) is sure to be the auspicious inaugural song. That is a glory indeed for any poet.
CHAPTER XIV

LIGHTS IN PROSE

Fakirmohana, Radhanatha and Madhusudana all wrote poetry as well as prose. While Madhusudana's prose was classical, Radhanatha's individualistic and artistic, that of Fakirmohana touched all standards from rustic speech to the grand manner of the erudite. But they were not all. Many others in their times and later have made significant contributions to the development of prose in Oriya which at present may not be very rich or comprehensive, but is nevertheless a granary of precious grain. To the Chronicles of the Jagannatha Temple, the ornate prose of Rudrasudhanidhi, the Journals of the Choinis, the metaphysical expositions of the Panchasakakha period and the Fast stories, were added, in the eighteenth century, the finished story-cycle of Brajanatha Badajena. To these were now added the voluminous prose productions of the 19th and 20th centuries, through text-books, essays, stories, periodicals, novels and the daily papers, all written under the impact of western influences. Now the tables are practically turned: We are now in the age of Prose. Poetry had dominated for over a thousand years, but was now gradually pushed below the surface consciousness of the nation, though without doubt, poetry's place, deep in the soul of the nation, remains as undisputed as ever.

Prose writers in Oriya during the modern period, besides the celebrated Trio, make a long list. But mention is made here only of those who have made some definitely new contribution in style or matter. These are as follows:

Ramasankara Ray, the Pioneer

This pioneer playwright of Orissa, of whom the reader will hear more in the chapter on Orissa's plays and theatre, was a pioneer in fiction too, having left behind a very significant novel which was written about a dozen years before Senapati tried his first. Ray tried three novels, but could
complete only one, *Bivasini*, which is quite a remarkable book not only for his times but for our times also. Over-shadowed by Senapati as a novelist, the importance and significance of this novel of Ray's has not been recognised as it deserves by literary critics in Orissa. But objectively considered it is much better planned than any novel of Senapati's and has some unusual characters and situations, quite modern in their essence.

It is the story of a famine in Orissa during the Maratha rule. The 'Bull of Paradip'\(^1\), as the Raja of Paradvipa was called, had an organised band of robbers, as one of the means to acquire wealth and power. This robber band controlled the entire Orissan Delta from Cuttack to the mouth of the Mahanadi, where that feudal chief’s palace-fort stood. Under the direction of the Raja the leader of the bandits, an educated and clever widower official of his, robbed the rich and helped the poor with doles and free food, with the blessings of a holy man who lived in an obscure islet in the Mahanadi. One night the band looted, in the same village, the house of a rich miser and that of a rich Oriya official under the Marathas, a man who was deliberately keeping the Maratha Subadar in the dark about the famine in the land. Among the booty were a handsome widow, the daughter-in-law of the miser, and also the daughter of the official, who were neighbours. A romance developed between the widower-leader of the robber-band and the young widow who, however, sublimated it, turning it into pure brother and sister relationship and sacrificing herself for the happiness of her friend, Rasakala, the traitor official’s beauteous daughter. The hero and the heroine were united under the auspices of the Raja and Rani of Paradvipa in the holy man's hermitage, to the hurrahs of a large crowd.

Among the other characters of the novel a few stand out as quite original for that time. One is Dasa Khadanga, the leader of the famine-stricken masses of Orissa, who dared to face the Maratha Subadar in his own palace at Cuttack and challenge him as to his responsibilities in the situation. The emaciated, starving hero died a martyr in the cause of

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\(^1\) Paradvipa, of which the old maritime glory is about to have a revival as a modern port on the east coast of Orissa.
his people, the first leader of the proletariat to appear in Oriya literature, perhaps in any Indian literature.

The other significant character is the Maratha officer Duman Sardar. Full of human kindness and sick to his soul with the atrocities the Marathas were committing on the innocent masses of Orissa, he was, under the guise of doing his official duties, secretly helping the Oriyas. This kind-hearted bureaucrat of those times reminds us of many a good friend of India among the Britishers in our own. He stands as the only lamp of humanity in Oriya literature during the whole dark chapter of the Maratha rule in Orissa.

This remarkable story has, however, lost the desired effect on its readers because of the archaic, over-Sanskritised style the author used and for its big, unnecessary patches of reflections and sermons to the readers. Ramasankara’s great defect in his plays also was this archaism, a defect which he could easily have avoided. This is clear from many examples of conversational simplicity in his writings.

Gopinatha Nanda Sarma: Philologist, Lexicographer and Critic

Next to Fakirmohana the man who was to receive the nation’s unstinted respect for unalloyed devotion to literature in the modern period is Pandit Gopinatha Nanda Sarma of Paralakemidi. Though only a poorly paid Sanskrit pandit in the local Maharaja’s High School, his scholarly contributions have been amazing both in quality and quantity. Completely ignorant of English or any other modern European language, the erudite Pandit had an intuitive analytical power worthy of any western scholar. Trained formally in Sanskrit only, this great scholar took up for critical study, the Mahabharata of Sarala Dasa, which had long been the contempt of Brahmins in Orissa and produced a book of textual analysis and literary assessment of unquestioned logic and authority on the great epic poet. His liberal, unorthodox attitude cannot be too much praised when we find that this great Sanskritist was the first in Orissa to point out the genuine beauty in the supposed barbarism of Sarala Dasa in language and content. He recognised them as expressive of the true idiom of the Oriya language and of the realities of Orissa society. He compares Sarala’s Mahabharata,
book by book and episode by episode, with the original in Sanskrit and with the Telugu and Bengali parallels, and discusses all aspects of the epic—social, textual, literary and religious—in as thorough a manner as was possible nearly half a century ago. Even today this study has not been surpassed.

A similar book of his on Jagannatha Dasa’s Bhagavata, has very unfortunately not been published in book form so far.

Pandit Gopinatha’s ‘Oriya Philology’ (Odia Bhashatatwa) is another monumental work. Competent non-Oriya linguistic scholars have expressed amazement at what this Pandit, ignorant of English, accomplished in this difficult field nearly fifty years ago. This may, indeed, be one of the very few books of this class in all the Indian languages. It is a big volume of about one thousand pages, covering all aspects of the morphology of the Oriya language.

The Pandit was also the pioneer in compiling the first genuine etymological Oriya Dictionary. Before him dictionaries in the language were merely voluminous lists of Sanskrit words, the majority of which were never used by the common man. Nanda Sarma was the first to ransack Oriya literature and also Oriya as spoken in the different districts of Orissa to collect genuine, native Oriya words and cite apt quotations from standard works in support of the meanings he gave to them. This Sabda-Tatvabodha Abhidhana (Etymological Dictionary) is therefore another monumental work that this great scholar has left behind.

In the brief gaps between these highly painstaking undertakings, the Pandit relaxed by making translations of Sanskrit kanyas and natakas. In these too he has left the stamp of his individuality. To the amazement of all readers the Pandit in these translations composed Oriya verses in the pure Sanskrit metres of the originals. In this too he was a pioneer, along with Raghunatha Parichha, a co-citizen of his. Acquaintance with Sanskrit metres and experiments made with them in modern times by other poets in Oriya, are really due to the successful pioneering of this great Pandit.

Caring little for rewards or literary honours, Pandit Gopinatha Nanda Sarma was busy over one monumental work after another all through his life. Only late in life unstinted praise
and homage poured in on him from all the intellectuals in the land, for his scholarship and his devotion to and dissemination of knowledge. He died a poor but an honoured man.

Shyama Sundara Rajaguru, the Essayist

A contemporary of Pandit Gopinatha Nanda Sarma who also belonged like him to Paralakemidi, Shyama Sundara Rajaguru was the pioneer in Orissa in the study of Oriya poetic metres. He also made the first critical estimates of the works of individual ancient poets with reference to events of their lives. Rajaguru’s premature death was a great loss to modern Oriya literature. His Prabandhavali containing all his literary essays is now mostly out of date, but its chronological value is recognised by all modern scholars in the field.

Pandit Mrityunjaya Ratha

Standing first in the Bihar and Orissa Sanskrit title examination, and winning a gold medal, Pandit Mrityunjaya Ratha showed, unlike Pandit Gopinatha Nanda Sarma, very little trace of Sanskrit scholarship in his writings. He wrote, for a Sanskrit scholar, in a remarkably simple style, clear, precise and easy-flowing. He has translated the Kumaramambhava of Kalidasa, and many of the celebrated Sanskrit plays into Oriya, but his most significant contributions are the critical biographical essays he wrote on several ancient and medieval Oriya poets, including Sarala Dasa. Unfortunately these essays still lie scattered in the pages of old periodicals. His book Nari-darpana, a collection of sketches on some noble women of India and Orissa, remains, for its delectable style, a unique book of its kind in Oriya so far.

