CHAPTER XVII

THE CONTEMPORARY SCENE

THE GREENS

With the break-up of the Satyavadi School, the cultural life of Orissa in general and Oriya literature in particular, went into an almost anarchical condition for several years. Though it had been the veritable nursery of national culture in Orissa for two decades, the School now came to be considered 'Satanic' because it taught English. Its brilliant staff was scattered all over the country for the propagation of the charkha and to raise money for the Tilak Swarajya Fund, which were parts of the Mahatma's Non-cooperation movement. The Satyavadi School, in spite of reforms and innovations, had carried on the cultural and literary traditions of Orissa that started from Emperor Kharavela's grandiloquent chronicle, in the 1st century B.C. and flowed in a continuous stream of ever widening expanse, revealing ever newer landscapes, down to modern times. The cyclonic blasts of the Gandhian movement, however, broke that tradition, a break that the nation had not known even during four centuries of a dismembered existence.

And the break, apart from the vacuum created by the disappearance of the Satyavadi School, was heightened and intensified by the rise of a group of young writers whose roots were not only nowhere in the Oriya speaking lands, but whose muse derived its inspiration direct from Bengal and the Bengali language, against the influence of which the Satyavadi School as a group and Pandit Nilakantha Dasa in particular had waged an uncompromising battle, in all that they did, said and wrote.

This new group, under the leadership of young Annada Sankara Ray, who was already known all over the state as a brilliant student, consisted of half-a-dozen of his undergraduate friends in the Ravenshaw College, the premier educational institution of Orissa. The group is now generally known as the Sabuja or the 'Green' and the works it produced
are collectively described as Sabuja Sahitya or the Literature of the Greens.

Of this group, three alone come in for consideration in a history of Oriya literature. They are Annada Sankara Ray himself, followed by his friends Shri Kalindi Charana Panigrahi and Shri Baikuntha Natha Patnaik. Of these three again, the reputation of Annada Sankara continues to remain high, out of all proportion to the small amount of writing in Oriya to his credit and in spite of the fact that soon after topping the list of successful candidates at the then Indian Civil Service Examination, he changed to Bengali, in which language also he has earned lasting fame as a novelist and essayist.

When Ray, Panigrahi and Patnaik entered college, Rabindranath Tagore was in the noon-day splendour of his fame. That this grand creative genius cast his irresistible and inevitable spell on these impressionable adolescents cannot cause any surprise. But that they, as a group, permitted themselves to be completely swept off their feet, forgetting their own land, people and culture, cannot speak very highly of the virility of their talent.

The group's very name, Sabuja, was borrowed from the Sabujpatra of Pramatha Chaudhuri, the famous Bengali prose stylist, and friend and associate of Tagore. Sabuja or Green, as used again and again by Tagore himself, in his poetry, was a symbol for rebellious youth. But, with Rabindranath and Pramatha Chaudhury, the word was almost a credo, a philosophy of life. It came to them late in life, in the maturity of their experience and studies, as a sort of shock-tactic to shake off the mental lethargy of their countrymen, enslaved more by their own social and religious customs than by alien rule. The word Sabuja was for them a call to the youth of the country, to revolt against all that was lifeless, senseless, joyless and ugly in our society, to bring a new zest into our intellectual and spiritual life, a new appreciation of the physical beauty of the earth.

The Oriya Sabujites, however, had nothing of this spirit in them. As a matter of fact, they were too young and too immature to have any settled creed at all. They hadn't even begun life. The experiences of life that alone provide the
wherewithal for creative work of any significance were still ahead of them. Soon after, all the members of the group entered the world’s arena of struggle and their literary productions changed colour as often as the passing literary and political fashions demanded.

The group started its career in 1920-21, but it failed to produce any book of its own before 1930. In that year a representative anthology of five members of the group made its appearance, after 10 years of almost incessant ephemeral publicity in the pages of the ‘Utkala Sahitya’. But even this representative anthology did not contain a line indicating either what the group believed in or what it wanted to destroy. And the book—Sabuja Kavita—appears as a whole a mere collection of poems of very uneven quality, having neither any co-ordinating theme nor any particular socio-politico-religious attitude. The book has not been popular either; it has not had a second edition, though 30 years have elapsed.

That the group had absolutely no roots in Orissa’s national life or culture, this single book is sufficient proof. The Mahanadi is mentioned once in a casual way. Nature in Orissa in these poems of an entire literary group does not otherwise exist at all. The poets sing only of fairies and clouds and mango blossoms in a vague, general way. Even Kalindi Charana’s Puri Mandira (Temple of Jagannatha) is so vague that what he says of that great shrine could as well apply to any other holy place in India or even a temple of any other religion. And Kalindi Charana’s poems in particular are so full of metrical errors that the lot are reduced to the level of mere juvenilia. In this anthology at least, his poems should have been thoroughly revised before they were allowed to find permanent place in a book.

Annada Sankara

The poems of Annada Sankara however stand out, demanding unstinted praise. They depict the poignant story of a young mind riven with conflict, but giving, all the same, a message for life, with a soft but stable aesthetic statement and remarkable metrical correctness, considering his age at that time. Unlike the poems of Kalindi Charana or Baikuntha Natha or
Harihara or Sarat Chandra, the other contributors to this anthology, Annada Sankara’s have a completeness of their own, indicating their birth in his own soul at least, if not in the soil of Orissa. Young Annada Sankara sings of love, beauty and youth in the most full-throated manner, as vigorous adolescence should. But at the same time, the brilliant young man feels the calls of life, of the world outside, of his duties and of his youthful ambitions. He plans to destroy (The Detroyer) all that is effete, old and inhibiting, but is restrained in his zeal by his sensitive reaction to love and beauty and to the imaginary self-satisfaction of an ivory-tower existence during a prolonged creative process. At last the young poet decides to plunge into life, and bids adieu to his Muse in a magnificent valedictory poem, Kamala-bilasira bidaya (Farewell of the Lotus-lander)—a poem that still remains unique in the whole of Oriya literature, symbolic not only of the general spiritual conflict of adolescent minds, but of Annada Sankara’s own unexpected exit from the Oriya language and his adoption of Bengali as the medium of his later creations.

Lines like ‘Once departed, youth does not return’ or ‘When the girl blossomed like a champaka bud in spring’, taken from those youthful poems of Annada Sankara, are now on the lips of every educated man in Orissa. His poems, though small in number, are aesthetically among the finest treasures of Oriya literature. But what distinguishes them from the products of his Sabuja friends and of many others also in Oriya literature, is the existence in them of the welcome intellectual ferment of youth, those virile uncertainties of a healthy adolescent mind and the compromises and decisions, made in adjustment to conditions of life, which only talented people know how to make with grace. All this intellectual and aesthetic beauty reigns in every line that young Annada Sankara wrote forty years ago, with a history and a message of their own for readers of every generation in Orissa.

