

THE SAGA OF THE LAND OF JAGANNATHA

BY

Dr. Mayadhar Mansinha

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To

The sad memory
Of Dr. Charles Fabri
Noble in birth and mind,

And

A full-throated minstrel

Of

THE SAGA OF THE LAND OF JAGANNATHA

And

Though belonging to far-off Hungary,
The most cherished companion that ever was
To this ever lonely soul,
Born on the desolate sands
Of Chilka's south-shore.

— M. M.

AUTHOR'S NOTE.

Small and inadequate that this writer is, it has been one of his cherished dreams, for years past, to write a book that might convey to interested readers outside Orissa, a not-unfair or inaccurate picture of the rich and varied culture of her historic people, the Oriyas. As matters stand, many an educated Indian has justifiable reason to even doubt the very existence of a thing as Orissan Culture, in contrast to well-publicised ones of Orissa's neighbours all around. It is for sheer lack of such publicity that the sacred art of Orissi dance that is now almost a craze with aesthetes all over India and abroad, was completely unknown to even Indians outside Orissa, just a decade back. And ironically enough, this great historic dance-style was brought to the notice of connoisseurs, not by any broad-minded Indian dilettante, but by a foreigner with deep aesthetical as well as international understandings,—the late Dr. Charles Fabri, the celebrated Hungarian Indologist and art-critic.

Three dreams and Dr. Fabri

This humble writer had a sort of brain-wave while he was Principal of the Gangadhar Meher College, Sambalpur. He secretly wished and planned to see in his life-time at least three acceptable books in English on the total Orissan culture, for outsiders, to at least know of, if not to study. It was exactly at this period that he came to know of Charles Fabri through a series of excellent articles by him on the Ajanta paintings. The writer invited him to Orissa with a request to write a similar series on the art and architecture of Orissa's famous temples. Thanks to the enthusiasm and patronage of Dr. Harekrushna Mahtab, the then Chief Mini-

ster of Orissa, for matters literary and cultural, Fabri, as suggested by the writer, was provided by the Orissa Government to with all facilities not only to see and study Orissa's monuments but to write also a 'History of Orissan Art and Architecture'. For sheer bureaucratic indecisiveness, the great author, however, could not see the book in print before his death. But any way, Fabri's book on Orissan Art and Architecture was certainly the first fulfilment of one of the author's three dreams at Meher College, Sambalpur.

The History of Oriya Literature.

Almost simultaneously with this arrangement with Dr. Fabri for a book on the building and plastic arts of Orissa, the offer came to this author, as a surprise to himself, from India's National Academy of Letters, to write a History of Oriya Literature in English.

This the writer accepted as a national obligation, though with grave diffidence, there being at that time no competent and comprehensive History of Oriya literature even in Oriya. However, the book, published in 1962, appears to have met to some extent, the author's dreams at Sambalpur about knowledge of Orissa abroad. A friend reports that he saw this book at the celebrated World Book Fair at Leipzig ; a daughter of America now studying Orissi dance, tells the fantastic story of having read this book in a New York library before she left the States, and this book also is said to have laid the foundation of Oriya studies in Moscow and Leningrad.

Readers are requested to look upon this *Saga of the land of Jagannatha*, as a sister both to Fabri's *History of Orissan Art and Architecture* and the humble author's *History of Oriya Literature*, and as the fulfilment of the third of the author's three dreams at Meher College, Sambalpur.

Help in National Integration.

Orissa, inspite of being the land of Konarka and Jagannatha, of Chhau and Odissi dances and of natural marvels, like the Chilka and the Satkosia gorge, still remains, so to say, a *terra incognita* to even the most educated people outside Orissa, ignorance such as that may be taken as one of many sure causes of our disintegrated and mutually distrustful and *unsympathetic* national life. It is hoped, therefore, that this humble attempt to place before all an over-all picture of the culture of a people, as yet not-much-known but whose heritage forms a most vital segment of the total Indian picture, shall be taken as a real aid to National Integration by all sympathetic and well-meaning readers.

The writer is grateful indeed to Messrs J. Mohapatra & Co., who, while not unconscious of their own limitations, have shown great enthusiasm for bringing this book out, out of sheer patriotic fervour, and have graciously borne the burden of investment that a publication of this type means.

The writer has also the pleasure of acknowledging here the assistance he got from his young friend, Shri G. N. Das, Orissa's well-known scholar, in bringing out this book.

M. M.

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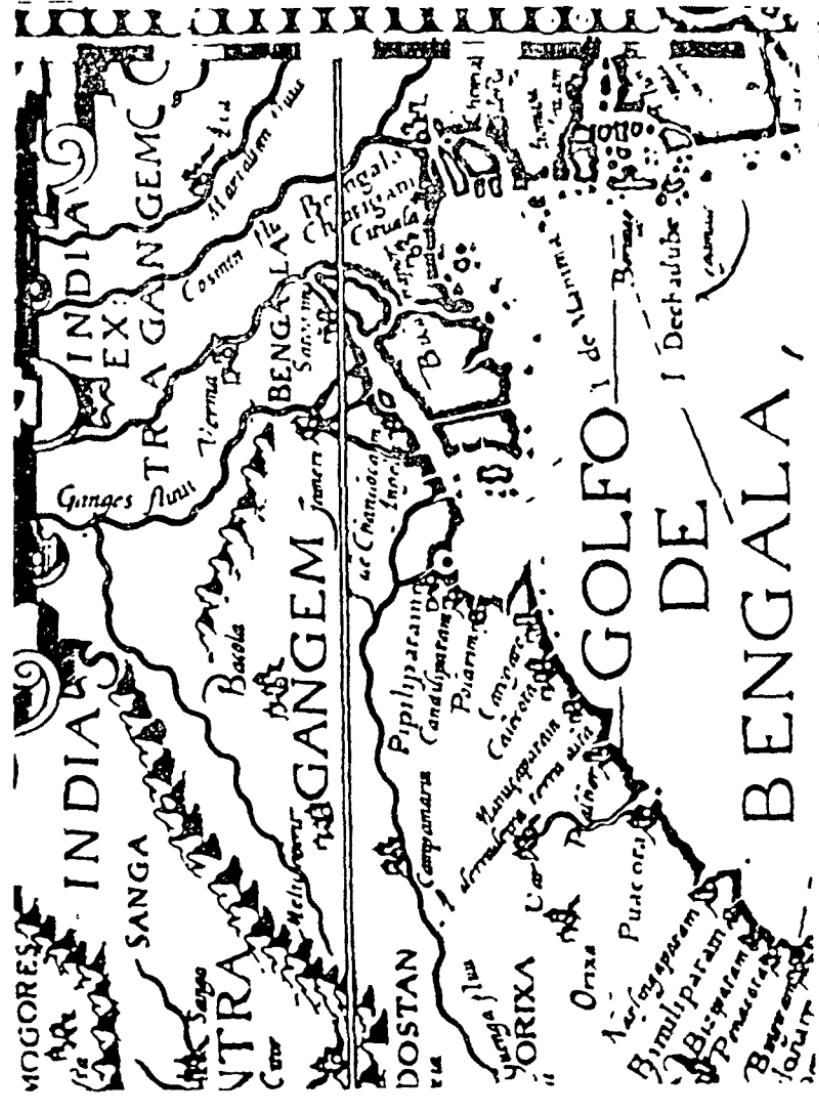
CHAPTER—I

THE LAND, HOLY AND HISTORIC

The Oriya Land through the Ages.

The four tell-tale maps presented here, will reveal to readers the tragedy of the Oriya people in having lost to neighbours all around, extensive chunks of their sacred home-land, through malevolent vicissitudes of History,

The two photo-pictures of Oriya literature in Bengali characters reveal further to the whole world the tragic cultural genocide of millions of Oriyas exiled in Bengal on whom Bengali has been forced, not allowing them to know even their own alphabet.

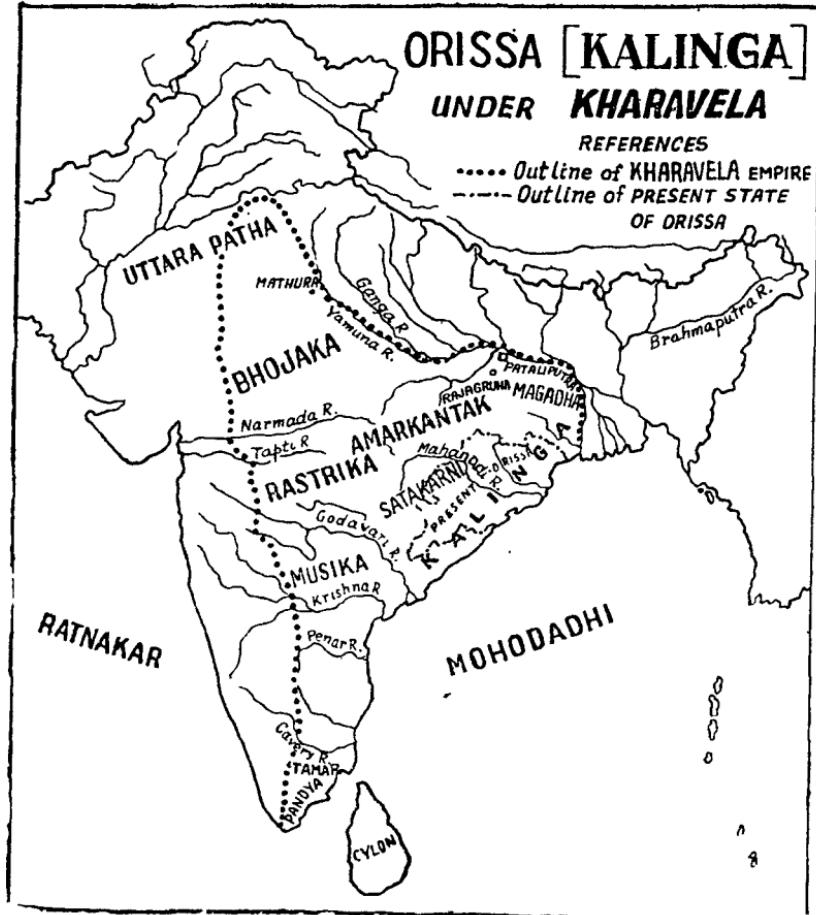


This is perhaps the earliest (16th century A.D.) cartographic representation of the extensive ancient territory of the Oriyas (ORIYA in the map) spreading right from the Ganga far towards Central India and also far South. This is an enlarged facsimile of the Orissa portion out of a map of the world published by Jacopo Gastaldi of Venice and supplied to us by Dr. L. Mansinha (Geophysicist) now in the U.S.A.

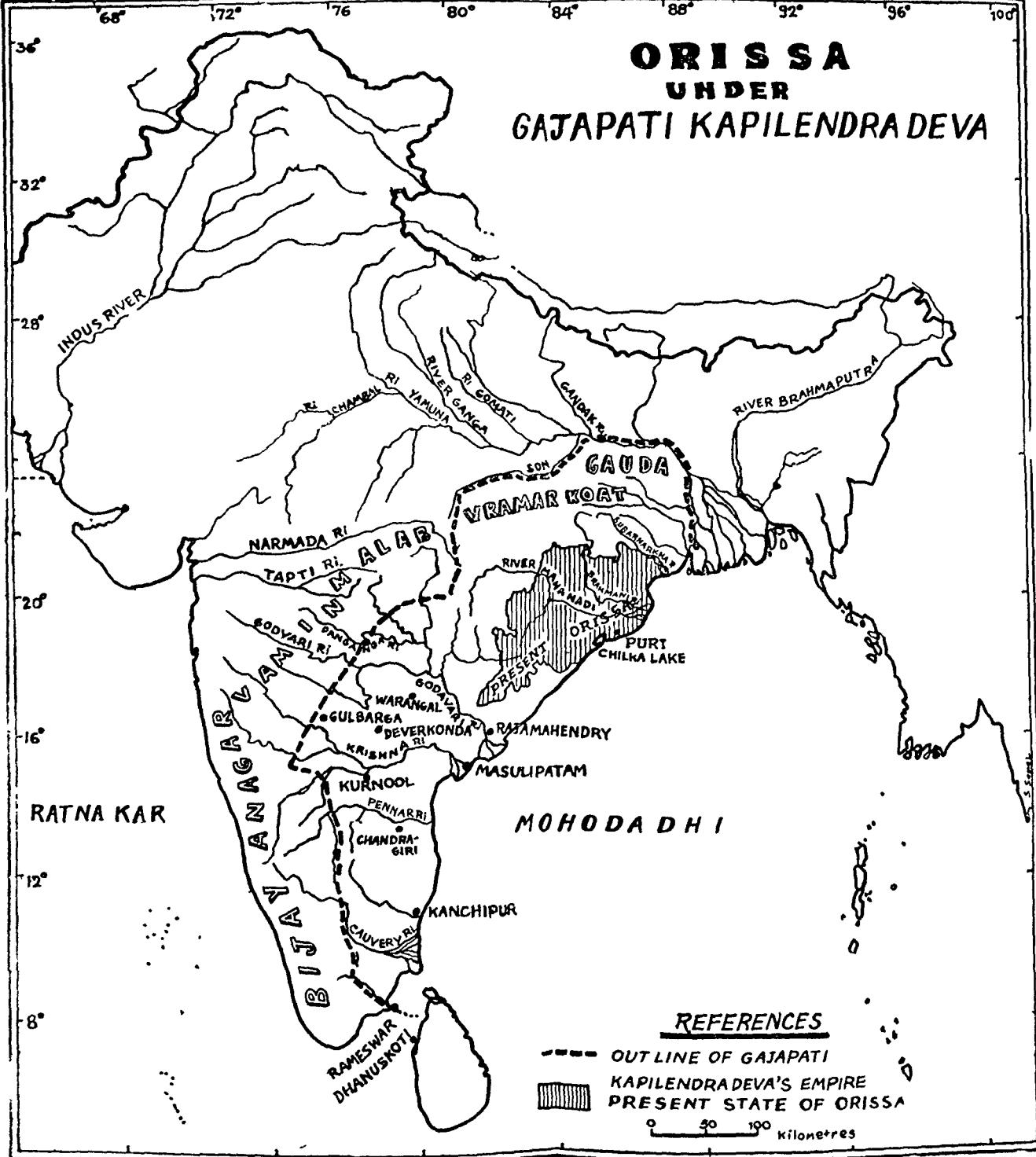
ORISSA [KALINGA] UNDER KHARAVELA

REFERENCES

..... Outline of KHARAVELA EMPIRE
- - - - - Outline of PRESENT STATE
OF ORISSA



**ORISSA
UNDER
GAJAPATI KAPILENDRA DEVA**



ORISSA

AS THE MOGULS TOOK IT OVER
(MAP DRAWN ACCORDING TO AIN-I-AKbarI
AND GENERAL MANSING'S RECORDS)



ভবিষ্য পুরাণস্মরণ

গুরুড় পুরাণ

—:(::):—

কাথি নীহার প্রেম হইতে অকাশিত।



ষষ্ঠ কন্দল

কাথি নীহার প্রেম হইতে
শ্রীযতীক্ষ্ণনাথ জন্মা দ্বাক্ষা।
মুদ্রিত।

মূল ১৩৪৮ সাল।

গঙ্গামাতৃয় ।

বন্দনা ।

শ্রীগণেশায় নমঃ ।
 বন্দই দেব লম্বোদর ।
 পাশ অঙ্কুশ বেনি কর ॥
 পৃথুল জটার স্বন্দর ।
 গজ বন্দন গণেশ্বর ॥
 অষ্টিকা দেবীর নন্দন ।
 অনাদি জ্যোতি নিরঞ্জন ॥
 যষ্ঠ আরস্তে তোর পূজা ।
 উরিণ কর্তৃ নাগরাজা ॥
 শ্যামল বরণ স্বন্দর ।
 অব্যয় ব্রহ্মকপ ধার ॥
 অঙ্কেক নামে মহাশুর ।
 বলে জিণিলা তিনি পূর ॥
 ভয়ে কম্পই বহুকৰী ।
 হরিলা অমর স্বন্দরী ॥
 দেবক দুঃখ দেখি হর ।
 চলিলে বধিতে অমুর ॥
 অষ্টিকা খোই কপিলাশে ।
 শিব চলিলে মহারোষে ॥

সে ছুর্গা মনরে বিচারি ।
 দক্ষিণ দ্বারে নাহি দ্বারী ॥
 কর্ণর মলিরং সন্তুত ।
 অষ্টিকা তোতে কলে জাত ॥
 তো নাম দেই গণপতি ।
 দক্ষিণ দ্বারে সেনাপতি ॥
 এমন্তে গলা কেতে দিন ।
 অঙ্কেক যুক্তে ত্রিলোচন ॥
 যুক্ত হোইলা অবশেষ ।
 চট্টদ সহস্র বরষ ॥
 তাহাকু করি প্রাণে নাশ ।
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 ত্রিশূলে তার মুণ্ড কাটি ॥
 পকাই দেলে কোপ বলে ।
 পড়িলা বাঢ়ৰা অনলে ॥
 রুধির চিতা দেনি কাশী ।
 নিজ ভুবনে গলে পশি ॥

CHAPTER I

THE LAND, HOLY AND HISTORIC

Since time immemorial, Orissa (ancient Utkala and Ka'inga) has been the most sacred soil for the Hindu in the whole of Hindusthan. Year in and year out, through the ages, streams of pilgrims, in search of divine grace and religious merit, have flowed into this land in an unceasing current. At the vanguard of those devout millions, in the dim distance of mythical time, we may descry even the great Pandavas with their equally great consort, Draupadi, trudging along the dusty jungle tracks of ancient Utkala, wishing to wash off all their supposed sins of commission and omission in the holy waters of the Vaitarani and the holler waves of the *Mahododhi* (the eastern sea) at Puri. And gradually might emerge to our vision, in that vast throng, the more distinct shadows of Shankara, Ramanuja, Madhava, Vallabha, Nanak and Chaitanya, in a galaxy of glorious teachers, preachers and saints, who, by their messages, actions and their very lives, have laid the foundation of the total unique personality that is India. And as though it was necessary to demonstrate the continuance of that tradition even in modern times, our great Father of the Nation, the supreme modern symbol of the total personality of India, like the other *Mahatmas* (great souls) who preceded him, indulged in 1934, in a walking-tour in Orissa, of all States in the Indian Republic, blessing this holy land's hundreds of miles of village-roads with the holy dust of his feet. He started from Puri, the holy city of Jagannatha, and walked up to Orissa's northern borders, in his compassionate mission of redeeming the fallen and the down-trodden, the Harijans of India. The Mahatma's pilgrimage has proved anew, as it were, the holiness

of Orissa's soil, so loudly proclaimed in India's epics and scriptures.

THE UTKALAS, THE KALINGAS AND THE ODRAS

This holy land has been variously known throughout Indian history, as well as in tradition, as Utkala, Kalinga and, latterly, as Orissa, according as the eponymous tribes predominated at particular times. The earliest to dominate the land were certainly the Kalingas, who were noted all over India for three things,—their personal bravery, their elephants, and their maritime trade and colonies¹. In the Mahabharata War, the king of Kalinga had to pull his weight, with a huge horde of war-elephants on the side of Duryodhana, as the latter happened to be his son-in-law, and became, according to the descriptions in the famous epic, a headache to his redoubtable opponents.

We find full corroboration of this excellent military tradition of the Oriyas in the long recorded story of India, Young emperor Asoka (circa 269—232 B C.), became so very enthusiastic to conquer little Kalinga because, though small in dimensions compared to his sprawling inherited empire, it was still unconquered (*avijita*). History narrates how the bravery of the Kalingas, resulting in unspeakable carnage, turned Asoka, the Terrible, (*Chandasoka*) into Asoka, the Pious (*Dharmasoka*), transforming thereby, the entire face of Asia.

ASOKA AND KALINGA

The two edicts of Asoka, meant for reconciling the subjugated but simmering Kalingas to their defeat and for maintenance of law and order as well, in the newly conquered territory, still stand well within the boundaries of the present State of Orissa. That proves conclusively, if proof was needed,

1. See Chapter IV

that ancient Kalinga and modern Orissa are identical. Most probably, the ancient land of the Kalingas had, as her natural boundaries, the two holy rivers of the Vaitarani and the Godavari, in the north and south respectively. To the north of this land, beyond the river Vaitarani and up to the holy Ganga, was the land of the Utkalas. According to the epic *Raghuvamsa* of Kalidasa, the Utkalas are said to have guided the army of Raghu, after its conquest of Bengal, across the river Kapisa, now in Midnapore district of West Bengal, towards the land of the Kalingas. Kalidasa describes also, in the same epic, how the soldiers of Raghu, after defeating the Kalingas, rested in the cool forest of the Mahendra mountain which still stands in majesty, in the present State of Orissa. But the Utkalas as a separate tribe seem to have completely lost their political existence by the time we reach History, after having been subjugated and ruled by, perhaps, their turbulent southern neighbours, the Kalingas. But by the fifth-sixth centuries, the war-like Kalingas also, in turn, seem to have slowly yielded place to a new barbaric tribe called Odras, from the western jungle lands who seem to have gradually spread over the whole country.

It is these Odras who indeed gave a new individuality to this eastern State, endowing her not only with a language of her own, but a pattern of life distinct in all respects from those of the neighbours all around. The descendants of those Odras still survive as Odas, forming the bulk of Orissa's hardy peasantry, who keep Orissa a food-surplus State, in spite of ever-recurring droughts and floods, enabling her to be generous enough to sister—States in times of need. It is again the unsophisticated homely speech of these Odas, living close to the soil of Orissa, that is supposed to be the fountain of Oriya undefiled and which, in the hands of master-craftsmen, like Sarala Dasa of the 15th and Fakiramohana Senapati of the 20th century, has turned out to be a

powerful vehicle of live, pulsating, vibrating, literary expression, smelling of paddy fields and village halls where the peasantry meet and gossip, and also of the village tanks and wells where women gather and talk away their small sorrows and jealousies.

Thus, the ancient Utkala and still more ancient Kalinga came to be known, at last, as only Orissa, a corruption of the Oriya word *Odisa*, or Sanskrit *Odra-desa*, the land of the Odras. But the educated Oriya has still a nostalgic weakness for the historical names of Kalinga and Utkala, in preference to the commonplace 'Orissa'. Hence, the first university of Orissa was christened as the Utkala University and, through Sri Bijoyananda Patnaik, the enterprising industrialist of Orissa, the name 'Kalinga' has had a glorious revival in "Kalinga Airways", "Kalinga Publications" and, above all, through the "Kalinga Prize" for popularisation of science, awarded every year by UNESCO on his behalf.

TRADITIONAL FRONTIERS

But whether called Utkala, Kalinga or Orissa, the traditional boundaries of this land of the Oriyas, were always taken to be the river Ganga in the north and the river Godavari in the south. And history has always corroborated that tradition.

The last Hindu king of Orissa, for instance, Mukunda Harichandana (1559-1568), was personally supervising the excavation of a canal from the Ganga into Orissa, at Triveni in the present district of Hooghly, West Bengal, which was then the northern-most territory of his empire. The Triveni-ghats still stand as a monument on the soil of Bengal to that Oriya king's engineering adventure as well as to the fact of that territory being once part of Orissa. It was during Harichandana's absence at Triveni over this riparian project, away from Cuttack, his imperial headquarters, that the

then Moslem ruler of Bengal could organise a stealthy incursion into Orissa which ended so disastrously for the Oriyas who had so far repelled all Moslem invasions from both the south and the north for over three preceding centuries.

With Harichandana's defeat and death, the age-old Hindu regime disappeared from Orissa for the first time. But the Afghans from Bengal, in spite of nominal victories on battlefields, failed to establish themselves, because of extensive guerilla war carried on by the patriotic Oriyas, throwing Orissa into twenty years of complete anarchy. Stirling's narration of this phase of Orissa's history makes most illuminating reading in that, the historic Oriyas, "in their effort to save their motherland from avoidable sufferings of no-government, *elected* at last, a king of their own. It was after this, that Akbar's army under general Jai Singh came to Orissa to wrest it from the Afghans, the erstwhile conquerors. Jai Sing, The new military administrator of the Moghul empire, however, was so impressed with the high cultural level of Orissa, that he did no more than impose a nominal rule, just signifying a conquest.

This account of Andrew Stirling, the eminent British scholar-administrator of the 19th century, gives us an idea also of the northern boundary of Orissa at that time. Says Stirling,—"At the expiration of the twenty-one years of anarchy and inter-regnum, the ministers and principal men of the country beginning to recover from their depression and alarm, assembled together to consult about the affairs of the nation and chose as their chief, a person named Ramai Raotra, son of the before-mentioned minister, Danaye Bidyadhar, whom they raised to the rank and dignity of Maharaja of Orissa, A. D. 1580, under the title of Ramachander Deo. . . . The election was confirmed by Sewai Jye Singh, the general of the emperor Akbar, who came into

the province about that time with his army, to look after the Imperial interests. The sight of Bhuvaneswara, its numerous temples, the crowds of Brahmins and the sacred character of everything in Utkala Desa is said to have impressed him with feelings of so much reverence and admiration for the country, that he determined to interfere very little in its affairs, and retired shortly afterwards leaving a large share of authority in the hands of its native princes. The town of Midnapore was, at this time, made the northern boundary of Orissa."²

Under the Moghuls, Orissa constituted a separate *subah* by itself. According to *Ain-i-Akbari*, it consisted then of five divisions or *sarkars*, such as, (i) Jaleswar, covering at least two of the modern south-western districts of West Bengal, i.e., Midnapore and Bankura, and half of the district of Balasore (Orissa); (ii) Bhadrak, covering the lower half of the present district of Balasore and the northern parts of Cuttack district; (iii) Cuttack, that included most of the present district of Cuttack and the present Puri district; (iv) Kalinga Dandapata, covering Ganjam (Orissa) and the present Srikakulam district of Andhra Pradesh; (v) Rajamahendri, covering the doab between the rivers Godavari and Krishna.

As recorded by his Bengali biographers, Chaitanya is said to have landed on the free soil of Orissa, leaving behind his Moslem-ruled Bengal, by just crossing the Ganga, that was Orissa's northern boundary. In his first journey into south India, Chaitanya is said also to have come in contact with Ramananda Patnaik, viceroy of the southern provinces of the then Orissan empire, and later the greatest of his disciples, at the town of Rajamahendri or Vidyanagar on the bank of

2. "Orissa, Chronology and History", in A History of Orissa, by W. W. Hunter, Andrew Stirling, John Beames and N. K. Sahu, ed. by N. K. Sahu, vol. II, (Calcutta, 1956), p. 254.

the Godavari. And so, the Ganga and the Godavari being the natural boundaries of Kalinga, or Utkala or Orissa, is no mere legend but was a historical fact for centuries. In the reign of Kharavela in the first century B. C., and under the Gangas and the Solars in the 15th, 16th and 17th centuries, the political borders of Orissa extended far beyond even these traditional frontiers, as has been unambiguously proved by historical records. In the earliest extant maps of India, Orissa appears also to cover practically the same territory between the Ganga and the Godavari and extends much farther towards the west than at present.

ORISSA'S VIVISECTION

How this extensive kingdom was reduced to its present small dimensions, is a story of the cruellest national amputation ever recorded in history, paralleled perhaps, only by that of Poland before the Second World War. By the treaty of Allahabad in 1765, Lord Clive is said to have obtained the Dewanship (authority to collect revenue) of Bengal, Orissa and Bihar from the then titular Moghul emperor. But at that time Orissa, unlike either Bihar or Bengal, was clearly occupied by the Marathas and continued to be in their possession till 1803 when only it fell into the hands of the British. The Marathas had got the "Province of Cuttack" (not the whole of Orissa) as a measure of appeasement from Ali Verdi Khan, Nawab of Bengal, in 1751, to stop their frequent raids into Bengal, over and above an annual *chauth* from him of 12 lakh rupees. So, Lord Clive, as the Dewan of Bengal, had to pay *chauth* of 12 lakh rupees to the Marathas, instead of collecting any revenue from "Orissa".

No Indian historian has ever cared, so far, to clarify this strange anomaly of history. The anomaly explains itself, however, when we realise

that Ali Verdi had ceded to the Marathas, only the "Province of Cuttack" extending from the south of the river Subarnarekha downwards and "Orissa" still remained in Bengal from the left bank of the Subarnarekha, northwards and westwards, right up to the Ganga. That "Orissa", unfortunately, never came back to the mother-state, thus causing perfect confusion as to the real political significance of the term "Orissa" in the British Dewanship of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa for which Lord Clive had entered into treaty with the titular Moghul emperor.

The truth is, the Afghans in 1568 and the Moghuls in 1592 had got, the same Orissa which extended from the Ganga to the Godavari, as she had through much of the long preceding history under the name of Kalinga in the time of Asoka and Kharavela or as Orissa under the Ganga and Solar Emperors. The Moghuls, therefore, had to treat this sprawling State as a separate *subah*, like Gujarat and Bengal.

But it was in the reign of emperor Shah Jahan that Orissa lost her age-old separate political entity, when in 1648, due to lack of suitable personnel, Delhi placed the administration of the *subah* of Orissa in the hands of Prince Shah Shuja, who was already governor of both Bengal and Bihar, for the same reason, with a Naib at Cuttack to manage affairs. Thus for the first time in history, and most unfortunately for her future, Orissa came under the administration of Bengal. About a hundred years later, Ali Verdi Khan, the then governor of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa, decided to divide Orissa into two parts, out of sheer vexation, and ceded the portion south of the river Subarnarekha to the Marathas to get respite from the Maratha plunderings in Bengal, Bihar and in at least the northern and richer half of Orissa, forming the south-western part of what is now West Bengal.

But historic Orissa's systematic amputation had started previously, to put into Ali Verdi's head this

idea of completing the process as a safety-valve for his administrative worries. It was during the period 1725 to 1735, when Orissa was ruled by Mohammed Taki Khan, the Naib, that this unfortunate process had started.

Says Stirling : "The administration of Mohammed Taki Khan, the Naib, (1725 to 1735 A. D.), is marked by a great reduction of the limits of the province of Orissa. In his time the remainder of the old Jalesore sircar lying between Tumlook, Midnapore and the river Subarnarekha, with the exception of a few small pergunnahs near the latter river, was annexed to Bengal, and the Nizam's Government obtained possession, either by force or intrigue, of the entire country included between the estates called Tikally Raghunathpur and the Chilika lake, thus greatly reducing the revenues and authority of the Rajas of Khurda."³

THREE ORISSAS

Thus, by the time Clive obtained Dewanship of Bihar, Bengal and Orissa in 1765 (about thirty years later) there were already "three Orissas" and not one, as existed all through the previous centuries. Of that sprawling historic Kalinga, Utkala and Orissa, the southern one-third covering the *Sarkars* of Kalinga-Dandapata and Rajamahendri of *Ain-i-Akbari* were wrenched off the mother-state, in successive bits, by the rising Moslem powers in the south, and became later the bone of contention between the French and the British as the *Northern Sarkars* which actually were the *Southern Sarkars* of the Orissa *subah* of the Moghul em'pe. The second and the middle one-third remained under the control of the Marathas as the "Province of Cuttack" as ceded to them by Ali Verji Khan as a measure of appeasement along with a *chauth* to them of 12 lakh rupees a year. The northern one-third

³ *Ibid.*, p. 253.

remained in Bengal and this was the "Orissa" referred to in Clive's Allahabad Treaty with the Moghul emperor.

Here are the opinions of unbiassed and unimpeachable British authorities given after nearly a century of that political tragedy.