The Pandit was a Sanskrit teacher in Government schools, and to the great loss of Oriya literature died prematurely, just when his creative powers were at the highest.

Gopala Chandra Prabaraja, the Satirist

A lawyer by profession and a zamindar by inheritance, Gopalachandra Prabaraja is accepted as the greatest prose satirist of modern Orissa. Inspired mostly by his friend
Visvanatha Kara, the famous editor of 'Utkala Sahitya', Praharaja wrote satirical comments on contemporary happenings and situations month after month for many years continuously in the columns of his friend’s journal. Only a few of these periodical writings have been published in book form, such as Bhagavata Tungire Sandhya (Evenings in the Bhagavata-hall), Nananka bastani (My father’s files) and Bai Mohanti Panji (Mr. Bai Mohanti’s papers).

As the subjects were mostly topical, these satires have by now lost their edge for modern readers, but some at least will retain their charm forever because of their pregnant humour. The character of Mr. Bai Mohanti, an imaginary old-world personality, sceptical of modern ways and making caustic comments on new-fangled manners when the occasion arises, is deathless already. He is the Sir Roger de Coverley of Oriya literature.

Praharaja had an amazingly fluent and facile style and is supposed to be the literary heir of Fakirmohana so far as his prose style is concerned. He wrote in the colloquial speech peculiar to the district of Cuttack, with a good sprinkling of the court jargon with which, being a lawyer, he was quite familiar. Enlivened with specious argument, facile wit and broad humour, Praharaja’s prose is highly entertaining.

Towards the latter part of his life, Praharaja busied himself with the compilation of a quadrilingual dictionary, the largest in Oriya so far, consisting of seven ponderous volumes.

Praharaja’s collections of the folk-tales of Orissa, as well as of its proverbs and folk-sayings are also a most valuable contribution to the literature. He was the pioneer in this field and as yet his collections remain the best.

THE TWO GREAT EDITORS

Men of genius all over the world require publicity officers for their messages and achievements. It would seem as though they bring them along with themselves for the fulfilment of their mission. The modern age in Oriya literature owes a great deal to two such Editors for the zeal with which they championed new writers and their writings and tried
to take them to the doors of common readers. One of the
two is:

Visvanatha Kara

As the Editor of the ‘Utkala Sahitya’ he was practically
the philosopher, guide and friend of three generations of
writers in Orissa. Coming under the spell of Madhusudana
Rao in early youth, this blue-blooded Brahmin renounced
the orthodox Hindu faith and became a Brahmo, braving
poverty and social ostracism for his freedom of conscience.
This intellectual integrity he maintained all through his
life, sparing none however highly placed or however intimate.
The scathing attacks in his editorial columns were read and
enjoyed with respect all over Orissa. His prose style was
logical, clear, absolutely free from redundancy or any effort
at mere embellishment, and had a uniform elegance all its
own. His Vividha-prabandha (Miscellaneous essays) remains
now the only book to his credit, but it contains some of the
most thought-provoking essays ever written in Oriya. His
essay on Upendra Bhanja has practically put an end to
all controversy about that poet and his objective evaluation
runs the risk of a challenge only from dogmatists and fanatics.
A friend of Radhanatha, Fakirmohana and Madhusudana,
he was their publisher as well as critic; critic and friend too
to all eminent Oriya writers down to the thirties of this
century. During all these years, about half a century, Visva-
natha Kara was to all intents and purposes the very heart
of literary life in Orissa and so great was the respect for his
standard of values that the publication of a poem or a story
by a young writer in his ‘Utkala Sahitya’ was taken as a
triumph, a certificate of success, an honour much coveted
but obtained only by the gifted.

Visvanatha Kara was also a very remarkable orator. He
was the pioneer of women’s emancipation in Orissa. His
daughters were among the first women graduates of Orissa,
and two of them, Srimati Pratibha Kara and Srimati
Suprabha Kara have also made names as writers.

Pandit Nilamani Vidyaratna

The other famous Editor, Pandit Nilamani Vidyaratna,
was a primary school teacher. To him goes the sole credit for the pioneering of the movement for the unification of scattered Oriya tracts under one homogeneous government in the present State of Orissa. As Editor of the ‘Sambalpur Hitaishini’ under the auspices of the Durbar of Bamra, he generated and kept alive Oriya patriotism and encouraged the cultivation of Oriya literature in all the mutually exclusive twenty-four ex-native states of Orissa. It was as editor of ‘Sambalpur Hitaishini’ that he discovered the poetic genius of Gangadhara Meher in the little known village of Barapalli and got him started on his career by arranging the publication of his early books. The poet has left behind an immortal poem as a tribute to this noble Editorscholar.

As Editor of ‘Praja Bandhu’ in the district of Ganjam then in Madras Presidency, Vidyaratna first organised a conference of the Oriyas in Madras in 1902, demanding unification of all Oriya tracts. This gave birth to the larger Utkala Sammilani or the All-Orissa Political Conference, which in its first session in 1903 brought to its platform Oriyas from all ranks and parts of the country demanding a homogeneous Oriya state. This materialised only in 1936.

Late in life, settled at Cuttack, Nilamani used to edit ‘Utkala Madhupa’, a unique magazine of miscellaneous knowledge.

He died a poor man, and has not yet received the honour that he well deserves from the Oriyas for whom he dedicated his life.

TWO CELEBRATED FREE-THINKERS

Among the prose writers in Orissa of the last three quarters of a century, two only stand out as the most outspoken free-thinkers. They are Jalandhara Deva of Bamra and Mohini-mohana Senapati, the only son of Fakirmohana Senapati, the novelist.

Born in the jungle-state of Bamra in the forties of the last century, Jalandhara Deva, a scion of the local Raj family noted for culture and scholarship, developed a surprisingly modern scientific attitude to life. In his criticisms of the
Sanskrit Mahabharata and Ramayana, he shattered the popular idols and ideas, making the demigods in the epics appear no better, on occasion, than erring fools like ourselves. He was a Westerner out and out and refused to compromise with irrationalities anywhere. The way Krishna and other Mahabharata heroes kidnapped and married girls does not show, according to him, that those epic times were very civilised. He also ruthlessly exposed the interested Brahmanic propaganda in all ancient Hindu literature.

Mohinimohana Senapati, the only son of the famous novelist, was a professor of philosophy and was, even to the last, a confirmed atheist. He caused his great father no end of mental suffering by his heresies and unorthodox behaviour. With relentless logic, he shattered the spiritual claims of Brahmoism, the faith of his father’s close friend Madhusudana Rao, who was his own guardian during his student days. He openly advocated polyandry and polygamy and even the abolition of marriage as an institution. Worse, he quietly committed vandalism on the writings of his great father by freely deleting portions which did not agree with his own ideas. Because of all these, Mohinimohana was not much respected in society, but was looked upon as queer-headed. He had no style of his own, but he wrote with clarity of thought and expression.

Sasibhushana Ray, the Prose Poet

Son of Radhanatha Ray, the poet, Sasibhushana may be described as the most befitting heir both spiritually as well as materially, of his great father. His works in prose are an excellent complement to what his father left behind in wonderful poetry. In company with his father, and also alone, Sasibhushana travelled very extensively over Orissa and observed men and nature most minutely. He knew the hills, forests, rivers and important villages of Orissa with a thoroughness and familiarity that no other man knew or now knows. Like his father he loved nature with a deep spiritual passion and spent most of his time in a quiet, sylvan retreat that he had built for himself in the famous island of Dhavalesvara in the river Mahanadi, four miles from Cuttack.
His *Utkal-prakriti* (Nature in Orissa), a book of prose-poems on the various beauty-spots in the State, is dedicated not to any person, but to Orissa’s great river Mahanadi, with a dedicatory note vibrating with lyrical emotion. His *Utkalar Ritualhina* (Pageant of seasons in Orissa) is another fine record. He wrote incessantly over a long period and died recently. His essays on Orissa’s Nature alone will make him immortal in Oriya literature. Here is a short extract from *Utkala-prakriti*, from the essay ‘Evening at Uttaresvara’.