**Baikuntha Natha**

The lines of Baikuntha Natha, not only in this anthology, but in all his numerous other poems of the period, are not only completely free from any serious rhythmic deficiencies, but have a fluency of expression, an apparent spontaneity
of manner and a liquidity of diction that would have been enviable in any poet. In those young days of his, Baikuntha Natha moved readers with a fire and a music in his lines that reminded them of Shelley. But, alas, that warmth and that spontaneity soon vanished, leaving only quantities of doggerel behind. Unfortunately again, his poems are the vaguest in all Sabuja poetry. The poet has failed to establish that mysterious harmony between emotion and intellect which is the hall-mark of great poetry. His poems, particularly of the early period, therefore read well, but do not convey a definite or consistent message. They lack the clarity and cohesion of thought which so distinguishes the poems of young Annada Sankara, his friend.

Later on, both Kalindi Charana and Baikuntha Natha have tried to be intellectual in their poetry. But they have only made their propagandist efforts obtrusive, filling their poems with dull and cheap arguments. Late in life Baikuntha Natha, however, lost a child and wrote a series of sonnets burdened with the heart-breaking sorrow and despair of a poet-father. This sonnet-sequence, forty in number, and collectively called Mrittika Darsana (Philosophy of Dust) may be taken as Baikuntha Natha's masterpiece, though the poems would have gained in poignancy and intensity if the sorrowing poet could have restrained his ever-multiplying and ever-crowding thoughts, his despair and despondency. As they are, they make this elegy on the death of a child unique in Oriya literature, sublimating a natural human sorrow to philosophic heights—though the philosophy itself is as cheaply pessimistic and as life-negating as the Book of Ecclesiastes in the Bible or the Manabodha chaautisa of Bhakta-charana. It is artistically inferior to both. But we must admire the daring introspection of the poet when in deep but illuminating sorrow, he asks his own partner in life, the mother of the lost child:

Will you, mother, who now think yourself so badly treated,
Stand detached from life henceforward for ever?
Will not you, tomorrow, under the influence of Maya,
Forget this sorrow?
And will not this wound of Death soon heal?
All is like a passing cloud, Laugh! O laugh!
Vanity of vanities, are love, beauty and ideals!

How naturally also the despairing, bewailing poet hugs the
very sorrow that crushes his spirit! It is now his only refuge.

The human child, searching in darkness, down the ages,
Seeks the secrets of life. Proud of his sciences,
How foolishly he has hymned his meagre discoveries,
While the mysterious grows more mysterious,
Refusing to answer the soul-racking query of Man.

Death and Darkness are the end of living beings,
Man has prayed blindly age after age,
Annihilation ends all glory and all struggle
And takes us in loving kindness to its bosom.
Tears, wounds, pain are the only Truths;
In the presence of my loving sorrow
I forget philosophies, all argument, and pretentious light.

ACHIEVEMENTS OF THE SABUJAS

Kalindi Charana

The Sabujas not only produced immense quantities of poetry in their several styles, but wrote novels, stories, and essays also. Emulating a previous attempt in Bengal, they collectively wrote a novel, Basanti, which was quite a sensation at the time. Annada Sankara’s literary essays on particular Oriya books and authors definitely broke new ground in their time, revealing a wide study of international literature. Also, they were written in a measured prose, in contrast to the ignorant and frothy adulation which is taken for literary criticism by most so-called critics in Orissa, even today. Kalindi Charana, in the group, made a mark also as a writer of short stories. Poet, essayist, novelist and story writer, Kalindi Charana stands out today as the real representative of the group, covering as he does all the facets of the group’s activities. Of his novels only one, Matri Manisa, has proved successful and popular. This book has been rightly selected by the Sahitya Akademi as one of the ten books in Oriya to be
translated into other Indian languages. The novel has carried forward the tradition of Fakiramohana in being written in a fluent colloquial style, and in not giving an incorrect pen-picture of Orissa’s rural society, though the Gandhian idealism which the book preaches in a veiled way is a very rare thing in the countryside of Orissa, as anywhere in the world.

Few of the poems of Kalindi Charana can really claim high stature as, with the metrical errors already mentioned and a sort of laboured felicity, most of them lack warmth of feeling, the white-heat of imagination and the emotional abandon which make great poetry.

Here, for example, are a few stanzas from two of his supposedly representative poems in the latest anthology of modern Oriya poetry. Readers may judge for themselves. This is from Gold:

Lifeless metal, but incomparably beautiful,
At what dawn in history did your lustre come to be prized?
What laughter have you brought to the world,
And what rivers of tears have you made to flow,
Oh, coveted of the Universe, Oh victorious, Oh great Gold!

You have urged the hands of a son to cut his father’s throat
And sown the seed of distrust in the hearts of pretty women.

All things are estimated by your value
And the world shall sing your glory in all ages.

And this is from The Museum:

If we look at the governments, formed throughout History,
All seem to represent some religion or other,
But where is the one Religion for all mankind?
And is not all worship, all meditation,
Just hypocrisies adopted for food only?
And how can all peoples have one Religion and one Truth
When food, climate and vesture are so varied the world over?
As we discard old fashions in garments,
Let us discard the old truths and religions.
Truth and Religion are changing, leaving only names
behind,
It is difficult to know what they are,
Their qualities are not visible to the eye.

The Sabuja Poetry

Collectively speaking, it is the poetry produced by the Sabujites in the twenties of this century that alone has given them their distinguishing label in Oriya literature. That there is enough of the ‘sabuja’ (green) in the poetry the young Sabujites poured out, cannot be gainsaid. Their lyrics were definitely a departure from all that had been produced so far in Oriya literature. True, the whole pattern was borrowed; true also that the roots of the young enthusiasts, like their imaginations, were hanging in an undefined air; true too that the poems were not even technically mature. But it has to be admitted that the Sabuja poetry ushered the intellectuals of Orissa into a new fairy land of beauty, music and freedom glimpsed in Orissa only by flashes in the pages of the ancient Upendra Bhanja or the modern Radhanatha. The Sabujites introduced new patterns of rhyming and new metres that have now been somehow assimilated into the language. Their bold attitudes to love, woman, and life are now part of the accepted mental pattern of the average intellectual in Orissa. It is the Sabujites again who first introduced an international awareness in Oriya literature.

For all these desirable and most excellent qualities we are most thankful to the Sabuja group. Their real achievement does not lie in concrete products so much as in the creation of a new atmosphere, in the discovery of new horizons, and in new ways of saying things.

THE INDIVIDUALISTS

Contemporary to or closely following the Sabujites were also many individual writers who devoted themselves to pure creative work, impelled by intrinsic talent and inner urges, unaffiliated to groups and without labels. In a world
completely vitiated now by coteries, sectarianism, and fanatical battles of labels, these solitary figures stand apart as souls dedicated to Saraswati, regardless of the quality of their total achievement. The outstanding names among them are Shri Godavaris Mahapatra and Shri Radhamohana Gadanayaka. And, though coming into the picture a little later, Shri Krishna Chandra Tripathi also belongs spiritually to this category.