Says Sir George Grierson, in his monumental *Linguistic Survey of India* : "The Orissa country is not confined to the Division which now bears that name. It includes a portion of the district of Midnapore in the north, which, together with a part of Balasore, was the 'Orissa' of the phrase 'Bengal, Bihar and Orissa,' met with in the regulations framed by the Government in the last decade of the eighteenth century. Oriya is also the language of most of the district of Singbhum belonging to the division of Chhotanagpur, and of several neighbouring Native States which fall politically within the same division."⁴

And according to the *Imperial Gazetteer* : "Midnapore District nearly coincides with the Muhammadan division known as Sarkar Jaleswar, which had its capital, the town of that name, now situated in Balasore district, and was included in Orissa at the time of Todar Mal's Settlement in 1582..... As a result of the decisive battle of Buxar, the Dewani of Bengal, Bihar, and Orissa was conferred in perpetuity on the East India Company in 1765. The Orissa therein referred to included only the district of Midnapore and a part of Hooghly; Orissa proper was not conquered from the Marathas until 1803."⁵

But the vivisection of Orissa thus committed out of sheer political or administrative expediency or even by conquest, by Ali Verdi and others

⁴ Vol. V, Part II, 1903, p. 367.

⁵ Vol. XVII, pp. 329-39.

would not have made much difference to the historic Oriya people when at last all their scattered territories were permitted to be reunited under one administration in 1936. But thanks to the new evil of intense parochial patriotism that showed itself under British rule, irrevocable harm was done to the Oriya language and culture in the scattered Oriya lands, by their more advanced brothers, amongst whom the Oriyas were forced to exist as neglected, helpless and victimised minorities for nearly three centuries. Under the over-all imperialistic administration of the British, there developed powerful under-currents of linguistic aggrandisement by the better-placed Indians over the less advanced and less privileged neighbours.

How thorough has been the cultural and linguistic genocide of the Oriyas at the hands of their more fortunate big brothers, had better be learnt from unbiased accounts of the British administrators.

Said Sir George Grierson again in his *Linguistic Survey of India* even after three centuries of political fragmentation of the Oriya lands : "On the east, Orissa is bound by the Bay of Bengal. On the north, its boundary to the east coincides with the river Haldi which here forms at the same time the northern boundary of the Contai sub-division of Midnapore. It then turns north-west along the river Kalighai, as far as the district of Bankura, so as to include in the Oriya-speaking area the four Midnapore police circles of Danton, Gopiballavpur, Jhargao and Binpur. It next turns back along the eastern boundary of the Singhbhum district, leaving the side of that district which is known as Dhalbhum in possession of Bengalis. Thereafter it follows the common boundary of Singhbhum and the Native State of Mayurbhanj as far as the State crosses the Singhbhum district up to its northern

boundary, being stopped by the elevated plateau of Ranchi. It skirts this plateau along the southern boundary of Ranchi district till it meets the State of Jashpur which it crosses so as to include the southern portion of that State in the Oriya area. It thence turns south, along the boundary between that State and the State of Udaipur across the States of Raigarh and Sarangarh and the districts of Sambalpur and Raipur and along the boundary between the Jeypore Agency of Vizagapatam and the State of Bastar, to near Dindiki where it turns east across Vizagapatam and Ganjam, and joins the sea-coast near Baruva, a small port in the latter district".⁶

The following extracts from Walter Hamilton's *Hindostan*, published in 1820, will also prove to the hilt how Orissa's ancient dimensions have so tragically been reduced for ever, on account of the linguistic nationalism that sprang up in India under the British rule.⁷

Says Hamilton : "Midnapore, Hidjelee and Tumlook—these are three subdivisions of the province of Orissa, being all within its geographical limits, but they have been for such a length of time subordinate to the existing governments of Bengal and so intimately attached to that province that they have become, in a manner, incorporated with it, and have, in consequence, been described along with it."

And says Hamilton, with regard to Orissa (Udessa) as a whole : "A large province of the Deccan extending from 18th to 23rd degree of North latitude. To the north, it is bounded by Bengal ; on the south, by the river Godavari ; on the east, it has the Bay of Bengal ; and on the west, the province of Gundwana. In length from

6. Vol. V. part II p. 367

7. Geographical, Statistical and Historical Description of Hindustan and the Adjacent countries, vol. II

N. E. to S. W. it may be estimated at 400 miles by 70, the average breadth."

Hamilton adds : "In more recent times it was governed by a dynasty of Hindu Princes of the race of Gajaputty who in 1582 were conquered by Mansingh, the Emperor Akbar's Viceroy in Bengal to which dominion it was annexed as a dependent government extending from Tumlook on the great Ganges to Rajamundry on the lesser Ganges or Godaverry, the Gunga of the Deccan. The chief rivers are Godaverry, the Mahanuddy and the Subunreeka, besides innumerable hill streams of a short course and small channel. The principal towns are Juggernath, Cuttack, Ganjam and Vizagapatam."

Mr. H. V. Bayley, a Bengal civilian, in his memorandum on Midnapore, said in 1852 in clear terms : "The Bengalee emigrants appear evidently to form only a small proportion of the people, from the greatest prevalence of Oriya family-names among all classes of society as Bera, Geri, Juall, Mohapatter, Mycap, Mytee, Punda, Putnaik, etc."⁸

Quoting the opinions of Mr. Bayley and Dr. Grierson, the O'Donnell Committee (appointed in 1931 to inquire into the possibilities of the formation of Orissa as a separate State) admits : "These statements seem to point to the steady Bengalisation of the areas adjoining Orissa, a conclusion which the statistics of languages seem to confirm." As quoted in this report, the number of persons speaking Oriya in the district of Midnapore in 1891 was 572, 798, whereas by 1921 it had been reduced to 142, 107 only and by 1951 census, to the contemptible number of 9,719 only !

⁸ The Memorandum on Midnapur, 1852, P.

WHAT FAKIRMOHAN SAYS

How the Oriya language, in what was once a clearly Oriya majority territory, was gradually wiped out of existence, makes pathetic reading in the pages of the autobiography of Fakirmohan Senapati (1847-1918), the great Oriya novelist, whose remarks fully corroborate those of the British officers. This writer could never restrain his tears while going through the passages describing the cruel butchering of the language of a helpless group of Indians by those who talk glibly of Indian nationalism and emotional integration.

Writes Fakirmohan ; "Out of the total area of about 5,000 square miles of the district of Midnapore, the entire southern part covering more than 2,000 square miles was purely Oriya-speaking. Conversations at home and outside, private correspondence, commercial accounts and legal deeds of the people of the area were all in Oriya. Not long ago, the court language in the Midnapore district was partly Oriya. For that reason, clerks from the Balasore Collectorate were often transferred to Midnapore..... The abolition of *chahalis* (pre-British primary schools of Orissa) in the district of Midnapore is a mysterious, painful and regrettable affair. Between 1865 and 1870 a Bengali Sub-Inspector of Schools was deputed for the purpose of establishing new Bengali primary schools in southern Midnapore. But the man faced stiff opposition from the population (which was entirely Oriya). All his attempts failed, though his job depended on the success of his mission. And so, he resorted to a subterfuge. He once stationed himself in a police station and collecting all the *abadhanas* (Oriya village-school teachers) there, through the help of the police, read out to them a supposed order in English from the District Collector of Midnapore to the effect that all *chahalis* would be

abolished and any Abadhana, after seven days of that proclamation, would be arrested by the police if seen in the area and would be subjected to both fine and imprisonment.

The man enacted this subterfuge in one police station after another and no wonder that it did act like magic. The Oriya people as well as the English-ignorant *Abadhanas* from Orissa were no match to this clever trick. The *Abadhanas* collected their scanty belongings in panic and left the historic Oriya land of Midnapore to the unchallenged dominion of Bengalee." 9

Not content with what they had done to Oriya language in Midnapore, the Bengalees tried worse tricks even in Orissa proper. Almost all through the 19th century, the entire officialdom in Orissa consisted of Bengalees, down to even police constables and low-grade teachers. And a section of them started a powerful move to prove that Oriya was not a distinct language, but was a mere dialect of Bengalee and as such, should make room for the rightful mother-language in the whole of Orissa. Oriyas feel so embarrassed today to know that great Indians like Dr. Rajendralal Mitra and even Rabindranath Tagore were among the supporters of such imperialistic moves against a voiceless and helpless people.

To our eternal shame also, it was the strong voice of two aliens, T. E. Ravenshaw, the then Commissioner of Orissa, and of John Beams, the then Magistrate of Balasore district, of whom Fakirmohan Senapati was the coach for Oriya, who saved the Oriya nation from a linguistic guillotine set up by the well-wishing big brothers.

9. For further evidence of Midnapore being once an Oriya land see in Chapter 4 (Orissa sails across the seven seas), the relevant extracts on Tampralipti (Present Tamluk in the district of Midnapore, West Bengal) being an entirely Oriya-speaking town even in late 19th century.

THE NOBLE EXAMPLE OF PARLAKEMIDI

As against this picture of unscrupulous self-aggrandisement and unpatriotic behaviour, the following statement in the O'Donnell Committee report (Part I, Page 27), on how the family of the Oriya Maharajas of Parlakemidi, then in the Madras Presidency, had treated the Telugu tenants in their extensive Zamindari, must put all who have committed cultural vandalism as described above or who still think that way, to shame. The report says that—"The Telugu witnesses, without a single exception, have stated, in no uncertain terms that, they are happy and contented under the (Oriya) Raja and have been living peacefully with the Oriyas within his territory. There has been no complaint that at any time preferential treatment had been given to the Oriya tenants. The Telugu and the Oriyas equally and entirely depend upon their Raja for all comforts and conveniences and for their well-being generally."

But the same O'Donnell Committee Report (Part I, page 6) says with regard to Midnapore : "It is fairly clear that the younger men, at any rate, desire Midnapore should remain in Bengal. To some extent, no doubt, this attitude is due to the propaganda carried on by the Bengal Provincial Congress."

THE LOSSES IN SOUTHERN ORISSA

Hindu power having disappeared from Orissa, in 1568, the Southern Provinces or the Sarkars of Kalinga Dandapata (roughly present Ganjam and Koraput districts of Orissa) and of the Rajamohendri (Present districts of Srikakulam and Godavari) as recorded in Aini-i-Akbari, were left unprotected and were soon easily grabbed by the Kutab-Shahis who, in the previous centuries, were not only kept rigourously in check but those

territories were at times raided right up to their capitals by the victorious Oriya armies. These Oriya territories beyond the Chilka Lake, under the Moslem rulers of the south, became the major parts of what became known, later in Indian History, as the *Northern Sircars*. These finally came into the possession of the British in 1799 after the fall of Tipu Sultan and the story of cultural and linguistic genocide of the defenceless Oriya minority in Ex-Madras Presidency, at the hands of their Southern neighbours, is no less pathetic than what happened to them in the North. The suppression of Oriya language and culture in these ex-Madras areas was so pervasive and so total, that if, as told to this author by eminent Oriyas of Berhampur, Ganjam, they in their school-boy days felt a desire for a free enjoyment of Oriya music, they had to get out of the then Telugu-dominated city of Berhampur for the quiet sea-shore of Gopalpur-on-sea, 10 miles off, lest in the eyes of Andhra brethren it might be unpardonable impertinence and even invite atrocities !

The following extracts from the 'The Oriya Movement', published in 1919 by the Oriya Samaj, Aska (District Ganjam, then in Madras Presidency) that once spearheaded the agitation for reunification of the outlying Oriya speaking tracts under one administration of their own, give a shocking enough picture of the deliberate cultural annihilation of the Oriyas in the Ex-Madras areas of those times :

"In Ganjam.....the repeated Government Orders insisting upon the use of Oriya as the Court language in matters whereto the parties are Oriya people, have particularly remained quite inoperative.....The study of Oriya is neglected

to such extent that in parts of Ganjam..... Oriya boys have perforce to adopt Telugu in place of their mother tongue..... But for the (private) employment of *Mativansa Naikas* (hereditary Oriya primary school teachers in pre-British days) from Orissa as rural teachers, the masses of Oriya population would have forgotten their mother tongue. This is indeed a deplorable state of things in respect of Ganjam where Upendra Bhanja, the greatest national poet of the Oriyas flourished. Even the Oriya Zamindari estate of Jeypore (now in Orissa as Koraput district) uses Telugu to the total exclusion of Oriya in its offices. (Page 103-6). The last census report (1911) of Madras shows a reduction in the Oriya population of Ganjam by nearly three lakhs compared with the census of 1901 (Page 308)"

LOSSES IN THE WEST

As in the North and the South, in the West also a large belt of Oriya territory as part of the former kingdom of the Bhonslas of Nagpur, became the Eastern districts of the Central Provinces. The present district of Singhbhum in Bihar was formerly a princely State, with close social as well as linguistic and cultural affinities with the neighbouring Oriya States of Mayurbhanj and Keonjhar etc. When the British conquered it in 1821, they entered into a treaty with the local Hos to encourage teaching of both Ho and Oriya. But when the district was placed under the Commissionership of Hazariba, that Hindi, because of the dominance of Hindi-speaking officials from the North, started driving Oriya, out of schools and courts. Even the two surviving Oriya principalities of Sareikala and Kharaswan of this district have been forcibly kept out of Orissa,

trampling under foot all logic and all political fairness.

Thus, through nearly four centuries of cruel political amputation, as well as deliberate cultural and linguistic killing, the ancient land of the Kalingas, that once spread from the Ganga to the Godavari now exists in much reduced dimensions, losing large chunks of her former territories to her powerful neighbours all around.

A RESURRECTED PEOPLE

Exactly hundred years after the British occupation of Orissa, the Oriyas became aware of the shameful disadvantages of their political dismemberment in four different Provinces. The whole nation met under the banner of Utkal Sammilani, ushered into existence by Mr. Madhusudan Das,¹ famous in modern times, as the Grand Old Man of Orissa. It is significant that the first session of this Congress of the Oriyas was presided over by Maharaja Sreeram Chandra Bhanja of Mayurbhanj.² The movement for reunification of the Oriya-speaking tracts under one administration was enthusiastically sponsored by the historic Oriya noble families of Ganjam, in the Ex-Madras area. And it is due mostly to the sacrifices and efforts of Maharaja Krushna Chandra Gajapati³ of Parlakimedi, the scion of the glorious historic Gajapatis of Orissa, who twice went to England to meet the British authorities, to bring them round to his views, that Orissa was made a separate province in the year 1936.

In 1947, the 24 princely States of Orissa including Sareikala and Kharswan, but without Mayurbhanj, were merged with the Orissa State.

1, 2, 3;—Vide their life-sketches in section II of this book.

But as a result of political disturbances about a year after, Sareikala and Kharswan were temporarily taken out of Orissa and placed under Bihar on the pretext of lack of direct communication between them. But in 1949, Mayurbhanj merged with Orissa, providing direct communication with Sareikala and Kharswan. But, in the meantime, such invisible political walls had been raised that Sareikala and Kharswan could not just walk back, to the home of their dear Mother, Orissa, as was solemnly declared before, by the authorities at Delhi.

PROSPEROUS, THOUGH SMALL

But though small in size now, as compared to her historic dimensions, and though so long utterly neglected, Orissa bids fair to be one of the richest and the most prosperous States of the Indian Republic. She possesses immense natural resources of which, as yet, not even the fringe has been touched. She is supposed to have the biggest coal fields in the world. Her iron ores are of the highest grade as well as in abundant supply. Her forests are an inexhaustible source of national wealth. And her hardy peasantry have made her one of the few food-surplus areas in India, despite heavy odds. The hitherto undeveloped Orissa is just now stepping into an era of industrialisation which is likely to change the very face of this ancient land very soon, with all her mighty rivers harnessed and with ports like Paradip, and others reviving the glorious maritime commerce of Kalinga, Utkal and Orissa.

CHAPTER—I

THE PEOPLE

The following pictures show the Oriya, that is gay and festive, inspite of poverty.



The Swing-songs of the Raja Festival in Orissa villages.

A typical Oriya village, houses standing shoulder to shoulder on two sides of a road.





Off day's duties, Oriya villagers might be seen of many an evening, having collective Bhajan recitations to the accompaniment of Castanets (Khanjani), as here.



The annual spring-time assembly of gods and goddesses in rural areas all over Orissa.

CHAPTER II

THE PEOPLE

Surely, the Oriyas are not an ethnological unit by themselves, like, say, the Tamils or even the Andhras. The ancient Odra tribal may be the predominant element, but the subdued, submerged or assimilated Utkalas and Kalingas could not have completely gone out of the picture, without leaving behind deep racial traits in the Oriya of today. In Bharata's *Natyashastra*, the Odra-tongue is described as a *bibhasa* which, in those days, meant just corrupted Sanskrit, having come in contact with the language of the local aborigines. The Odra, however, was not the only aboriginal or non-Aryan tribe that rubbed shoulders with the proud Aryan on the ancient Kalinga soil. From time immemorial, the Savara tribe has lived, cheek by jowl, with the Odras and they have all along been mentioned in close association in ancient Indian literature. The origin of Jagannath is now unashamedly traced to a tribal totem of these Savaras.¹ Thus Orissa has become, through ages, an extremely interesting melting-pot of races, languages and cultures and may be regarded as an excellent example of national integration.

THE DRAVIDIAN INFLUENCE

But pervading all conscious or subconscious synthesis, the Dravidian or rather the broad south-Indian cultural influence forms the warp and the weft, as it were, of the entire texture of Oriyas' national life. It were better for the Oriyas if they were not only conscious of, but alert about it. Nothing has been more damaging to the sturdy individuality of their

1. See Chapter XI

culture as the impact on it of Bengal during the 100 years of British rule when Orissa was no more than a tail of the sprawling giant that was Bengal Presidency of those days. The ancient Oriya had nothing so much in common with the Bengali, as he has even today, after centuries of administrative estrangement, with his southern neighbours, the Telugu the Tamil or the Kannadiga. Orissa's own systems of dance, music, cuisine and ways of living, even after much Bengalisation, during the last century, and a half still stand closer to the south Indian rather than to the north Indian patterns. A number of the commonest of household words in Oriya are of pure Dravidian origin, of which even the average educated Oriya is completely unaware. The more the Oriya strives to emulate the Bengali or the north Indian, in arts and ways of living, the more does he stray away from his genuine ancestral culture, which has the closest affinities with the Dravidian.

THE ORIYA CUISINE

The centre and the very fountainhead of Oriya culture, however, has all along been Lord Jagannatha of Puri. A dinner served in the home of any educated Oriya today, may not appear to be much different from one served in any Bengali home. Even cultured Oriyas do not realise that this is not a matter of credit or satisfaction for them. But a decade or two back, a dinner prepared in any Oriya village on social or religious occasions was plainly on the pattern of cuisine followed in the grand kitchen of Lord Jagannatha of Puri. Like the holy *Mahaprasad*² of Jagannatha, it was simple, wholesome and tasty. Millions of pilgrims from all corners of India who come to Puri, go into ecstasies over this tasty, simple and wholesome

2. *Mahaprasad*—Great (*maha*) Blessing (*prasad*), the name by which the food ceremonially offered daily to Jagannatha is known and honoured all over Orissa. *Prasad* is the common term in Orissa for all sorts of ceremonial offerings to any deity.

prasad of Jagannatha. But the educated Oriya, in his craze for the modern ways, craves for and patronises the over-oiled, over-spiced Calcuttan pabulum, unmindful of the gastronomical disasters it brings in. Such items of food, as the ubiquitous potato, *puree* and *parotha* of today, with mustard oil to add urban flavour to their curries, were unknown even in the towns of Orissa a few decades back, not to speak of the villages. But these supposed delicacies of a supposedly civilised man's table have started dominating Orissa's kitchens even in her distant interior villages, her drawing-rooms dominated again by tea and *rasagolla*. These dietetic visitations from Bengal have slowly worked havoc in the general health and strength of the once sturdy Oriyas.

CULTURAL DEPTHS

The temple of Jagannatha not only sets the standard in Orissa of healthy and balanced food, but has also inspired Orissa's own native systems of dance, music and songs. It was this famous shrine that was once the very home of what is now known as the Odissi Dance.³ The hereditary danseuse of the great temple kept up this lovely regional art, proudly accepting not only the rigorous training necessary over years, but even the moral austerities, generation after generation. This was imitated outside the temple of Jagannatha through what is known as *Golipua* *dance*, performed by young boys to cater for the aesthetic craving of the common citizen. It is through both these styles of Odissi Dance that classical Oriya songs have been popularised among the illiterate Oriya mass in the most colourful manner. And so has been the classical Oriya poetry, through the colourful *palawalas* of Olissa, distinct in scope, dimension and performances, from their counterparts in Bengal. The *caskathja*'s

C3. See Chapter IX.

role is to spread among the people, the knowledge of the *puranas* spiced with humour as well as some horse-play and histrionics ; two pieces of stick, dexterously manipulated, supplying all the needed music and rhythm. The *leelas*, *suangos* and *jatras* are the operaised Puranic episodes, with an ethical objective to educate the illiterate audience in the sense of right and wrong,—song, recitation, music and histrionics, all linking up and developing an exciting story, generally with happy endings.

All these mass-entertainments in Orissa, on the whole, are characterised by high cultural flavour. The Oriya *pala* alone, expounding highbrow classical Oriya literature to illiterate but eager Oriya peasantry, proves conclusively their high cultural level, in spite of illiteracy.

THE ORIYA VILLAGE

If the Oriyas developed their own patterns of cuisine as well as social entertainment, their village-planning too demonstrates their sturdy individuality. An Oriya village is unlike the village in either Bengal in the north or Andhra Pradesh in the south, Orissa's two close neighbours. It consists generally of two rows of thatched houses standing shoulder to shoulder, leaving a street in-between. At one end of the village must be a temple with a tank for general purposes and at the other, a *Bhagabata-ghara*, the home of the Oriya Bhagabata, the Bible of the Oriya peasant. Ever since that great writer-saint, Jagannatha Dasa, adapted the Sanskrit Bhagabata into Oriya in the 16th century, it has become almost an household article with the Oriyas. Every Oriya village, since that time, must have a *Bhagabata-ghara* as the very centre of all its social life, a sort of multi-purpose institution, peculiar to Orissa. It used to be, till yesterday, the village library, the

village hall, the village school, and the village guest-house all combined. Things are, of course, changing fast, the peasant's mind getting oriented, in these spacious times of ours, more towards elections, development-projects, clubs and litigation, than towards the antiquated wisdom of the *Bhagabata*. And the dire consequences of this modern attitude in individual as well as social life, are already visible to all, except perhaps to a few parasitical and knowingly myopic political touts, irrespective of political affiliations.

THE SWING-SONGS OF RAJA

Orissa's feasts and festivals are intimately linked up with agriculture, the mainstay of Orissa's entire national life. Most of these also are peculiar to Orissa.

The one that inaugurates and welcomes the agricultural year all over Orissa, is *Raja*, which marks through biological symbolism, the moistening of the summer-parched soil with the first showers of the monsoon, thus making it ready for productivity. Significantly enough, it is taken to be an especially gay time for unmarried girls, the potential mothers of the race. Bevies of them will, therefore, be seen trooping in and out, all the three consecutive days of this joyous festival, in the best of dresses and decorations, eating cakes and rich food at the houses of friends and relatives, spending long, cheery hours, moving up and down on improvised swings, rending the village sky with their merry, impromptu songs. Though anonymous and composed extempore, much of these *Raja* songs, through sheer beauty of diction and sentiment, have earned permanence and gone to make the very substratum of Orissa's folk poetry. A few samples may be interesting to readers :

Plank is dovetailed into plank,
 So is my mind into yours ;
 But the caste is the only bar,
 Oh, my dear, dear sweet heart ;

Faithless indeed are women ;
 Their fickle minds,
 Lacking steadiness in character,
 Stray away with the least provocation.
 Is'nt it so, my dear, dear friend ?

You males are faithful creatures indeed !—
 As you pretend, back home, to be perfect saints
 After spending nights at different places;
 Is'nt it so, dear warm lovers !

Wasn't I once to you like a rose-out-of-season,
 Making anxious enquiries,
 If you missed me but for a moment !
 How could the same you, so completely forget me
 Ah, dear lover of mine !

As the weaver-bird swings on the tall palm-tree,
 The whole village admires
 That gold-coloured girl,
 For her Telugu hair-do !

The vulture's nest is in the hole of a tree,
 And that ugly black girl,
 Becomes the laughing-stock of the village
 For trying the Telugu hair-do !

When destined to live with an aged husband,
 I have to chop gourd with a paddy-pounder ;
 How could I be indifferent to him,
 As gossips say ?

As the swing made a queer angle,
 These eyes chanced to fall,
 On the small opening in a window :
 And I have felt ever since,
 As though bitten by a cobra !

While girls thus scatter beauty, grace and music all around, moving up and down on the swings during the *Raja* festival, young men give themselves to strenuous games and good food, on the eve of the onset of the monsoons which will not give them even a moment's respite for practically four months, making them one with the mud, slush and relentless showers, their spirits kept high with only the hopes of a good harvest.

It is only after the agricultural operations are over and the peasant's heart is full with joy at the first golden waves of ripe paddy under the clean, cool autumnal sky, that Orissa's peculiar festivals keep coming thick and fast according to a well-thought-out, though unwritten, schedule.

THE DASAHARA

The next big festival after *Raja* is the *Dasahara*. It is unfortunate that due to Bengali dominance of Orissa's social and administrative life for over a hundred years during British administration, what was formerly a purely military rite, has now been debased into a noisy *tamasha* of a *puja* of idols, actually of mud and straw, but gilded and decorated with tinsel at enormous cost, without even a shadow of the pathos-love'y faith of the Bengalis behind their *puja* of the tender-hearted *Uma* (the Mother, the *Devi*), the consort of *Siva*, visiting her parental home, but leaving it too soon, her departure causing universal grief. The Oriyas

have not got the rich store of moving songs, built up in Bengal through centuries, round this national faith and festival of theirs. The sordid Oriya imitation, supposed to be at its best at Cuttack, is no more than a vulgar assortment of mythical figures, revealing the darkest ignorance of the heart-warming poetry and unifying social significance of this peculiarly Bengali festival, a fine flower of the emotional-romantic ethos of the Bengali people. Fortunately, however, this vulgar imitation is still confined as yet to only a few towns.

Till recently, the *Dasahara*, as observed by the landed gentry and the rulers of the princely States of Orissa, partook of the nature of a military function. In some States, like Mayurbhanj, it was a day of free *shikar* when even the reserved forests were thrown open for hunting game. And in Orissa's fifty thousand villages, it is still no *puja*, as with the Bengalis, but is Dusserah, as with the south Indian brothers. What is worshipped in these villages, is not any image, but vocational implements of each caste, the very means of their livelihood, the very nourisher, indeed, the very Mother, so to say. In the villages of Paikas, the ancient militia of Orissa,⁴ the rusty, unused ancestral swords and spears are brought out on this day, when in bygone times their heroic forbears used to start on fresh military expeditions. The degenerate, impoverished, enfeebled descendants of those heroes commemorate the great events through some stylised military dances, not knowing what else they should do and pathetically unaware, too, of the significance of even what they perform.

THE FESTIVAL OF YOUTH CULT

With the fathers and elder brothers gone on military expeditions which the celebration of Dusserah in Orissa really commemorates, what should the teenagers do ?

4. See Chapter III.

And so, six days after the *Dusserah* festival, was arranged the *Kumarotsava*, the festival of the unmarried or the pre-adolescent. It is customary for them to put on new clothes on this day, the girls going through some poetical rites when the romantic autumnal full-moon beams out in the cloudless sky, and boys and girls have merry-making together, till late hours of the night.

This festival appears to be the remnant of a youth-cult in ancient Orissa. Kumara is Kartikeya, Lord Siva's son, symbolising, beauty, youth, bravery and military leadership. At a comparatively young age he rid heaven and earth of a supposedly invulnerable demon. The ancient, social planners of Orissa had probably chosen the Kumara cult for placing before the nation's young the inspiring example of the divine Kumara, the paradigm of youth, manliness and beauty, resembling the Greek Apollo. Kalidasa's lovely and sublime poem *Kumarasambhavam* is the fittingly picturesque backdrop for the advent of Kumara, the young and handsome divine hero. It is fascinating to think that the ancient Oriyas had taken up this supreme symbol of youth for an annual poetisation, highlighting the excellence of youth-cult in the nation's consciousness.

With the eldest sons and able-bodied relatives out on military duty, what were the elders to do also, in the semi-deserted villages ? The whole of the next month of Karttika (October-November) was, therefore, one of austeries for them. They took one vegetarian meal in the evening and listened day and night to the *Puranas*, recited by the village priest. With the harvests coming up in the fields and with the boys away in distant war-theatres, they naturally thought of their ancestors. This gets symbolic expression in Orissa as *Paya Amasya* (New Moon day of Karttika), known all over India

as *Dipavali* (Festival of Lamps). On this day begins the New Year for the Marwaris and other north Indian peoples; the Bengalis worship *Kali*, as they did *Devi* on the Dusserah day; but to the Oriyas it is solely one of remembrance of the ancestors, of invoking their spirits through *Sraddhas*⁵ in the daytime and bidding farewell to them with lighted sticks in the first watch of the night.

LINKS WITH SOUTH-EAST ASIA

This quiet month of Karttika in Orissa not only still links the present-day Oriya to his ancestors, but also with completely forgotten countries across the seas, all over South-East Asia. In their desire to help guide the ancestral spirits to descend unerringly in the vast space on their respective villages and homes, one would see even today in Orissan villages, a covered but perforated earthen pot carrying inside a lamp, hoisted every evening on a pole, throughout the dark part of the month of Karttika, climaxing on the Dipavali night, in the festival of torches.

This hoisting of a beacon-light in this season is still a custom in Thailand and other countries of South-East Asia, thus revealing the tenuous link that still exists between Orissa and those lands.

At the pre-dawn hours after the full-moon of Karttika, Orissa observes the peculiar festival of 'Floating of Boats'. And this too is still observed in Thailand, supposed to have been, like the hoisting of a lamp at night as described above, introduced by an Orissa princess married into the royal family of that lovely land.

With the harvest brought home, the whole of next month, Margasira (November-December) is devoted to the worship of Lakshmi, goddess of wealth,

5. *Sraddha*, commemorative rites enjoined on every Hindu.

not through images, as in Bengal, but through symbolic paddy-measures. Significantly enough, this worship of Lakshmi is left entirely to the house-wives, the living Lakshmis in each home, even the ubiquitous Brahmin priest not being allowed to encroach on their little personal empires. This worship is done on each Thursday of the week all through the month. The houses are washed and decorated, the floors are beautified with symbolic designs made with rice-flour mixed with water and the roofs, with garlands and festoons, woven out of the colourful paddy-stalks.

THE ASSEMBLY OF MEN AND GODS

With the coming of the spring, starts the massive annual cultural efflorescence in Orissa's villages, spreading all around the colour of the participants and the fragrance of Orissa's art and poetry, through performances of *jatras*, *pala*s and *daskathias*. Money flows like water from the common funds in the village, in inviting and remunerating celebrated parties, and the innately culture-hungry Oriya peasant, assured now of at least the next few months' food, would think nothing of walking ten miles and back home the same night, for the rare mental pleasure of witnessing a good *jatra* or *pala*. Orissa's villages become veritable cultural live-wires this season, with cymbals and *mrudangas*⁷ sending waves of resounding rhythm and songs in lilting tunes, heard for great distances. This gay mood in the social life of the Oriya peasant culminates in the Dol-Jatra when at thousands of rural centres all over Orissa, the innumerable village-gods and goddesses assemble, after having been taken out each day of the previous week, to neighbouring villages and offered *prasad* by the simple householders with great seriousness. These mutual visits of gods and goddesses assure and symbolise social amity in

7. *Mrudanga* (or *Mridanga*) the common percussion instrument in any Indian musical performance supplying the needed time-rhythm and accompaniment.

particular regions. The assemblies of village deities are associated with rural exhibitions of industrial and agricultural products where the village folk (men and women) meet once a year and the peasant makes his annual purchases of household and agricultural implements.