The setting sun has already tinged the white banner and the trident on the main temple of Lingaraja. Over there, the temple of Alabukesvara looks lonely in the Kochila forest. At a little distance stands the temple of Ramesvara, surrounded by the ruins of other temples, with a melancholy air. Beyond the paddy fields, one’s eyes greet the temples of Brahmesvara, Bhaskaresvara, Meghesvara, and Raja Rani. The tops of the temples of Parasuramesvara, Sidhesvara, Muktesvara, and Kedaresvara are visible also from among the mango groves. . . . . The island fane in the lake of Bindusagara looks picturesque as birds congregate over its roof for the night’s rest. On the steps of that lake, ladies from Bengal, Maharashtra, Orissa and Andhra-desa demonstrate the aesthetic sensibilities of their various regions. The great lake Bindusagara looks gay with the reflections of these beautiful women on its steps and with the colour of the setting sun, yet has the melancholy of glories long past. . . . . The expansive rocky upland round about the temple of Alabukesvara is now painted a golden-yellow with the rays of the setting sun. Over there, from the wide belt of paddy-fields near the river Gangua up to the Dhauli Hill, bullock carts are carrying sheaves of newly cut paddy and hay, wending homeward. The Sun-god is retiring like us men, behind the Bisram-ghat (Rest ghat) of the Bindusagara. Suddenly somebody sings out in the nearby woodland:

‘I saw today, Oh darling,
The vision that is blue
Like a rain cloud.’
CHAPTER XV

PLAYS AND THEATRES IN ORISSA

In Orissa as in all other civilised languages and peoples, the play and the theatre originated and have been intimately associated with religion. And both have issued from the two social opposite poles of the masses and the aristocracy. The two categories of drama, entertainment for the masses and for the classes, have continued to exist side by side, and have influenced each other for centuries in their effort to adjust to changing tastes. Let us consider the ‘class’ or classical variety first which is supposed to be artistically higher, representing true literature and the intellectual character of a people. Comparing both varieties, any unbiased critic must feel that the differences are in modes of expression, of degree rather than of kind, that by absolute standards of art and entertainment some of the mass dramas are as good as, if not better than, their opposite numbers in the classical variety. But prejudices die hard and, while we find third-rate formal plays being honoured as text-books for post-graduate studies, the finest of the mass plays are not even taken into the gracious consideration of the critics and the litterateurs.

Orissa has all along been a hospitable land of arts, such as architecture, sculpture, dance, music and drama, with a surprising individuality in each. About her characteristic Odissi dances, now practised by famous artistes like Indrani Rahaman and others, this is what the distinguished art-critic of The Statesman once said: “It is obvious, now that we have seen Odissi dances five times, that this is a distinct school of Bharata Natya, or more correctly, a survival of some proto-Bharata Natya, some ancient Indian dance from which sprang, not only Bharata Natya but all sorts of varieties—Kathakali, Kuchipudi, a number of Attamas, some ancestor of present-day Kathak, and presumably the dances of greater India: Siam, Java and Bali. As it is, Odissi is a lovely dance, with a large vocabulary of finger and hand
gestures, not as punditic as Bharata Natya, but rather like the pure dance (Nritya) form of it.”

Dancée was as inseparable and integral a part of the Oriya drama as it was of Oriya social life itself. It is unfortunate that this cultural colour is slowly vanishing from the national life in Orissa owing to general poverty, and more particularly to the disappearance of the feudal chiefs and landed aristocracy in general. Orissa’s famous temples were also a magnificent gift of these aristocrats to the nation. And each such temple may be taken as a permanent theatre in stone. The design of the world-famous shrine of Konarak, for example, as a chariot of the Sun-god, colossal in size and as delicate in artistic creativeness as exquisite jewellery, is nothing less than a gigantic theatre, with life-size Apsaras supposed to be dancing, singing, and playing on musical instruments all along the aerial journey of the Sun-god, the whole chariot being sculptured all over, like a replica of the Universe, representing the animal, the vegetable, the human and the supra-human creatures in all their bewildering varieties. If a play is a mirror held up to nature, Konarak is indeed a colossal play conceived and executed by superhuman playwrights in stone, for all the world to view at any hour and in any season. And what is true of Konarak is more or less true also of other famous shrines in Orissa, like the Raja-Rani, the Lingaraja, the Brahmesvara, the Parsuramesvara, Muktesvara and similar other shrines, celebrated not so much for their deities as for the grand life-dramas they display. In other words, before we discuss the plays in the Oriya language, it would not be out of place to recall that the people speaking that language have wrought and left behind magnificent permanent plays in stone in a series of temples. As a matter of fact the literary plays in Orissa had also their earliest cradles in these artistic treasure-houses. It is inferred from literary and historical documents that the first regular and formal plays in Orissa were enacted either in the precincts of the temples at Puri and Bhubanesvara or in the neighbouring maths and monasteries or in the carved theatres on Khandagiri Hills where celebrated religious

1 The Statesman—Republic Supplement, 26.1.56.
heads or pious Jain, Buddhist or Hindu monarchs staged episodes from the Puranas and the Epics as part of their pietistic culture.

THE SANSKRIT DRAMA

There was a long tradition of Sanskrit drama in Orissa on which the local Oriya drama gradually grew during the 19th century. Down to the early years of the 20th century no playwright could free himself from these traditions. In all Oriya plays of those days the Prologue with the Nata, the Nati and the Sutradhara was inevitable. And as a matter of fact the early plays include a large number of translations of the Sanskrit plays into Oriya. Pandits Mrityunjaya Ratha, Gopinatha Nanda Sarma, Harihar Misra and others have left behind Oriya translations of almost all important Sanskrit dramas. But Orissa has the credit of creating and enacting some celebrated original Sanskrit plays also on her own soil which may be taken as her small contribution to the grand sum total of Sanskrit dramatic literature. And the tradition of these theatres and plays goes back as early as the 12th century, as is revealed by records in the temple of Jagannatha. From these records at Puri it is now known that the Sanskrit play *Piyushalahari* by one Jayadeva was enacted in the courtyard of the Jagannath shrine. The play *Lalita-Madhava* by Rupa Goswami was staged in the Radhakanta *math* famous as Chaitanya’s home at Puri. This appears to be a command-performance as it is on record that all the expenses were met from the State treasury. The ruins of the stage where this play was staged still exist. Another play is *Jagannatha Vallabha nataka* by Ray Ramananda, who resigned his viceroyalty of the southern provinces under Orissa monarchs after meeting Chaitanya at Bezwada and busied himself with arranging plays and dances on episodes in the romance of Radha and Krishna to please his spiritual master. It was enacted once in the courtyard of the temple of Jagannatha and again three years later in the monastery of Jagannatha Vallabha, a favourite resort of Chaitanya’s. It is on record that in the latter performance the author himself played the hero
and a devadasi Mukta (Pearl) took the part of the heroine.

It has been mentioned that King Kapilendra Deva of the Solar Dynasty of Orissa was a great conqueror and ruler. His reign in the 15th century may be called the Golden Age in Orissa history. There is a Sanskrit play named *Parasurama vijaya* to the credit of this triumphant monarch. In all probability this semi-religious play carries in thin disguise Kapilendra Deva's own panegyrics as a great conqueror. It was acted in the courtyard of the king's palace or that of the temple of Jagannatha. What makes it interesting and valuable in the history of Oriya drama is that in this play, in lieu of songs in Prakrit as ordained in Sanskrit poetics and as practised by all Sanskrit playwrights from Bhasa downwards, we find songs in genuine Oriya. This was certainly a daring experiment for that age and earns the play, which has not much literary merit in itself, the credit of making a beginning with the formal literary play in Oriya.

Then out of the confused darkness of Orissa history under the Moslems and the Marathas, a nightmarish story of invasions and counter-invasions, lootings, arsons and extortions, the factual evidence of a few more plays suggests that in spite of the highly unsettled conditions in which they appeared and the holocausts they managed to survive, play-writing and play-acting was a lively tradition in Orissa long before British rule and English education. In the middle of the 18th century, some unknown author wrote a play called *Gauri Harana* which was staged at Puri with Hindi songs inserted in it for the convenience of the Maratha ruling class of the time. This gives excellent topical value to the play. Then one Khadgaprasada of Dhenkanal, once a vigorous centre of Oriya literary culture under the patronage of the local feudal chiefs, seems to have produced a play called *Padmavati Harana* in 1834. Then in 1868 Raghunatha Parichcha produced *Gopinatha Vallabha nataka*, the peculiarity of which play is that, though its language is Oriya, all the verses in it are written in faultless Sanskrit metres. This style has been practised by many in Orissa, the most prominent of whom is the late Pandit Gopinatha Nanda Sarma of Paralakhemidi, as has already been mentioned in the previous chapter.
This closes the chapter on Oriya plays of pre-modern times. The story of real modern plays begins in 1877, more than seventy years after the British conquered Orissa.