*Godavaris Mahapatra*

Shri Godavaris Mahapatra is the one literary man in Orissa who has successfully proved that writing can be a vocation by itself. Not equipped with any academic degrees, but endowed with a powerful pen, this ex-student of the Satyavadi School has worked silently in his closet and avoided public appearances as far as possible. He has been, all the same, a force to reckon with in the socio-political life of Orissa during the last thirty years. Poet, short-story writer and novelist, Mahapatra discovered in his late middle age that he has a talent for satire. Ever since, the satirist in him has completely and triumphantly suppressed all other aspects of his creativity and helped to establish him as the richest source of humour in contemporary Orissa. Mahapatra may safely be taken as the most widely read writer in Orissa today. As editor of the ‘Niankhunta’ (The Poker), his monthly magazine, Mahapatra has set a record perhaps unique in modern Indian languages. As a matter of fact, Mahapatra is not the editor alone of this monthly, but its sole contributor, its printer, publisher and sales manager also. The majority of Mahapatra’s writings cannot however claim the status of literary satires, for they are no more than personal lampoons. It is unfortunate that Mahapatra often stoops to the level of personal attacks, thereby only revealing his own prejudices. That way Mahapatra may be said to have set a disastrous example in Orissa. Though extraordinarily effective for the moment, his writing also dates quickly from week to week. His excellent talent is therefore wasted in ephemeral success. A selection of his satires has recently been published in a book, *Kanta o Phula* (Thorns and Flowers), but it is no more than his magazine in book form, not
likely to make any difference in the character of these writings.

But some of Godavaris Mahapatra's short stories are likely to be counted among the best in Oriya literature. His stirring patriotic song, whose first few lines run thus:

Rise! Oh, rise! Ye dead men of Barabati
Rend the earth asunder! Ye hundred Captains of Khurda,

Raise your heads, and listen,
The Mystic is calling at the old gate of the city,
Above the inaccessible mountain pass and below the castle walls.

Nations are awake; breaking your fetters,
Rise! ye dead men, ye weaklings,
To regain the glory of the past, glories lost and glories dead—

will ever be echoed by Orissa's sky, with its grand emotion, grandly spoken, in grand rhythm.

Radhamohana Gadanyaka

Shri Radhamohana Gadanyaka occupies a niche of his own in modern Oriya literature as the greatest balladist after Pandit Godavaris Misra, and for his almost immaculate rhymes. He has made fine, inspiring ballads out of many neglected incidents in the history of Orissa and of India—reminding us in a general way of Tagore's Katha o Kahini. Recently he has brought out a beautiful collection of ballads on birds and beasts famous in the tradition and literature of India (Pasupakhira kavya). He has made his mark also as a translator of poetry, and has very successfully translated Kalidasa's Meghadutam. All his original lyrics make delectable reading for their excellent musicality. One, entitled 'The Wayward', seems to represent the erratic life of the poet. The concept of an uncompromising liberty of action con-

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1 The historic fort at Cuttack in ruins ever since the British captured it after 3 days' assault
2 The last fort in Orissa to be destroyed by the British
tained in this poem moves the reader with its virile individuality. Here are two of its typical stanzas:

I admit, your old familiar paths are straight and easy,
And there are millions of them spread around this earth.
There are no hurdles on them and no occasion for despair,
Life runs on them smoothly, with mechanical ease.

But I shall walk the untrodden paths,
and the untravelled ways

In spite of your scolding,
As I desire to know and discover,
what lies behind the Veil.

For that, I shall silently place upon my head,
    glory as well as insult, and
Shall open my breast to storm and tribulation.

A day will come
When you shall seek me out,
To honour me for all that, for all that.

Though no degree-holder, Gadanayaka is surprisingly erudite in Sanskrit, Oriya and Bengali. He is well acquainted also with English. He is now considered the greatest metricist in Oriya literature.

THE PEOPLE'S POETS

In the thirties new trends of thought made their appearance, not because of any extraordinary happenings in Orissa but as distant dying eddies of the intellectual revolt in post-war Europe, reaching the quiet shores of Orissa through books and newspapers, mostly brought in from Calcutta. Marxist theories had already been put into practice in Soviet Russia, creating global enthusiasm for the have-nots and the underdogs. In India, too, under the inspiring leadership of the Mahatma, the entire nation was going through an unprecedented upheaval in the effort to win freedom from alien rule. But the average contemporary Indian intellectual, it seems, felt a greater fascination for the Soviet experiment and
the Marxist political ideologies, than for the message of the still small voice of the great Indian leader. The apotheosis of Gandhi by poets and writers of India was already over by the end of the twenties, leaving in the intelligentsia only a lukewarm sympathy for the national movement. The disillusionment came generally out of the conduct and character of Gandhi's individual provincial followers. The intellectuals were shocked by the ugly clay feet of the golden images of their imagination. But they were yet to know also the actualities of communist rule in Russia whose severely censored press kept all its ugliness from general knowledge, and to which, not only distance and inaccessibility but also clever propaganda lent an imaginary charm. While the horrors of concentration camps, purges, shootings without trial and incredible espionage as an integral part of communist rule were yet to become common knowledge, the glamorous dream of a heaven on earth for the common man continued unbroken.

To the Marxian political Utopia was added the supposed great discovery by Freud of a new psychological empire of the subconscious. And parading of a knowledge of or admiration for these two new trends in international thinking became the mark for the 'progressive' or 'modern' among a large rising group of intellectuals. So, speaking from our experiences in Orissa, many poets and writers who were not even national, became internationalists overnight, just by parroting the communistic or psycho-analytic jargon. The most fantastic claim made by these so-called 'Progressives' was to call themselves the 'People's Poets', despite the fact that their jargon-crowded lines were not intelligible even to highbrow intellectuals. In their estimation, any verse that mentioned Lenin and Stalin automatically became great poetry. All else was trash. The tempo of this literary fanaticism has considerably diminished by now, but unintelligibility still continues to be considered by some as a mark of great poetry, perhaps out of sheer habit.