With the summer getting gradually hotter, making the soil hard and parched, plants silently withering, and not the cattle alone, but even the peasantry finding adequate water-supply a problem, festivities grow fewer in number and about three months of forced idleness unbalances also the entire family budget of the peasant. It is in this season that thousands of them run to cities for earning some cash, scurrying back like animals to their villages with the first showers of the monsoon.

THE DANCE FESTIVALS

In the summer, however, two dance-festivals, most peculiar to Orissa, take place. One is the famous Chhau dance, gloriously surviving and flourishing, till yesterday, in the group of north-eastern Oriya ex-principalities of Sareikala, Mayurbhanj, Nilgiri, Bonai, etc., which, with the adjoining districts of Singhbhum in Bihar and Bankura and Midnapore in West Bengal, once made the ancient Utkala. While Oriya language and culture have mostly disappeared from Bankura and Midnapore through long political dismemberment and consequential cultural genocide from Big Brothers, the north-eastern group of Orissa Native States contiguous to these districts have undisturbedly carried on the Chhau dance along with literary and other cultural traditions of Orissa, due to the good fortune of having been administered by historic Oriya feudal families, till yesterday. The chhau dance could be kept alive, chhau for all these centuries in these princely houses, as the rigorous training extending over years involves considerable expenses

THE DANDA

The other peculiar Orissan summer entertainment is the Danda dance. Unlike Chhau, sponsored by princes and brought up in palaces, Danda is purely a folk dance and a folk rite, centering again round the Siva-Sakti cult. Unlike the sequestered life of Chhau, Danda is widespread all over Orissa. Rustic troupes after going through the prescribed austerities and rituals extending over a month, leave their villages and keep thousands of peasant-folk spellbound, night after night, as they move from village to village till the monsoon sets in. It is operatic in character, basing itself on the story of a Savara couple's survival of a cobra-bite in the forest through the compassion of the goddess Durga and is extremely hilarious with rough humour and horseplay, ending most magnificently in the leader of the troupe stepping out on the arena with a musical bow and presenting and solving riddles in songs, his tinkling bow supplying simple, dignified rhythm to his steps as well as to his recitations.

THE POLE STAR OF ORISSA'S WOMEN FOLK

In this season again, on the new moon day of the month of Jyestha (May-June), comes the most important of all festivals for the Oriya women, the Savitri Upabasa,⁸ in honour as well as emulation of Savitri, the bright jewel of Indian womanhood, who forced the Death-god Yama, to release her dead husband's soul from his merciless noose, by the strength of her virtues and out-witting him, the great Lord of Life, through typical feminine cleverness. Let not the reader run away with the idea that Orissa alone is the land of Savitrис in the whole of India, but when we find that such a festival for women-folk is not found in either Bengal in the north or Andhra Pradesh in the south, Orissa's two great neighbours, much credit should be conceded to

Upabasa—a Sanskrit word meaning "fast"

the social leaders of ancient Orissa who planned the national life on the basis of high idealism, suitable to the character of the soil and independently of the ways of their immediate neighbours. On this Savitri-day, every married Oriya woman, irrespective of her contemporary mood for the poor partner, fasts the whole day and takes only fruits and soaked (not cooked) cereals, after listening to the ever-inspiring story of how Princess Savitri's love could conquer even Death !

COSMOPOLITAN, YET DISTINCTIVE

Like a truly cultured individual in any part of the world, Orissa's culture may be said to, thus combine, in a mysterious manner, the unique qualities of being both distinctive as well as cosmopolitan. It is a culture built up of all the three great cultural strands of India, the Aboriginal, the Dravidian and the Aryan. While the language of Orissa is Aryan, its musical pattern is undeniably Dravidian. Many a custom in Orissa is also purely aboriginal, the festival of Raja being an excellent illustration. We shall see in the next chapter how the Orissan army was generally headed by Brahmins, its rank and file consisting of recruits from all castes and tribes. Caste was much less rigorous in Orissa than in most parts of India. And of this grand cosmopolitan synthesis, the great Lord Jagannath of Puri stands as the wonderful symbol and example, acting, even today, as the beacon light for the whole Indian Republic for implementing what is now called 'national integration', but which is already a social fact in Orissa.⁹

RE-THINKING FOR THE MODERN ORIYA

All the same, the Oriyas of today should not lose sight of the distinctiveness of their regional culture. If, for lack of proper introspection, they construe

9. See Chapter X on Jagannatha

national integration in the wrong way and lose their own distinction, then it will be a loss to the sum-total of Indian culture, and not of Orissa alone. India presents to the world a philharmonic orchestra of multi-culture. India has never believed in any sort of totalitarianism,—political, cultural or religious. In Indian philosophy the word *Vyakti* stands both for an individual as well as for the manifestation of divinity, thus combining in one and the same word, the individuality, as well as universality harmonious expression of apparent opposites in one single personality being thus presumed to be possible, at least in theory. India preaches through the *Bhagavat-Gita* the observance of *Swadharma* (fulfilment of one's inherent ethos) for each individual as well as for each group of individuals. The great among us, are always apart and different from us, though, at the same time, they are also closer to us in a deeper sense than our neighbours. The present-day Oriyas should do well, therefore, to try to discern and accept in their-day-to-day life, the beauty, the excellence, as well as the healthfulness for both body and mind, in the ways of life that their forbears had devised for the nation,—which, following those simple Spartan ways, once built and ruled empires, created deathless art and magnificent monuments and entertained itself not only with masterly, manly and colourful architecture and sculpture, but with dances, songs and plays that by no stretch of imagination could be described as sneaky plagiarism from any source, though it was never ashamed of any dignified synthesis or assimilation. Such dignified cultural synthesis is possible even to-day, provided, the modern Oriyas decide to be less crazy over ephemerals and have a little more re-thinking of even the essentials of life, as was emphasised by their sturdy, manly, proud and glorious ancestors.

CHAPTER III

HOW ORISSA FACED TYRANTS AND AGGRESSORS

THE KALINGA WAR

As mentioned earlier, ambitious, impetuous, ruthless Asoka, the young ruler of Magadha, wanted to conquer little Kalinga, perhaps because, it still remained proudly *avijita* (unconquered) by the side of the extensive empire that had been built up by his grandfather and father. Sheer mania for overlordship has been the main inspiration behind most wars in history, and *digvijaya*, the subjugation of the four quarters, was all along the insane craze of ancient Indian rulers also, under the political pretext of "unification of lands under one umbrella." Such a desire in young Asoka was, therefore, quite natural. But is it not the greatest riddle in human history that a young and powerful emperor, after defeating and subjugating a small tribe, dared not wage another war and declared warfare itself an unmitigated nuisance not worth resorting to, by any head of state ?

The answer lies not really so much in the philosophic cogitations of the victorious young emperor on the ethics of war as a means for achieving accepted political objectives, as in the unexpected bravery and spirit of reckless martyrdom of the little bunch of freedom-loving Kalingas in warding off aggression on their motherland, completely heedless of their own meagre resources in men and equipment, as against those of a vast empire. The brave Kalingas, though small in number, must have fought the imperial army for every inch

CHAPTER-III

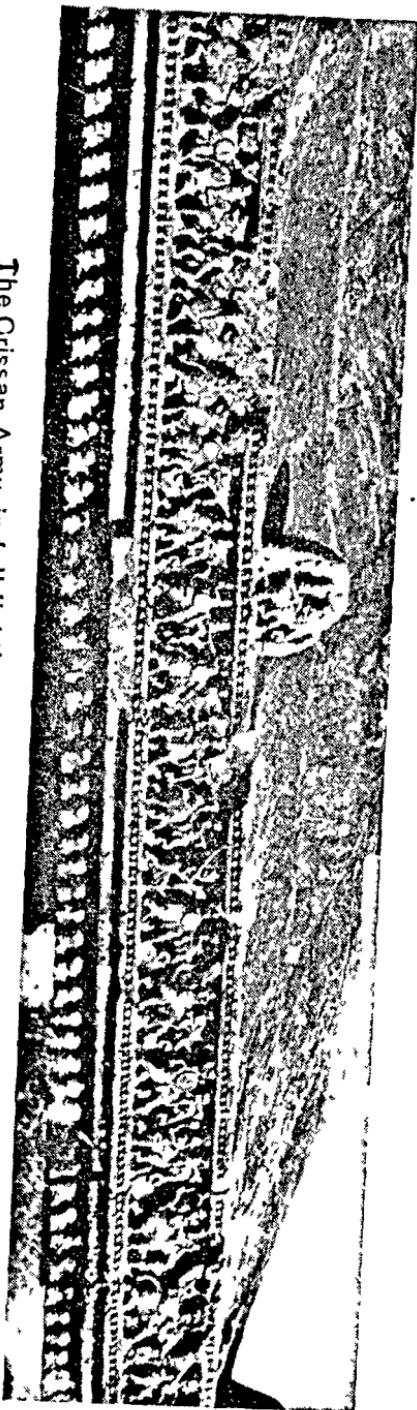
HOW ORISSA FACED TYRANTS & AGRESSORS

The following tell-tale ten pictures will show how deep has been the grain of militarism in Orissan Art & Society.

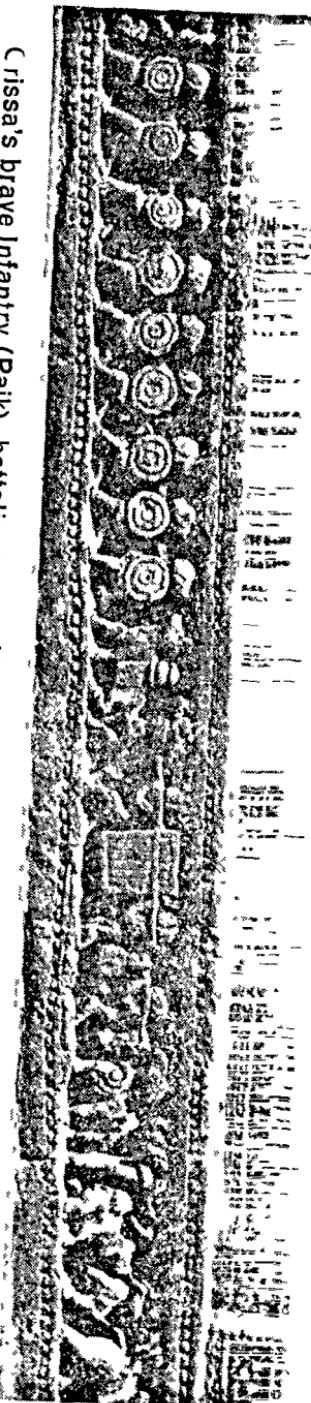


The earliest battle scene in Orissan sculpture, (1st century B.C.), on a bas-relief mural frieze inside one of the Udayagiri-Khandagiri group of caves, depicting the rescue of a lady in distress.

Crissa's brave Infantry (Paik) battalions marching on to war with the Commissariat following. Konarka



The Crissan Army, in full fighting trim, marches out for conquests. Konarka.





A raging battle of Elephants, Horses and Infantrymen which was but a familiar scene to the artists of Konark.



The Commissariat of the Orissa State Army. Konarka.

Konarka's War-elephant non-chalantly squeezing life out of an enemy-combatant.





One of the famous war-horses of Konarka, crushing under its powerfully-shod hoof,
a writhing enemy soldier.



An Oriya Tommy takes leave of his young wife and only child, on summons from the king. To be marked, especially, is the natural sad look of the young wife, even on hard stone. Konarka



A typical zestful Oriya Paik of to-day, despite long four centuries of contempt, neglect, exploitation and half-starved existence.

The Oriya Paik of even to-day can't help indulging in a bout of war-game, once the crummer beats out the familiar rhythmic militant throbs, still lingering deep in his clan-consciousness, after centuries of dissociation.





Symbolic of the unchallenged military superiority of the ancient Oriyas, is this Holy Horse of Suzerainty, being securely led back home after meeting many a military challenge. Konarka, Mayadevi temple.



Surendra Sai of Sambalpur royal House, who died an uncompromising rebel against the British Raj, during India's first battle of Independence in 1857.

of their homeland from the banks of the Ganga in the north to the Godavari in the south, as they retreated step by step to the narrow, rocky doab between the Mahanadi and the long-extinct Prachi river, on which Tosali, the capital of their little kingdom, stood. Historian now imagine that Asoka's invasion of Kalinga was probably two-pronged, one from the north and the other from the south. The victorious detachments met in the capital of Kalinga, on practically the same ground where the present capital of Orissa, Bhubaneswar, stands, and where too the psychological transformation of young Asoka is supposed to have taken place. Considering the population of a small coastal belt of land, such as the kingdom of Kalinga, most of which must have been jungle-covered two thousand years ago, the casualties (150,000 prisoners and 100,000 killed) are really staggering. The young emperor, who personally led the campaign, was naturally shocked at the unimaginable horrors of the battlefields one after another and the widespread sufferings, in particular, of the civil population of the conquered land, which was highly cultured, even according to the admission of the victorious enemy. Apart from his deep remorse for the killed, the wounded and the imprisoned, the young emperor appears to have been deeply moved, because "violence was done to those among the population in that land who were cultured enough to obey the words of their parents, elders and teachers and knew proper manners even towards their servants."

It was good, however, not only for the whole of India, but also for Asia, that the small tribe of Kalingas was defeated with such colossal human sacrifice. Otherwise, the psychical reaction in the erstwhile ambitious and ruthless young soldier-king, would not have been so soul-explorative as to drive him to take to Lord Buddha's noble Dhamma of Compassion seriously enough and thus transform a sectarian

Indian faith into a world-religion and make India immediately international, without yet being a nation.

Even as a military event, the Kalinga war stands on the same footing as the battle of Thermopylae or Haldighat, for reckless martyrdom of the defeated for the sake of freedom and human values. But how the Kalingas took that defeat is also no less glorious. Read between the lines, Asoka's Kalinga edicts clearly show that the imperial administration of subjugated Kalinga was far from peaceful. That, there was ceaseless guerilla fighting inside and around the conquered territory must be taken as a fact. This explains why the emperor had the horrors of the Kalinga war inscribed only at far-off corners of his empire, hundreds of miles away from Kalinga itself, and also his deep anxiety to win over the tribes of the border areas of the newly annexed land. This also accounts for his orders to the newly-stationed bureaucracy in Kalinga to make the gentlest and most considerate approach to the conquered people who must be simmering with a sense of burning hostility.

KHARAVELA'S RETRIBUTION

This accumulated national discontent of the Kalingas perhaps flared up as a personified retribution in the great Kalinga hero, Kharavela, about 150 years after. It could not be otherwise, as violence only breeds more violence, the two worldwars of our civilised twentieth century being clear illustrations. From Kharavela's Hatigumpha inscription, it appears that the very first significant act in Kharavela's magnificent royal career was to attack Magadha, Asoka's home state. The Kalinga king almost gloats over the fact that he triumphantly occupied the Suganga palace of the Magadhan kings and made his elephants and horses drink the water of the Ganga, while the defeated King Brihaspatimitra, was made to worship the feet of the victorious enemy from Kalinga. In a spirit of sheer exultation over this

retributive victory over Magadha, Kharavela felt it to be the most righteous royal act to have his brilliant military as well as civil achievements inscribed on the roof of the Hatigumpha cave of the Udayagiri hill which looks straight, in boastful arrogance, at the Dhauli hill, four miles across, carrying the memorial of Asoka's conquest of Kalinga a century and half earlier,

Though shortlived, Kharavela's empire in the 1st century B. C. appears to have covered nearly one-third of the Indian sub-continent (See map in the first Chapter). This first Kalinga empire vanished too soon. The military traditions of the Kalingas, however, continued to be a historical fact till after the British occupation of their land in the 19th century A.D. Slowly, through centuries, the Bhaumas, the Somas, the Gangas, the Solars and the Bhois appeared and ruled the land and built up a national and social life, broadly on the traditions left behind by Kharavela, comprising, in general, the significant triune streams of (i) liberal patronage of arts, (ii) religious tolerance and (iii) development of the material quality of the nation : three factors that are most essential to the prosperity and stability of any state.

THE GLORIOUS SAILENDRAS OF JAVA

Through all these dynastic vicissitudes, however, the rivers Ganga in the north and the Godavari in the south remained the natural and traditional frontiers of Kalinga, Utkala or Orissa, the national homeland of the Oriyas, as with the Kalingas of Asok's days. Our present confusion about the frontiers of Orissa are due mostly to the rise of small, shortlived but independent local dynasties here and there, at different periods when the central power weakened. One such was the kingdom of Kongada, covering about half of the Puri and Ganjam districts of the present Orissa State, with its capital somewhere on the shore of the Chilika lake which was then a great maritime harbour. Pressed

between the Gangas in the south and the Bhaumas in the north, the Sailodbhava kings of Kongada, after resisting impingement on their borders for about two centuries, seem to have, at last, left their dear homeland altogether, under very desperate circumstances, to settle in Indonesia where there already was, perhaps, a goodly colony of Kongada Kalingites. Neither the Sailodbhavas nor their Kongada kingdom is heard of in Orissa's history any more after the 7th century A. D. But we come across the sudden rise in South-east Asia of a glorious royal dynasty with the significant title of Sailendras. They have left behind immortal artistic monuments there, carrying the unmistakable stamp of the Orissan traditions of architecture and sculpture.¹

Between the 12th and the 14th centuries, under the Gangas, the military traditions in Orissa seemed to have stabilised into such national conventions and customs as could be relied upon by the central power in times of any national emergency.

In the words of Hunter : "Under the Hindu princes it (Orissa) supported, besides a peasant militia of 300,000 men, a regular army of 50,000 foot, 10,000 horses and 25,000 elephants. If the Hindu chroniclers have magnified the number of regular troops, we know from Mussalman annalists that the Orissan king could, at a moment's warning, take the field with 18,000 horses and foot."²

The now familiar Oriya surnames, once signifying regular military assignments, such as Dalai (group commander), Dalabehera (group commissar), Senapati (general). Bahinipati (Commander-in-Chief), etc. were created in this period. Though the rank and file

1. See Chapter IV and V

2. W. W. Hunter, *Orissa*, Vol. I, Chapter V.

came from the national peasant militia and enjoyed hereditary freeholds for that purpose, the higher posts in the army, thanks to the general catholic spirit of the Orissan society all through history, were held by Brahmins. selected for their military aptitudes. The surname of Bahinipati belongs, in Orissa, only to Brahmins. It is not for nothing, perhaps, that Parasurama, the great Brahmin-hero of the Puranas, spent his last day in the holy Mahendra mountain of southern Orissa. Till very recently the *jagadharas* (gymnasia) of Puri were celebrated centres of physical culture, patronised entirely by the Brahmin Pandas of the Jagannatha temple.

ORISSA AND THE MOSLEMS

The Moslem invaders appeared on the Indian scene about the same time as the Gangas took over the reins of central government in Orissa. It is remarkable that for three centuries, the little Hindu kingdom of Orissa successfully resisted all Moslem invasions from the north as well as the south and kept the torch of freedom burning bright, when practically the whole of Hindusthan was under the dark night of an alien rule. In the words of Hunter : "Again the persistent valour of the Oriyas drove the the Muhammadans before them into the heart of Bengal. The Orissa Prince divided his army into two columns. One of them occupied the eastern or river-route northwards through Bengal, keeping along the Ganges and besieged the Mussalman Governor in his capital. The other advanced by the great military road along the western frontier and sacked the chief town of Birbhum.....The vanity of the Mussalman historians has covered the national disgrace, by converting this Hindu raid into a Tartar invasion under the generals of Chengiz Khan..... Long after the Afgans had trodden the conspicuous Hindu dynasties of India into the dust, Orissa asserted its independence and remained the stronghold of the ancient national faith. It was not till its princes had

proved false to their trust and leagued themselves with the Mussalmans against the patriotic cause, that they tell."⁸

KONARKA, A TOWER OF VICTORY

Readers should bear in mind that the world-famous Sun-Temple of Konarka is really nothing but a tower of victory, built by the great king Narasimha Deva for commemorating his grand victories in a series of engagements with the contemporary Sultans of Bengal, Tughan Khan and Ikhtiyarwodin Yazbak. Underneath the magnificent sculptures of war-horses and war-elephants of Konarka, the ruthlessly trampled figures are indeed those of the enemies of an alien faith. The plethora of war-scenes all over that supposedly holy shrine and even the presiding deity, the Sun-God, wearing modern army boots and driving a chariot, only veiledly proclaim a great military victory. The Kendupatna copperplate-grant of the same monarch declares in words, which are as ornate as the sculptures of Konarka, that "the whitish stream of the Ganga became not only black for a considerable length, with the collyrium washed off the weeping eyes of the Yavanis (Moslem women) of Rahr and Varendra (Bengal), thus being transformed by King Narasimha into dark-hued Yamuna, but appeared also to remain still, for sometime, in self-amazement at this extraordinary happening!"

King Kapilendra Deva of the Solar dynasty is taken to be the second Kharavela of Orissa. Rising from the ranks, this king showed a restless spirit and inexhaustible energy, filling the long 27 years of his reign with incessant invasions, sieges and military alliances, extending the frontiers of his empire in the south up to the banks of the river Kaveri (the northern boundary being the Ganga, as before)

8. *Ibid.*, Vol. II, Chapter VI.

and inflicting crushing defeats alike on the Hindu power of Vijayanagar and the Moslem Bahamanis. Historian R. D. Banerjee says : "He (Kapilendra Deva) succeeded in conquering the entire eastern coast of the Bay of Bengal from Hooghly in Bengal to Trichinopoly in Madras. According to the Gopinathpur inscription, he possessed Udayagiri, the seat of a Vijayanagara viceroyalty in the Nellore district of Madras, and Conjeevaram in the Chingleput district."⁴ About Kapilendra's invasion of the Bahamani kingdom, Banerjee says : "The King of Orissa invaded the Bahamani empire and almost reached the gates of the capital.....Perhaps this is the only instance in which the Indian Mussalman historian was compelled to admit the defeat of a king of his own country."⁵

MILITARY TRADITION IN ORIYA LITERATURE

Some readers might throw out a sensible enough question here, that if the Oriyas were such a fighting people, has their military quality left any trace in their ancient literature ? And it might surprise most readers to know the reply to be an emphatic affirmative. Among plenty of literary material in Oriya, mention may be made here of only three books, throbbing with the glorious military traditions of the Oriyas.

The first is the Oriya *Mahabharata* of Sarala Dasa, a great book in itself, but most valuable too as a historical document. Thanks to the brilliant researches of Dr. K. C. Panigrahi, it is now definitely proved that the south Indian campaigns of Arjuna, the Pandava hero, against Yudhisthira's *Rajasuya* sacrifice as described in Sarala's *Mahabharata* are but those of heroic Kapilendra Deva who was the poet's contemporary, as ascertained from historical records. Belonging as Sarala Dasa did to the caste that supplied the rank and file of the national militia of Orissa, he must have personally participated

4. History of Orissa, Vol. I, pp. 3-4

5. Ib p. 296, Ibid.

in some of the incessant campaigns of his warlike overlord. The poet mentions in his *Mahabharata* some ancient centres of pilgrimage which still exist in Andhra Pradesh and nothing in his grand epic is so exciting as the narratives of battles, carrying an undoubted imprint perhaps of personal experience and his hereditary zest for heroic exploits.

THE WAVES OF WAR

The second book, *Samara Taranga* ("Waves of War"), by Brajanath Bedajena, describes actual battles fought between the Maratha forces and those of the feudal chief of Dhenkanal in Orissa. In this poem we come across, for the first time in Oriya literature, descriptions of real battles with the living protagonists on both sides appearing, exactly as in war-memoirs, warplays or war-novels of today. Badajena's descriptions of the preparations for the war, the disposition of the cannon, the cavalry and the infantry, the emotions of soldiers on the eve of the battle, the hideous shambles that a battle leaves behind, with the piteous cries of the dying and the wounded, the routed army's pell-mell flight for life, are all depicted in matching words and colours without the least effort at exaggeration or for effect. The manly, stirring address of the Raja of Dhekanal to his courtiers who had advised him to retreat from his fort to avoid further reverses, is worthy of being treasured in any literature. "I am determined", says the Raja, "to stay on here. Let anybody come and dislodge me. Let the man, who is afraid of death, though carrying arms, go back to plough his fields. The beauty of a soldier's life lies in his death on the battle field. Who mentions a coward's name except with contempt ? He is no more than a girl inspite of a male form. The man worth that name would deem it lucky indeed if his body got riddled with wounds in a battle field. He, whose heart palpitates at the sight of blood is contemptible, no

matter if he be covered with jewels or possesses wealth untold."

THE PAIKA-KHEDA

The third book is the *Paika-Kheda* or "The Book of the Soldier." It is a book on military affairs by a hereditary militia man, Kanhai Champati Ray. It is written in archaic Oriya metres and language which proves its ancientness, and in uncouth, unpolished expressions as are natural to a soldier. But underneath the rough, inartistic, semi-articulate expressions of this Oriya tommy, the picture that emerges is amazing. It was written after Orissa had been conquered by the Moslems, and the patriotic soldier-author says in the concluding canto of his book that he felt the necessity of writing a book such as this, lest the traditions of his class be forgotten altogether under an alien government. It is divided into 12 cantos, dealing with different aspects of national defence, such as recruitment, the weaponry, divisions of an army, the medical corps, flags and their semaphoric uses, the Navy and preparation for naval battles, military expeditions and construction of forts. The concept of a national flag symbolising a nation's honour is certainly not new or modern, for we read in the sixth canto of this book :

"If the flags on our camps have to be lowered,
take it as synonymous with death.

So, soldiers, be ever on the alert to die.

For your flags.

Death should be preferred, any day, to the lowering of the national banner."

The soldier-poet also begins his special chapter on flags with these significant lines :

"Let me communicate with sweet reasonableness
wherein rests a Paika's real credit.

And also what should generally be taken as his nation's honour ;

That is nothing else but the mysterious impacts of a flag, oh, soldier,

Let me explain, therefore, its varieties."

NAVAL FIGHTS

The most exciting canto in the whole book, however, is the 7th, describing naval battles. It begins rather apologetically, in this manner :

"I shall now describe the merits of naval fights,
And thus dispel the doubts of my pupils.

There is nothing else like this, of which a Paika should be proud.

So listen, with attention.
As I explain this ancient lore."

The poet then says that there are innumerable varieties of naval craft of which only nine were commonly used in Orissa and he describes each in detail (see pictures), naming, however, the *Chaturi* (the Clever Lady) type as the best for war purposes. But, according to his narrative, each variety had its special use in war, such as, for carrying food, weapons, soldiers and also the commanders. The one called *Ganga Prasad* (Blessing of Mother Ganga) worked with revolving wheels underneath the keel, to smoothly cut across the waves. And the *Chaturi*-type of vessel was actually a steamship. It consisted of four chambers, the one in the bow being for the steersman, *Mangaraja*, a well-known, common surname among Paikas and Khandaita of Orissa even today, who sat aloft, holding the tiller which was geared to a set of bellows in a lower chamber, to be pressed by his feet. Under the bellows was a reservoir of water, over another chamber for fuels. When the occasion arose, the *Mangaraja* would ignite the fuel and work the bellows

and soon would rise columns of steam through apertures, assisting the sails in moving the vessel quickly to desired directions !

Such amazing literary evidence of "The Book of the Soldier" is corroborated again, by facts narrated by a British historian of the early 19th century. The following extracts from Hamilton's Hindusthan (published, 1820) are highly interesting, throwing a flood of light on the now-forgotten maritime glories of the historic Oriyas and reminding readers of the invasion of England by the Spanish Armada. Says Hamilton.

"Prior to the acquisition of Cuttack by the British, the Raja of Kanika had baffled the Marhatta generals in all their attempts to subdue him. The Marhattas had been accustomed to embark troops and artillery on large unwieldy flat-bottomed boats, unmanageable in large streams or near the sea, in consequence of which their ill-constructed fleets always fell a prey to the Raja's light-armed vessels which were long, narrow, with barricades to cover the men, some of them having 100 paddles or oars. When these squadrons met, the Oriya boats moved quickly round the heavy Marhatta armada and picked off the men with their matchlocks, until the remainder were compelled to surrender. . . . On this account, the Kanika chief and his country were viewed with vast horror by the Marhattas. . . . To the British Government also its subjection presented a task of real difficulty. . . . The Oriyas were expert in stockading both their country and streams."

The soldier-poet of this small but monumental book, *Paika-Kheda*, prefers also a naval engagement to a land-fight, for, though it may take longer time, naval operation, says he, results in heavy casualties among the enemy !

The medical corps, according to the *Paika-Kheda*, consisted of hereditary *Pandaras* whose duty it was to

carry the wounded from the fronts as quickly as possible and treat them with herbs. The wounded were exhorted to dash off again for action, after their wounds were dressed up, if of course, they were able to walk. Otherwise, they would be taken as cowards, who used their slight wounds as pretexts for avoiding death. The *Pandaras* are also said to have been in possession of some pills that put an end to hunger and fatigue in a soldier, so that he could, if exigencies of war so required, carry on the fight without any necessity of food and sleep for days together.

The book reveals that in those spacious times young men were conscripted for the national army irrespective of castes. But a young fellow recently married was exempted. What a wise and romantic consideration indeed ! But his turn would come after three years of married life. This reminds us also of the most movingly pathetic sculpture on the wall of the Lingaraja temple in Bhubaneswar of a soldier's farewell to his young wife with a tiny baby in arms, the face of the good lady, even on hard stone, revealing ineffable sadness.

On the other hand, travellers' accounts, corroborated by tell-tale sculpture on the walls of Orissa's many temples, proclaim, in the clearest terms, that even the women of Orissa, at least of the upper classes, were as warlike as men. The spirited pretty horse-rider of Mukteswara Temple in Bhubaneswar is a fine illustration. And Bruton, the British sailor, who visited Orissa in 1633, says : "They (the people around Puri) ride on goodly horses, booted and spurred ; so likewise do their women."

Paika-Kheda, though written in Oriya and trying to exhort only the author's compatriots—"how to become good soldiers of the *Gajapati*", should be taken as a valuable military document in the entire field of Indian literature.

UNDER MOSLEMS AND MARATHAS

Though at last conquered, the Oriyas never forgot their age-old military traditions, as occasions arose. The Moghul administration, thanks to the noted Hindu officials of the catholic emperor Akbar, such as Todar Mall, Mansing and Jaisingh who came to settle affairs in the newly conquered State of Orissa, maintained only an over-all control, leaving the local chiefs much freedom of action. The old imperial Hindu dynasty was allowed to continue, with rights to enjoy tributes from all principalities south of the Mahanadi, extending as far down as the southern borders of the present district of Srikakulam in Andhra Pradesh and with full control over the temple of Jagannatha. But as later Moslem governors and their upper-India associates turned hostile and rapacious, a battle royal went on practically all through the Moghul rule between that alien government and the people, spearheaded by the Maharaja of Khurda, the descendant of the historic Gajapatis.

Then came the Marathas whose only objective was to squeeze money out of the land. But Stirling says that, Masalih-ad-Din, the first Naib Subadar appointed by the Nagpur Court to collect and supply money from Orissa, sought permission from the authorities, after two years of his uncomfortable sojourn in Orissa, "to relinquish the government, stating forcibly his inability any longer to fulfil his engagements, owing to the declining resources of the country and still more to the turbulent and unmanageable character of the Khandait or military Zamindars of Orissa who could be kept in no sort of subjection without the constant employment of a very large army in the field, the expense of maintaining which engrossed the whole revenue."