The Modern Stage and Play: Ramasankara Ray

The British came to conquer and rule Orissa in 1803, nearly half a century after British administration was established in the neighbouring province of Bengal. To start with, the newly conquered Orissa was tacked to the tail-end of Bengal. To help the British in its administration, streams of Bengali officers flowed into Orissa. By that time, in imitation of the English plays and theatrical performances given by the British residents of Calcutta, the Bengali stage and drama had already come to vigorous life, and in their turn the Bengali officers in Orissa started arranging performances of Bengali plays on social occasions like Dasara at Cuttack. For many years the literary drama and the formal stage in Orissa in noted towns like Puri and Cuttack were really Bengali, as the so-called educated upper class in Orissa till the other day was also Bengali through and through.

Ramasankara Ray, father of the modern Oriya drama, in his introduction to the first drama which he wrote in 1880, writes that, sick with the performance of Bengali plays in Orissa, his mind revolted and he wanted to produce plays in Oriya depicting the glories of the historic Oriya people. At that time Ramasankara was a young man of 20 or so and had just passed his First Arts-Examination. But three years previously the first modern Oriya drama Babaji nataka by Jagamohana Lala had already been published. It was a four-act play and had anticipated Gandhi and our Constitution in making out a case for prohibition. Unfortunately in it, ethics overpowered dramatic art, and thus this first play in Oriya was a stage failure. And so, in spite of having a pathfinder ahead of him, Ramasankara Ray, with his first play published in 1880 that became an instantaneous success from all aspects of the theatrical art, is taken as the father of modern Oriya drama—because from the very start he wrote plays in Oriya with the same commendable object as the Elizabethan playwrights wrote plays in English, viz. to make his language as great as Bengali and other Indian
languages; and secondly because the plays themselves were excellent specimens of dramatic art as far as contemporary tastes and standards went.

His first play dealt with the most romantic episode in Orissa’s history, the story of King Purushottama Deva who conquered the southern kingdom of Kanchi or Kanjivaram and brought away pretty Padmavati, the Kanchi princess, in order to get her married to an untouchable in revenge for the insult her father had meted to him, but ultimately married her himself through the clever stratagem of his chief minister.

This story, as already described, has been the theme of many a poem, ballad and play in Orissa. And just about the time we are discussing, a Bengali litterateur, Rangalal Banerjee, published a kavya in Bengali named Kanchi-Kaveri based on the same royal romance. Young Ramasankara took up the same theme of perennial interest to the Oriyas and produced a play of the same title.

This play Kanchi-Kaveri had great influence on dramatic production in Orissa for nearly three decades. Although Ramasankara wrote nearly thirty plays of diverse types, this first play of his is accepted as his masterpiece and still enjoys a reputation as a high class literary product. For many succeeding playwrights it became the norm of dramatic production.

Ramasankara is not only the father of modern Oriya plays but also of the modern Orissan stage. Paradoxically enough the young playwright, failing to get either patronage or appreciation in high quarters at Cuttack, discovered an enthusiastic and discerning drama lover in a Mahant of a distant rural math in the district of Cuttack. To this little-known but highly patriotic Mahant of Kothpada, whose resources were by no means plentiful at that time, Oriya literature and the Orissan stage owe eternal gratitude. For 40 successive years, this Mahant maintained a permanent theatre at his rural math and kept on producing new Oriya dramas year after year on festive occasions, spending considerable amounts of money. Without this Mahant’s enthusiastic patronage, the infant Oriya drama might have died a natural death.
But, in the meantime, the performance of Oriya plays had gradually spread to all the important towns and villages of Orissa. It became a part of the social prestige of the Rajas, Maharajas, and the aristocrats in town and country, to invite theatrical parties for shows on occasions like marriages and other social functions. The late Madhusudhana Dasa, Orissa’s great political leader, was one of the most important of such patrons. Inside his famous garden-house at Cuttack (now converted into a women’s college) he set up a permanent stage where for many years good shows were given by amateur parties of the city. Similar permanent or semi-permanent theatres grew up almost simultaneously at Paralakhemundi, Baripada, Nilgiri, Chikiti and a host of other places under the patronage of Rajas, zamindars and rich Oriyas.

By the beginning of this century the new Oriya drama had come to stay. Many professional theatrical parties had been started. Although they were all short-lived, their mushroom rise indicates the growing enthusiasm of the people for the new type of intellectual entertainment. Even the principles of dramaturgy were now discussed and debated in the contemporary press. The place and need of song and music in drama were discussed at length in the ‘Utkala Sahitya’, then the leading Oriya monthly magazine. Bikrama Deva, Yuvaraja of Khariar, himself a playwright, published his Nataka rachana pranali (The process of play-writing), drawing the attention of the dramatists to the ‘unities’ of Greek plays so as to bring drama closer to life. But not to speak of others, these counsels were not observed by the Yuvaraja himself in his dramas.

A large number of plays famous in those early times are now completely lost. But amongst them, those of Rama-sankara Ray still remain outstanding for their distinct literary qualities as well as for their chronological importance. For a pioneer, considering the unpropitious conditions in which he worked, his continuous experiments appear quite surprising. He has not left any type of drama untouched—historical, mythological, social, comic, satiric and romantic plays were woven out of his own plots. He gave songs an appropriate position in drama and used blank-verse
and prose with effect for the first time. Pandit Gopinatha Nanda Sarma, of Paralakhemidi, Pandit Mrityunjaya Ratha of Cuttack, Pandit Haribara Misra of Puri and Raja Radhamohana Rajendradeva of Chikiti in Ganjam district, on the other hand, carried on the classical Sanskrit tradition.

**Raja of Chikiti**

A celebrated literary and social aristocrat, this Raja of Chikiti wrote plays with his idiosyncrasies deeply impressed upon them. The title of all his plays began with the letter 'P' such as *Panchali pattapagarana, Parimala sahagama, Prakriti rahasya, Prakrita pranaya, Prataba*, etc. He wrote the plays in stiff, ornamental prose with songs in unfamiliar Karnatic modes. All the plays of the Raja have become obsolete, but to the historian of Oriya drama they are a mile-stone that he cannot afford to miss because of their undoubted individuality.

**The Stage as Platform and Pulpit**

Besides retaining the old traditions, Oriya drama, was now widely used as the pulpct also for social reforms such as widow-remarriage, love-marriage, abandonment of caste-pride, abolition of dowry, etc. It has already been said that the very first play in modern Oriya was about the drink evil. The most important of these reformist dramatists was the late Bhikari Charana Patnaik, well known in Orissa also as a satirist and as the protagonist of cottage industry. In his plays he has satirised mostly the snobbery of the early generation of English-educated Indians, castism, ultra-modern ladies and those Indians who preferred to be called Sahibs rather than Indians. He wrote also two noted historical plays, but his main contribution to Oriya drama remains in his satirical ones.

Besides the reformists, there were also the revivalists who tried to re-establish in the minds of the people the individual ideal and a social order based on Bhakti, by means of numberless dramas made up of episodes from the Puranas, such as the stories of Dhruva, Prahlada, Sudama, etc. This class is entirely out of the picture now, as few have faith in those make-believe stories.
Patriotic Plays

The most dominant type for nearly fifty years, covering the last quarter of the nineteenth and the first quarter of the present century, was the play trying to instill a patriotic spirit in readers and audiences. The objective was patriotism, of both local and the all-India variety. All through the British period, the Oriyas lived a dismembered existence, suppressed and exploited in each of the four different provinces in which they were scattered. Patriotism in Orissa in the last 50 years was, naturally enough, more of the parochial and less of the Indian pattern. Indeed, as has been said before, the first great Oriya dramatist resolved to write plays in Oriya only on account of a revulsion from the performance of Bengali plays on Orissa's soil. But Indian patriotism was no less intense if less copious. The first and foremost national need of the Oriyas of those days was to react manfully to the contempt and exploitation of others as a people. Hence poets and playwrights of that period made it a point to rouse intense feelings in the hearts of the Oriyas for their existence as a united and resurrected people, by recounting their past glories. And so, while Bengali poets and playwrights have gone mostly to the annals of Maharashtra and Rajasthan and to the history of the Mughals for the materials of their historical plays, poets and playwrights in Orissa have turned their eyes to their kings, Kharavela, Kapilendra, Purushottama, Mukunda and Narasimha. The most important figure in this category is Pandit Godavari Misra, of the Satyavadi School. He was essentially a poet and has earned literary immortality in Orissa through his enchanting semi-historical ballads. He has written only two plays, Purushottama Deva and Mukunda Deva. Not connected with any stage in his lifetime, Pandit Misra could not, in the nature of things, make his plays perfectly stage-worthy. But his plays are distinguished for two reasons: first for the excellent poetic quality of the sentiments expressed and of the language employed, and secondly for the strong patriotic feeling both plays breathe. It is mainly for this that these plays, particularly Purushottama Deva, were once the rage in the schools and colleges of Orissa. A song from Pandit Misra's Purushottama Deva could be the marching song of any victorious army returning from
the battle-field with flying colours. Quoted below are a few lines.