*Bhagavati Charana Panigrahi*

The real pioneer in this field was, however, a quiet, un-
obtrusive, but intrinsically very highly cultured young man, whose words were as clear as crystal and who had no hypocrisy nor any pretensions. He was the late Bhagavati Charana Panigrahi, younger brother of Kalifidi Charana Panigrahi. This young man’s premature passing away has been an irreparable cultural loss to Orissa. Through stories, essays and other publications, and actual political fieldwork, he laid the foundation of Leftist thought in Orissa. Of those who joined him and survived him and are still supposed to be holding the banner of Leftist thinking, but with less verve are Sachi Routaray, Ananta Patnaik and Manmohana Misra. The last-named won a reputation as a composer and singer of stirring Leftist songs in early years. He has long left his erstwhile communist comrades denouncing his old ways of thinking. Comrade Ananta Patnaik still writes, but writes such jargon that it is impossible for us common readers to say what exactly it is all about. A few excellent pieces, however, on matters not related to Marxist ways at all, in correct metre and delectable and intelligible diction, do exist to his credit. One such is a moving poem on Bapuji’s death, entitled ‘Let the blood flow and flow’.

*Sachi Routaray*

But the loudest in the whole group, the one who claims to be the pioneer and the sole representative of all that is of progressive thought in Orissa, is Sachi Routaray. Poet, novelist, short-story writer, and essayist, Sachi has, admittedly, been quite a force to reckon with in Oriya literature for the last three decades. It is he who started calling himself and others of his brand, ‘People’s Poet’s There are other claims too. Whatever one may think of them, it cannot be denied that Sachi Routaray has been or once was in possession of a powerful pen. Of the whole band of Leftists and so-called ‘Progressives’, we find in Routaray’s literary craftsmanship alone an undeniable force and individuality. Even commonplace Leftist or surrealist jargon is touched in his poems with a charm and power that is just not there in other writings of the same category. It is a pity therefore that Routaray’s
real creative work is so small, bearing no proportion to
the claims he has made. The poems he wrote in the early
days of his literary career on Orissan village life (Pallisi)
are among the finest of the class. His short stories reveal an
unusual insight into the mind of the rural folk and keen
social observation, but there are, alas, not more than a dozen
or so of them.

The Common Man in Modern Oriya

Nearly half-a-century before Sachi Routaray and his
followers pretended to be 'People's Poets', Fakiramohana
in fiction and Nandakishor Bala in poetry had brought the
common man of Orissa into the magic circle of literature,
in a moving and dignified manner, with deathless lines.
They did not shout sectarian slogans about the 'class-war'
or 'the sovereignty of the proletariat', nor had they felt
any necessity to address the common reader with strings of
unintelligible gibberish, all the while pretending that they
spoke the language of the people as well as for them.
We get much more moving pictures of the sufferings of the
common man in the have-not layer of our society, painted
in lines beautifully transparent and surprisingly artistic,
in the poems of Krishna Chandra Tripathi, than in those of
Sachi Routaray. There is not one poem of Routaray's to
compare with Tripathi's 'Musa, the scavenger' or 'Neta,
daughter of Damia of Padhan street'. They convey indescri-
bable suffering, suffering not necessarily due to economic
factors alone, of the unknown human individual in any
part of the world. How copiously does Routaray, eager for
the Progressive claptrap, shed neat big tears for the mas-
sons of Konaraka, in which marvel of human dream he
sees nothing but tragedies of slave labour. That is not at all
a fact. And this is how the People's Poet essays to speak
to the hearts of his people:

Geometry

On both sides of canals
Are parallel lines of palm trees.
Are these blue blue maps in paddy fields
Drawn by the soft hands of the triangular cloud?
In the triangle of the forest the banner of clouds flies
(On the green, gray and soft crests of the forest).
Today the carpet of green grass is spread on earth,
And we shall meet.
Is the river Krishna in spate?
Is the Gangetic valley rain-drenched?
Oh friend, while plying my boat on the Tista and the Meghna

Suddenly I turned south.
Do you know how the oblique line
Of the diamond fish turned its angle?
The fountain from the eye of the golden fish
Suddenly struck the boat on his way!....

What could be finer 'people's poetry' than this? Yet it is Routaray again who complains that the poems of most other modern poets in Orissa are above his head!

The Chauvinistic and Black-marketing Moderns

By the end of the Second World War, the scene had changed. The hammer and sickle harangues had exhausted themselves. All unknown to himself, the poor rickshawalla had become, for some time, the most glamorous hero of short stories and poems, and had as suddenly gone back into oblivion. There is absolutely no sign of hammer and sickle now anywhere in either poetry or fiction. The field is now crowded with pseudo little Ezra Pounds and pseudo little Eliots.

All or most of these moderns or progressives in Orissa, as far as we know, have been shown up again and again as mere imitators, if not plagiarists. If the Sabujas borrowed ideas and phrases, the so-called Moderns are known to have lifted from other languages whole poems intact, passing them off as their own. They steal, are exposed, are ridiculed and steal again. How else can such ill-equipped bands of poetasters satisfy their hunger for poetic fame? Many of them do not know even their own country and people or even their own language. They seem incapable of producing anything on their own. The scribbling of distorted prose in the illusion of producing poetry is all they are capable of. They seem to be completely unaware of the various stages in the evolution
of modern trends in the Western literatures. There is nothing of Futurism, Imagism, Symbolism, or Surrealism in anything that they write. They have only taken the vague externals of modern versification from English or Bengali, mostly from Bengali, and use names celebrated in those languages in defence of their own incompetent products. An honest critic in Orissa has to think several times before he pronounces judgment on any literary piece that takes his fancy lest, lying in the pages of some obscure magazine or book in Bengali or English, the original of it be detected.

On the whole, the achievement of the Moderns amounts to very little. The noise they make is out of all proportion to their intrinsic worth. That is just because they behave like political parties and when confronted with questions they cannot answer, they react with table-thumping, shouting, and threats. These appear to be acceptable parts of their literary interpretation.

At the head of such armed defenders of the faith stands Shri Jatindranatha Mohanti, a Lecturer in English. This intellectual has been propagating the view that nothing so far has been produced in Oriya literature as wonderful as the poems of his two protégés, Shri Guru Prasada Mohanti and Shri Vanuji Rao. In a pontifical introduction to an anthology of these two poets’ representative poems entitled *Nutana kavita* (Modern Poetry), Lecturer Mohanti says, *inter alia*:

> There is as much difference between these poems and those written by others in Orissa today, as there is between Eliot’s unification of sensibility and dissolution of sensibility. One may be called the *poetry of ‘give-up’*, the other of *co-ordination*. Such a co-ordinating spirit is the greatest fact about these modern poems. The newness of these poems consists not only in the poetic urge, in style or discipline of expression, but in the new attitude to life embedded in the poems themselves, which is absolutely new in Oriya poetry.

How unrelated these claims are to actual performance, the readers may like to judge for themselves. There are
half-a-dozen poems in this anthology from Shri Mohanti's first favourite, Shri Guru Prasada Mohanti. These deal not only with adolescent love but with adulterous love and are without the least vestige of the sublimating experience of the grandest human emotion that love is. They reek merely with gross physicality. Here are a few samples:

These days I walk on the river sands, in the grey evenings,
Where I see people in red and blue and other colours,
In lonely corners. Sighs intensify as night presses on,
And many breasts are unified.
The more dunes rise, the greater burns fleshy desires;
You, darling, should come to me, there
To drip grossness and obscenity,
From your lips, as much as you can.
Come to me either as chastity or as much like adultery as possible.