Adds Stirling : "Notwithstanding that large military bodies were posted all over the State, Marathas

were unable to retain the Khandait and Paiks in any sort of order. Those of the seashore and the hills, not only laid the whole of the pergunnahs bordering upon them under regular contribution, but frequently the Paikas of several small killas, combining together, advanced into the heart of the district and committed the most ruinous depredations up to the very walls of Cuttack. Every year, regularly after Dusserah, the Maratha armies took the field under the Subadar in person and advanced into some part of the Rajwara to chastise some insolence or to enforce some demand for tribute. When successful, the most sanguinary punishments and destructive ravages were inflicted,—but they were frequently defeated and their weakness exposed, by the Paikas of killahs which now scarcely retain a name."

THE PAIKA REBELLION UNDER THE BRITISH

The British took over Orissa in 1803, from the Marathas. Sick with the near anarchical conditions under the Marathas, the Oriyas generally welcomed the change with a sigh of relief, and the Pandas of Jagannatha gave the British generals an ovation in sonorous Sanskrit verses. But, only a year after the British occupation, Jaya Krushna Raiguru, the hereditary priest of the Maharaja of Khurda, unfurled the flag of rebellion, on behalf of his prince. The rebellion was quickly suppressed and the Maharaja was kept a prisoner while the great Brahmin patriot was publicly hanged at Midnapore, perhaps the earliest Indian martyr to freedom under the British.

But even that did not deter the Oriyas. The same fire that had flared up against invader Ashok two thousand years ago, still burnt bright in the hearts of the thousands of Paikas, and their Khandait leaders. They were disillusioned with British rule, being deprived of their age-old rights through the nefarious machinations

of the Bengali intermediaries, who had followed the British occupation-army from Calcutta and spelt such economic ruin to Orissa as had not been witnessed under even the Moghuls or the Marathas.

Between 1804 and 1815 several land settlements—annual, biennial, triennial and quinquennial,—were carried out, each proving unsatisfactory and each increasing the tax-burden on the peasantry. Salt, which was so far a free item of consumption, as well as a good source of income of the people all along the extensive sea-shore of Orissa, was now taxed. The cowrie, the native currency, was devalued and the peasant was made to pay taxes in coins which were in short supply. On the promulgation of the notorious Sunset Law, many ancient noble families of Orissa lost their all overnight and their valuable estates were taken over by Bengali clerks in the revenue offices in Calcutta almost for a song.⁶ According to Mr. Ewer, who submitted a report on the Paika rebellion, "two-thirds of the Oriya Zamindars were completely wiped out and replaced by Bengali Zamindars in their places." One of the generally unscrupulous Bengali officials in Orissa of those days deprived even Buxi Jagabandhu Vidyadhar, the hereditary Commander-in-chief of the Maharaja of Khurda, of all his most valuable jagirs through manipulation of records. There was not a single English-knowing Oriya at that time. The Bengalees, who had had the advantage over the Oriyas of being acquainted with the British processes of administration and of English education for nearly a century by that time, had complete possession of the ears of the British masters who did not know Oriya either. So, appeals to the British government proved ineffective and, as a result of the seething general discontent, rebellion flared up in Orissa in 1817.

6. R. D. Banerjee, *History of Orissa*, Vol. II pp 279-81

THE HEROIC ORIYAS OF NORTHERN SARKARS

In the so-called Northern Sarkars (actually the Southern Sarkars of the old Orissa subah of the Moghuls), beyond the political borders of the Orissa division, the Oriya chiefs of Ganjam had also kept up continuous revolts against the British, making settled government almost impossible in that whole area. Chief among such rebellious Oriya feudal Rajas was that of Ghumsur, the glorious home of Orissa's great poet, Upendra Bhanja, who, though the greatest of romantics in Oriya literature, has also often styled himself, true to the spirit of his race, in the colophons of his innumerable poems, as "Upendra, the hero among heroes". The chief military strength of this now-extinct famous royal house was its loyal militia of tribal Khonds. The record of the sufferings and sacrifices of these aborigines for the sake of their land and chief, reads almost like a fairy tale.

In March, 1817, a band of these Ghumsur Khonds marched into Banpur, a thana in the district of Puri, contiguous to Ganjam, inhabited by their tribal kith and kin. They perhaps sought their support for the war against the hated Feringi who had dishonoured their chief. The spirit of these rebels inflamed the hearts of their compatriots on this side of the political border, already burning with resentment against the alien government. The fire broke out, setting almost the whole of Orissa ablaze and thousands of Paikas jumped into the holy jihad, with their ancient swords unsheathed and their musty matchlocks hastily trimmed, after many years of neglect.

The Paikas declared themselves masters of the whole thana of Banpur, burning all government buildings, killing about 100 government officials and looting the treasury. Then they marched triumphantly towards

Khurda from where all government officers fled in panic. Here too the State treasury was looted, the money going to defray the expenses of the rebellion. The British authorities at Cuttack now sent two detachments of troops. But both were routed by the Paikas, one at Khurda and another at Pipili, an English commander losing his life. The Paikas, by this time, were masters of the whole subdivision of Khurda.

The government at Cuttack sent now two battalions, one to Puri and another to Khurda, consisting of 550 English soldiers, besides Indian sepoys. By this time, the rebels had entered and occupied Puri. Like Emperor Bahadur Shah during the Sepoy Mutiny later on, the Maharaja of Khurda became the natural leader of the patriotic Paikas and their enthusiasm knew no bounds. The spirit of rebellion had spread into the farthest corners of the land and the great Khandaitis of the maritime forts of Kanika and Kujanga had also unfurled the banner of defiance against the alien ruler. At Puri the temple priests of Jagannatha declared the end of the British Raj and the resurrection of the glorious reign of the Gajapatis in Orissa in its place.

But now the anticlimax of the Paika adventure began. The British declared martial law and were lucky enough to capture Mukunda Deva II, the Maharaja of Khurda, the spiritual fountainhead of the rebellion. And that hastened the demoralisation among the rank and file of the rebels, accustomed, through centuries, to act only on the inspiration of their leader. Both at Puri and Khurda, the Paikas suffered reverses and fled into jungles in various groups. But as the Maharaja of Khurda was being taken to Cuttack as a prisoner, the Paikas, loyal to their finger-tips to the personality of the Gajapati King, mustered strong on the way, as if by magic, to release their king from the hands of the infidels. In this too they failed and thus the backbone of the insurrection was broken. But the guerilla war

of the Paikas continued for over a year. A special detachment of the British army was posted in Orissa to hunt out the straggling remnants of the rebels from their jungle hideouts.

The captured freedom-fighters of Orissa, the earliest of modern Shahids, were tried at the Sadar Nizamat Adalat at Calcutta. Seven of the leaders were sentenced to death, two were awarded rigorous life imprisonment at the Alipore jail, twenty-five were made detenus outside Orissa, for unspecified periods, nine were to undergo detention for 14 years each, and no fewer than 103 were transported to the British penal islands of the Andamans. Thus ended perhaps, the *First war of Independence* in British India.

ORISSA DEMILITARISED AT LAST

But the worst was yet to come. The British, in their panic, disarmed the entire Paika militia and deprived them of their hereditary jagirs, thus turning overnight, a proud, historic tribe of gentlemen-soldiers into a race of coolies. And to fill the cup of misery, the freedom-loving Oriyas were declared a non-martial race ! No previous government had so ruthlessly clipped the wings of the Oriya nation as was now done by the unimaginative British in vandalistic vengeance. It was under their rule that the historic Oriyas ceased, at last, to be a fighting people, which they had been from almost time immemorial down to the first quarter of the 19th century.

But even in the deprived and disarmed soldiery of Orissa the fire of ancient heroism kept smouldering and sprang into flames whenever a congenial opportunity offered itself. There were Paika uprisings again in 1833 and 1847 under the leadership of the Raja of Angul. The Raja was deposed, his State was annexed to the British empire, and Sindhu Gadanayaka, the leader of his forces, with twelve other commandants, was transported for life,

SURENDRA SAI AND CHAKRA BISOI

In the War of Independence of 1856-57, Orissa also threw out a leader of idomitable courage in Surendra Sai of Sambalpur who continued a guerilla war in Orissa's western region against the British, till 1861. Captured and imprisoned at last, he died an unsurrendering hero in the historic fort of Asirgarh in the then Central Provinces.

But the bravest of them all and the true modern symbol of "unconquered Kalinga" of Asokan edicts, was Chakra Bisoi, the valiant Khond leader of Ghumsur who, for about a decade, became a veritable thorn in the flesh of the British authorities in south-western Orissa, eluding all attempts at capture and dying a free man as, perhaps, his inmost soul desired, in his jungle hideout somewhere on the bank of the Tel river in Kalahandi district of Orissa.

Thus ends the long story of valour and patriotism of the Oriyas, beginning from the days of Asoka, when their small but heroic national entity was pitted against the force of a mighty Indian empire, to those of a lonely Chakra Bisoi, defying the most powerful empire on earth and dying a free man under the very nose of the most ruthless colonial administration in history. Has not this long and glorious record of the Oriyas, of grand sacrifices for the sake of great human values, any lesson for the Oriyas of today or for Indians, for that matter ?

CHAPTER IV

ORISSA SAILS ACROSS THE SEVEN SEAS

THE CULT OF A SEA-GODDESS

There is one festival in Orissa which is off the general plan of festivities that come thick and fast in the agricultural season.¹ It is held all over Orissa, throbbing with human values and shining with deep maritime significance. This is the Khudurkuni Osa ("The Fast of Rice-bran") observed by all Oriya girls, for the happiness of and their cordial felationship with their brothers. This lovely festival of the simple village girls reflects the socio-economic conditions of the Oriyas in historic times much more sharply than many a research paper of pundits.

Behind this festival is the pathetic tale of a loving little sister, pining for her brothers, away in distant lands, across the seven seas, for purpose of commerce, which was their family occupation and a general feature of Orissa society at that time. Tortured by jealous sister-in-law at home and unprotected by absentee brothers, she prays fervently to the goddess Mangala, the divine patroness of all Oriya people living on banks of rivers or lakes or on the seacoast, offering only a handful of rice-bran, anything better than which she did not possess. And the brothers did return after the worship, holding out similar happy consummations for all Oriya girls in respect of their brothers as a result of similar prayers to the same compassionate goddess Mangala.

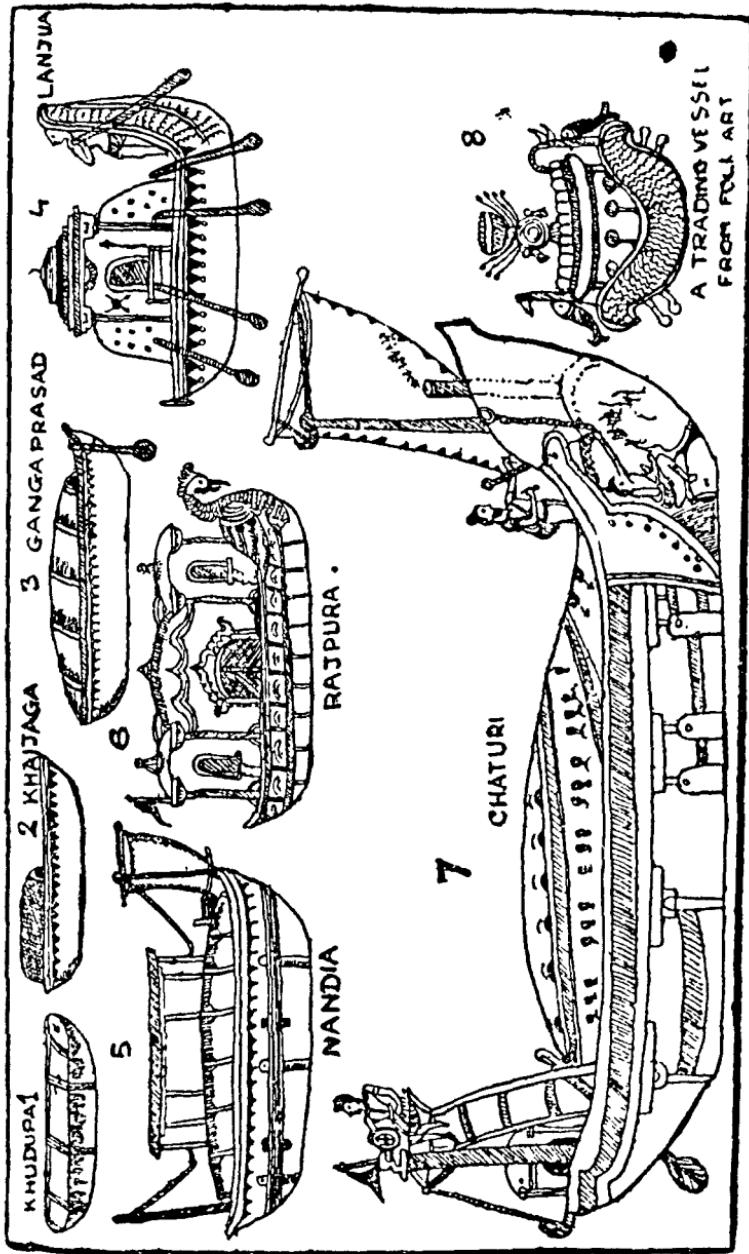
For purposes of this festival which comes off on every Sunday in the month of Bhadra (August-September), a sea-going vessel is generally drawn, even in

1' See Chapter II.

CHAPTER—IV

ORISSA SAILS ACROSS THE SEVEN SEAS

The four following pictures demonstrate the universal Oceanic lore in Orissa's art and traditions.



ପାଇକ ରେଣ୍ଡା

ପାଇକ ରେଣ୍ଡା ପୋତାବଳୀ

Designs of various ancient Orissan naval craft. (Reproduced from the Paika-Kheda—the Book of the Soldiers, by Kanhai Champatiroy of the 16th century, edited and published by Padmashree Pandit Sadasiva Rath Sharma of Puri.

The Festival of Rice Bran (Khudurukuni) being observed by young Oriya girls. Mark, Goddess Mangala, the Patron—Saint of ancient Orissan mariners, with the backdrop of a ship painted on the wall.

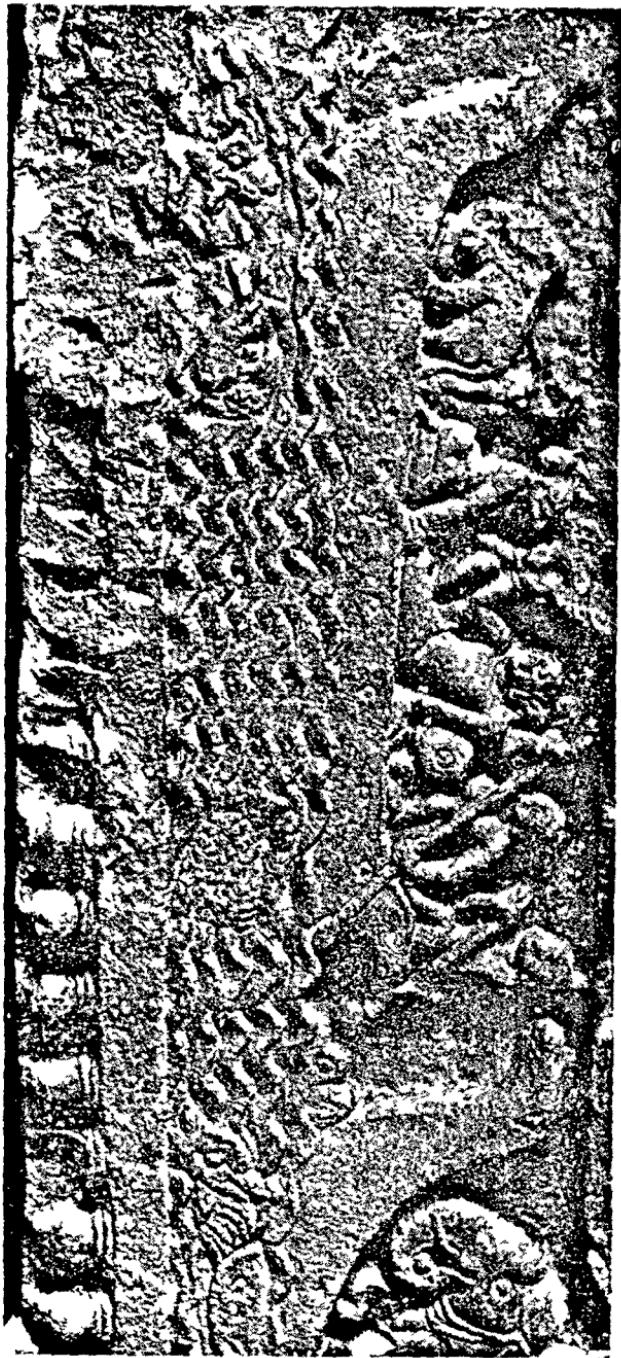




A group of Oriya oversea traders presenting to King Narasinhadeva, the builder of Konarka, seated on the royal elephant, the queerest of African animals,—a giraffe.

A Konarka Panel

Sculpture of an ancient sea-going vessel carrying elephants and horses, found at Bhubaneswar and now kept in the Orissa State Museum in the same city.



areas remote from the sea-shore. The female artists do not forget to indicate therein the waves and fish, along with the sails and riggings, to provide the necessary realism to the function. On the flour-painted ship the goddess Mangala is installed in symbolic form and the place of worship is decorated with garlands of fresh water-lilies that generally blossom in this season after the cessation of the monsoon, making the landscape of Orissan villages quite colourful. The girls troop out in batches early in the morning to nearby ponds to collect liliest and spend delightful hours in making garlands out of them and hang these artistically over the painted ship, the object of their devotion and concern. Then the priest comes towards the evening and recites the story of Ta'poi, the merchant's daughter, to commemorate whose sufferings the festival is celebrated in Orissa. The story, in a nutshell, is as follows:

A merchant prince in a harbour-town on the sea-coast of Orissa had seven sons and daughters-in-law and only one daughter, Ta'poi, the youngest in the family. The merchant's affairs were highly prosperous. But this had always excited burning jealousy in a poor Brahmin widow of the neighbourhood. One day she found Ta'poi playing in the street with an ordinary bamboo-basket along with other boys and girls of her age. The Brahmin lady told her,—'Ah, Ta'poi, you should be playing with a golden moon and silver baskets. What a shame for a rich man's daughter like you to play like these common children !'

Ta'poi immediately demanded a golden moon and a silver basket from her parents. The old merchant felt such abuse of wealth preposterous. But the innocent girl was adamant in her demand. The fond parents yielded. But by the time the making of the golden moon and silver basket was only half-way through, the parents died one after another.

The sons, thereafter, took up their father's oversea business and made arrangements for going abroad. Before starting on their long and uncertain voyage, they told their wives to see to it that Ta'poi, their darling sister, was looked after just as she had been by their late parents and that every little wish of hers was satisfied.

The wives were acting in accordance with their husbands' request when the Brahmin widow came on the scene again ! She told the young ladies,—“You are fools indeed to keep yourselves so busy all day just to keep this girl in such comforts ! It is she, when the brothers return, who will poison their ears against you and make your life hot. Beware of your sister-in-law, you silly women. She is your potential enemy.”

The picture changed immediately. Ta'poi, the darling daughter of a merchant-prince, was now told to look after the family goats. Soon she was in rags and turned black, wandering in the jungles, looking after a herd of goats, without food and drink. It was the youngest sister-in-law who was a little kind to her and stealthily gave some food with which she just sustained, her frail body. One day, in the month of Bhadra, when the rivers were in spate, a male goat, the favourite of the eldest sister-in-law, who was the mistress of the house, got lost in the jungle. When Ta'poi brought the herd home that evening, without the favourite animal, she was severely beaten by her eldest sister-in-law and was sent back hungry and footsore into the jungle to fetch it back. It was a dark and rainy night. Ta'poi, poor girl, called the animal loudly and wandered about in the darkness. During that blind, miserable, infernal journey she stumbled upon the goddess Mangala, the patron-saint of Oriya mariners, installed and worshipped at many points on the long Orissa sea-coast even today. Kneeling down before her, Ta'poi offered the handful of broken grains of raw-rice (khuda) which her youngest sister-in-law had

secretly tied in her apron when she was cruelly driven out of the house. There she worshipped and wept, bewailing her sad lot in the long absence of her brothers, for whom she was more concerned than for her own plight. About midnight, a man approached her, attracted by the sound of her pathetic wailing. After a few enquiries it was revealed that the visitor was no other than Ta'poi's youngest brother, who, along with her other brothers, had arrived at the nearby port. Their ships were at anchor at the river-side not far from there. Ta'poi was taken to the ship and given a bath as well as clothes and jewellery. A message was sent to the wives also to come and perform the ceremony of Boita Bandana ("Welcome to the Boats"). They came in the morning and, when questioned, replied that Ta'poi who lying ill at home. All of them, except the wife of the youngest brother, were directed to go to the stern of the ship to worship the goddess Mangala, the divine patroness of ships. But she was no other than Ta'poi in her new dress and jewellery. Sitting by her brothers, she cut off the nose of each woman, one after another, as they approached to worship her. They all fled in shame into the nearby jungle and were devoured by tigers. The brothers returned home with the wife of the youngest brother and the sister Ta'poi. They brought home new wives and settled down in happiness.

Thus ends the story of the votive tale of Khudurukuni fast, universally observed by unmarried girls in Orissa, even today. Many a folk-tale of Orissa, like this story of Ta'poi, is woven round the oversea merchants called Sadhabas in Oriya, of which the current Oriya surname of Sahu, held generally by the mercantile castes of Orissa, is a corruption.

TAMLUK, BALASORE AND GANJAM

Orissa at present has no port to speak of except Paradeep which is yet to be completed. But the glory

of the once vital and important harbours of Orissa, such as, Tamralipta (modern Tamluk in Midnapore district, West Bengal) all through the middle ages, and of Balasore and Ganjam during the days of the East India Company cannot be denied.

About Tamralipta, which, because of an unfortunate political alignment, is claimed by others as solely their own, leaving the wrong impression that it was never on Orissa soil, Hunter says :

"Tamluk, now an inland village of Bengal (district Midnapore) formed the maritime capital of Orissa. . . . Although finally transferred to Bengal in 1725, Tamluk bears witness to its ancient connection with Orissa by its legends, by its local customs and by its vernacular speech. And although we have introduced Bengali as the language of official life, a mixed patois and a compound written character of Bengali and Oriya, until very recently prevailed in Tamluk. Many Orissa idioms survive and surnames of the people bear witness to their Orissa origin. Children in some village schools of Midnapore district learn Bangali in the morning and Oriya in the afternoon. They still adhere to the Oriya Almanac. . . . Until 1869, when the Kendrapara canal opened out the Orissa seaboard, Tamluk continued to monopolise, by a land route through Midnapore, the whole exports of Orissa, although it had ceased to be able to send them out to sea." ²

The late Satindra Narayana Roy, a Bengali scholar, says :

"Tamluk or ancient Tamralipta is outside the present geographical limits of Orissa. But, ethnologically and linguistically, it is a part and parcel of Orissa. No doubt Bengali is the language of the town, but illiterate women still speak Oriya diluted with an

admixture of Bengali. The seaport is closely associated with Orissa from the standpoint of history..... The kings of the Peacock dynasty (of Mayurbhanj) reigned here for a considerable time. And the last king was driven out by a kewat (fisherman) adventurer from Orissa, called Kelu Bhuyan".³

BALASORE

In modern times, the British established their earliest entrepot on the eastern coast of India at the old port of Balasore, long before they pitched their tents on the mud banks of the Hooghly where no port then existed.

About Balasore, which was a flourishing port during the 17th and 18th centuries, Hunter says : "Silver had still six times the purchasing power which it has now and the Orissa factors bough at up at the lowest price for ready money, the fine muslins of Cuttack. From this time (1688) forward, the English factory (at Balasore) had little to fear from the Mohammedan Governors of Orissa. It pursued its speculations unconcerned amid the wreck of the Moghul empire, calmly storing up its merchandise behind its cannon-mounted parapets. Nevertheless it (the port of Balasore) declined in importance, as its younger rival on the Hooghly (Calcutta) gradually grew out of a cluster of mud huts into the metropolis of India. Nature also and the bar-building ocean, declared against it. Nevertheless, Balasore still continued to flourish. The troubles of the times made us abandon our old factory at Cuttack, inland capital of the province, and Balasore thus monopolised the whole trade of Orissa. This too, in spite of the fact that goods sold at six p.c. cheaper in Cuttack market than at Balasore. While all Orissa lay at the mercy of Afghan, Moghul, and Marathatta banditti, the English factory at Balasore grew into a great seat of maritime trade."

And thus says Hunter also about Ganjam : "The Governors of Madras bore also the title of President of the Right Honourable Company's affairs on the coast of Coromandal and Orissa. A line of factories sprang up on the coast and at Ganjam, just beyond the southern district of Orissa.⁴ We had a great commercial establishment governed by a council and chief..... Here was a body of English gentlemen doing business on the largest scale, with ships anchored in the river (Rushikulya) to carry them and their goods in case of need."⁵

SENAPATI'S EVIDENCE

Fakirmohan Senapati (1843-1918), the celebrated Oriya novelist, himself a citizen of Balasore, says in his excellent autobiography :⁶ "In my boyhood, Balasore was a great centre of maritime trade. Five to six hundred ships frequented the harbour. The majority of them carried Orissa salt abroad and the rest exported other merchandise to Rangoon, Colombo, Madras and the Islands in the Indian Ocean..... Balasore as a port and entrepot was well-known not only throughout India, but also in Europe. Before they settled in Bengal, the Dutch, the Dane, the French and the English, all these European traders, had opened their marts here..... The same riverside of Balasore where once thousands mustered strong for commerce, is now desolate, overgrown with jungle and silent like a graveyard. The old river has silted up. And the entire commerce, of even Balasore town itself, is now in the hands of outsiders."

And here is the evidence of the British historian Hamilton on Balasore as a flourishing maritime port :

"At a very early period of European intercourse with India, the Portuguese, Dutch and English had

4. That time the whole of Canjam and Koraput districts of Orissa formed part of the so-called Northern Sarkars.

5. Orissa, Vol II, Chapter VI

6. Chapter IV

factories here (Balasore) and it is still noted for maritime transactions. The native vessels from Balasore and Cuttack which carry most of the grain from Bengal to Madras are of a very superior description to other native vessels employed on this coast..... Pilots for the Calcutta river are procured in Balasore roads." ⁷

As a matter of fact, Fakirmohan Senapati started his romantic career working at the quayside of Balasore as an overseer, on behalf of his uncle who had contracts to repair the sails and the riggings, and has left tell-tale short stories, full of the brine and turbulence of the sea and of the activities at the busy port that Balasore was, in his childhood days. Even people in their sixties (my esteemed friend Shri H. C. Baral, for instance) still remember ships built at Balasore going through colourful ceremonies on their maiden voyages. The port was abandoned because of the silting up of the river Budhabalanga. And the same is the sad story behind the disappearance of other ports on Orissa's long sea-board that were once famous emporia of trade and points of embarkation for voyages, to Burma, Ceylon and South-east Asia.

ORISSA IN SOUTH-EAST ASIA

The deep stamp of Orissan tradition on the art and life of South-East Asia is undoubted, according to all unbiased connoisseurs. Dr. Hermann Goetz, who does not go into ecstasies over Orissan temples, has to admit, willy-nilly, that "the influence of Orissan art made itself felt in the temple ornamentation of both Java and Cambodia." ⁸

Says also William Willette, a distinguished English art-critic: "A characteristic which seems to be distinctive of the Bhauma period (of Orissa history) is

7. Hamilton, *Hindusthan* 1820

8. *Five Thousand Years of Indian Art*, pp 164

the manner in which the relief-carving extends over several blocks of masonry,—a device which helped to ensure that the sculptures would not be removed. I do not think there is any need for me to stress how similar they are in this respect, as well as in general style and manner of execution, to those of the world-famous Buddhist temple at Borobudur in Java. The resemblance is not of course coincidental, but is due to the direct implantation in Indonesia of the whole, Mahayana, Buddhist, Saivite and Vaisnavite culture of Orissa or that part of it called Kalinga, by the Sailendra emperors who ruled Java from 8th to 14 th. centuries. They are convincingly identified as a descendant branch of the Sailodbhava kings who preceded the Bhaumas in Kalinga. The fact that both Sisiresvara (at Bhubaneswar) and Borobudur can be dated to 8th century makes their stylistic connection even more certain."⁹

It has already been described ¹⁰ how the Sailodbhavas of Kongoda were compelled to leave Orissa for good and migrate to South-east Asia, to emerge there as the glorious Sailendras, a little later. From the 1st to the 9th centuries, many such migrations must have taken place, imperceptibly integrating Orissan elements into the ethnic build-up of people of the South-east.

THE KONARKA GIRAFFE

The sculpture of a giraffe on the wall of Konarka, which is an unique fact in the entire Indian art-world, proves to the hilt, the intimate intercourse of Orissa's maritime merchants with the regions all around the Indian ocean.

The famous temple of Konarka would seem now to have dropped right from heaven on to a desert. But, according to tradition, the vast structure could be

9. *The Illustrated weekly of India*, July 14 1957

10. See Chapter III

possible because the place was once well connected with river-routes, the temple itself standing on a flourishing estuarine harbour. The dried-up bed of the river Chandrabhaga, on whose bank rose the temple of the Sun God, in an extensive garden, already dedicated to the Vedic god Mitra (the Sun), is even now clearly marked out. Most probably, when Konarka was in the process of building, a local maritime trader, who had mercantile connections with eastern Africa, with a desire to please the royal builder Narasimha Deva, who frequently came from Cuttack to see the progress of his project, had brought on board his vessel the strangest of all African animals, a giraffe, whose existence was beyond the wildest imagination of even the imaginative Indians. The giraffe is depicted on the wall of Konarka being presented to the royal visitor, sitting on an elephant and watching, with natural amazement, the strange creature heading an equally curious crowd. This proves for the sceptical and degenerate posterity that the Oriyas once had seaworthy vessels to carry a giraffe from distant African coasts and a maritime harbour to bring it conveniently to, besides, of course, craftsmen who were progressive-minded enough to welcome the uncouth and unfamiliar giraffe on to the holy walls of a temple, along with the romantic and harmonious elephant, deer, swan and pretty girls, the age-old conventional motifs.

THE BOAT-FLOATING FESTIVAL

Reminiscent of all these maritime enterprises, carried on for centuries as part of the national life of Orissa, the Oriyas still observe the Festival of Boat-floating on the full-moon day of Karttika (October-November) which, like the festival of Khudurukuni, is unique in not being found among any neighbouring peoples, proving, doubtless, the long oversea commerce of the ancient Oriyas.

If a foreign observer visits Orissa during the small hours of the full-moon night of Karttika, he will find Orissa's innumerable rivers, tanks, lakes

and ponds made picturesque with thousands of small toy-boats, made generally out of banana-bark, illuminated with burning candles and floated ceremonially with a conventional prayer. After the ceremonial floating the participants—men, women and children—would be taking their purificatory dips, long before sunrise, in the keen cold air of an incipient winter.

The average Oriya, now almost ignorant of most of the achievements of his ancestors, is unaware of the socio-historic significance of this unique festival. It is on this day, with the setting in of the favourable north-eastern monsoons, that the Oriya maritime merchants of yore set their sails for distant lands across the Indian ocean. The departure was highlighted by colourful ceremonies by the womenfolk and crowded farewells on the quaysides by the kith and kin. Orissa's historic ports have disappeared. But traditions refuse to die, and the entire Oriya nation, though oblivious of its significance, goes all out this day to pay tribute to its glorious ancient mariners.

The realistic descriptions of naval warfare by Orissa's soldier-poet, Kanhai Champatiroy, of the sixteenth century in his *Paika-kheda* (Book of the Soldier¹¹) should also be borne in mind when we think of the deep maritime impression left on the social consciousness of the Oriya people, as proved by such observances as the Fast of Rice-bran or the Festival of Boat-Floating. It is a historical fact also that the south-eastern part of Burma was once called "Srikhetra" (Puri) and her south-western part, "Ukkala", (a corruption of Utkala, another name of Orissa). All foreigners in Indonesia were known by the word "Kling", which is really "Kalinga". There can be no doubt whatsoever that even behind these words lies a long history of maritime contact between the Orissa coast and the lands across the Indian Ocean, though surviving in Orissa only in religio-social customs at the present time.