We have inscribed victory on the forehead of the Mother-land

In words painted with the blood of the enemy
Who has been routed,—his pride dashed to the ground.
And incised on his thousand faces are the curses of Death.
Come ye brothers, dedicate your lives to the service of the Motherland,
And you will reap the rewards of a hero on the other side of life.

The Mother, whose history is both lovely and terrible,
And whose progeny have made her both holy and famous,
Ye brothers, embellish her with garlands of fresh glory.

Asvinikumara and Kali Charana

The next man to dominate the stage was Asvini Kumara Ghosh. Like the Mahant of Kothpada monastery who patronised Ramashankara Ray’s plays, a new patron now comes into the field in the figure of Banamali Pati, a rich countryside money-lender in the district of Puri. This village Shylock was later cruelly murdered by a group of his victims. It may be that he helped start the Art Theatre, which has in a way been the mother of the modern stage in Orissa, as a profitable investment for a fraction of his miserly accumulation. For nearly a quarter of a century this Art Theatre, with its repertoire of Asvini Babu’s plays, constituted the entire professional theatrical world in Orissa. After the proprietor’s tragic death the party broke up and was entirely eclipsed for some time. Then it revived as the Annapurna Theatre which is now running with comparative prosperity. It has permanent stages both at Cuttack and Puri, each with its own troupe of actors and actresses.

Asvini Kumara Ghosh established the prose drama on the Orissa stage. Closely connected with the Art Theatre, he evinced excellent stage effects in all his plays. He has nearly thirty plays to his credit. But they suffer from too much of a ‘stagey’ atmosphere and theatrical speech. They are all totally lacking in literary grace.
The man who supplied these correctives to the Oriya plays had no difficulty in quickly driving Ghosh's plays off the Orissa stage. He is Kalicharana Patnaik, a noted musician and an excellent director. He has now nearly thirty plays to his credit. One, Bhata (Rice), ran a hundred nights when it was first staged, a record in Orissa. Kali Babu, though retired, is still the centre of the present-day Oriya stage. He ran his own stage for nearly two decades and created out of unpromising raw material all the actors and actresses who are of any importance in Orissa today. It was Kali Babu who made acting a natural art on the Orissa stage—a much more difficult thing than the artificial, formal and stereotyped performances of the old days. He has made dialogue natural too and has used music for excellent stage-effects. As a matter of fact, Kali Babu's plays have become attractive and popular more for their music than for real dramatic art. Swayed by an impulse to cater for the taste of the groundlings, Kali Babu has however debased his plays as literary works by over-loading them with many of the attractions of the yatras and suangas, including some of their vulgarities. Unfortunately this Kali Babu tradition now reigns supreme on the Oriya stage. It is a mixture of horse-play and rough humour, like the slapstick of the cinema. The operatic qualities of the yatras are grafted on to a so-called dramatic form which merely provides a background. Character development and high seriousness, literary dignity, classical taste and idealism are now scorned as unacceptable highbrow stuff.

But the lowbrow must be told plainly that it is not the passing stage popularity but real literary worth that endures, that earns the glory of immortality. Such plays are few and far between in Oriya, as no stage manager will touch them. But quite unconnected with the professional stage, indeed caring little for it, and guided by pure literary motives, some have produced literary and poetic plays which may long outlive the present and past sensations of the moment. Those deserving mention in this class of literary dramas are Sivinath of Kamapala Misra, Purushottamaa Deva and Mukunda Deva of Pandit Godavaris Misra, Priyadasi of Kalindi Charana Panigrahi, Muktipathe of Baikuntha Patnaik and Puja-rini.
Rajakavi, Nashtanida, Barabati and Buddha of another writer. It seems to be in the fitness of things, and a challenge to the vulgar sensations of the contemporary theatre, that the highest praise given to any single drama by Professor Girija Shankara Ray, the learned historian and critic of the Oriya drama and son of Ramashankara, in his book Oriya natya kala already referred to, has been reserved for one of these small poetic plays of one such writer, in preference to any of the temporary sensations, past or present.

The contemporary playwrights who deserve mention are Bhanja Kishor Patnaik, Rama Chandra Misra, Gopala Chhotaray, Manoranjana Dasa, and Kamala Lochana Mahanty. They are all young and very busy in their creativeness at present. Estimates of their contributions to Oriya drama will have to wait until critics can view them in their true perspective and until the dust of passing controversies has died down.

Considering their dismembered existence of over four hundred years, the Oriyas have a repertoire of plays of which they need not be ashamed. The number is already considerable, and practically all types of plays are available in the language--plays written on strictly Sanskrit lines by Pandit Gopinatha Nanda Sarma, Harihara Misra and Raja Chikiti are there; plays written on a regular Elizabethan model are of course there, and also, pure farces, tragedies, comedies, tragicomodies, social, historical, political and psychological plays, and so on. Recently one-act plays have been making quite a stir.

THE MASS PLAYS

(Lakshmi Purana Suanga and Baishnava Pani's modern Yatras)

The masses of Orissa have evolved their own intellectual and artistic entertainments which are closely bound up with the soil and whose history is intriguingly and mysteriously uncertain. There is as yet no accepted theory as to their origin and development—they seem self-evolved and self-contained. They consist of pure dances, or dance and music, or dance and recitation, as also a combination of music and
acting. The pure dances are those of the Adivasis—the horse-dances and the lathi-dances of cowherds performed in the month of Chaitra. The Devadasi dances in the temple of Jagannatha are the pristine forms of the genuine Odissi dance, unchanged for centuries. The ‘Gotipua’ or boy-dances of south and east Orissa are a combination of song and dance, a sort of make-shift substitute for the Devadasi dances of the temple, but which now represent a complex dance-culture and prolonged musical training.

But the masses would soon get tired of gyrations and the whirling of limbs, if these did not tell a connected story. ‘Gotipua’ dances are popular, not so much for the art of dancing that they exhibit as for the highly spiced romantic love-songs relating to the love of Radha and Krishna which they describe and enact. Story, dance, music and histrionic art are all admirably combined in the yatra, which therefore is the most popular form of entertainment in the villages. The yatra may be described as the drama of the village street staged under the open sky without a formal theatre. And these yatrās have been flourishing in Orissa from the earliest period of her history. In the friezes over some of the caves of Khandagiri near Bhuvaneswara many historians decipher the representations of nothing but mass entertainments. The double-storeyed Ranigumpha is supposed to have been a semi-formal theatre in Jain and Buddhist times. Said Dr. Charles Fabri referring to these caves in a Radio talk: “The most fascinating of these is the two-storeyed cave now called Ranigumpha, with some admirable second century relief carving, the meaning of which has not been made out. It is a complicated frieze of figures reclining, fighting, abducting a woman and of other subjects carved very much in the style of the Buddhist stupa of Bharhut. Some of the figure work, though archaic, is simple and is excellently done and must be counted among the best sculptures of early Indian art. In other caves one finds such interesting scenes as a ballet performance by a ballerina in front of the pavilion, accompanied by the music of a number of musicians sitting alongside. Most probably these were attempts by early Oriya artists to depict mass entertainment which we undoubtedly find in the medieval art of Orissa, as one of the most favourite motifs.”
These mass-plays in Orissa are generally described by three names according to their subjects—lilas, suangas and yatras. Lilas, such as Rama-lila, Krishna-lila, or Bharata-lila speak for themselves. The suanga, the earliest variety, is generally associated with some particular god or goddess. Yatra is a general term, covering most secular and mythological subjects, full of rough good humour, and containing plenty of songs and melodramatic incidents like fights, murder, abduction and rescue of pretty women. All the three varieties seem to have flourished since very early times, particularly the first two. It may not be out of place to give here a short account of one suanga of the 15th century, because of the modernism of its attitude towards the position of women at home and in society and to the caste system and general social standards. It is called Lakshmi Purana Suanga, written by Balarama Dasa (15th-16th century), author of the popular Ramayana in Oriya. The theme and spirit of this suanga have become an integral part of the national life and national consciousness in Orissa, an indication of the powerful influence this literature can exercise over the mass mind if treated as the great poet Balarama Dasa has treated it. Now for the story of Lakshmi Purana:

Each Thursday in the month of Margashirsha is supposed to be the day of Lakshmi-worship for each householder in Orissa. On that day ladies are expected to cleanse and decorate their houses and worship Lakshmi in the shape of newly harvested paddy and the paddy-measures. Now, on the eve of one such day, Lakshmi, the consort of Jagannatha and the busy housewife of His household, the famous Shrine, begged leave of her husband and his elder brother to go the rounds of the city to see how the holy Thursday was being observed by the people. Permission was easily granted and the two brothers Jagannatha and Balabhadra also desired to have an outing that day. The two parties went their separate ways. Lakshmi, in the disguise of an old Brahmin lady with faithful maids in attendance, called at many doors, visiting the ministers, the chief priest and also the local merchant princes. Everywhere she was disgusted with the sight of lazy men and women still snoring in their beds, with houses still unswept and in disorder, oblivious of her
worship: At last she came to the outskirts of the city of Puri and there she was surprised to find Sria, a Chandala woman, up from early hours and ready for the day's holy fast. She had swept her little cottage clean, decorated it with mural drawings, and had painted the doorstep with rice paste. She had drawn the hundred-petalled lotus with the feet of Lakshmi in it. The living goddess in disguise was charmed to see such true piety, such purity of devotion in a Chandala woman and she entered into her cottage, blessed her and lo and behold, the humble cottage turned into a magnificent palace and an appropriate change took place in all other directions also, such as a common householder would desire. Exactly at this moment the two brothers, Jagannatha and Balabhadra, were passing that way. They saw Lakshmi in a Chandala's house. Balarama, the irate purist, became furious and thus addressed his younger brother Jagannatha: "Look here, Kanhai, your wife is very fickle. She is a disgrace to our family. She lacks the dignity of a highborn woman. See with your own eyes, she is now in a Chandala's house. And soon she will return to the temple and enter our kitchen and defile the sanctity of our holy precincts. I certainly cannot tolerate such irreligious conduct. She must not enter the temple again. If you are fond of your wife, you may go and live with her in the Chandala colony." Poor Jagannatha mildly protested that it would be difficult to get another wife like Lakshmi. Nothing could appease the irate, sanctimonious elder brother. They returned to the temple where they thought they could live peacefully without women.

Lakshmi returned in time to the temple and met Jagannatha Himself guarding the main door. When the great lady wanted to enter, she was prevented by her own husband. A very interesting battle of words followed. Lakshmi protested against the orders of the elder brother and asserted that she had not done anything wrong by visiting the home of a Chandala. Jagannatha replied that, apart from that particular offence, she was on the whole an undesirable woman, whose reputation was that she was in the habit of breaking up old homes to build up new ones, and again breaking up those to build others. Such a capricious woman, said Jagannatha, was not to be accepted any longer in His home and so He was going to divorce her forthwith. Lakshmi, the great lady, was equal to the occasion. She behaved 'manfully' and looked squarely at her husband, rebuking
him loudly for obeying his brother and acquiescing in the accusations against his devoted wife. She said that He, Jagannatha, was no better than a cowherd while she was no other than the daughter of the King of Seas. She would not brook being lectured to by a cowherd on the dignity of caste. When Jagannatha told her to take with her all the precious jewellery she had on and return to her ever-howling, salty, asthmatic father, the ocean king, his lady replied that she would rather leave behind all her jewellery for His new and more worthy wife, and that she need not return to her father's place as a helpless, divorced woman but could manage for herself. She went away beyond the limits of the city, and summoned Visvakarma to build her a home. She lived there in all magnificence with her retinue of women attendants. And she engaged Vetalas to bring away stealthily all the food, the entire wherewithal from the temple so that the two brothers would wander like beggars until they realised her importance in their life. She divined that if the two brothers were to live comfortably without her, no man in the world would care for a woman and she was determined to see to it that such a thing never came to pass. The brothers woke up next morning to find that the whole temple was empty. They felt hungry and went to the kitchen, but there was nothing to eat. Impelled by increasing hunger they came out on the streets to beg food in the guise of old Brahmans, but from each door they were driven off as tramps. After many pathetic and frustrating experiences the two unfortunates came to Lakshmi's new home beyond the city limits. There at last they were given bath and food in the way to which they were accustomed in Lakshmi's old home, the Jagannatha temple. They became suspicious and recognition at last led to reconciliation. Lakshmi however agreed to return to the temple on two conditions: that she would now be free to visit anyone's house irrespective of caste, and secondly that her prasada would be enjoyed together by people of all castes from Brahmans to Chandalas. This is in fact done even today.

Thus ends the Lakshmi Purana Suanga which was written in Oriya in the 15th century by the great poet Balarama Dasa. It has been enjoyed by vast masses of Orissa for these four hundred years. As a matter of fact this suanga has created and established the Thursdays of Margashirsha as national
festivals and as part of the national life of the Oriyas. This speaks of the tremendous influence these street-plays, like the Puranas, have been exercising on the mass-mind in our country. And, apart from folk entertainment, what a charming little human and sociological document, what a fine imaginative piece of literature this is. It shows the glory of the woman in the home and pulls the barriers of caste to pieces. Here is, I believe, a good proof that some of these folk-plays are much higher artistic creations than many of the formal plays.

These suangas, lilas and yatras have all become gradually modernised. As mentioned earlier, the folk-plays and literary plays have influenced one another in Orissa to a considerable extent. Particularly since Kali Babu came into the arena of the Orissan theatre, the literary plays have absorbed a good many yatra-elements to attract customers, to the detriment of pure dramatic standards. Those who had shown him the way in this field long before, were Govinda Surdeo and Mohana Sundara Deva Goswami who, by bringing rasa lilas on the formal stage, had created terrific sensation in their times and undoubtedly proved the irresistible attraction which a combination of the yatra and the theatre would have for the masses. On the other hand, the yatras have assimilated a great deal from the modern theatre and plays in the course of adapting to modern tastes and subjects. Blank-verse and prose dialogue are copiously used in the present-day yatras and they are now divided into acts and scenes, which was not the style before. Modern costumes and current styles in acting are also readily absorbed.

**Baishnava Pani**

Among the persons who have modernised and revolutionised the yatras in Orissa, the most celebrated name is that of the late Baishnava Pani who started his career as a boy-dancer on the stage of the Mahanta of Kothpada. There are nearly fifty yatras to Pani’s credit, some of them going through thirty to ninety editions. The gift he has made to the mass culture of Orissa is of inestimable value and is indeed deathless. One or two excerpts from one of his yatras may show not only how he has modernised them but also how intrinsically worthy his creations are as literary pieces.
The story of Kedar-Gouri is the Oriya version of the romance of Laila-Majnu, of Romeo-Juliet, or of Pyramus and Thisbe in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*. Baishnava Pani has a *yatra* or *gitinatyā* on this youthful and romantic theme. The story is supposed to have taken place in the time of King Lalatendu Kesari of the 8th century. But Pani, a poet, has completely ignored the dead chronology of history by infusing into his playlet an interesting topicality. So, when King Lalatendu comes upon the scene and enquires of his minister about conditions in his State, the latter replies: “Your Majesty, as you have established hospitals and engaged doctors, everybody is enjoying excellent health in your kingdom and is singing your praises. The management of schools and hostels is also flawless and practically a river of education is flowing through the country. The conduct of officers and officials is also blameless.”

The King then expresses his desire to visit a local school, which he does and there meets both Kedar and Gouri, the pre-adolescent hero and heroine who were classmates. Thus the play begins in a modern way.

But soon after, in the next scene, the conventional *duta* or messenger comes in singing a song which is a telling satire on present-day elections. Says he:

> Look at the great fun in the present world, ye brethren. See how small folks rise by means of votes and how the fools who cast votes fail to distinguish between the straight and the crooked. After the ballot paper is thrown inside the box, the candidates forget all their appeals and their promises, and pretend not to know us. Baishnava says, Ye brethren, do not get yourselves involved in this muddle.

Now, Kedar and Gouri, prevented from meeting each other by their relatives, decide to meet at night in a jungle outside the town of Bhubaneswara. There, as luck would have it, Kedar imagines through a misunderstanding that Gouri had perhaps been devoured by a tiger and kills himself. Soon after Gouri returns and finding her handsome lover already dead, kills herself too. But before killing himself, Kedar burst into a song full of poignant feeling:

> Ah, cruel tiger, where are you? Why don’t you come and
eat me too? Do not delay. My beloved Gouri is now inside your stomach. Do mix my flesh and bones with hers. We could not be united in life, why do you not unite us in death? Just now she, whose body was like lightning, would have been in loving embrace with this body of mine. But now I am grovelling in the mire of agony. We left our homes and families to meet here, and you took my loving fair bride from me. This indeed breaks my heart.