My lips will be torn by your teeth,
Thick and lonely sands will churn beneath your breasts,
Your hot blood will cool with satiety
And my soul will vanish in your body.
(from 'Dear Sweetheart')

Evening steals from the lane like a fugitive,
I sit by the window, crouched, treasuring in my pockets,
Not jasmine garlands and bouquets of champaka-buds
But her blouse, her round breasts and her black eyes,
In my handkerchief they are tied, in my body, my soul and my maleness.

I shall question, 'May I ask you something today, darling?
Do you know the hottest part of hell is the penalty for unchastity?
Do you know the end of this adultery?'
(from 'The Worthless')

I have seen you slowly take off your shoes,
And stretch yourself upon the bed, with your hair and garments dishevelled,
And then rise again to recondition yourself,—
Then we meet in the Town Hall meeting.

You love and grow quick with child,
I have seen the cinema posters on your body,
When the wind sweeps you off the ground
I dream of you in the paradise of my pyjama coat.
(from ‘Alaka Sanyal’)

Need we go further? The readers must have observed by now, the ‘unification of sensibility’, the ‘co-ordinating spirit’ and the ‘new attitudes to life’ these revolutionary poems convey and for which Jatindranatha Mohanti claims such uniqueness. They were indeed never seen in Oriya literature before, as he says. In the opinion of Mohanti, by ‘new attitude to life’ is meant perhaps a new attitude to sex, and starkly physical at that.

Not content with an Introduction of this kind, Jatindranatha Mohanti brought out a magazine named ‘Prajna’ (Wisdom), to publicise the unique poetry of his literary heroes. The first page of the third number of this quarterly is adorned by a poem entitled ‘The Breasts’ from the pen of Mohanti’s other great favourite, Shri Vanuji Rao. It has given up all semblance of verse, though in the table of contents of the issue it is still listed as ‘poetry’. It is plain prose. Anyway, here are a few paragraphs (not stanzas) from this most modern of modern poetry:

When the sea of my desire is storm-tossed and black waves are about to engulf my universe, my boat loses all sense of direction, and I feel lost in the midst of hostile forces. Then I mistake your breasts to be buoys, where my boat may cast its anchor.

Sometimes the breasts appear dead and cold as twin mausoleums built of hard marble. Or they are twin planets of the starry heavens—the sun and the moon.

On long winter nights your breasts are two warm, swollen loaves, right from the oven. By the time the stars in the sky disappear, I lie in my bed and think it is all illusion—your breasts are only the lid of the casket of my mind.
One searches in vain in these nerveless echoes of other people's words for the slightest glow and warmth of strong individual feeling, or the crusaders' spiritual fire, or the revolutionary's righteous anger. Sachi Routaray's hammer and sickle variety of poetry and that of his erstwhile comrades had at least a fire which warmed many hearts. But these ersatz Pounds and Eliots have neither the dream of the brave new world of the Leftists nor the sense of prophetic frustration as revealed in 'The Waste land', nor yet the amazing scholarship that lies behind Pound's cantos.

The Exotics

The second band of the Moderns, while not quite so egocentric as the ones described above, has pinned all its faith in the exotic, in the distant and the unfamiliar. Orissa, her history, her people, her culture, and all she stands for does not interest them. They seem to feel that to appear progressive or modern, one has just to ignore the traditional and indigenous subjects and styles. Their leader is Binod Chandra Nayaka who, writing in his village home, in a distant border district of Orissa, sings of the long arctic night, the Aurora Borealis, the dance of the pigmies in equatorial Africa, or the smile of Zanzibar girls picking clove-flowers, completely oblivious of his native environment. Here is a sample drawn from another of these exotics, indicating the depths of delusion of such geographical modernism. It is part of a letter supposed to be written by an Oriya girl to her scholarly lover in England. Even in India, this supposed Oriya girl does not inhabit in her native Orissa, but writes from Kalimpong, the Himalayan hill station.

KALIMPONG

Dearest Darling,
I hear you have turned Marxist,
And sent your Keatses and Byrons
From your shelves to the second-hand bookshops,
Worshipfully putting in their places
Tolstoi, Turgenev, Gorki and Engels.
You have joined also, I hear,
Some Roadside Committee at Hyde Park Corner!
THE CONTEMPORARY SCENE

You write to say that you will visit the Slav countries
And China, after finishing your Continental tour.
What is all this, my darling?
To what have you come!
Why not go to Rome or Turin or Gibraltar
Or, say, Venice, under whose grey sky
Shelley wrote poetry inspired by Tuscany wine?
And that Switzerland where the whole world throngs,
To see its snow and multi-coloured clouds.

I would like, darling, for you to go there also.
And when you go, forget not to take with you, darling,
The Prussian pullover and fur coat,
Our marriage gifts.

And, you say you will go to the land of Stalin!
No, no, I cannot permit you.
If you insist, Potassium Cyanide will be my resort;
I shudder at the idea!
Remember, you are a D. Litt. of Oxford,
An A.M. of the University of Columbia,
And you must know, my father has made a will in —
your favour,—

Yours is his ship-building concern.
(The Exchange—by Basavadatta Misra)

Such a letter has never been written in Oriya, because there is not one among the seventeen million Oriyas, rich enough to will away a ship-building concern to a wayward Marxist son-in-law, nor does such a highly cultured, cosmopolitan and financially free son-in-law exist in Orissa. This is nothing but the fancy of a deluded band, which imagines that exotic references alone are enough to make a poem look grandly progressive and modern.

THE CREATIVE BAND

Fortunately, however, such deluded, chauvinistic or eccentric people are not all the writers in contemporary Oriya literature. The 'Moderns' loom in importance so out of proportion to their actual achievement because of their group-consciousness, bellicose behaviour, propagandist conduct and
also the very angularities they deliberately adopt in their pretensions to originality.

But there are scores of other poets and writers who silently go on contributing their quotas, enriching and expanding Oriya literature. By the very nature of the creative process each of them has to be individualistic. Each has to speak in his own way, responding to the call of his inner urge or the summons of his environment. They cannot, like the Leftists or the Moderns, have common labels to shelter under, nor form groups to fight battles of slogans.