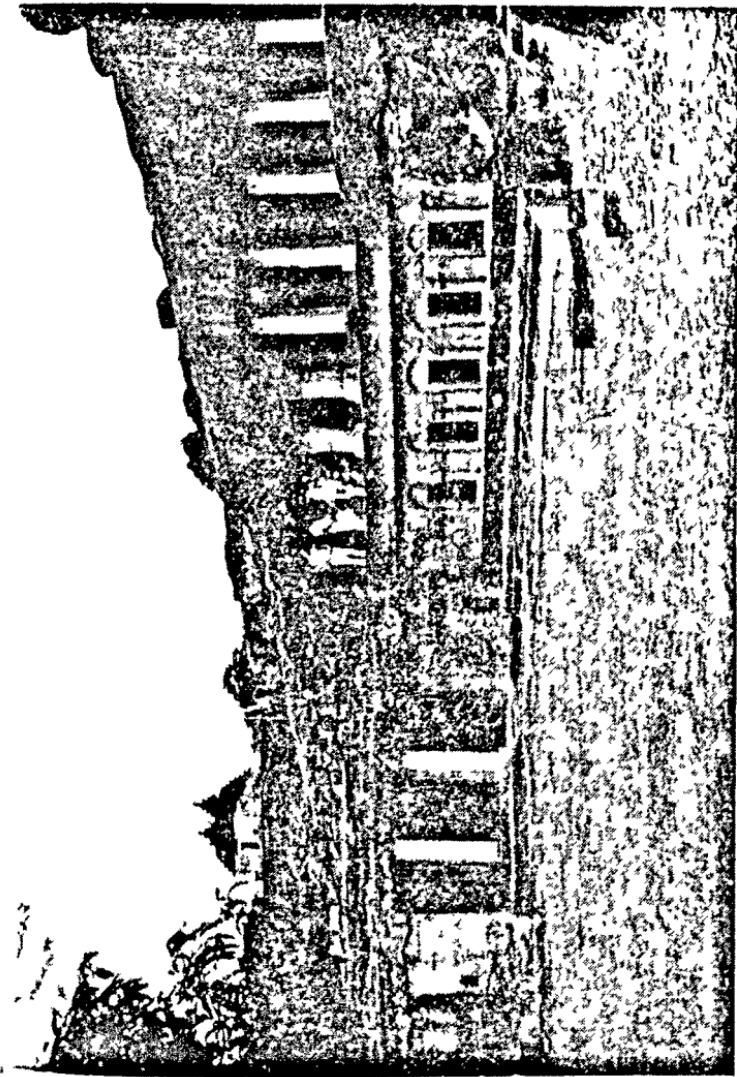
11. See Chapter III

CHAPTER—V

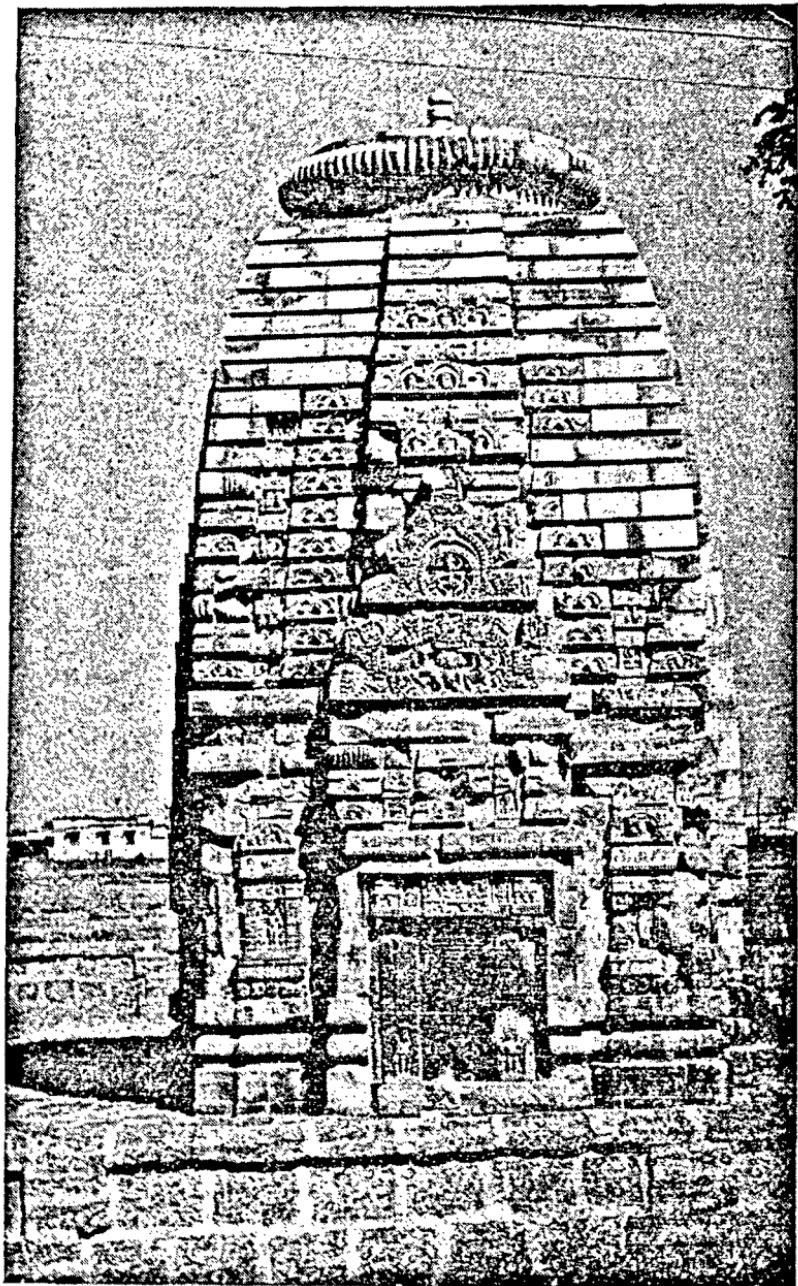
ORISSA DREAMS IN STONE

A

The following pictures display the evolution of Orissa's civil and sacred architecture through the centuries, from the 4th B. C. to the 13th A. D., the delightful varieties proving conclusively, an amazing zest in the ancient masters of Orissa for constructional novelties and non-conformist experiments.



The earliest religious architectural adventure of the Oriyas. This cave-palace, in the Udayagiri-Khandagiri group of rock-cut-homes for meditation, near Bhubaneswar, was constructed by Queen Hansa, wife of emperor Kharavela (1st Century B. C.), and hence still known as Rani Hansapura.

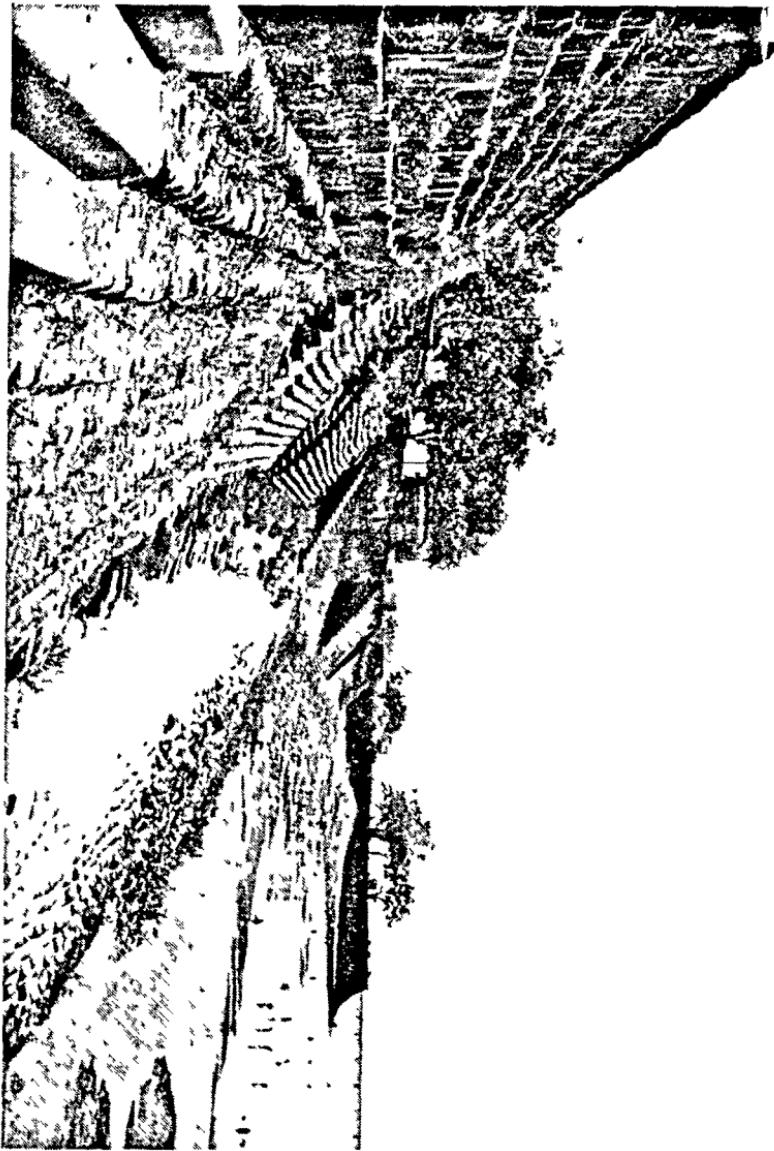


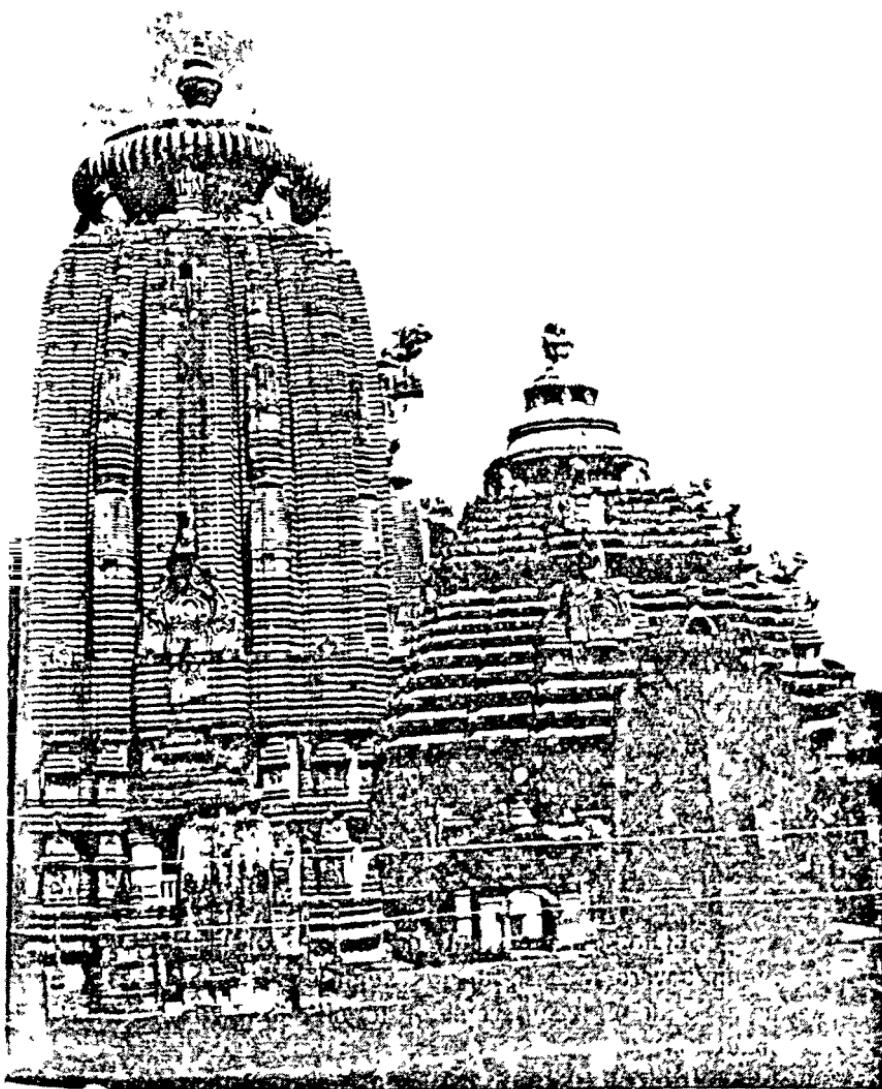
The oldest extant temple of Orissa, the Satrughneswara (6th Century A. D.), in Bhubaneswar, wherein we may see the straight lines of the pyramidal structures of North and South India, shaping towards the graceful curvilinear turret (Shikhara), the most significant part of the later temple-art of Orissa.



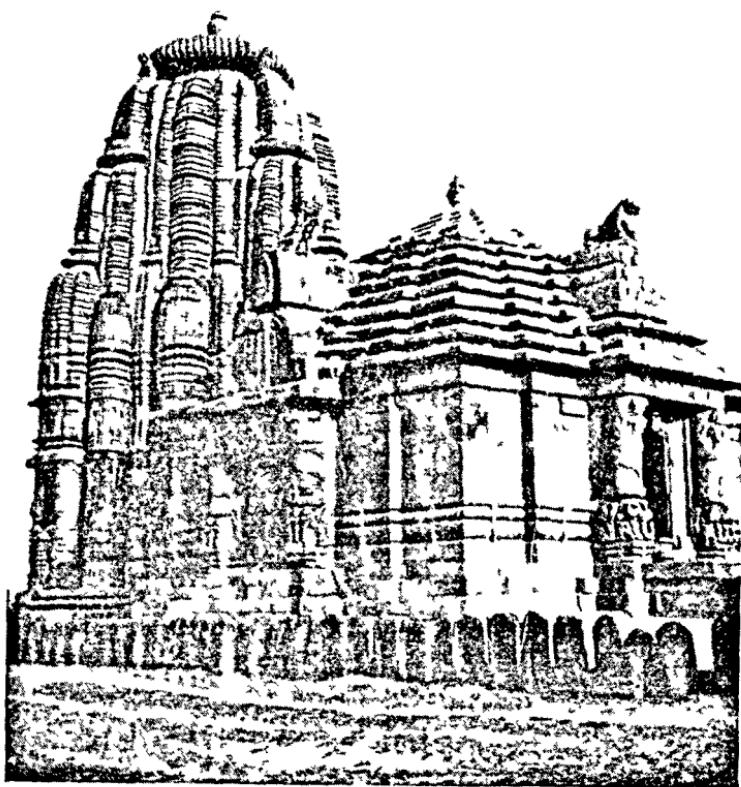
The Muktesvara temple (Bhubaneswar) with its Torana, described by connoisseurs as the Gem of Orissan Temple Art, for its delightful proportions.

The millennium-old 3 mile-long Stone embankment of Kathjuri, protecting the historic city of Cuttack, still stands strong,— a remarkable feat of Civil Engineering of the ancient Oriyas.

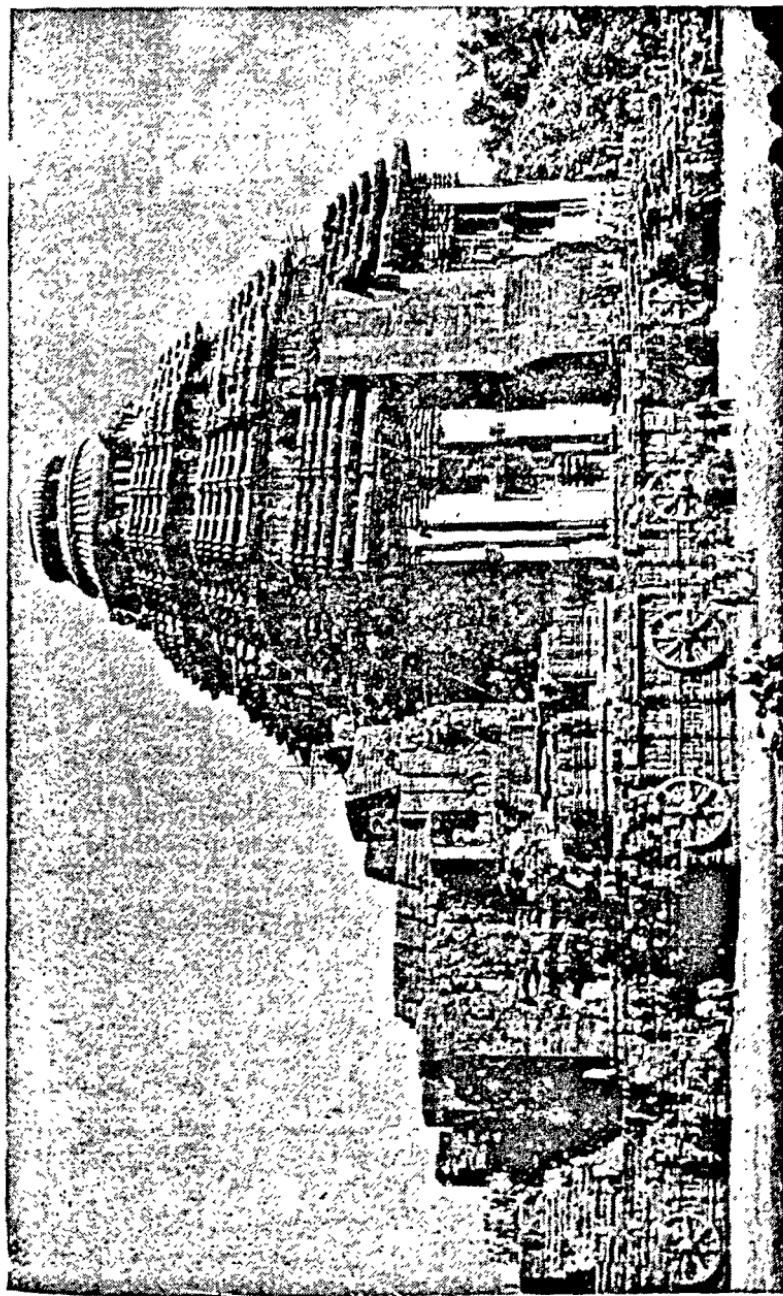




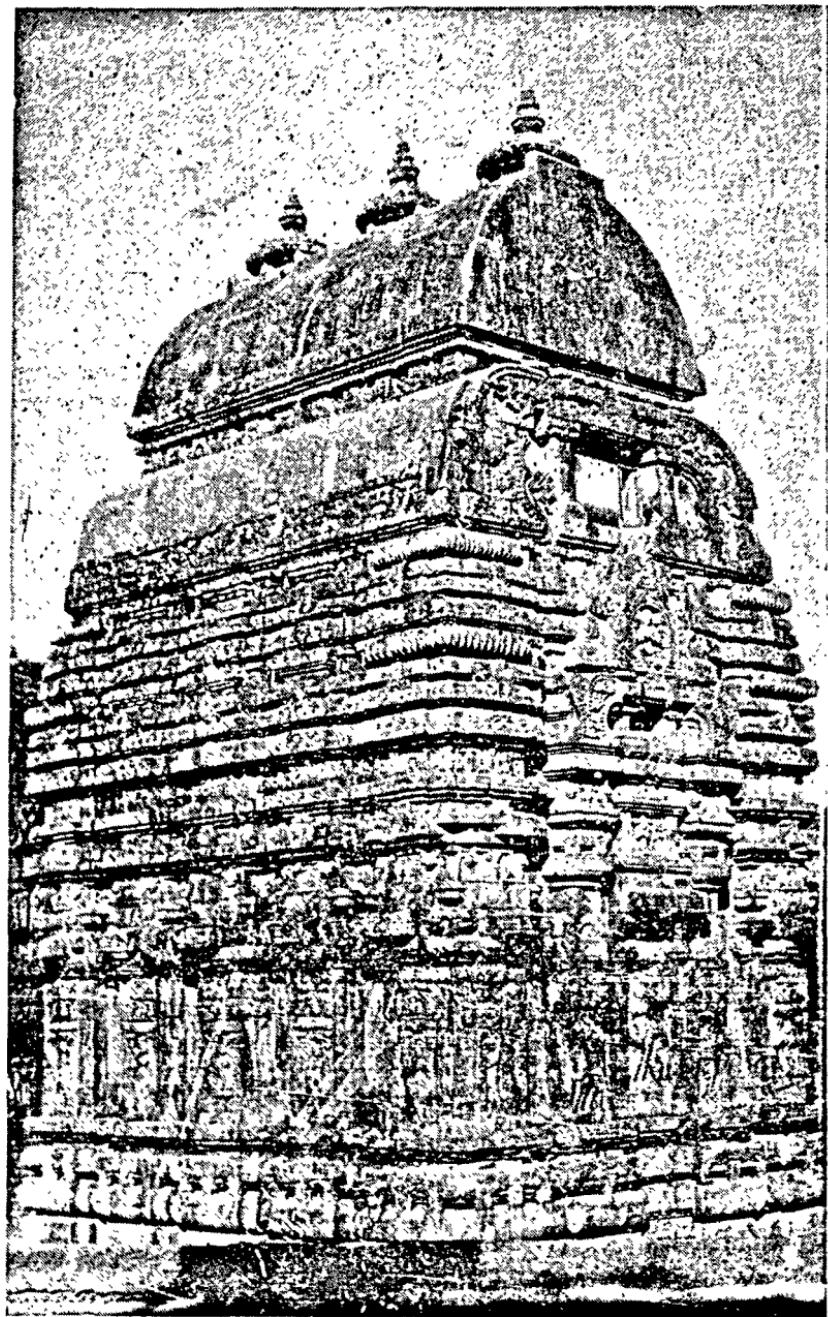
The Palace Majestic of Lord Shiva at Bhubaneswar,
the Lingaraja (11th century), completing the evolutionary process
of the temple-art of Orissa.



Rajarani, the eternal art-maiden of Orissa, where attempts were made to fulfil through all the style requirements of an Orissan Temple, to see the freest play of Beauty.



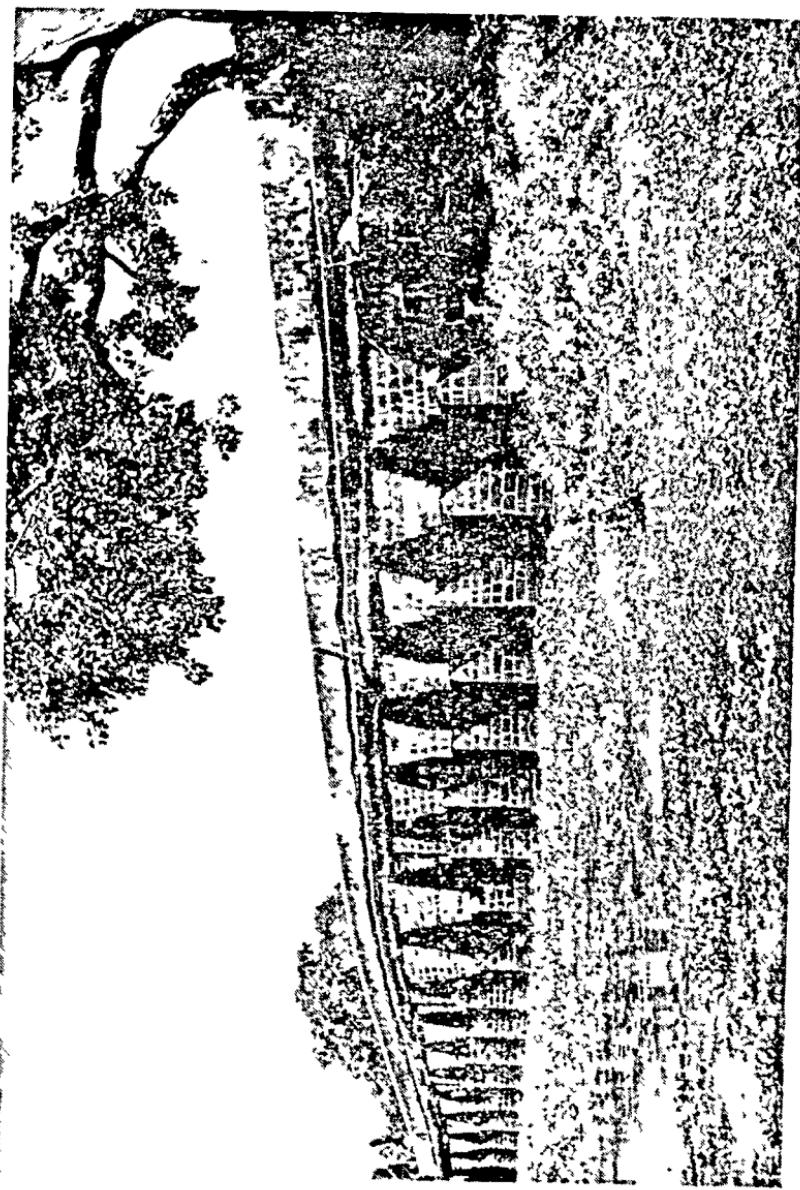
Konark—the chariot celestial of the Sun-God the last and the greatest architectural experiment of the Oriyas.



The Boital Temple of Bhubaneswara, dedicated to Shiva by a devout Marine Magnate (Boital) of ancient Orissa,-hence the name-in a path-breaking style.



Sisupalgarh, (C. 4th B. C.) near Bhubaneswara, is regarded by experts as one of the earliest planned towns and forts in India-a tribute to the vision and execution of ancient Orissa's secular architects.



The Bridge to Paradise, — The Atharnala (eighteen-span) bridge—that lands pilgrims by road, directly on the holy soil of Jagannath. Chaitanya used to go into ecstacies as soon as he set foot on this bridge, constructed in the year

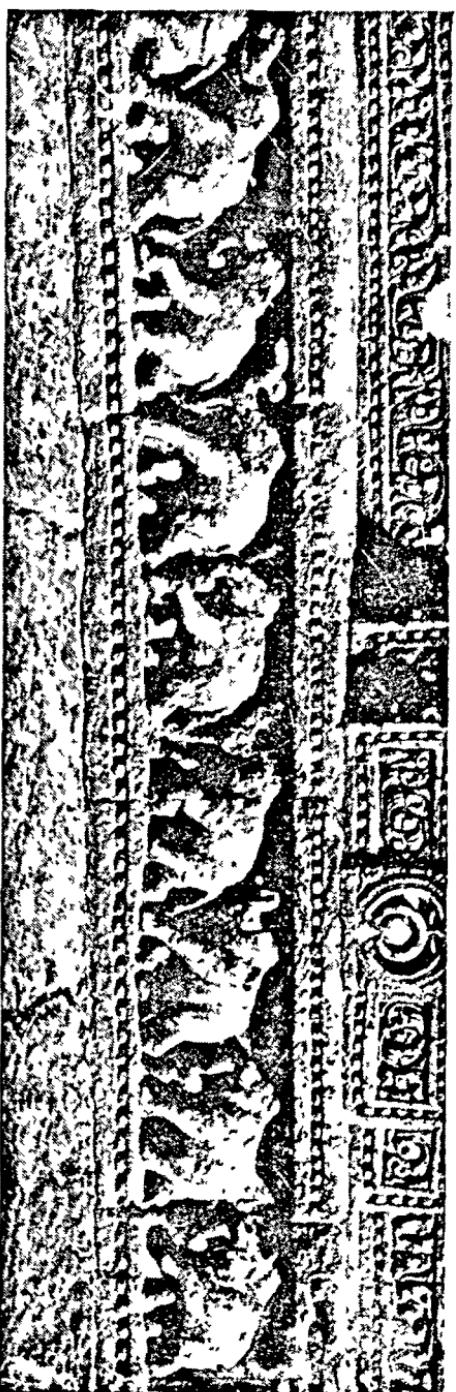
CHAPTER—V

B

The following ten pictures, while presenting before readers the gradual individualistic evolution of Orissan sculpture century by century, hope to point out how this great national art delighted pinpointing especially those shapes, lines and events that make even this fleeting world of ours, so adorable.



The Noble Lord of the Forest, guarding Asoka's famous Kalinga Edicts at Dhauli Hill (4 miles from Bhubaneswar), all these twenty-four centuries. It is supposed to be the earliest sculpture of an elephant in entire Indian art.



The Dhauli elephant-head, slowly burgeoned in the land of Gajapatis, the Lords of Elephants, through the deft-strokes of Oriya artists, into most marvellous elephant-displays in the world of art, as shown here.

This is from Konark's frieze of elephants encircling the entire bottom of the temple, bringing into our vision all possible behaviour, patterns, singly and in herds, of those great animals,—a sight, indeed, for gods.

The way the Orissan artists delighted in the simple and majestic contours of animals is indeed a remarkable. The elephant and the woman appear to be their favourites for the same reason !



A lovely maiden gets ready for the tryst. A recurring motif in Orissa sculpture, developing into the subsequent Love-Life-play which indeed is life on earth. Bhubaneswar. (Victoria & Albert Museum)



The sweetie takes off the ringing anklets, lest, these betray the tryst.

—Raja Rani Temple, Bhubaneswara



"Hope, he does not disappoint me ?"—A Sweetie
waiting at the rendezvous.

Lingaraja : Bhubaneswar.



Love lights the flame of Life.
—Khiching, Mayurbhanj.



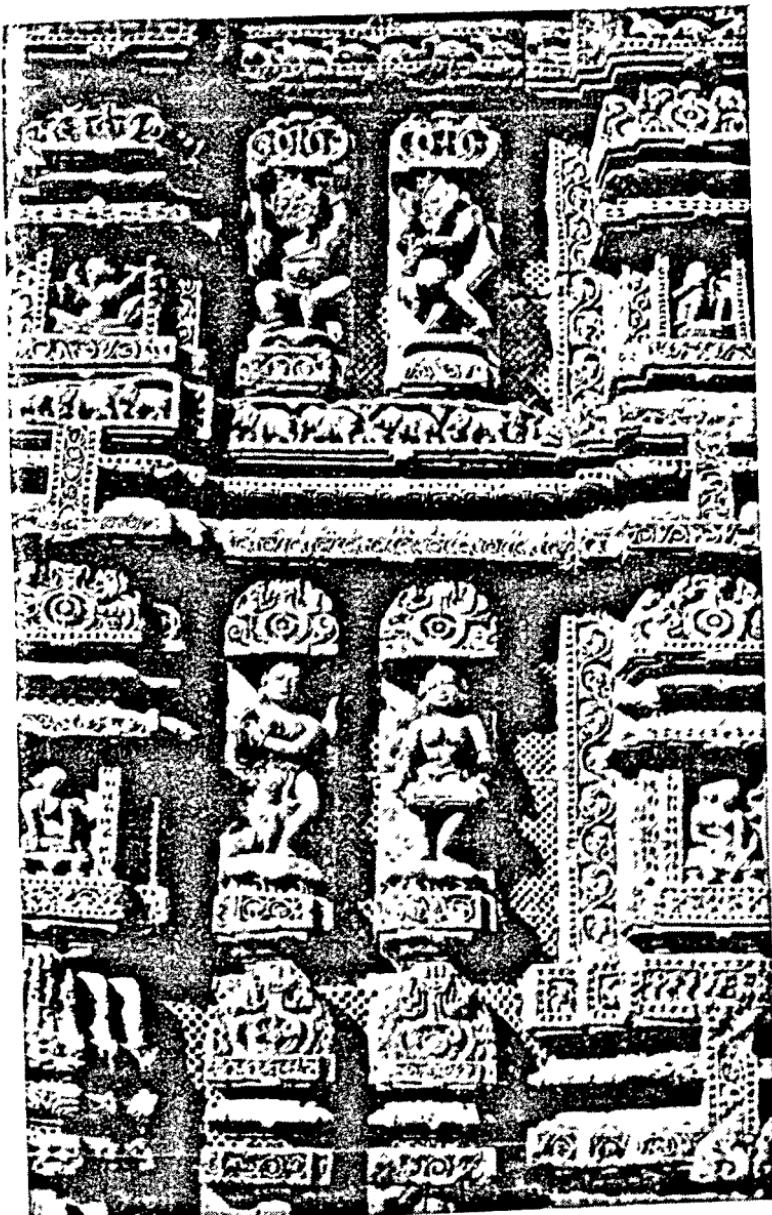
The delightful glory of Motherhood, a woman's fulfilment.