Thus, in its dénouement this folk-play rises to fine dramatic and artistic heights in the hands of Baishnava Pani, the great folk-poet of Orissa. The excerpts given above will have convinced readers that folk-plays in Orissa today are not only keenly alive to the demands of modern times, squarely facing contemporary problems in the face, praising or criticising and satirising according to their genuine reactions, but also are replete with intrinsic literary merit.

There are two more types of mass entertainment peculiar to Orissa which should also be mentioned. One is Pala, quite different from the Pala in Bengal, and the other is Daskathia. Both these types of entertainment are above all vulgarity and though highly intellectual and literary, are still suitable for mass consumption. Both, in their own ways, keep the rural masses enchanted and enthralled by their musical recitations of classical Oriya poetry, interpreting them with parallel quotations from different authors in Oriya and Sanskrit with humorous interspersions. Generally daskathia (whose only musical accompaniments are two small blocks of wood, hence the name) narrates a single story, which provides plenty of opportunity for literary digressions. The Palawalas generally take up themes like war, love, devotion or separation and display a wealth of classical literature on each point, singly or, more often than not, in competition with another party. Not the scholars, not the Government or aristocrats, not the printing press in Orissa, but it is these wandering Palawalas and Daskathias who have kept alive among the Oriya masses the keenest appetite and enthusiasm for classical Oriya literature.
CHAPTER XVI

THE SATYAVADI SCHOOL

Though the followers of Radhanatha and Madhusudana continued writing down to the twenties of this century, they had ceased to be a literary force by its first decade. A new group had come into the field which was somewhat critical of the contributions of Radhanatha and Madhusudana. This was the Satyavadi School, founded by Pandit Gopabandhu Dasa of hallowed memory.

Exactly a hundred years after the British occupation of Orissa, the Utkal Sammilani, a political body founded in 1903, which had gathered into its fold people of all ranks from the prince to the peasant, made a unanimous demand for unification of the scattered Oriya-speaking tracts under one administration. In the previous year, the journalist-patriot Pandit Nilamani Vidyaratna had sown the seed, as narrated before, in Ganjam and south Orissa. This was the earliest demand to be made in India for a homogeneous state on linguistic basis and for the next thirty years, the unification of Oriya lands was the dearest dream and the sole aspiration of all Oriyas. Poet, patriot and saint, Pandit Gopabandhu Dasa became the very heart and soul not only of this national agitation, but of the entire national life of the Oriyas during this period.

On the model of the Fergusson College in Poona, Gopabandhu started a Vihara in the extensive bakul-garden of Sakhigopala, eleven miles north of Puri. Inspired by his idealism and saintly character, highly educated persons like Pandits Nilakantha Dasa, Godavaris Misra and Kripasindhu Misra, who could have got excellent jobs under the British Government for the asking, joined Gopabandhu on pittances. Theirs was the old Indian ideal of plain living and high thinking. They voluntarily adopted this ideal to set an example to younger generations for the uplift of Orissa and of India.

The institute where these eminent scholars formed the patriotic staff was only a High School, but because of Gopa-
bandhu's personality and the intellectual eminence of his sacrificing band, the Satyavadi High School became and remained the cultural centre of Orissa for about two decades. Gopabandhu and his associates all took up literature, for which each of them had displayed natural aptitude from his student-days, as the means for propagating their ideas and ideals. They wrote histories, poems, plays and innumerable essays in their zeal to awaken in the hearts of their people a patriotic consciousness, the desire to live again as free men and revive the glories of their forbears. The result has been quite an appreciable body of literary work with a distinction all its own. The Satyavadi School broke up too soon, in the flood-waters of the Gandhian movement. The staff stepped into the morass of politics and Gopabandhu died prematurely. But the entire group has become immortal for the work they did in the few years they devoted to literature as teachers of the Satyavadi High School. Though not a very great figure in literature, nor original in any way, Pandit Gopabandhu, the leader of the group, so completely symbolised the national feelings by his saintly life, that he deserves foremost consideration in describing even the literary contributions of the Satyavadi School.

PANITI GOPABANDHU

The most inspiring orator, the noblest politico-social worker and the most far-sighted and clear-minded educationist so far in Orissa, Pandit Gopabandhu Dasa was essentially a devoted servant of humanity. Though handicapped by an organic defect of speech, the high-souled Pandit, out of sheer will to communicate his vibrant spirit to the masses, became a moving orator, swaying vast crowds to tears and laughter in a way that has never been known in Orissa before or since. Charged with lofty emotions, he more often than not spoke poetry, and some of his addresses in councils and conferences are now taken as classical examples of beautiful, noble Oriya prose.

The patriot really started his public career as a poet. The little that he produced in his student days was so marked with individuality as to attract special recognition from no less
a personality than Radhanath Ray, the demigod of Oriya literature in those days. But, after passing out of the university, Gopabandhu became so immersed in various nationalistic activities that he completely forgot poetry, his adolescent love. The founding of the Satyavadi School was only one of his multifarious activities. There was no aspect of the national life which did not engage his attention, or which failed to be blessed with some significant touches from his noble personality. In order to spread his ideas among the classes and the masses of Orissa, he first founded the monthly 'Satyavadi' and later the weekly 'Samaj'. In the editorial columns of these two journals Gopabandhu poured out his soul, his feelings and his agonies too. The prose that he wrote with an inimitable blend of the colloquial and the classical, easy flowing, sonorous and rhythmic, reminding the moderns in Orissa of the charm of the biblical idiom of the Bhagavata of Jagannatha Dasa—was a revelation of the nobility which Oriya prose can attain at the touch of a master spirit.

Responding to the call of India's struggle for freedom, Gopabandhu did not hesitate for a moment to sacrifice his school and his periodicals, and even to leave the unanimous Oriya agitation for a province of their own, of which he was by now the heart and soul, into the background, in the interests of the larger national emergency. He made himself and his colleagues the spearhead of the freedom movement in Orissa. Gopabandhu was imprisoned in Hazaribag jail for two years from 1922 to 1924. In the lonely leisure of those years Gopabandhu came back to poetry, the old love of his student days.

He wrote two small books inside the Hazaribag jail. One is Bandira Atmakatha or the 'Soliloquy of a prisoner'. In this book he tells us his reactions to men, things, places and affairs as the railway train swiftly carried him from Orissa towards Hazaribag in Bihar. Without any attempt to heighten the effect through embellishments of any sort, the simple verse used in this book turns into noble poetry, charged with the galvanising outpourings of a great heart. First published in the columns of the weekly 'Samaj,' even while Gopabandhu was in jail, these soliloquies took Orissa by storm. Lines from them are now part of the intellectual make-up of every
educated Oriya. Here are some examples to show how that patriotic soul cried out in agony for the suffering millions and why these soliloquies touched the heart of the Oriyas so deeply.

How well do I know the people of Jenapur, where
The train that carries me out of Orissa has stopped.
• Three years ago I visited this place,

When it was devastated by floods,
Incalculable was the damage done to homes, crops and cattle,

And a thousand eyes were wet with tears.
• Ah, those painful scenes, whose very memory
Agonises my whole soul.

The train is already signalled to leave,
The last bell rings, the green flag waves.
How I wish in vain, alas, to get down here
To meet the dear people of Jenapur once more,
And moving from village to village,
To speak a word of hope to everybody, before parting!
How I wish too to pour out my unspoken feelings to them,

Before an assembly of theirs on the sands of the Brahmani,

And to see how the poor dears fare
Under the tyranny of both Man and Nature!

The other book that Gopabandhu wrote in Hazaribag jail is Dharmapada, describing the heroic sacrifice of his own life by the boy-architect of that name, in the interests of his class, while engaged in the construction of the temple of Konaraka. The legend was already there, but he has given it literary glory. He has tried to put before the modern Oriyas, as the ideal for the individual citizen, the willing readiness to forget his own interests for those of the state, the community, and the nation, that Dharmapada showed when occasion so demanded.

These two poems have become as popular in Orissa as folk-poetry. Artistically they are not of a very high order, but what moves the ordinary reader so deeply about them,
is the nobility of the ideals and the purity of emotions they express. Gopabandhu's poems of his student days are also available now in book form. In some of them the Gopabandhu that we know, the great, noble, humane soul, is clearly visible even in those early years, through the humanistic and universal feelings they carry.