Among such dedicated young writers, *Shri Krishna Chandra Tripathi* comes first to mind. Humble, unostentatious, uncontaminated by any ‘ism’ except humanism, unspoiled by any pretensions, and far above plagiarism, this poor schoolmaster who lives in a distant village has not yet received the recognition he so much deserves. Lines like his, which throb with human passion for the underdog in society, are found nowhere in the work of the so-called ‘Peoples’ Poets and nowhere is it so artistically expressed. Genuine poet that he is, Tripathi, while overcome with his own sorrow, speaks poignantly also of the sorrows of his village, of his neighbours, of his country and lastly of humanity. In his hands, ‘Musa Hadi’, the scavenger, and ‘Neta, the daughter of Damia of the Padhan Street’ stand out as symbols of pervasive human suffering everywhere. Absorbed in the men and nature around him, this poet gives us the most unforgettable miniatures of rural Orissa. His poetry alone, of all the writings in contemporary Oriya, presents to us a real picture of rural Orissa with all its frustrations, in the midst of a beautiful landscape. Like his passionate outpourings on the sufferings of man, Tripathi’s patriotic ballads (*Ahuti*—Offering) are warm and touching, and the poems in his *Sankha* (Conch-shell) are fiery with revolutionary ardour. Tripathi, of all the contemporary poets and writers in Orissa, stands out as the most dedicated soul, completely given to creative labour. He cares little for publicity and cherishes no loyalty to anything except his own creative urge, speaking of the truth with genuine poetic passion and music.

*Shri Kunja Behari Dasa* has already produced a considerable
amount of poetry and is still producing. But unfortunately most of it is no more than readable verse. Though there is plenty of socialistic or patriotic enthusiasm, the genuine poetic fire is not much in evidence in most of what he produces. Of late, Kunja Behari Dasa has appeared as a collector of Oriya folk-poetry, publishing considerable volumes. But the Orissa Press has condemned much of it as a deliberate fake. While Dasa has made quite a noise about it, not without material gain, the real pioneer and most genuine worker in this field goes unhonoured, though not unrecognised. This lone worker from one of the dark interior ex-states of Orissa, Shri Chakradhara Mahapatra, has been silently collecting and compiling folk-poetry from all parts of Orissa for the last thirty years. It has been the mission of his life. Recently his monumental anthology has come out with a beautiful poetic Introduction. This is going to be one of the finest collections of folk-poetry in Indian letters.

A few words of tribute should be paid here to the poetic talent of the late Prana Krishna Samala in whose tragic and premature death Oriya literature has lost a writer of fine sensibility. Prana Krishna adorned whatever he lay his fingers on. His earliest poems reveal a vision of beauty similar to those found in the writings of young Keats. It is most unfortunate that just when his powers were reaching maturity, he became the victim of a mental disturbance, which proved fatal. He died in 1958 at the age of 46.

Srimati Vidyutprabha Devi, among the women writers in modern Oriya, has written a considerable amount of very readable poetry. Her felicity of expression is remarkable; her lines run in an easy, spontaneous flow, soft, harmonious, elegantly phrased. However, this is the only feminine touch to be found in this lady writer’s works. She seldom writes on peculiarly feminine problems. Under a man’s name her poems would not show any incongruity at all. On the whole, therefore, Vidyutprabha’s poetry appears to be no more than super-excellent verse.

It is, on the other hand, in the rather unpolished lines of young Manorama Mahapatra that we find a genuine, un SOPHISTICATED, womanly touch. But she is just starting her
poetic career. For her age Kumari Tulasi Dasa writes more like a scholar and thinker than as a person of strong emotions that an adolescent is expected to be.

Sick, poor, shabbily treated by life, Rabi Singha, the fiery young poet, stands in Oriya letters today, as a typical intellectual Bohemian. Young Rabi Singha shows the fire of an uncompromising rebel in all that he writes. But this is merely the voice of an Angry Young Man. Lasting contributions from his pen are yet to come.

Among a host of young writers who, without faith in any slogans, have adopted the modern verse-forms in order to speak out their minds because these forms are handy for their purpose, mention should be made of Shri Jnanendra Varma, Shri Chintamani Behera, Shri Ramakanta Ratha, Shri Binod Routaray, Shri Durgamadha Misra, Shri Durga Charan Parida, Shri Brajanatha Ratha, Shri Manoj Das, and Shri Jadunath Dasa Mahapatra. In the writings of Shri Durgamadha Misra, Shri Ramakanta Ratha, Shri Binod Routaray, Shri Chintamani Behera and Shri Jnanendra Varma, the individual feel, the germ of all creative products, comes out quite clearly, despite the modern verse-form. Shri Durgamadha Misra’s quiet little poems on the writer’s day-to-day domestic and personal problems, Binod Routaray’s and Chintamani Behera’s on Love, Ramakanta Ratha’s on his intellectual reactions to social circumstances, and Jnanendra’s satires, all prove beyond doubt that the modern verse-form has its own uses and that it is more suitable for certain ways of expression than any other form. The lyric, the epic, the song, the ballad and the sonnet were all invented in different ages to meet ever-new demands of expression. So it is, that modern verse answers certain creative needs. There is no denying the fact. But the trouble with some of the bellicose moderns is that they make a fetish of a mere form, and try to pass off deliberate eccentricity as a mark of genius. The world cannot be taken in so easily.

Of these moderns in Orissa, however, two in particular deserve special mention. They are Shri Ramakanta Ratha (I.A.S.) and Shri Jnanendra Varma. The poems of Shri Ratha arrest the common reader’s attention by a keenness of observation and by an intellectual quality that is not
usual with the common run of this class of writers. Clarity of vision and a genuine co-ordinating spirit, present in each of his pieces, set them apart from the others. They prove also that form by itself has little to do with genuine poetic creation.

Shri Jnanendra Varma, among the younger contemporary poets, reveals the true modern and progressive mind. An out-and-out free-thinker and iconoclast, he shows scant respect either for religion, mysticism, social conventions, or political sham. Conscious of a poet’s mission, he never hesitates to hit out at hypocrisies with sharp satire wherever he finds them. Unfortunately, he has not mastered the rhythm in his lines and some otherwise excellent poems are marred by juxtapositional incongruity. The thinker in him, gets the better of the artist in his iconoclastic enthusiasm.

The Cavalcade of Ages

But the wonder of wonders in Oriya literature is the fact that here the most ancient is seen walking abreast of the ultra-modern. Besides the internationalists stand the intensely parochial. Books written in the style of Upendra Bhanja or Sarala Dasa are being produced even today, side by side with those that claim to be most modern in style and content. A Pandit at Berhampur (Ganjam district) is composing a Gandhi Mahapurana on the lines of Sarala’s Mahabharata. And the Kalinga Bharati Association, founded by the late Bichhanda Charana Patnaik, is as much chauvinistic in its efforts to establish the patterns of medieval Oriya poetry as the standard verse-form in Oriya, as are some of the moderns in claiming exclusive excellence for their own works.

The interesting intellectual battle is in progress. It is not likely to end in the foreseeable future.