—Lingaraja, Bhubaneswara



Perhaps, a warrior's last sweet sip of life, on the eve
of a battle.

—Raja Rani : Bhubaneswar.



The intense romantic life they lived, the ancient
Oriyas wanted to see it permanently in the mirror of Art.
And that has become Orissa's glory.

—A Konarka Panel



Sample of delicate Stone-Filigree by Oriya artists, to show how, at times, they were just lost in the creation of sheer beauty through lines.

—From Satrughneswara Temple (6th century) Bhubaneswar, supposed to be the earliest-extant temple in Orissa.—

CHAPTER—V

C

War, Woman and the Divine may be said to be the Triple basic inspirations behind the entire Art and Architecture of the ancient Orissans. The non-chalant manner in which those Masters have set the sublime and the sensuous side by side reveals an amazing psychical bravery as well as naivete.

It is regrettable indeed that while the world rings with the voluptuosity in Orissan Art, little is heard from aesthetes about the Sublime in the same, challenging comparision with the best anywhere, in the same category.



Serene Akshovya Buddha from Ratnagiri (9th century A.D.), District Cuttack.



The calm thunder-wielder (Vajrapani)
from Lalitagiri, (Dist. Cuttack), 10.v
in the Indian Museum, Calcutta.

VC—2



The cosmic Mother who can kill evil, with a smile.
Khiching, District Mayurbhanj.



The benevolent Bodhisattva Avalokiteswara.
Lalitgiri, Cuttack District.



Equestrian Sun God of Konarka, going his daily cosmic round. How superbly the natural concern of a Pater families for the welfare of his ever wandering clan is expressed here on hard granite by Orissa's artists of the 13th century.



Perhaps the most elegant Shiva
in entire Indian art.
Khiching, District Mayurbhanj



His Serene Holiness the Sage
Brihaspati.
(Orissa, 12th century, British
Museum)



The Compassionate one, with Bodhi (Enlightenment)
symbolically springing out of his consciousness.
Khiching, District : Mayurbhanj.



His lovely Majesty the King of
Nagas,
Khiching, District Mayurbhanj



Her Gracious Majesty the Queen of the
Nagas.

Khiching : Mayurbhanj.



Another adorable One of Ratnagiri
Mahavihara.



The Noblest Buddha of Ratnagiri Mahavihara (Dist. Cuttack)
with the humble author by His side.

CHAPTER V

ORISSA DREAMS IN STONE

From King Kharavela in the 1st century B. C. to King Narasimha Deva in the 13th Century A. D., for about twelve centuries, the soul of the Oriya people seemed to have been possessed by a frenzy of self-expression, resulting in a long chain of splendid artistic enterprises, which place the Oriyas among the topmost builders in the world. History records that these Oriyas (or the Kalingas or the Utkalas) once enjoyed extensive empires with commercial and colonial contacts with far-off lands across the seas. All that glory has vanished, as it does in history, leaving the Oriyas a small bunch of people at present, seemingly helpless victims of the exploitation of both Man and Nature. But the few gifted spirits in this ancient land, among both the crowned heads and the common folk, who, unaffected by the rise and fall of imperial glory or the short-lived prosperity of individuals around them, devoted themselves to the creation and worship of Truth and Beauty have imparted a deathlessness to their national heritage that alone makes the Oriyas, even in their present ebb-tide condition, hold their heads erect in the fellowship of peoples.

Right from the honey-comb of caves, befittingly rough and simple for meditating Jain monks, on the twin hills of Khandagiri and Udayagiri, close to Bhubaneswar, the present capital of Orissa, to the phantasmagoria in stone, that is the world-famous Sun-Temple of Konarka, connoisseurs could plainly see almost a syntactical record of unbroken evolution of a nation's ever-widening and ever-improving vision and skill, found perhaps in no other State of India. In

these various gigantic architectural and sculptural enterprises, one can easily decipher today the many cantos, as it were, of a grand epic of the soul of a nation. This epic of Orissa's stones speaks the eternal language of Beauty, Endurance and Devotion on which only, true Human Heritage is built up. These monuments exhibit, even through dances and love-plays, nothing but a nation's changing faith, age after age, ever reincarnating its understanding of the Unseen. From the animistic totems of the aborigines in the dim past, to the highly cultivated monotheistic symbol-worshippers of the Mahima cult,¹ Orissa, of all the Indian States, presents the most curious field of religious development for students of anthropology today. And each stage and each development in this nation's religious experience has left behind an enduring vestige in some thoughtful architectural expression. With the change of ruling dynasties and the consequential metamorphosis of the nation's faith, the same shrine in many cases has had to change its structure and character over and over again. But the usual cosmopolitan and tolerant spirit of Orissa has taken care to assimilate rather than exterminate the preceding beliefs. It is now undisputedly accepted that the original deity in the famous shrine of Jagannatha was a deity of the Adivasis². In the successive centuries the same deity was taken over by the Jains, the Buddhists, the Tantricists and, lastly, the Vaisnavas, the characteristics of each of which are even now clearly visible in the structure, set-up and daily ceremonies of that most famous of all Hindu shrines,

THE ROOTS OF THE NATIONAL ART

The historic urge of the people of Orissa to express their successive faiths through fitting architectural

1. See Chapter XII.

2. See Chapter IX.

and sculptural magnificence was not centralised round capitols of royal dynasties, as had happened in the history of many a people, but was spread out all over the land as an integral part of the total culture of the Oriyas. No important village in Orissa is without a temple, and wherever Oriyas settle down even today, their prior twin civic needs are a temple, preferably of Jagannatha, and a set of Oriya *Bhagabata* by the poet Jagannatha Dasa of hallowed memory of the 16th century A. D.

According to the *Vizagapatam District Gazetteer* :

"While in Ganjam (now in Orissa) and further north scarcely a village is found in which there is not a temple or a substantial building containing the images of Siva or Vishnu, in Vizagapatam (in Andhra Pradesh) there is not a village in a hundred where such can be found."

And says W. W. Hunter in his *Orissa* :

"In going up the Mahanadi, I noticed that each rocky islet or wooded crag that rose from its banks, was crowned, not, as upon the Rhine, by the castle of a noble, but a temple to a god. Even foreigners feel that they are treading on hallowed ground.³

Temples are built even now in the same indigenous style, with similar decorative and sculptural motifs as in the distant past. The race of builders and artisans who set up those breath-taking structures at Bhubaneswar and Konarka is not yet extinct. It still lives, not concentrated in any city, but scattered all over the State, keeping the old traditions alive. Given the money and materials needed, even these degenerate descendants can set up similar temples today.

Such an artistic tradition in Orissa has been possible, because, the impulse to build and to beautify

3. Vol. I, Chapter III,

perhaps sprang from the very soul of the nation and was not transplanted from elsewhere. Orissa's national aesthetic pattern is surprisingly indigenous, with few borrowings. It displays a total national urge, not to perpetuate the memory of any single individual, however great, but to portray only its own faith in the Divine. Through the length and breadth of this land and all through her history, kings, queens, ministers, feudal chiefs, oversea merchants, inland traders, village headmen, and even poor *sadhus*, have vied with one another in their efforts at obtaining a sense of fulfilment through the dedication of shrines, tanks, and monasteries, with which the whole land is thickly studded. The dedication was so full and complete that, except for few legendary references, the name of this glorious band of patrons, builders and master-artists are, to everybody's regret, completely lost in the deep abyss of time. Even the glorious kings and queens of Orissa so forgot themselves in the service of the king of kings that, while the temples they built to their gods have stood firm and four-square to the elements for centuries, the palaces they made for themselves have vanished beyond all recognition.

THE HUMAN IMAGERY

But though names have been lost in oblivion, the personalities of individual patrons and master-builders have left their unmistakable stamp on most of the monuments of Orissa in spite of a broad conventional generality of their pattern. The single *sikhara* (tower), symbolising the human body, with the deity residing in the darkness of the heart inside, seems to be the original temple-concept of the ancient Oriyas, as is proved by the temple of Satrughnesvara, supposed to be the oldest of the extant temples at Bhubaneswar. Even now the various sections of an Orissan temple are described in terms of the human body, viz. "feet", "thigh", "neck", a "skull" etc., giving the proof positive of the human imagery behind the

peculiar indigenous temple-structure in Orissa, the most graceful among all temple-patterns in India. The curvilinear *sikharas* of the Orissa temples, rising gradually up and up, ending in the neck-like depression, with the head-like *amalaka* (fluted disc, resembling an amalaka fruit) on top of the spire above it, gives a good enough semblance of the human imagery. To this simple structure, as the abode of god, have been added, in later times, the appurtenances of the *Bhogamandapa* (chamber of offerings) and *Nata mandapa* (chamber of dance) as the general features of Orissan temples. These structures were added to the sanctum when the temples no longer remained places of worship only, but became religious academies, where priests, philosophers and saints could expound their religious theories and practices to spell-bound audiences, and also functioned as centres of ritual dances and recitations.

But, amidst such general types, what variety of structural experiments appear to have been attempted by the ancient builders of Orissa ! The Parasuramesvara, resembling a Christian church with a long hall, the Voital Deul, built in imitation of a sea-going vessel (*boita*) by, perhaps, an oversea merchant; the Rajarani, displaying the pattern of a medieval cathedral; the Mukteswara, the most perfectly proportioned temple complex in the pure Orissan style, and the Konarka, built as a chariot for the Sun—God with wheels and horses, — what a panorama of buildings has been left behind by these builders who so merged themselves in their creative experiments as to leave nothing behind that could even be faintly considered personal !

LIFE ON THE TEMPLE WALLS

Bhubaneswar, the capital of Orissa, is rightly called the 'city of temples'. One sees temples scattered not only all over the old town, but also in all directions in the surrounding jungles and paddy fields. Whichever

way one looks, one meets with tall, tapering *sikharas* rising upwards into the blue heavens, symbolic of a nation's myriad hands uplifted in prayer to the Almighty. This city, a veritable wilderness of monuments, unrolling the mysterious history of a nation's fond dreams and ambitions covering about seven centuries, and unfolding all the stages of development of a national art, stands as a grand national museum of Orissa. Towering above the whole surrounding landscape, picturesque with blue hills, green valleys, tawny uplands and grey spires of innumerable old temples, stands the mighty temple of Lingaraja, in royal majesty. A grand example of Orissan architecture and sculpture in perfect integration, the fane of Lingaraja combines the majesty of its proportions to a wealth of exquisite carvings, so fine and delicate as to excite the envy of goldsmiths and jewellers. The profusion of sculptures on the enormous walls of Orissan temples might appear wasteful of human labour or as the work of those lacking in a sense of elegance. But with God residing in the darkness of the *sanctum sanctorum*, the builders, not incorrectly, imagined the outer walls to resemble, more or less the phenomenal world. The Hindu's God has always been cosmically conceived and realised, and the Orissan temples stand as visible symbols of that grand concept, reflecting Life on their walls in its bewildering variety, the Invisible Divinity residing in the inmost recess of the heart within, accessible only to those who seek. The inside of any Orissan temple is dark and bare like the void in our own hearts, while the sculptured panels outside, display not only the human, but also the animal, the vegetable and the ultra-mundane world of gods and demi-gods.

THE LOVE-PLAY

And in the vast, bewildering confusion of biological unfoldment that is life, is not the union of two sexes, the central factor? If the *Upanishads* sang ecstatically that all beings are born in joy, what

exactly could that be but that of union, the complete mingling of two hearts, two souls, and two bodies, that is Love ? Could that be obscene, indeed ? By what logic the master-artists, who took the temple walls as their canvas for the whole Life, could have left out the central factor of creation, that is Love ?

We have no right to judge art with the yardstick of little pruderies and unintelligent and arbitrary social conventions. Viewed with the angle of vision of those devoted artists and builders, who wore out their precious lives for giving a local habitation to their faiths by turning a temple into an epitome of the visible world and a home of the world-soul, the so-called obscene sculptures should surely appear, as innocent and commonplace as sex in children or flowers. They might hurt our sophisticated eyes and offend our sense of hypocritical elegance only so long as we miss the broad viewpoint of the builders in the total cosmic conception of these temples.

THE WOMAN IN ORISSAN ART

But the supposed offending figures are indeed few compared to the vast, bewildering panorama of life that stretches before our eyes on these walls. The royal processions, the march of armies in full panoply, the religious discourses, the charming defile of deer, elephants, and ducks, the frolics of monkeys, the penances of yogis, the obsequious attitudes in royal courts, the animals of the jungle and the water, and all imaginable happenings in social life, are depicted in stone, representing life, in fittingly apparent confusion. But WOMAN emerges out of this confusing tangle as the loveliest strand running through the whole and as the central factor in the whole creation that she really is: The great anonymous artists of Orissa seem to have devoted the best of their skill, imagination and devotional labour to recreating the women of their dreams

in stone, shaping them with as perfect charm and loveliness as would be possible to impart to such a hard substance, by any sculptor of any country in the world. Women waiting expectantly for their lovers with doors ajar, as on the temples of Brahmesvara and Muktesvara, women waiting under asoka trees, as on the Rajarani women writing letters to their lovers or getting ready to welcome them, as on the Lingaraja; women dancing and playing on all varieties of musical instruments, with enchanting abandon and naivete', as on the walls of Konarka; and, above all, women completely surrendering to their lovers, the warm ecstasy of consummation blazing on their glowing cheeks,—these cannot fail to draw anything but elegant, nostalgic and serenely wistful emotion in any except the grossest of human minds. A few crude vulgarities on the temple walls of Jagannatha should not be allowed to sway the judgement of connoisseurs regarding the so-called obscenities in Orissan sculpture. To one vulgar representation, there are scores that express soul-stirring human romance with uncommon elegance and grace. Indeed, no poet depicted women in finer lyrics than did these medieval stone-artists of Orissa. These dreamers in stone have created some of the most superb female figures in the whole world of art, representing the eternal feminine, the eternal charmer.

And again it is only to those with jaundiced eye, that Orissa's story of art might appear to be nothing but morbid obsession with woman or love-play. The Orissan masters have expressed all human emotions and situations with remarkable skill, covering extremely interesting examples of the heroic, the sublime, the fantastic, not excluding even the most repulsive, as part of life's spectacle on earth.

Famous connoisseurs of Orissa's art-heritage have testified to the capacities of Orissan artists

for varied sculptural expression, and to their performance as consummate builders, with a veiled message for even the ultra-modern artist.⁴

TALES OF DEDICATION

To illustrate the overriding devotion to art of the great Orissan architects and sculptors, who, absorbed in the very joy of creation, forgot themselves and the world around them, two stories current in Orissa may be narrated here as the fitting finale to this humble inadequate essay on Orissa's grand artistic heritage. Both are associated with the construction of Konarka. Here is the first :

When the temple of Konarka was in the process of construction, its great royal patron, King Narasimha Deva, once visited the site and moved about, incognito, to see how the masons and sculptors were doing their jobs. In one corner of the sprawling camp, King Narasimha saw a well-known artisan deeply absorbed in his sculpturing. The sculptor had an attendant only to supply him with *pan* (betel) whenever he stretched his left hand backward. The king ordered the attendant to move away silently and himself took his place. The great sculptor was so lost in his creative process that he was absolutely unaware of what had happened at his back. He stretched his left hand as usual and got a *pan* from the king's personal container, handed out by no less a person than the king himself. The artist swallowed it and went on with his work. But finding the taste of this *pan* different from what was being supplied by his attendant, he looked back, after sometime, to enquire. And finding His Majesty himself standing as his personal attendant, he immediately prostrated himself at the royal feet with profuse apologies. But the noble and under-

4. See Appendix—1

standing monarch lifted him up, saying, "Maharana⁵ you are worthy enough to have the king as your attendant".

The second story about a noble prodigy is as follows—

Twelve hundred artisans had been engaged by King Narasimha Deva to build the Sun-Temple. They had already taken twelve long years, the entire revenue of Orissa for that period having been spent on the project. But the temple still remained unfinished. The finial on the *vimana* could not be fixed, despite all efforts. There had been many dangerous slips. The king was getting old and restless, hopeful as he was, when the project was started, to see the temple completed and the deity installed before anything untoward happened to him. So, more in anger and despair than in discretion, he ordered that, if by a certain date the temple was not completed, all the twelve hundred artisans would lose their heads. But now enters on the scene a lad, twelve years old, from a distant village. He had come in search of his father who, for the last twelve years, had never been home, forbidden, like all the other artisans, by the king to leave before the temple was completed. The father, who now happened to be the chief architect, had never seen that only child of his, as the latter was in the mother's womb when he had left home, twelve years back. The boy got himself recognised by his father, however, by the peculiar berries of their home-garden which his mother had sent him with. The old architect was supremely happy to see his only son after these long years. And, to add to his joy, he found the boy highly gifted in the hereditary qualities of his caste. He quickly grasped the problems of the

5. In Orissa, artisans in stone and wood are generally known as *maharana*.

masons and carvers as he moved among them and saw them at work. But he found his father sad and uncommunicative after the first few days of joy. He then came to know about the threats of the king and the desperate situation the artists were in. The prodigy was stirred to his depths and his dormant genius started working. He went about the unfinished temple and studied its problems. Then, one day, he gave quaint suggestions to his father, who was taken aback by their ingenuity and thought them worthy of a trial. And, lo and behold, the ! finial was fixed without any risk. There was universal rejoicing in the camps. But some mean spirits became jealous of the great father and his still greater son and started the story that they were all going to lose their heads, all the same, for, when the king would know that it was the boy who completed the temple, he would surely think that all the twelve hundred artists were just procrastinating through the years for more wages from the royal treasury and were deliberately deceiving the him. The boy's spectacular achievement had also put all the twelve hundred senior artists in the shade. The king should on no account know that the highly technical job of fixing the finial on the temple was accomplished by a boy. What then would he think of them all ? This caught everybody's imagination, and they all went to the old architect and demanded of him to choose between his son and the fate of his twelve hundred caste-men. The poor old architect was in despair. But his gifted son volunteered to sacrifice himself for the sake of the prestige of the twelve hundred veterans. He took leave of his stunned father, climbed to the top of the temple and jumped into the deep waters of the river Chandrabhaga, which was then flowing by the temple, and disappeared.

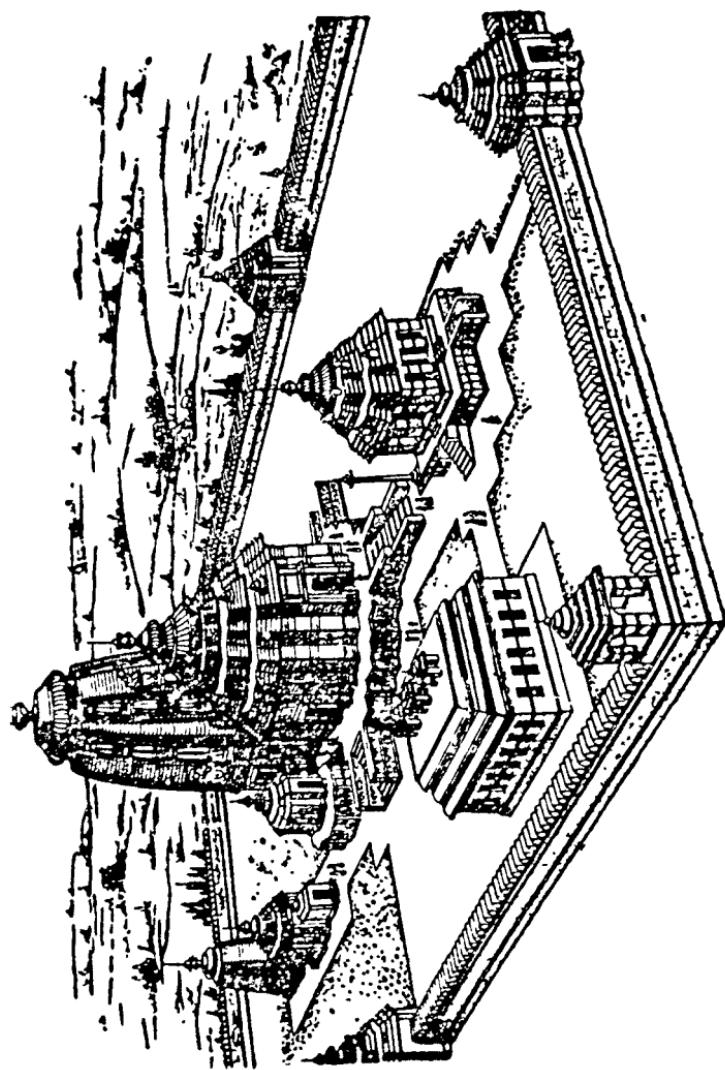
This poignant story of grand sacrifice has been a favourite theme of plays, ballads and poems in Orissa.

In that golden age of Orissa's artistic creativeness, the king and the common man thus stood together, impelled by the insatiable urge to create, placing Beauty, Faith and the Weal of all above their small little interests. Orissa's magnificent monuments are not the scrolls of honour of kings and potentates, as these generally are in most other countries. In Orissa, these are indeed an effort at eternalisation of the dreams, aspirations and devotion of numberless gifted artists, who dedicated their all, for the joy of creation. For that reason alone, they stand even now in unearthly magnificence, defying Time and attracting lovers of beauty from all corners of the world. Orissa's innumerable temples are also not merely places of worship. Through the master touches of great artists, these homes of gods have become, as it were, veritable chalices containing to the brim, the quintessence of the spirit of an entire nation. No group of temples so completely and so colourfully displays the very ethos of an entire people as these of Orissa. From the unadorned caves of Udayagiri of the first century B.C. to the enchanting sophistications of Konarka in the 13th century A.D., Orissa's artists have written a grand national epic in stone, which is no less revealing of the soul of a nation than any great literary epic, judged even by the most rigorous aesthetic standards, and no less worthy of the salutation of art-lovers all the world over.

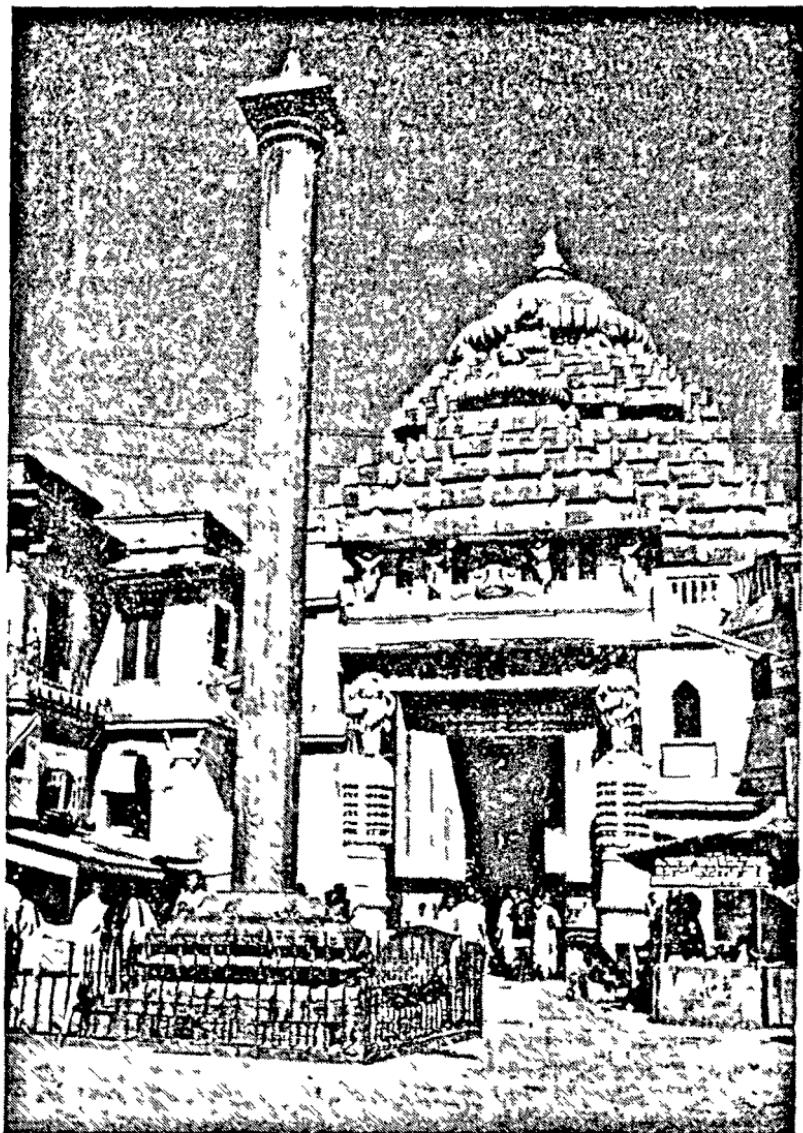
CHAPTER—VI
THE WONDER THAT IS KONARKA

A

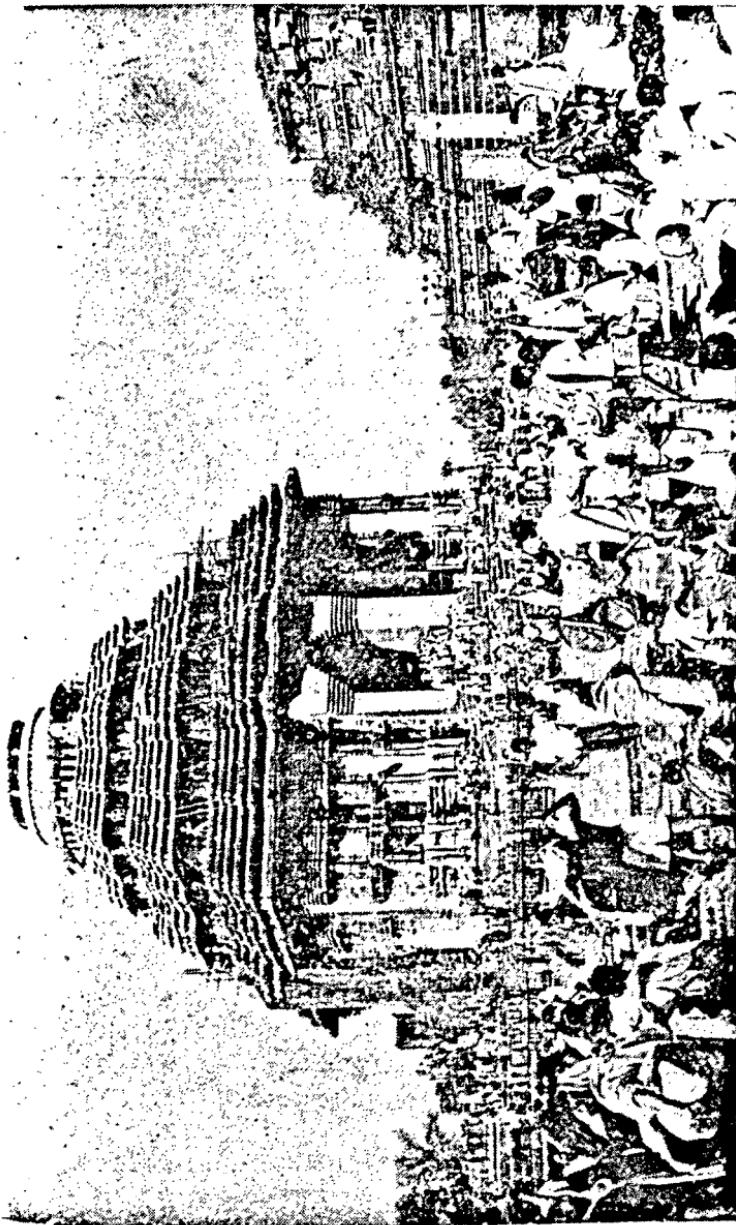
Konarka's own world of Beauty, Love, Power and Worship, as revealed in the following sixteen pictures.



Percy Brown's imaginary lay-out of Konarka as the whole complex stood
in its splendid early freshness.



The monolithic granite-pillar with the Sub-God's charioteer Aruna on top, now in front of the temple of Jagannath, formerly stood in front of the Konarka temple, in mythological as well as architectural appropriateness.



Once a Year, desolate Konarka wakes up to life, as thousands of pilgrims throng its deserted courts, on the 7th day of the white fortnight of the holy month of Magh (January), It might be the anniversary of the Konarka's day of inauguration. Nobody knows really.

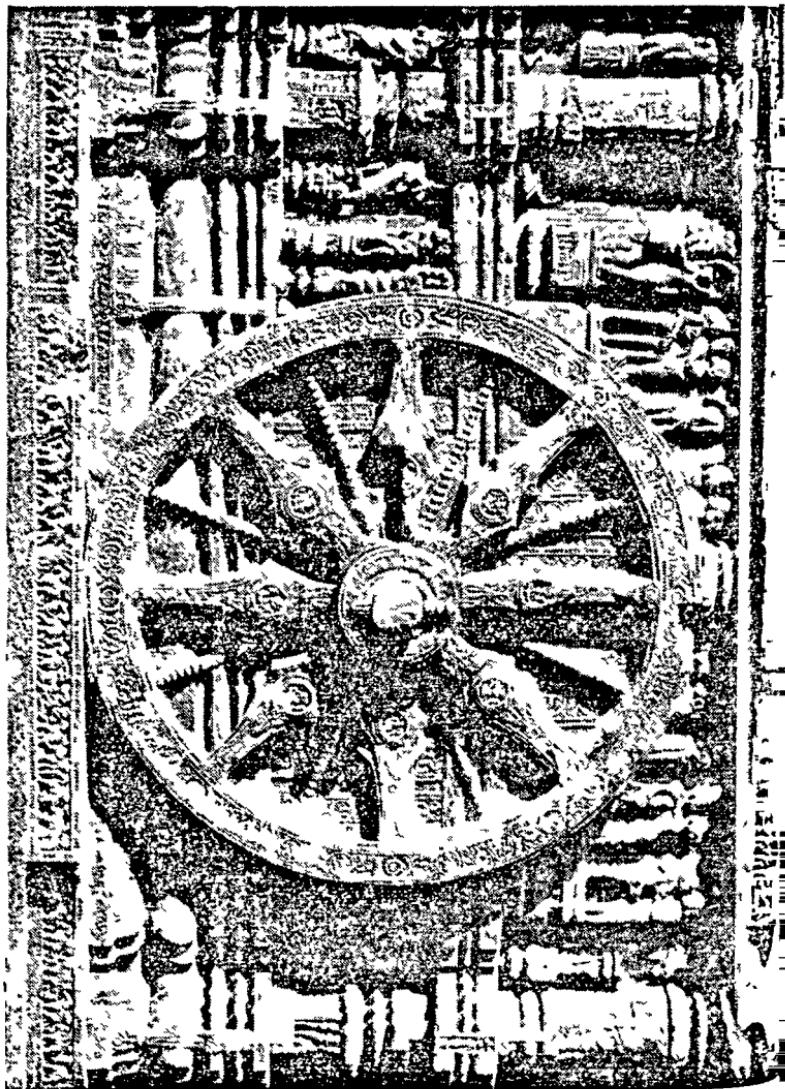


Narasimhadeva, the great warlike emperor of Orissa (13th cent A. D.), and the dreamer of Konarka, which actually is a magnificent victory tower, symbolising his thunderous routing of Mussalmans.