GOPABANDHU'S COLLEAGUES

Pandit Nilakantha Dasa

First among Gopabandhu's associates and now the doyen of litterateurs in Orissa, Pandit Nilakantha Dasa is reputed more for his erudition than as a poet, though his immortality is going to be based on what he produced as a poet during the days he was a school teacher of Satyavadi. In those days he produced excellent translations, or rather adaptations, of Tennyson's Enoch Arden and The Princess which read almost like original works and are most enjoyable for their style. In Dasa Nayaka (Enoch Arden) it is colloquial and in Pranayini (The Princess) loftily grand. His historical-biographical kavya, Kharavela, adapting classical Oriya metres to modern treatment, was not very popular because of the uniform elevation of its style which was not necessary and which also, one feels, went over the heads of its readers. His magnum opus, and fortunately the most popular of his books, is the kavya, Konarake (At Konarak) with its two prologues—'The Night at Ramachandi' and 'The Dawn at Ramachandi'.

The young patriotic scholar-poet once led his students, as Head of the Satyavadi School, on an excursion to Konarak. Unfortunately, there were heavy showers and they all took shelter in the temple of Ramachandi on the sea-shore about three miles away from the Sun-temple. The tired students soon fell asleep, leaving the poet-scholar to his musings over Konarak, its fall and the fall of the Oriyas also. He imagines that the boys were dreaming of Konarak in their sleep, after having seen its wonderful architecture and sculpture. Through those dreams the poet unrolls the whole panorama of Orissa's history in the subconscious world of his young students. That is the first prologue, 'The Night at Ramachandi'.
In the morning, the boys see again the rain-washed magnificence of Konaraka, the billowy sea, and the golden undulations of the beach, broken only by the meandering silver line of a river running into the sea. The poet describes these beauties to his students and then leads them on to the royal romance of Narasimha Deva and Maya Devi in which lies the seed of the marvellous creation that is Konaraka. This is the second prologue, ‘The Dawn at Ramachandi’. The reader is then ushered into the magic world of the main book, the kavya Maya Devi.

In the compound of the Sun-temple at Konaraka there is a temple of Maya Devi. It is still a mystery how a temple bearing the name of the Buddha’s mother could find a place at Konaraka. Many have conjectured from the existence of this temple that Konaraka was once a Buddhist shrine. This is still disputed. But the young poet-scholar Nilakantha Dasa tried to provide a most plausible explanation of this mysterious temple, an explanation which he constructed out of popular legends. He relates how, once when he was out on a trip in the ex-states of Orissa, he heard this story from a mendicant minstrel.

Prince Narasimha Deva, son of Anangabhima Deva, in one of his expeditions to fight a notorious highwayman and his infamous band, came to know of the princess Maya Devi of Sisupalagada, whose chieftain-father had been plundered of all his wealth by that gang. The prince immediately fell in love with this beautiful daughter of an impoverished feudal chief. There were frequent secret meetings and it was taken for granted that they would soon be married. But in the meantime the old king Anangabhima Deva had arranged his heir-apparent’s marriage with the princess of Kashmir, negotiated by no less an emissary than Visvanatha Mahapatra, the celebrated author of Sahitya Darpana, who is supposed to have been a contemporary of Anangabhima. When this news became known to the crown prince he was broken-hearted. He hastened to Sisupalagada and hesitatingly and in tears, broke the bad news to the princess Maya. Surprisingly, the reaction in the lovely princess was altogether different from what was expected. She welcomed the news, asked the prince not to worry about her, and requested him to come after his marriage with the Kashmir
princess to Sisupalagada along with her and take her (Maya) with them to the Barabati fort (where the kings of Orissa formerly lived, now in ruins at Cuttack) as a serving maid to the future king and queen of Orissa.

Narasimha married the Kashmir princess. But soon after, he left Cuttack for Tamralipti to free that imperial port of ancient Utkal, of piracy, leaving word to his young bride that she should call on the princess Maya at Sisupalagada. The Kashmir princess met her husband’s first sweetheart and was moved by her charm and character. But mysteriously enough, when they were about to embrace each other, princess Maya collapsed and died in the other’s arms. According to the former’s wishes, secretly expressed to a confidante, she was not to be cremated but her body was to be embalmed and placed in a box and, after being taken to the Barabati fort, the home of her lord, floated down the river.

Narasimha Deva returned from Tamralipti via the eastern sea-coast and landed at Charitra (Hiuen Tsang’s Che-li-ta-lo) which was then a prosperous harbour, standing at the mouth of the river Chandrabhaga. The Kashmir princess was there to welcome him home. People talked about a box floating in the harbour containing the dead body of a lovely lady, whose charms even death had not been able to undo in any manner. Narasimha personally went and brought the box out of water, recognised that it was none other than Maya and over her earthly remains built the temple of Maya Devi, as the first step in the plan for the magnificent Sun-temple of Konarak. As Narasimha lifted Maya’s dead body out of the box he had a mystic experience in which Maya told him who they actually were—the Sun-god had been born as Narasimha himself, and Maya and the Kashmir princess were no other than the two celestial wives of the Sun-god, Chhaya and Sanjna. She was now leaving him to permit her friend, the Kashmir princess, to possess his undivided affection during this particular terrestrial existence.

Pandit Nilakantha Dasa has written a kavya of grand, wild beauty, most befitting this noble royal romance against the background of the medieval feudalistic world of Orissa and of India. Interspersed with matchless ballads and songs in the style of Tennyson’s Princess, this kavya has the indelible stamp of a creative individuality. The lines flow on like a
mountain cascade with Browningesque vigour and Miltonic grandeur, and the young poet throws out similes and metaphors of his own and a profusion of ideas, in a style of versification that is at once pliant and manly, expressive as well as recondite, vibrant in simple charm and magnificent in bejewelled aristocracy—all of which together combine to make it a grand work of art, in spite of occasional blemishes caused by careless construction and an apparent obscurantism born of sheer exuberance.

Pandit Nilakantha has been a great figure in modern Oriya prose also. His *Arya jivana*, published likewise in the Satyabadi School days, still remains unique among its kind. It is a collection of essays interpreting the Hindu view of life and society. The style is in the grand manner all through, vigorous and assertive.

The Pandit has continued to write essays on pure literature also. For the last 40 years or so he has been spearheading the opposition to the Radhanatha School, spreading the view that the latter has spoiled the pristine purity of Oriya literature. Panditji is a deep scholar of Sanskrit and of the Chaldean culture. He talks enthusiastically of Assyria and Zarathustra and Ahura Mazda, whenever he gets an opportunity. He has been an implacable enemy of Vaishnavism and openly denounces the Bengali culture, so largely imbued with the Bhakti and Tantric cults, as a disastrous influence on the culture of Orissa since the days of Chaitanya.

*Pandit Godavaris Misra*

In the early days of Orissan patriotism, the first quarter of this century, Pandit Godavaris Misra's plays, *Purushottama Deva* and *Mukunda Deva*, caused a sensation everywhere in Orissa, as we have already seen in the chapter on the drama in Orissa (Chapter XV). Now they are little read and seldom staged. But his ballads based on historical anecdotes and legends of Orissa are really superb and assure their author immortality as a poet. His other short poems are available in several books. They have a character of their own, but lack both grandeur of ideas and polish of style. They are popular for their homely naturalness. His recently published autobiography is a worthy addition to that class
in Oriya literature.\footnote{Selected for a posthumous Award (1962) by the Sahitya Akademi} Pandit Misra has left behind a considerable mass of prose writings also in the shape of short stories, essays, and adapted novels. All that Panditji wrote breathes warm patriotism.

**Pandit Kripasindhu Misra**

Pandit Kripasindhu Misra was the historian in this group. To the great loss of Orissa he died just when he was attaining maturity and had enough experience to produce great books in his chosen line. His big book on Konarak is really monumental. His other books are *Barabati* and *Utkala Itihasa*. Apart from their value as histories, their enjoyable literary grace easily secures for their author an honourable mention in the history of Oriya literature.

That is all about the Satyavadi group. Flourishing in the heyday of the Utkala Sammilani, with which the group was closely associated, it went on creating literature that reflected the glories of ancient Orissa so as to inspire the Oriyas to participate in the national agitation for a united Orissa. They presented the ancient Vedic culture in a new garb to suit modern times. It is also in the writings of some of this group that one comes across a most eloquent advocacy of universalism and international brotherhood, growing out of a healthy nationalism. The writings of Pandit Gopabandhu in particular breathe the purest humanitarian sentiments, rising above all narrow considerations.

We now come to the twenties of this century when India was swept from end to end by the cyclonic Non-cooperation movement of Gandhiji. Gopabandhu and his group plunged headlong into this national movement. The Satyavadi School, the very heart of Orissan culture and literature for about two decades, which had maintained unbroken the tradition of Orissa’s literary history, broke up, leaving all but anarchy in her literary world. Visvanatha Kara, the famous Brahma editor of the ‘Utkala Sahitya’, was bitterly opposed to the Non-cooperation movement and openly described it as ‘mass hysteria’ in the columns of his monthly.