PROSE: FICTION

The Satyavadi School, the centre of reform and crusade that it was, and manned by brilliant intellectuals, made a very creditable contribution to the development of Oriya prose. We have already spoken of the inimitable elegance of Pandit Gopabandhu’s orations, addresses and editorials,
and of the virile prose of Pandit Nilakantha Dasa. The Sabujites contributed an international touch and an easy expressiveness which had not been there before. Sachi Routaray’s prose writings have no distinction of their own, but his single novel *Chitrargriva* is the only example in Oriya of a continuous satire. Strangely enough, there has so far been no effective dissertation in Oriya giving a convincing academic interpretation of the Leftist attitude to life, in spite of so much Leftist noise. This easily proves that Leftist literary movements in Orissa have been more political than intellectual and are the backwash of the mental ferment taking place elsewhere.

**Gopinatha Mohanty**

*Basanti* and *Matira Manisa* are the best novels to the credit of the Sabuja group. The language of urban *Basanti*, and even of *Matira Manisa* set in a rural area, has an unmistakable middle-class sophistication about it. Spiritually, the Sabujites could never acclimatise their thought processes to the earthy soil. Their works as a whole breathe only middle-class elegance. In bold contrast to the Sabujite elegance emerged, next in order, the rough, rugged and vital prose style of Gopinatha Mohanti, redolent of the furrowed land, the wild forests, the craggy hills and fast-flowing hill streams. Here was a style stamped with the impress of a unique individuality, with its own ways of looking at things, and with the courage to say things in its own way. It is a style that is Gopinatha Mohanti’s own, and can never be anybody else’s.

Gopinatha Mohanti is in every way a path-breaker. Caring little for the problems of publication and sale, he has written enormous novels, and with even less concern for their popularity, he has taken as his subjects, not the popular, romantic or the socio-political topics of the educated middle class, but the fate and traditions of the primitive aborigines in the distant jungle district of Koraput. Of the thousands of employees of the State Government of Orissa, he alone seems to have completely identified himself with the people, and has been able to see rich human values which have failed to interest hundreds of other officers. Mohanti has not only turned the lives of the aborigines into modern
prose-poems, but has also studied their languages and written their first grammars. Here is indeed a worthy officer of the Indian Republic. He has put to excellent use his opportunity to know his country and people. He himself has rightly said in a self-revealing article, *Why I Write*: 1

I love the visible as well as the invisible world. I love Man, I love Life. And this love flows out into expression, as water from a down-turned pitcher... In this process, the sorrows of other people become my own, and the joys of the external world enter into my inner existence. Whenever I sit down to write, my thoughts silently entwine with this country where every particle of dust shows love for me, where Nature includes my personality, and the same blood as mine runs in the veins of Man, no matter how far off he lives. This relationship brings intensity of union and the pleasure it gives is not to be found elsewhere. In the darkness of my environment I keep this lamp of love alight and creations come of this union. I do not know, of course, what value the critical world may give to these works!

It was in the fitness of things that Mohanti received the Sahitya Akademi Award for his book *Amritara Santana* (Children of Immortality) describing the life and habits of the Kondhas of Koraput district. But that may not be Mohanti’s masterpiece. *Paraja*, treating the same Adivasi life, is a much better constructed novel. And Adivasi life, too, is not the only field to which the novelist has given his attention. His *Harijan* is a far more realistic and powerful novel than Mulkraj Anand’s *The Untouchable* dealing with the same subject. His *Danapani* (Bread and Water) gives us a most pathetic and true picture of a lower middle class householder, who kills his conscience and yields to all compromises in the interests of his family.

It is a pity, however, that, aesthetically considered, Mohanti’s total achievement may not be found commensurate with his interest, his enthusiasm and his labour. He may be a path-breaking pioneer, but the true creative artist need not necessarily be a path-breaker. Mohanti’s works have the

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1 *Dagara*, Vol. XIV, No. 4
appearance of the wilderness. They seldom make happy reading. Mohanti has never trained himself to stop where he should, but goes on and on, till he tires even the most patient reader. His short stories give the impression of essays and his essays take the colour of short stories. His novels, after the initial glamour is over, are likely to date as they do not deal so much with the eternal problems of life, as with specific situations, which are likely to change. He also, at times, uses crudities and vulgarities of expression to prove his devotion to realism but which, if avoided, would not have made much difference to the story.

Others

Gopinatha’s elder brother Kanhu Charana Mohanti is a far more prolific writer than his talented younger brother. He has regularly produced a novel a year for the last forty years or so. They have an excellent market also, unlike those of his younger brother. But on the whole, Kanhu Charana has not been able to rise to a high artistic level. He should have tried to glory more in the quality rather than in the quantity of books he produces. Of late he is giving a socialistic tinge to his works and some of his novels have been popular on the stage also in dramatised versions. That Kanhu Charana, in spite of being a busy Government official like his brother, has devotedly pursued literature for decades together, is an unusual example and calls for emulation and admiration in every walk of life. Kanhu Charana is one of the few financially successful writers in Orissa. He too, like his brother, has received a Sahitya Akademi Award for his novel Ka (She). His Sasti (Punishment) bids fair to remain his masterpiece. It is the pathetic story of the love of a country girl for a social outcaste. The heroine Sabi is delineated in natural colours and behaves with remarkable dignity in difficult situations without seeming something apart from her rural surroundings. This book should be translated into other languages.

Others who have been working and enriching the language in the sphere of fiction are Nityananda Mahapatra, Godavaris Mahapatra, Raja Kishora Patnaik and his sister Basanta Kumari. Shri Gokulananda Mahapatra, a college teacher of
science, has produced a few very popular works of scientific fiction. Raja, Kishora Patnaik, an advocate, and his sister Basanta Kumari, an M.A. in Economics, deserve a sincere word of tribute from all lovers of Orissa and Oriya literature, for the way this highly cultured brother and sister have jointly devoted themselves to the service of their mother-tongue. Together they have produced scores of short stories and novels and have gone on publishing them at their own expense. Proud individualists, the writings of both brother and sister display their own peculiar styles and their own observation of life. Basanta Kumari's stories and novels are told, moreover, with the right feminine touch, with an eye for petty details and a quiet, natural manner. Her novel *Amada Bata* (Untrodden Path) has been very popular also as a play.

*Dr. Harekrishna Mahatab*, the well-known Indian political leader, is also a writer in Oriya. To kill time in Ahmadnagar jail he started on historical studies and thus felt a necessity to write the latest history of Orissa. Though adequately documented, it has little literary merit and is not to be compared with the late Pandit Kripasindhu Misra's monumental historical work on Konaraka or even his defective history of Orissa. Mahatab has, however, written three novels, taking the Non-cooperation movement as the motive power behind their plots. These have indeed the unique credit of being the only ones in Oriya in which the Gandhian movement has been so utilised and they present a realistic enough picture of rural Balasore, the district of his birth and also the birthplace of Fakirmohana Senapati. Mahatab's works however lose much of their value because of a style that is plain, without either intensity or nuance.