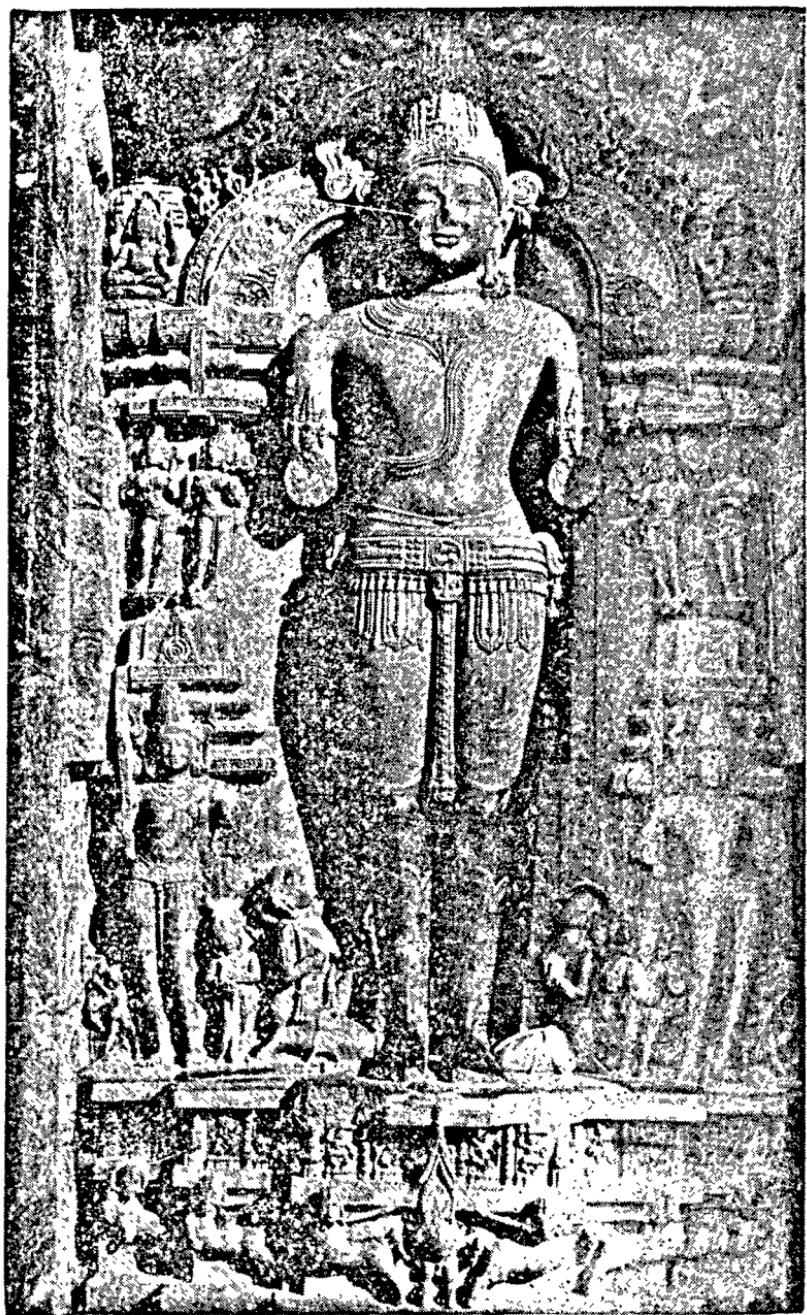
Orissa's most gracious Queen-Empress of the 13th century, sharing the glories of Art and military triumphs with her great royal husband King-Emperor Narasimha Deva, as caught by the chisel of an adoring sculptor of Konarka.

The wheel of **Sansar**,—One of 24 fitted unto the Sun-God's Chariot of Creation, that is Konarka Temple.

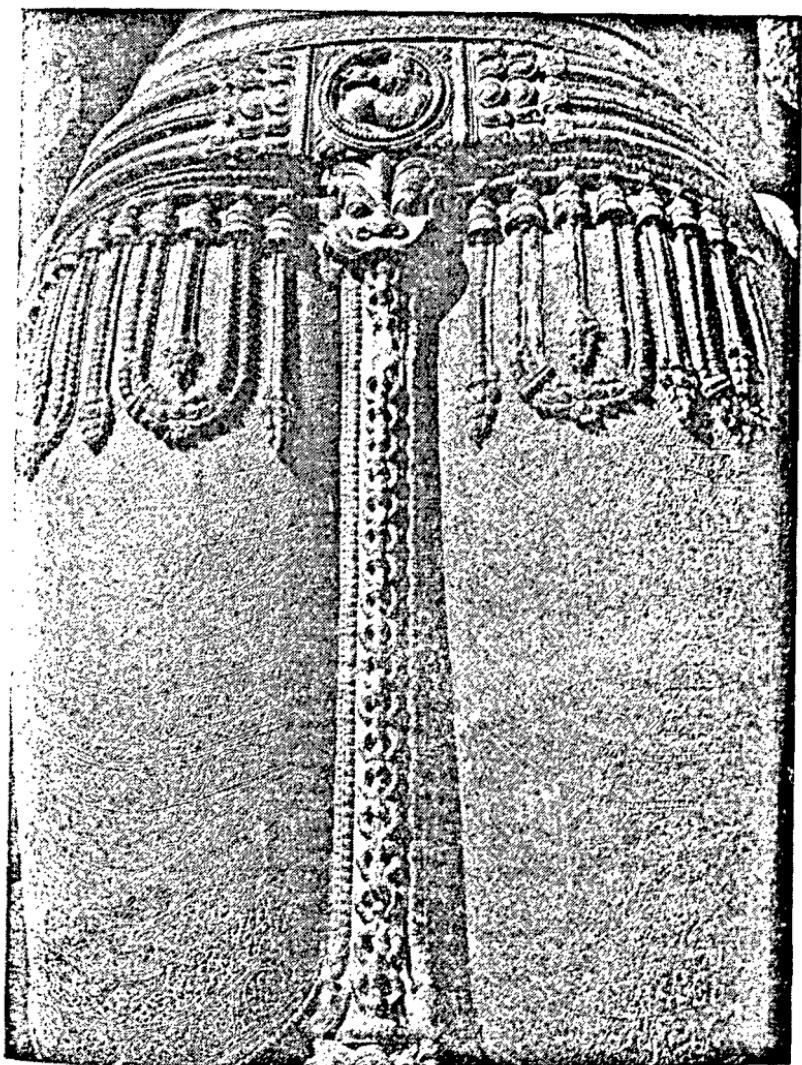




Symbolic of Life Abundant on the walls of Konarka, the home of the Sun-God, is even each little medallion on the spokes of the wheels of carrying such exquisite life-plays, as shown here.



The resplendent Sun-God of Konarka with his Seven Chiot horses,—symbolising the seven colours of the sun-ray.



The Gossamer delicacy of the Divine apparel of Konarka's
Sun-God, so marvellously worked out on even hard chlorite.



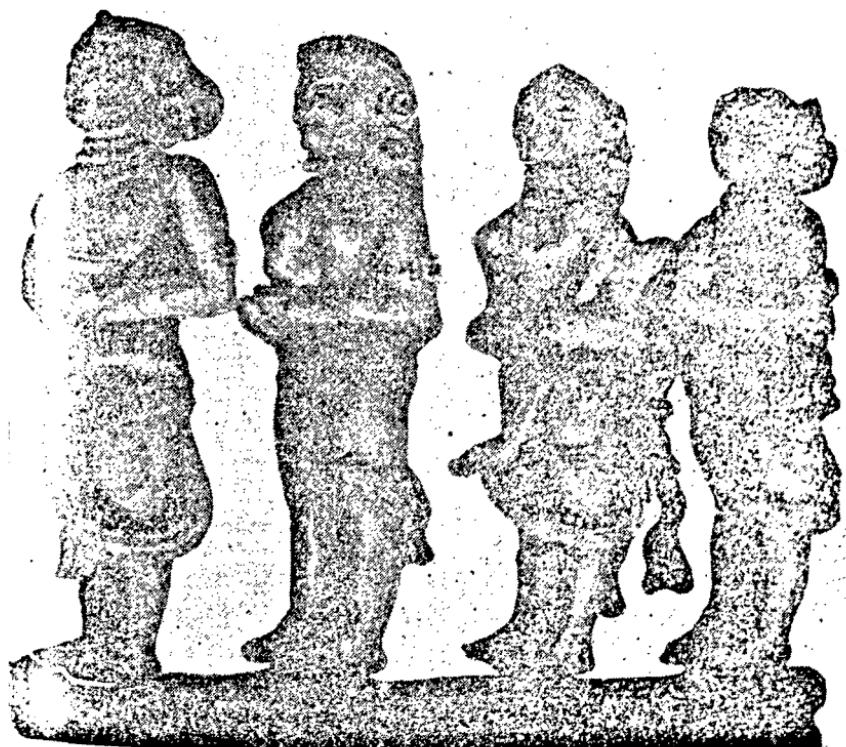
A celestial flutist of the Sun-God, lost to all phenomenal awareness in the ceaseless process of her musical offerings to her Lord.



The Sun-God's agelessly beauteous drummer offering divine
sonic hymns to her Lord, all these centuries, up on
Konarka's turret.



One of the Sun-God's heavenly cymbalists, serene in paradisiac contentment, with her humble but competently performed part in the total entertainment offered to the Lord.



Devout female worshippers around the pedestal of the
Sun-God, Konarka.

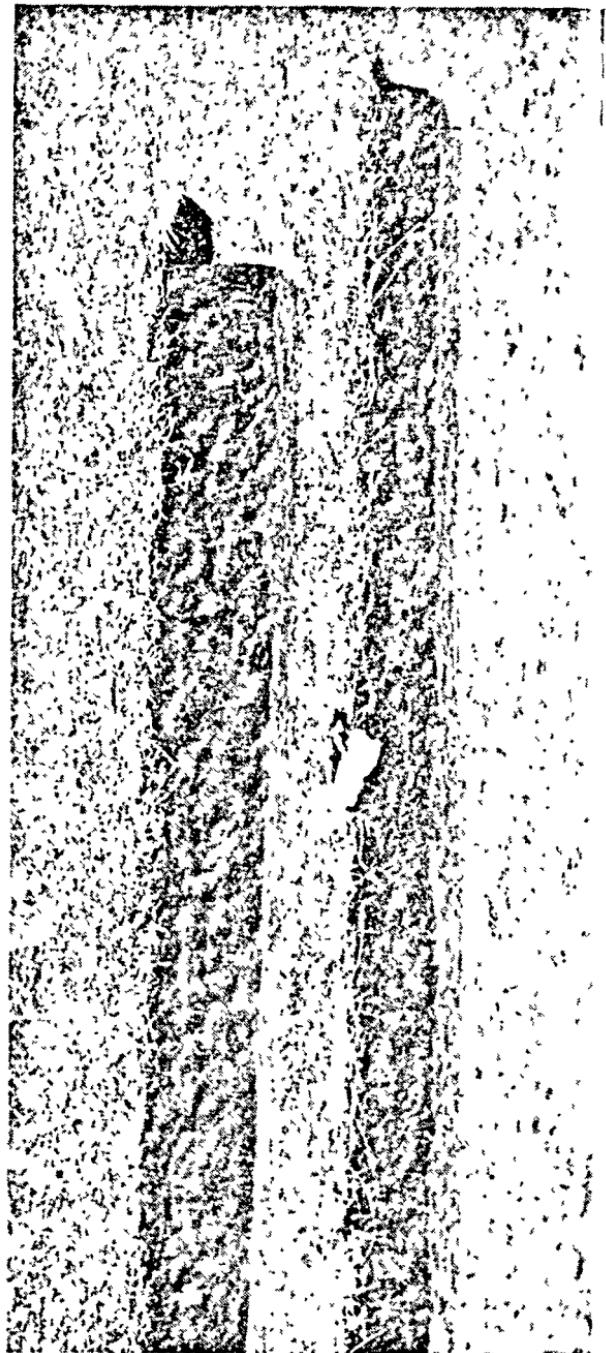
VIA-14

Eager Male worshippers around the pedestal of the Sun-God, Konarka,





Reflecting the tremendous zest for life in contemporary Orissan Society, Konarka—artists have left this delightful panel of a Tug-of-War in which they themselves perhaps indulged during their off-hours,



Two of the many immense iron beams of Konarka that haven't rusted at all, though exposed directly to salt sea-breeze for the last Seven Centuries.

CHAPTER—VI

B

Konarka's superb world of deathless Love, as revealed in the following eight pictures is a unique achievement indeed among all schools of world-Art.



"Your nearness is all that I desire in life,
my dearest darling."



Lips that unify vibrant souls.



"May I gaze at this most marvellous loveliness, forever
and evermore ?"





Alas, am I jilted at last ?



"Life's most enchanting refusal :—
"Please, darling, Please ! —Watching eyes might be around !'



Hope, he turns up
in time
as he promised.



The ecstasy of two becoming one, and one, two,
simultaneously.

CHAPTER VI

THE WONDER THAT IS KONARKA

The Sun-Temple of Konarka should not be judged merely as an isolated monument of glory on its own rights. It were better to look at it as the culminating and grandest chapter in the epic of aesthetics of a historical people who had tried to give shape to their national dreams and aspirations in ceaseless architectural experiments during a period of over 1200 years, beginning with Kharavela in the first century B. C. to Narasimha Deva, the builder of Konarka, in the thirteenth century A. D. Konarka may thus be taken as the last wonderful experiment in a long and variedly colourful chain of creative projects. Konarka is the finest efflorescence of the artistic genius of a race that had thrown up temples, bridges, and embankments all over its home-land, in great upsurges of building-energy, arising out of the periodic upheavals in national faith. And Konarka, though the grandest of the achievements of the Oriyas, stands today as the most tragic of all the monuments in Orissa, the brightest flaming up of a lamp before it blew out, presenting to the sensitive onlookers the saddest ensemble of Beauty and Bereavement, Desire and Desolation, Ambition and Frustration, lying in scattered dilapidation on the deserted sands of a lonely sea-beach. But even in ruins, Konarka still remains an epic in stone, loudly proclaiming to the wide world the very magnificence of human endeavour that is great even in its faults and failures. While Konarka, standing in the midst of empty, silent, undulating sands of the sea-beach, far away from human concourse, gains enormously in its sombre dignity, like a tragic hero, out of its very

dilapidation, it raises also, at the same time, tantalising questions in the minds of the spectators, as to why and how such a colossal architectural experiment was undertaken in an inhospitable desert ? It is said that the ambitious king, Narasimha Deva (1238—1264), spent almost twelve years' revenue of his sprawling Orissan Empire on this pet project of his. Why was such colossal waste of public funds committed on this far-off desert fringe of his empire, away from his own palace and capital , so nonchalantly by a king, who, on all accounts, is taken to have been a practical man ?

Like the achievements of all men of genius, Konarka, a collective dream-product of many a genius, remains an eternal enigma. It gives rise to questions, leaving no clue whatsoever for satisfactory answers. It looks as though it was deliberately designed by its great makers so as to produce only one single, total, cumulative impact on the spectator, and that was one of wonder, And hasn't that objective of the makers been most eminently fulfilled ? For, doesn't every aspect of Konarka, its architectural vastness along with the superb delicacy of its sculpture, its divinity as well as its profanity, its wild indulgence in sheer fantasies as well as its remarkable restraint and realism, its vitality as well as its inherent weaknesses, its oratory and still more its reticence, all combined, transfix the onlooker in an initial state of amazement, submerging all critical judgement ? Three centuries after it was built, Abul Fazl, Akbar's historian, has indeed high-lighted this one aspect of Konarka, saying, "Even those whose judgement is critical and who are difficult to please, stand astonished at its sight." The builders of Konarka may, therefore, be taken to have rightly aimed at the only true effect of all great art,—the sensation of wonder,—and there it stands, no less wonder inspiring in its ruins than when it stood fresh and whole.

HOLY CHANDRABHAGA

Again, while to art-lovers, Konarka is nothing but a superb artistic monument, to millions of pilgrims of Orissa and beyond, its artistic significance is only secondary. To them all, it is still meaningful only as the holy habitat of the Sun-God. On the 7th day of the bright fortnight of the lunar month of Magha (January-February), thousands of rural folk trek there for a holy dip in the small, shallow pool, a mile away from the temple, which is all that remains now of the dead river Chandrabhaga that once flowed close by and is supposed to have been broad and deep enough to accommodate sea-going vessels. After the purificatory dip in the early hours, the pilgrims walk to the sea-beach to witness, once in a year, the miracle of the grand red ball of the sun rise out of the blue sea, 'like a new-born calf' in the picturesque language of the people, reminiscent of the striking parallelism in the Vedic hymns. The unsophisticated mass, closer to Divinity than most of us, worships God through that really divine act of a sun-rise and then comes back to the deserted temple to offer ritual worship to the Sun-God's 'nine planets' within the temple precincts and returns home. "Yet once every year", says Percy Brown referring to this annual festival; "the stillness is shattered, the temple again comes to life to recall scenes of its ancient glory, when stirred by some strange instinct like that of migratory birds, pilgrims in their thousands converge from long distances to worship the Sun-God. For one whole day, its broken walls pulsate with fervent prayers from people of all classes."

Percy Brown adds : "The night spreads her garments over all and by the following dawn the place is deserted, the devotees have filtered away in groups across the sands towards the horizon and the great

'ruin sinks again into solitary silence, steeped in its own dark thoughts".

The seventh day of the bright fortnight of the holy month of Magha, the day of this pilgrimage, is supposed to be the day on which Shamba, Krishna's son, having been cured of leprosy, through the grace of the Sun-God, offered grateful worship to him here, on the bank of the holy river Chandrabhaga, now existing only in legends. The place where the temple now stands has been holy on that account, as the soil graced by the Sun-God from pre-historic times, and has been known to the devout as the *Arka-Kshetra* (*arka*, sun, from which the very word *Konarka* comes), just as Puri is known as the *Vishnu Kshetra*, Bhubaneswar, the *Shiva Kshetra* and Jaipur, the *Sakti Kshetra*. Perhaps, in an undefined period of Hindu revival, all these places were simultaneously converted to Brahmanic worship out of the older Buddhist shrines in a well-thought-out plan that has made Orissa, the holiest State of Hindu India. In the long story of this holy seat of the Sun-God, the temple that King Narasimha built in the 13th century A. D. is no more than a mere transient, though dazzling, dream.

KONARKA, A PROSPEROUS SEA-PORT

This place was not only holy, but, standing at the mouth of the old river Chandrabhaga, was once a prosperous harbour, from which the merchants of Kalinga sailed to Ceylon and countries of South-east Asia. Perhaps it was so even in the time of King Narasimha in the 13th century, as otherwise, such a vast building-project could never have been possible. Down to the modern times, the river was the main artery of transport in Orissa or, for that matter, all over India. Without a navigable stream, the colossal amount of heavy materials, man-power and food that

must have been needed for the construction of this giant temple, could never have been gathered in a workable manner. And to prove that Konarka was once a prosperous sea-port, its own sculpture is evidence enough. On the southern side of the *Jagamohana* (the front portion of the temple that alone has remained somewhat intact), there is a panel in which the king sitting on an elephant receives an ovation from a group of well-dressed people. In it a long-necked giraffe¹, an animal indigenous to East Africa, is included. It could not have been brought to Orissa except by a sea-worthy vessel or to Konarka if it were not also a maritime harbour.

In spite of holiness combined with urban and maritime prosperity, this *Arka-Kshetra* (the holy habitat of the un-God) had not, till perhaps King Narasimha's time, a shrine commensurate with its reputation, like Puri, Jajpur and Bhubaneswar, the other three holy centres of Orissa. Probably this tempted the great King Narasimha to try to immortalise himself here, in this holy but as-yet vacant spot, as his forbears had already done at Puri, Bhubaneswar and Jajpur. And an occasion supremely favourable to his ambitions presented itself.

KONARKA, A MONUMENT OF VICTORY

By the time King Narasimha came to occupy the throne of Orissa, epoch-making events had already taken place in other parts of India. The whole of north India, including neighbouring Bengal, and most parts of south India, had been occupied by Moslem invaders. On the east coast of India, Orissa was the only-independent Hindu State till that time, and proudly so remained long after. The all-conquering

1. See Chapter IV.

Moslem hordes got some of their worst defeats from King Narasimha Deva, though they had also been previously beaten back by his father, Anangabhima Deva, with still more glorious victories over Moslems to follow under the succeeding dynasty of the Solaris. Young King Narasimha, however, had not only repulsed the Moslem invaders from Bengal at the very frontiers of his empire, but pursued them to their capital, Lakhnauti, and sacked that city. And such glorious victories, were repeated at least twice in Narasimha's reign. The national jubilation over these repeated routings of Moslem invaders was perhaps the background for the construction of a symbolic temple to the Sun God, the great dispeller of darkness, to materialise through it the aspirations of a rich, dominant and victorious king, and to have himself immortalised in the story of his kingdom, as some of his illustrious forbears had done before him. The sculptures all over the walls of Konarka tell this story in unmistakable terms. A jubilant feeling of joy and victory is writ large on every inch of the temple of Konarka. The immense zest for life that the world of Konarka reveals loudly proclaims the spacious times when this temple was being built. The abundance of war scenes, from whole armies,—chariots, elephants, cavalry and infantry,—marching in full accoutrements, to single war-horses and war-elephants, ruthlessly crushing enemies under their feet, so unusual and so irrelevant in a religious shrine, stand, without doubt, symbolic of nothing but the historic fact of its great royal builder having inflicted crushing defeats on his enemies. In no other temple of Orissa do we come across such war-like scenes, and in such profusion too. And the deservedly celebrated Konarka horses and Konarka elephants thus gain a motivational integration into the whole layout of the temple, which would have been lacking otherwise. There is no historic or literary evidence to show that King Narasimha, the

builder of Konarka, was a particular devotee of the Sun-God, like the Pharaoh Ikhnaton of Egypt, nor even the simple fact that he was a pious man in any sense. He was the greatest among the great Ganga kings of Orissa,—powerful, heroic, unchallenged and victorious. He was perhaps earthly-minded to the core, as a successful king is expected to be. If Konarka is so fascinating to all lovers of art today, it is not because of the presiding deity or the piety of its builder, but because it displays, in the divine language of art, the joy of life on this earth of ours. That became possible, perhaps, because of the resounding victories over a formidable national enemy and the consequent national rejoicings. Konarka is, for that reason and in that sense a truly national monument. It reminds us of the rise of England from obscurity to greatness after the shattering of the Spanish Armada.

WAR, WORSHIP, WOMAN

Broadly speaking, Konarka may symbolically be taken as a shrine of War, Worship and Woman,—the three central factors of human life on this planet. The great connoisseur, Coomaraswamy, seized upon the essence of the situation when he said of Konarka : "It is a hymn to life, a frank and exquisite glorification of creative forces whose one symbol is Love." The same reaction has been echoed also in the words of Abanindranath Tagore, when he said ecstatically : "This is a merry mart of eternal youth."

Konarka is, indeed, a magnificent lyrical epic in stone, narrating the uninhibited joys of love and victory, dedicated to the Master of Life, the Sun. Few poets have sung in words more sweet and divine, of the beauty and charm of woman, the symbol of joy and victory on earth, as did the poet-builders of Konarka, in hard stone. The Konarka artists have

delineated love sensuous and love sublime, in all such forms as every male heart dreams round the woman and Coomaraswamy reveals his great insight as an art critic when he says, "The sculptures of women (in Konarka) are frankly the works of lovers".

A great deal has, however, been said about the obscenities of Konarka. Some obscenities are, of course, there. But the fact that these are practically non-existent on the main temple, the *vimana*, and the *nata mandir* (the dance hall) and are displayed only on the walls of the *mukhasala* or *jagamohana* (the entrance hall), does suggest some religious, social or technical convention that the artists followed for such type of buildings, but of which we are absolutely ignorant at present. If these are attributed to perversities of the builders or the general immorality of the society to which they belonged, then what could limit their propensities to only specified areas ? But ethics apart, haven't the artists of Konarka so abundantly demonstrated their capacity to delineate also, the delicacy of sublime human love and the deepest mysteries of Faith ? Only master-artists could create the sculptures now named "the kiss" or "the lovers" the joyous, ecstatic abandon of dancers and musicians and the divine light, grace and peace on the face of the various Sun images at Konarka.. The wheels of Konarka now famous all the world over, are not only grand and resplendent enough to be the wheels of the heavenly chariot of the God of Gods, but amazingly full of the delineation of life, symbolising the wheel of life, that is this *Samsara*. One indeed needs the vision of poets to understand what, to prudes, may appear as merely immoral, to inhale the pervasive beauty, colour and aroma in the totality of Konarka, and to say, like the great artist, Abanindranath Tagore —

"The ever old and the ever new dance-sport of the whole universe is going on day and night under the sportive *Kadamba* tree of love, sacred to the gods, to the accompaniment of burning lamps of divergent colours placed round the bejewelled throne of the bodyless God of Love. Here (in Konarka) nothing is silent, nothing is motionless, nothing is barren or sterile. Stones are ringing with the deep resonance of the *mridanga*-drum, stones are running like frisky, spirited horses, pulling the car at top speed. Stones have blossomed out here like ever-blooming flowers in the bowers, embracing all quarters in their thousand arms of shining green !"

THE ELEPHANTS OF THE LORD OF ELEPHANTS

No less magnificent than this superb delineation of human passion, are the sculptures of animals in Konarka. The elephant, however, dominates the entire layout,—that noble creature being the heraldic symbol of the kings of Orissa, the Gajapatis, lords of elephants. The magnificent elephant procession that runs round the bottom of the entire temple is a sight for gods to see. The *khedda* operations are depicted in meticulous detail with tell-tale realism. Next in order come horses, deer, antelopes, geese, ducks, bears and also strange and imaginary creatures. The masons conceived the entire exterior of the temple to represent the phenomenal world, with the Sun, the Creator, inside. So, nothing of this life was to be ignored, not certainly the sex-act, out of which only the myriad phenomenal life emerges. The zest for realism, for truth and the discovery of grace, beauty and dignity in the commonplace things of life, is indeed amazing. That is how the horses and elephants of Konarka have become masterpieces and each woman in stone has become an enchantress. As Coomaraswamy says : "It is perhaps the animals (of Konarka) that are most impressive ; the led horse is of unsurpassed

grandeur. The outside of this temple is an image of this life, *samsara*, every bond and each desire of loveliness that binds man to the wheel of life and death".

KONARKA, THE COLOSSUS

While the concept of Konarka as a whole was that of a war memorial, of military victory, materially too, it was no less a grand monument of Man's war against Nature and Adversity. The most stirring part of the story of Konarka really centres round its engineering skill, its structural Adventure and its constructional daring. Traditionally, the temple is supposed to have been built on the bed of the river Chandrabhaga, which had to be filled up with piles of boulders to support the heavy super-structure. This is proved by recent diggings into the foundation, which reached water-level at a depth of 4 to 5 feet only. Some attribute the temple's fall to this constructional defect. But the fact remains that at no point in the plinth-area is there any sign of the building having ever sunk by its own enormous weight, because of a weak foundation. Considering the soft, marshy ground, on which the great temple stands, this must be taken to be a remarkable feat of the Oriya architects.

The ease with which stones and iron beams of colossal size were transported from long distances and lifted and set up at considerable heights, is certainly another amazing feat. Referring to this, Manmohan Ganguly, a modern engineer says²: "It is a matter of great wonder as to how such heavy stones and iron beams could be raised to such great heights before the invention of steam engine, wire-rope, derrick or pulley-block. Our imagination is excited to the highest pitch in trying to discover the contrivances that the architects had recourse to, in raising, fitting and fixing these heavy beams

2. Orissa and Her Remains, pp. 150-51

and blocks of stone. The huge stone figure of the lion, meant for the *Vimana* at Konarka, was raised to a height of 100 feet and was brought from a quarry at a distance of many miles from the actual site of work, across forests, swamps and rivers, with inadequate means of communication."

In the monumental book on Konarka in Oriya, by the late Pandit Krupasindhu Misra, details are quoted from government records about some of the stone-blocks and of the iron beams used at Konarka. According to Pandit Misra, the lion-stone, referred to by Ganguly, was placed at a height of 170 feet (not 100 feet, as Ganguly had said in his book), and the portion of it that was projecting beyond the temple-wall, measured 600 square feet and weighed 45 tons or 1260 maunds. The monolithic chlorite block of the Nine Planets was split into two parts by the Public Works Department about 50 years ago, to enable the lighter slab, containing only the sculptures, to be taken conveniently to the Indian Museum, Calcutta. But even that was found so unwieldy and expensive that the attempt was ultimately given up. Now, the lighter slab (a quarter of the original block), containing the figures of the Sun's nine planets, is kept in a separate room and is still worshipped, while the bigger slab lies by the road between the local Dak Bungalow and the temple, embedded in sands. When intact, this monolithic block weighed 16.5 tons or 742 maunds. The monolithic *Kalasa* (Vase of Plenty), that once adorned the top of the main temple, was, according to government accounts, 25 feet high and weighed about 2,000 tons, and was placed at a height of 200 feet. The Aruna pillar, a one-piece chlorite block now planted in front of the temple of Jagannatha at Puri, was once standing in the intervening space between the main temple of Konarka and the Nata-mandir or the Dance Hall. Its height is 34 feet. There were four more similar or slightly bigger

pillars at Konarka. At least for the chlorites, the stone-cutters of Konarka must have journeyed 150 miles to the ex-Native State of Nilgiri where alone such stones are available in Orissa. Even for other common varieties of stone they must have covered at least 50 miles. For miles around Konarka, there is nothing but soft alluvial soil that becomes a vast dust-bowl in summer and an impassable stretch of mud and water in the rains. How the Oriyas carried the stones of such enormous size from such distances across rivers, forests and marshy, trackless, alluvial plains, in those pre-mechanical days, is a mystery that has not yet been solved. Referring to this super-human feat of the Oriya builders, says W. W. Hunter:³

"They handled their colossal beams of iron and stone with as much ease and plasticity as modern workmen put up pine rafters."

And even the generally unsympathetic Stirling has to admit:⁴

"No one can certainly behold the massive beams of iron and the prodigious blocks of stone used in the construction of this edifice (Konarka) without being struck with amazement.....One cannot but wonder at the ease with which the architects seem to have wielded and managed the cumbersome masses of iron and stone used for the work."

Few in India talk or even know also of the marvellous iron beams of Konarka. Whereas the celebrated Delhi iron pillar is only 22 feet above ground, with a girth of only 16 inches, the biggest Konarka iron beam is 35 feet long with a girth of 36 inches. If the Delhi pillar weighs 18 tons, this Konarka beam weighs 90 tons. Unlike in Delhi, the iron beams

3. *Orissa*, Vol. I, p. 297.

4. *An Account of Orissa*, pp. 164-76.

of Konarka have been exposed to the salt air of the sea for seven centuries, showing no sign of rust. Finding these beams thicker at the centre than at the ends by about one or two inches, Fergusson, the well-known authority on Indian architecture, was surprised at the scientific insight of the ancient Oriya builders.

SALUTATION TO THE ANONYMOUS ARTISTS

In Orissa, the land of famous temples, Konarka, built at the close of more than 1,200 years of architectural experiments, is the biggest, tallest and the most enchanting and astonishing of them all. What now goes by the name of Konarka temple is really the porch, the main temple having toppled down long ago. But even the porch is taller than the main Lingaraja temple at Bhubaneswar. The *vimana* of Konarka (230') was almost double that of the Lingaraja (121'). It is recorded in the Madala Panji, (the chronicles of the Jagannatha temple) that the ambitious and victorious King Narasimha had declared that he would leave behind a monument that put to shade all others built by his forbears, in every respect. His ambition and aspiration happily coincided with his victories over the national enemies and the stupendous work that is Konarka became possible. But Percy Brown is right when he says that "Konarka represents the crystallised and accumulated experience of several hundred years of this type of temple-building (in Orissa), so that no longer is it a fortuitous range of separate structures, as in the Lingaraja or Jagannatha, for examples, but a reasoned and systematic co-ordination of its parts, into an architectural unity..... The temple of the Sun at the Konarka, therefore, illustrates in every respect the fulfilment and finality of the style."