In the short story the names of Surendranath Mahanti, Raja Kishora Ray, Mahapatra Nilmani Sahu, Bama Charana Mitra, Achyutananda Pati and Pranabandhu Kara are well known. Mahapatra Nilmani Sahu, Ramachandra Misra (Faturananda) and Shri Sunila Misra are very well known as satirists. But, for suggestiveness, breadth of vision, subtle satire, and a high order of intellectualism, Surendra Mahanti is unrivalled. In some of his stories Shri Mahanti tears to shreds the literary and political pretenders of Orissa with biting sarcasm. In others he has delved into some of the
unanswered questions of life. It is unfortunate that, more and more busy in politics, Mahanti’s writings grow fewer and fewer. The same may be said also of Shri Sraddhakara Supakara who, coming from Sambalpur, produced some charming stories with fascinating local Sambalpur colour in his early years. But politics, a jealous mistress, seems to have completely absorbed him.

Prose in modern Oriya is fast developing its expressive power through daily papers and journals, which are rapidly multiplying. There was only one daily paper in Cuttack twenty-five years ago. Now half-a-dozen have appeared. Magazines too are increasing in number. Travelogues have appeared in growing numbers. Names well-known in this field are those of Dr. Sriramachandra Dasa, Dr. Radhanatha Ratha, Shri Ananta Prasada Panda, Shri Golaka Bihari Dhala, Shri Sriharsha Misra and Shri Umesha Chandra Panigrahi. Orissa is the only State in eastern India, barring Calcutta, where three professional theatres flourish, giving regular shows throughout the year, week in and week out. One-act plays are extensively produced. One by Shri Pranabandhu Kara was considered the best in India one year. The compilation of adults’ and children’s Encyclopaedias are also already under way.

PROSE : CRITICAL STUDIES AND BELLES-LETTRES

Critical literary studies are also on the increase. Shri Natavara Samantaray and Shri Bansidhara Mahanti have thrown new light on the development of different periods of Oriya literature. Shri Natavara Samantaray’s studies and researches provide an excellent and solid foundation for the historical interpretation of modern Oriya literature from the middle of the last century down to recent times. Young intellectuals like Shri Chintamani Behara, Shri Nilmani Sahu, Shri Benudhara Raut, Shri Narendra Kumara Misra, Shri Sarvesvara Dasa, Shri Pathani Pattanaik and a few others are contributing to true aesthetic and interpretative criticism. In a field clamorous with battles of slogans and bellicose propaganda, the essays of young Chittaranjana
Das also are introducing a new element of imaginative intellectuality. In spite of his advancing years, Prof. Artavallabha Mahanty displays amazing energy in editing the ancient classics of Oriya, his favourite occupation. At present he is busy preparing an authenticated edition of Sarala’s great Mahabharata. But unfortunately Shri Mahanty’s involved style of writing, with no eye for precision, renders his ponderous introductions very difficult to digest.

**Pandit Binayaka Misra**

In contrast to Shri Artavallabha Mahanty and others like him and dwarfing them all by his remarkable achievements, stands the humble but erudite scholar, Pandit Binayaka Misra, worthy of a nation’s sincere tribute. With only a middle school education to his credit, this brilliant Pandit has made himself a formidable scholar in several languages, including English. It is he who has added through his researches a new chapter to the history of Orissa, that of the glorious Bhaumas. He has written a *History of Oriya Language* and a *History of Oriya Literature*—both the only authoritative books in the field so far. It is fortunate that the old revered scholar is now busy revising his monumental works, and it is a pity that his valuable contributions, as well as the excellent example he has set before his countrymen of a disinterested pursuit of knowledge, which is so very rare, have failed so far to create the necessary awareness of his importance in the cultural life of his people.

**Popularisation of Sciences**

Dr. Basanta Kumara Behura, Dr. Gokulananda Mahapatra, Dr. Gadadhara Misra, Dr. Bidyadhara Padhi and many more of the lecturers of Science are doing excellent pioneering work in the popularisation of the sciences in Oriya. In economics and the political and social sciences, Dr. Sadashiva Misra, Dr. Sriramachandra Dasa and Dr. Baidyanatha Misra have been very effectively educating the minds of the reading public with very well-written essays and books. The illuminating historical articles of Dr. Krishna-chandra Panigrahi, Shri Satyanarayana Rajaguru and of Shri Kedaranatha Mahapatra make pleasant and refreshing
reading. It is a pity that their writings are so few and far between.

Krishna Prasada Basu

But the palm for the finest Oriya prose in the contemporary scene should undoubtedly go to Shri Krishna Prasada Basu for his series Akhada ghare Baithaka (Talks in the Village Music Hall) published in the pages of the monthly ‘Jhankara’. Describing in story-form the genesis and character of Oriya yatras, they reveal a fluency, a mastery of colloquial as well as scholarly idioms, a pervasive humour, and an unusual narrative power that are indeed amazing in a man who had never attempted any prose before, and who, even now, has no literary ambitions or pretensions. A professional master of music and Oriya yatras, Krishna Prasada wanted only to write his experiences. When published in book form, Basu’s Akhada ghare Baithaka will no doubt be a prose classic in modern Oriya.

Higher Criticism

The weakest branch in Oriya prose at present appears to be higher literary criticism. Plenty of discussion takes place in periodicals, but it is not of a very high order. It is a pity that not a few of the Oriya teachers, of all people, have rather unwittingly become a positive menace to the growth of a virile and intelligent appreciation of the delicate values of literature. Lacking any deep acquaintance not only with international languages, but even with Sanskrit, these pseudo-scholars, their minds habituated to the narrow limits of a single regional literature, take literary criticism to be merely long strings of quotations, and unbalanced, verbose encomiums or pontifical opinions based upon wrong assessments. Typical of this short-sighted and dogmatic tendency in Orissa is the organisation Kalinga Bhaṣati already spoken of, which has been trying to drive home to all and sundry that nothing comparable to the medieval rhetorical poetry of Orissa exists in world literature. The annual meetings of this institution are held in great pomp and are presided over by Ministers, Professors, Pandits and fanatics, all pronouncing absurdities which pander to feelings of cheap regional patriotism.
But this certainly is not the way a healthy growth of literature can be promoted. Will not the Oriyas remember what their own great poet Dinakrishna Dasa once said in his charming Rasakallola (last canto), with reference to the importance and responsibility of critics of literature, so many centuries ago? Says he:

Poetry is a delicate woman whose father is the poet,
But whose nurse is the expositor,
Her worth is only partly recognised
If she is enjoyed by a noble soul versed in Rasas.
A perverse ignoramus is no less than a hostile step-brother to her.

A variety of treasures are there
In the treasure-house of poetry,
To usurp which by force
Only fools, untouched by knowledge, are generally tempted.
The pretensions of these shameless creatures are exposed, however,
In their very dealings.