Dr. Ananda Coomaraswamy also felt : "It would be hard to find anywhere in the world a more perfect

example of the adaptation of sculpture to architecture than is afforded by the temple of the Sun at Konarka."

And wrote Fergusson : "There is no roof in India where the same play of light and shade is obtained with an equal amount of richness and constructive propriety as in this instance (Konarka), nor one that sits so gracefully on the base that supports it."

And Sir John Marshall thus sums up the architectural achievement at Konarka : "There is no monument of Hinduism that is at once so stupendous and so perfectly proportioned as this Black Pagoda and none which leaves so deep an impression on the memory."

But these grand tributes really go, not to King Narasimha, or to his minister, Siva Samantarai, who is supposed to have supervised the construction of the temple, but to the great band of 1,200 anonymous masons of 13th-century Orissa, who got an opportunity for the expression of their dreams and hereditary skills and were able to pour out their soul into the hard, uncouth stones of Konarka. The soft, warm vitality that pulsates underneath the rough stones of Konarka has stemmed not from royal commands or bureaucratic cleverness and efficiency, but out of the depths of dedicated souls of artists, and for that reason only, it defies death and decay, even though in ruins. It is only such soul-infusion into dead materials that creates deathless art.

In the words of Dr. Stella Kramrisch : "The colossal statues of the Sun Temple of Konarka hold (in limbs that look as though they had been turned on a potter's wheel) their joyous attitude in space, high up on the roof, and because they transport their being into the volume of their emotions, the images of the Sun Temple of Konarka belong to eternity in the world of art."

These great artists of Konarka have left absolutely no record of themselves. But to any seeing eye, the warm, living touch of those forgotten but glorious masters is still there in every inch of stone of the colossal structure. They set up, with such self-effacing devotion. The soul of twelve hundred poets who together wrote out this great epic, sought and realised deathlessness for their spirits, through pure worship of Law and Beauty, even as they worked like slaves under orders of an earthly king, because they knew the ineffable ecstasy of dedicating their daily task to the King of Kings.

For world-estimation of Orissa's artistic heritage please see Appendix-I at the end of the book.

CHAPTER VII

ORISSA WRITES OUT HER SOUL IN LETTERS

If politically, Orissa is the Indian State with the smallest non-Hindu minorities in its population, culturally, she is also the purest, her fine artistic heritage bearing the littlest external impact ever, in the whole of India, Oriya, her language being the closest to Sanskrit of all the modern Indian languages. In the Oriya language the number of foreign words might be counted on one's fingers, the substratum still remaining almost wholly Sanskritic. And because of this common Sanskritic base the differences between the four East-Indian languages, Assamese, Maithili, Bengali and Oriya, are so thin, that if one knows one of them fairly well, little difficulty will be experienced for one to understand others. It is just like the close affinity among the Scandinavian languages, Norwegian, Swedish and Danish which started individual literatures of their own only the other day. It is because of this close affinity between two neighbouring languages, Oriya and Bengali, that the Buddhist ballads and lyrics of the 7th-8th centuries A. D., discovered in Nepal and published by the late M. M. Haraprasad Sastri of Bengal, under the name 'Baudha Gan' O 'Dohan', are justifiably being claimed by both Bengali and Orissan scholars to be the beginnings of poetic creations in either language. But the language of those Buddhist Psalms is as far from either modern Oriya or Bengali as that of Langland's Piers Plowman from modern English.

LITERATURE BEGINS WHERE ART ENDS

It is by the 13th century, however, that the Oriya language and literature as we know them today, begin to take clear outlines.

It is remarkably significant that in the national life of the Oriyas, their literature starts where their

A specimen of Oriya writing on palm-leaf.

Sati Chaura, the famous cremation yard of Cuttack, on the left-bank of the Kathjuri, has slowly developed as Orissa's pantheon, containing as it does, the last remains of many of her great literary heroes, such as Radhanatha, Madhusudan, Nandakishore and Gopal Chandra Praharaja.

VII-2



national art and architecture end. From the first century B. C. to the 13th century A. D., the Oriyas had gone on creating architectural and sculptural marvels. The nation's soul seems to have felt the need for a fresh medium of expression by that time. And so national literature seems to have started its course, only after the last chapter of the national Book of Art that is Konarka, had been written off. We see the first prose utterances in Oriya in an inscription of the 13th century on the walls of a temple at Bhubaneswar and the first lyrical notes in the language were heard almost at the same time. It is significant that prose from the beginning was employed for practical official purposes, while poetry was used as the vehicle of the emotional outbursts of mother Yasoda for young Krishna who had left Mathura under royal orders. This lyric, popularly known as the "Keshaba Koili", is still recited by school children in thousands of Orissa villages, to the immense joy of aging parents.

OUTSTANDING CHARACTERISTIC OF THE ORIYA LITERATURE

The most outstanding characteristic of the Oriya literature which thus emerged in the 13th century, as one surveys its entire panorama, appears to be the very gratifying fact, that essentially, it is a literature of the common people. In all other modern Indian languages literatures were ushered into existence by persons who were seasoned scholars in Sanskrit, India's great sacrosanct classical tongue. But poor Oriya cannot boast of either royal patronage or a scholastic foundation. Oriya literature was not only born but also developed and thrived because of the unseen but powerful urge of an isolated and neglected people who earnestly wished to see their own humble and homely thoughts, dreams, aspirations and experiences given expression to, in the speech of their day-to-day life. No Maharaja ever helped her poets on the scale or with the enthusiasm that we meet

in other Indian languages. Except during the medieval period, and occasionally in the modern, no great work of this literature has ever been dedicated to any crowned head. Poets in Orissa, not only in the initial pioneering stages, but all through her history, have been essentially men and women of the proletariat, ignorant not only of Sanskrit but even of any other language except their own. Oriya literature, more than any other Indian literature, is really democratic, created by the people and for the people. It has grown and still thrives, not because of the encouragement of the rulers of the land, but in spite, not only of their apathy and indifference, but of their positive contempt and even organised suppression during some periods. No other Indian language has had to struggle so hard for its very existence, nor has suffered such losses through the linguistic aggressiveness of her neighbours, as we have already described in the very first chapter of this book.

True to the synthetic genius of the people of Orissa, Oriya literature is not only proletarian but has developed, in spite of contempt, disregard and violence from many quarters, an amazing cosmopolitan character. It has been enriched by the natives of the soil and also by Andhras, Marathas, Bengalees, Rohilkhandis, Mussalmans and Aborigines. This may be the only literature in the Indo-Aryan family of North Indian languages to which the Adivasi has contributed so significantly. The blind Khond poet Bhima Bhoi's monotheistic *bhajanas* are priceless treasures of this language. The Adivasi figures in the poetry of Orissa almost from the very beginning. Bhima, a fisherman, left behind a ballad that any erudite Sanskrit scholar would be proud of and which is, even now, lovingly recited in almost every village in Orissa. Yadumoni, the carpenter, has become legendary in the land, as a wit as well as a top-ranking rhetorical poet. Innumerable also are the most valued contributions to this literature, from Orissa's genuine peasantry, the historic Odras.

And if an additional proof was needed of the proletarian character of this literature, we amply find it in the fact that, as we proceed from period to period, it is deeply coloured by the changing religious faiths of the people under successive historic dynasties. First it is Jainism, then Budhism, then Siva-Saktism and, the last to appear in the field and the most deeply enduring of all, leaving the profoundest impression on the mind and character of the people, is Vaishnavism with its two branches, the Rama-cult and the Krishna-cult. The basic faith of the Oriya people appears to be, however, what may be called Mahayana-Vaishnavism, which, in varied forms, has, from the earliest times, been reflected not only in the literature but also in their art and architecture and their national character.

THE PALM-LEAF LIBRARIES IN THE VILLAGES

Before the advent of the printing press in the last century, the entire literature of the Oriya people was lying on palm leaves, inscribed with an iron stylus by the patient and pious labour of devoted scribes; a labour extending over months and years. This writer remembers an honest hardworking peasant of his village in his childhood days, who, for years spent all his middays in the silent, painstaking job of transcribing only one book, the *Bhagabata* of Jagannatha Dasa, the guiding star of his whole religious life. At that time printed sets of Jagannatha's *Bhagabata* were already available in the market and had already made their appearance in the village. But to that simple unsophisticated Oriya peasant, the printed paper was still vulgar, lacking the aroma of sanctity attached to palm leaves.

Libraries of palm-leaf manuscripts are even now found in almost every village of Orissa. Every important family in a village possessed a private library of these ancient books as a proud family heirloom. Not even the fringe of this vast imprisoned literature

has yet been touched by research workers. The village folk guard these books as precious, occult knowledge with fanatical zeal and pathetic ignorance.

The existence of this extensive palm-leaf library system in Orissa for so many centuries, covering almost every village and almost every important family in the land, and mostly created and maintained by the peasantry, is another proof of the basically democratic character of the Oriya literature.

EXTENSIVE LITERATURE

As Indian languages go, Oriya literature is quite extensive. There are, in Oriya, at least fifty well-known versions of the *Ramayana* and four or five recognised versions of the *Mahabharata*. Practically all the *Puranas* are there, most of them related to the Sanskrit originals only in name, because of the free display of imagination by the Oriya authors. Rhetorical poetry of the medieval period is equally abundant. While *Puranas* live on in the mass mind because of their excellent story elements, the rhetorical poetry of the medieval period is still the delight and passion of the people, because of the beauty of the language, the varied associations of sense with sound, and the romantic tales it generally deals with. This entire old literature remains a world by itself, peculiarly satisfying to the psychology of the peasantry, comfortably meeting them on their own level, fulfilling their mythological, religious, moral, and, above all, their aesthetic demands. Modern literature has deplorably failed to reach the people in the way the old did and still does. There are definitely no greater genuine 'People's Poets' than the great ancients of the Oriya literature. In spite of the printing press, the daily paper, the literary periodicals and the ever-expanding schools and colleges, modern literature has failed to receive the hearty welcome in village homes, like the older variety.

The semi-literate village reciters, the wandering minstrels, the dancers, and the open-air theatrical troupes have kept the old literature alive among the masses in Orissa through all the vicissitudes of the history of the land, and even the printing press has popularised the old literature more than the new. The best-sellers in Oriya are still the *Puranas*, or the *Mahabharata* of Sarala Dasa, or the lyrical *Ramayanas* of Viswanatha Khuntia.

THE UNIQUE ORIYA MAHABHARATA

From the slight beginnings in the 13th century to the 20th in our times, the literature of the Oriyas has thus grown in dimensions and varieties, with a rich harvest of epics, *puranas*, *kavyas*, songs, prose and lyrics of all categories.

But the first great creator in Oriya to emerge on the horizon who laid a solid foundation, providing stability to the whole later super-structure, is Sarala Dasa of the 15th century, the poet of the Oriya *Mahabharata*, the very first large book in the language. Almost a contemporary of Chaucer, Sarala Dasa exhibits, to some degree, the same rough and vigorous qualities, the same unblushing eye for and delight in truth and the same instinct for description and characterisation, as his English counterpart. His descendants are still in a flourishing condition in his village in the district of Cuttack, and his birth-place and burial mound have become places of pilgrimage. It is incontrovertible that he, an actual tiller of the soil, knew not Sanskrit nor had any pretensions to scholarship. Like the Scot poet Robert Burns, Sarala Dasa appears to have got the irresistible impulse to compose verses while ploughing the fields. And picking together what he had heard from Brahmin pandits, this semi-literate peasant started writing the *Mahabharata* in a language which till then contained no more than a few folksongs and which was

contemptuously looked down upon, not without justification perhaps, by both the rulers and the Brahmin intellectuals of the land.

But the *Mahabharata* of Sarala Dasa remains a grand composition, in spite of and maybe because of the natural handicaps of the author. It could not be a translation of the original in the very nature of things, as the poet was ignorant of Sanskrit. And so it has turned out, more or less, to be an original work. The poet has upset the order of Books in the original and the continuity of its narrative. He has narrated the story in his own unhampered way, giving full freedom to his unbridled imagination, grafting new stories and new situations on the old tale and completely ignoring incidents and stories of the original epic, as he pleased. The whole of this *Oriya Mahabharata* is written in the vital, vigorous, forthright language of a rustic, caring little for embellishments, indulging often in hyperboles and naively mixing up realities with the figures and happenings of the imaginary world, as is common with peasants all the world over. And significantly enough, the realities were invariably based on the poet's limited experience within his environment, thus turning the whole poem into a picture-gallery of men and matters of contemporary Orissa. Surprisingly enough; this semi-literate peasant poet of the 15th century Orissa throbbed with patriotism for the land of his birth. The patriot poet makes the Pandavas visit the important holy places in Orissa on their way to Heaven, and tries to prove, through a half satiric and half-morbid story, in which Yudhisthira had to marry again in his old age during the Orissan part of his last pilgrimage, that the very soil of Orissa was generative of manly vigour, age notwithstanding. Indeed, it might naturally have appeared so to the poet, as Orissa in his time was still vigorously independent, while the entire North India and the major portions of South India had by that time been conquered and ruled by Mohammedans for over a century.

Attempts have been made to place before Orissa's reading public authenticated translations of the original *Mahabharata* in prose and verse by Rajas and Maharajas, through the help of Pandits, as a counterblast to the poetic hotch-potch of Sarala Dasa. But the nation has rejected the efforts of Pandits and Maharajas, and still keeps adoring the rude, unpolished, but vital production of the semi-literate peasant of the 15th century. Bengal had to wait for two centuries more to see a *Mahabharata* in Bengali. Sarala's *Mahabharata* was therefore translated into Bengali and Kasiram Das's *Bengali Mahabharata* carries unmistakable signs of full knowledge of his Orissan predecessor's masterpiece.

A BOOK REVOLUTIONISES ORIYA CHARACTER

A century after Sarala Dasa had prepared the ground, a band of scholars who met at Puri started a New Age in Oriya literature. They are known in Orissa as *Pancha Sakha* or Five Comrades, they being Dasas Balarama, Jagannatha, Ananta, Yosovanta and Achyutananda. Their total output is enormous. But the major portion of it is absolute theological abracadabra which no modern mind, except those whose thinking is hidebound, would touch as literature. But that mass of rubble contains a few gems of very great human value. And these, consisting of some ethical ballads still sung by the village minstrels, are deservedly popular over Orissa today.

The seniormost among the Five Comrades was Balarama Dasa, the author of the earliest and the most popular *Ramayana* in Oriya. Besides the *Ramayana*, Balarama wrote a considerable number of small poems, some of which are as popular still, as his *Ramayana*. Among the other Comrades, Achyutananda, the youngest, was the most prolific, the list of books to his credit running to hundreds. He was, besides, a social reformer, in that, though born to high caste, he lived

among low caste people and wrote specifically to uplift them culturally, and remarkably succeeded also in his efforts. He is worshipped by millions in Orissa even today as a Patron-saint of some depressed castes in Orissa. His *Samadhi* and *Math* on a hill in the district of Cuttack are centres of pilgrimage.

But the real giant among the Comrades was Jagannatha Dasa, an absolute contrast to the peasant-poet Sarala Dasa in being both high-born and a thorough scholar in Sanskrit. But to the eternal blessing of his race in which he was born, this intellectual and social aristocrat determined in early youth to abandon the pride and prejudice of his class and caste and to make his life and learning a complete dedication to God and Humanity, as represented in his people, the illiterate masses of Orissa. Defying the contempt of the court, friends and critics, Jagannatha started writing the *Bhagabata Purana* in the language of the mass, to show them a path of faith and virtue which were denied to them by their ignorance of Sanskrit, to know which Divine Tongue they could not even aspire also, being but contemptible Sudras. Jagannatha Dasa not merely wrote the *Bhagabata* in Oriya but wrote it in the most elegant, mellifluous, lucid diction as has yet been possible in the language. He is supposed to have invented or popularised a novel nine-lettered metre, universally known now as *Bhagabata metre*, which has turned out to be the handiest instrument for versification in Oriya.

It is said that while young Jagannatha was busy translating the *Bhagabata*, canto after canto, he, as a test of his success, used to sit under the famous banyan tree within the precincts of the Jagannatha Temple and recite the verses to the crowds of pilgrims who daily visited the shrine. The pilgrims from all corners of Orissa heard spell-bound this new religious poetry, which so long was a sealed book to them, in the

language they spoke daily among themselves, but with the magic touch of a poet and a saint added to it. Young Jagannatha was now satisfied that his translation was, after all, successful and his fame and that of his book spread far and wide in a short time, through the pilgrims. Scribes started copying it as holy labour and villages vied with one another for possessing a complete palm-leaf set of Jagannatha's *Bhagabata* with a sacrosanct home of its own, where the village elders could assemble in the evenings after the day's toil, to listen to it as recited by the village priest. So, almost each village in Orissa began having a 'Bhagabata Home' (*Bhagabata ghara*) which became a multi-purpose institution, combining in it the village assembly, the village school, the village library and the village church. It appears now that the birth of Jagannatha and his *Bhagabata* in Oriya were matters of destiny for the whole nation. For not long after Jagannatha passed away, the dark night descended on the prosperous and independent kingdom of Orissa which had defied till then repeated Moslem invasions for centuries. The land was attacked, conquered and wrenched, bit by bit, from the North, the South and the West as already described in the very first chapter of this book. The Pathans, the Moghuls, the Marathas and the British overran the country one after another. The kingdom was dismembered, brothers killing brothers, and through misrule, extortion, famine and internecine battles, the peasantry,—the backbone of the race—became almost dehumanised. These dark days continued from the 16th century right up to the 20th. But even this long night of misfortune could not do much damage to the Soul of the Oriya people, as in their dismembered and the exploited misery, this Oriya *Bhagabata* of Jagannath Dasa turned out to be a great cementing force among them, as it still is. Through three centuries of misfortune, the *Bhagabata-ghara* continued to be the rallying point for the masses in Orissa. It still remains the simple pious ambition of

the average unsophisticated Oriya peasant to be able to read and recite this *Bhagabata* in his old age, or listen to it being read and recited by his children. In fact he sends his child to school with the main objective of giving him just enough literacy as will enable him to read Jagannatha's *Bhagabata*, which, so far, has been the greatest incentive to the spread of literacy in Orissa. Whatever native morality and goodness prevailed among the Oriyas till yesterday was due, most certainly, to this single book of Jagannatha Dasa.

ORISSA'S NATIVE FAITH

Jagannatha was a contemporary of Chaitanya who spent the last 18 years of his life at Puri. The poet and the saint liked and respected each other as soon as they met. But as Jagannatha and his Oriya literary Comrades had already been moulded in their own processes of spiritual and literary strivings, they were not much affected by Chaitanya's sentimental cult. Orissa, as already stated before, has had a religious culture of her own,—an indefinable combination of the Vedic, the Buddhistic, the Aboriginal and the Tantric strands of thought, all being symbolised in the single personality of Lord Jagannatha of Puri. From widely current legends it has now been ascertained that Jagannatha (see separate article) was originally a tribal Deity of the Savaras. Later on this God has had Buddhistic and Brahmanic metamorphoses also, in which evolutionary stage he lasts till today. As a Brahmanic God, Lord Jagannatha represents the reappearance of Krishna, in Kali Yuga. So, it is the Krishna-cult that has turned into Jagannatha-cult in Orissa. And the beatific realisation, for the devout Oriya, till Chaitanya came on the scene, was looked for, through a combined process of Vedantic self-examination, Buddhistic self-purification as also esoteric Tantric practices. That is what we

find expounded again and again in the writings of Jagannatha and his associates.

But the seductive process of sublimated sex-love as the way to the Divine realisation as preached by Chaitanya, and the cheap austerity of *Kirtan* as practised by him, now began to have the most baneful effects on Orissa's society, literature and politics. Misunderstood by feeble, uneducated and undisciplined minds, the sublimated sex-love as a spiritual practice produced a huge mass of pornographic literature, both religious and secular, that did not exist in Oriya before and has considerably vitiated society in Orissa. In politics also, Chaitanya's stay at Puri hastened Orissa's misfortunes. Charmed by his magnetic personality as well as his religious ecstasies, many high officials of the independent Hindu kingdom of Orissa, resigned their posts to enjoy his divine companionship at Puri and while Krishnadeva Raya of Vijayanagara was knocking at the southern gates of the empire, King Prataparudra of Orissa was himself spending sleepless nights in his palace at Cuttack, sending emissaries to Chaitanya at Puri, to be favoured with a *darsan*. And thus the inevitable happened. Orissa was soon trampled under the feet of invaders after centuries of glorious and virile resistance. And after this, we reach the second period in Oriya literature with the new background of a subjugated and dismembered political existence.

THE AGE OF RHETORIC POETRY

In the second or medieval period which extends down to modern times, the contrast between what had been produced before and what follows, is as between the daylight and the light from coloured electric bulbs. Gone are the days of naturalness and unpolished vitality, of interest in the charms of Nature and the problems of Man, and the unrestricted enterprises in diction. The nation being subjugated and ruled by

foreigners and subjected to continuous famines and interneccine wars, Saraswati now leaves the cottages of free citizens and courts the patronage of small feudal chiefs, who, having lost all opportunities of independent action, now took up literature as a pastime, along with hunting and harem and occasional raids to neighbouring territories. Versification now tended to be more and more artificial and the more twisted, more incomprehensible and lexicographical it was, the greater was the credit for the poet. There are, of course, redeeming exceptions, as always there are in any period, in whose works we find the natural human emotions expressed in simple, direct, and beautifully alliterative musical lines. But, by and large, with all poets, major and minor, throughout this period, the other marked tendency was, to tag the toy of poetical art to the wings of music. That has been the real saving grace of this period and has indeed helped the survival of many pieces in the memory of the race which should have long been buried deep in oblivion, with their own weights of pedantries and artificialities.

UPENDRA BHANJA

The poet who dominates this period and in whom all the vices and virtues of the Age are typified, is Upendra Bhanja, who, having been deprived of the throne of his little principality of Ghumusara in Ganjam District, through family feuds, was forced to spend the life of an exile in a neighbouring State, and, not having any serious vocation like Tagore, produced an enormous amount of poetry, or rather verse. Schooled by court pedants, Upendra seems to have been deeply impressed in his receptive years with the verbal jugglery in decadent Sanskrit poetry. To recreate that in Oriya, became his life-long passion. He has left behind a small amount of lyrics and poems in the natural language of poetry expressing the instinctive reactions in the human heart to the charms of

Nature and of the fair sex, indicating what the poet was actually capable of. But that sort of achievement must have been thought puerile by the dry-as-dusts of the royal courts and unbecoming of an aristocrat, not betraying much erudition and Upendra's major efforts were devoted to the successive creation of *Kavyas*, each more difficult to understand than the previous one, on account of the artificialities of diction and intricacies of versification, that he deliberately adopted to prove his uniqueness. He composed the entire *Ramayana*, using a new metre for each canto and all through this wonderful epic not only do the first lines begin with the letter 'Ba', but the number of the stanzas in each canto is a figure that, in writing, begins with that letter, and the name of the book *Baidehisa Bilas* is an alliteration of 'Ba's, the epic being also said to have been completed in '*Bara-Masa*' or twelve months, in keeping with the verbal symmetry. He wrote descriptions of seasons in verses, of which if you take away the first letter, they mean the summer and if you take away the second, it will mean the rains, and so on. All things considered, Upendra may be said to have reached the very acme of craftsmanship in word-jugglery in the entire Indian literature. He has used all the metres, simple and complex, that were then prevalent in Oriya, with consummate skill and has invented also some of his own. Upendra may be said also to be the father of songs in Oriya. None have excelled him so far, in creating that dreamland of youthful romance, high-lighting the voluptuous sex-love. This extraordinary power of his, for painting erotic love, combined with an equally extraordinary power of verbal jugglery has enabled Upendra to exercise a spell over the masses and classes in Orissa which is not warranted by his achievements in real creative excellence. His followers and imitators in the language are not only numerous, but their line continues even today.

THE SINGERS

But when we keep Upendra and his bizarre standards of artificialities out of the picture, we come across the fountains of true poetry in a large number of places even in this supposedly barren period in Oriya literature. Great among the numerous poets of the period, Abhimanyu Samantasinghar, Dinakrushna Dasa and Kavisurya Baladeva, who, in spite of attempts at the tentacled, lexicographic pedantries and conventional techniques, have left behind a store of poetry which still keep the masses in Orissa enthralled through enchanting music in their alliterative lines, as well as common human passions. The craze for Sanskritisation of Oriya, however, had gone so far in this period that Kavisurya Baladeva wrote his famous "*Kishore Chandrananda Champu*", half in Sanskrit, and half in Oriya. (For the more detailed achievements of Baladeva Rath and Gopalkrushna Patnaik, please refer to the separate article in this book—"The Songs of Orissa That Are Danced Away.") The flower of Radhakrushna cult in Orissa, however, was Gopalkrushna Patnaik of Paralakhemundi. A true *Bhakta*, Gopalkrushna has poured out his soul in lyrics, wet with emotional devotion and bright with sublimated feelings. He is of the class to which Vidyapati and Mirabai belong,—in some of his songs the echoes of his unknown comrades being distinctly heard. In the songs of Gopalkrushna and in the poetry of Abhimanyu Samantasinghar, Oriya language has acquired ethereal qualities, not repeated again so far. In the hands of these masters the language may be said to have reached a beatific consummation.

THE MONOTHEISTIC ABORIGINAL

In contrast to these charming lyricists of Radhakrushna cult, stands alone and unique, but of the same stature, the blind, Khond Poet Bhima Bhoi, (see separate chapter) the flower of the monotheistic Alekha cult, (see separate article) of Orissa. Bhoi may

be said to be the finest contribution of Buddhism to Oriya literature, just as the other singers are of Vaishnavism. The Alekha cult to which Bhima Bhoi belonged was a sort of revival of Buddhism which seems to have remained underground as the basic national faith of the Oriyas since the days of Asoka.

THE UNIQUE WAR-POEM

Unique not only in this period, but in the entire Oriya literature and fit to be counted among the very few that exist in the entire Indian literatures in the same category, and standing all by himself, is Brajanath Badajena, the poet of *Samara Taranga* or 'Waves of War.' The poet belonged to Dhenkanal State and perhaps personally participated in the action against Maratha invasions of his mother-State. The Marathas were repulsed and the poet took up this contemporary topical subject, for writing a stirring war-poem. He has given minute descriptions of militaristic details, with a magnificent address to the cowardly and the hesitant, in the vigorous and uncouth phraseology of a soldier (see Chapter III for greater detail). The cantos of this little volume but a great book, are written in various heroic metres, and where Oriya has proved inadequate, the poet has freely used Hindustani and even Marathi.

By the time Gopalkrushna and Bhima Bhoi and Badajena had passed away, English education had already been introduced in the country, although they themselves lived and died quite unaffected by anything Western. Quite unknown to these great medieval poets, however, the dawn of the modern period had set in and new notes were already heard from newly arrived birds. It is a pity that the old and the new never met.

MODERN PERIOD

The modern period is a complete break-away from the medieval, though not from the old. The

contact of the West helped to reorient the vision and the outlook of the Indian people and gave them an entirely new sense of values. This has created all over India a new, virile literature with wide spheres of approach and sensibilities, of which the old masters were absolutely innocent.

But the contact, because of sad historic conditions, came to Orissa rather late and in circumstances most disadvantageous to the Oriya people. The opportunities which made Bengal and Bengali prosperous in so many directions, were not only denied to Oriya or Orissa, their next door neighbours, for nearly two centuries, but are not available to them even today.

It is only for the last few years that the Oriyas have had a State of their own. For four centuries from the day Orissa lost her independence in the last quarter of the sixteenth century to only ten years before the British left India, Orissa and the Oriyas lay dismembered in four different provinces, a down-trodden and ruthlessly exploited minority in each. Though this unhappy phase is now ended, the bitter memories remain, as well as after-effects of amputation and exploitation as described in the very first chapter of this book. This fact has to be mentioned, because it helps one to understand the background of modern Orissa. Modern Oriya literature was born in the throes of, so to say, a 'resistance movement.' The spearhead of this Oriya resistance against forces of deliberate genocide and exploitation from Big Brothers, was an extraordinarily able and clever man who is deservedly worshipped today as the father not only of the modern Oriya literature, but of the Modern Oriya Nation.

This man, Fakirmohana Senapati (1843-1918), true to his family name, became the real 'General' of modern Oriya literature. But the total renaissance in Oriya literature in the late 19th century was not the work of Fakirmohana alone, but of a magnificent Trio, unique

in literature of any country, in that, without the least mutual jealousy or malice that is taken for granted among poets, artist and litterateurs all the world over, these three literary heroes of Orissa worked like a coherent and co-operative team, as though on a planned project, each complementing the other and each on the most heartening social and emotional relationship with the other two.

(For more detailed biographical treatment of this wonderful Trio, Fakirmohana, Radhanath and Madhusudan and their contributions, please refer to the second part of this book,

BARDS FROM VILLAGES

Radhanatha, Fakirmohana and Madhusudana had each a host of followers. Limitations of space make it impossible to discuss all or even some of them. But two among this host demand special mention, one for the originality and freshness of approach in his slender contributions, and the other for the extraordinary excellence of his workmanship, both hailing from the distant countryside.

Nandakishore Bala, while writing much in imitation of Radhanatha and Madhusudana, was essentially the poet of the Orissa village and successfully brought folk-rhymes and folk traditions into the spheres of modern lyric. His *Palli-chitra* (Rural Vignettes) generates deep nostalgic feeling in the heart of every Oriya for that quiet, picturesque, self-contained, pious, rural existence that is lost beyond recovery due to the impact of the modern civilisation. His *Nana Baya-gita* (Many Crazy Rhymes) remains the most important collection of children's verses in Oriya so far.

Gangadhar Meher, the poor weaver-poet of Sambalpur, is remarkable for his brilliant craftsmanship as a poet. His range of studies was small, being poorly educated. But he brought to the old mythological subjects a new magic and flavour, a new music in the lines, a new fineness in the rhymes, a new vision and realism in the characters, that was not seen or heard before in Orissa. Like the world-famous textiles of Sambalpur, which he was trained to produce for a living by heredity, Meher treated poetry also as a living, colourful and picturesque art. Each of his Kavya is like a scroll of Chinese painting, vibrating with feelings, colours and situations. His field was limited but within those small boundaries he created Edens. A very large number of his couplets and quatrains have gone into common parlance and his versification has remained the norm of finest poetic rhythm in Oriya, so far. Of all the Oriya poets past and present, his rhymings are the most perfect and the most musical. His Sita in his famous Kavya *Tapaswini* is a superb creation in feminine ideal.

THE SATYABADI SCHOOL

Although the camp-followers of Radhanatha and Madhusudan carried on their tradition well into the third decade of this century, their influence as literary forces practically ended in the first decade, yielding imperceptibly to a new generation of intellectuals.

In 1903, exactly one hundred years after the British occupation of Orissa, was formed the Utkal Sammilani (Convention of the Utkalas) on whose platform the princes and the people of Orissa

5. See Chapter XX.

of all ranks rubbed shoulders, in a united demand for unification of the Oriya-speaking tracts that lay scattered in four different provinces. This was the earliest demand in India, for a homogeneous linguistic State. From 1903 to the end of the first World War and advent of Gandhiji and his Non-co-operation Movement, this was the deepest dream and the most potent aspiration of the Oriyas. This national passion found effective expression in the twin noble souls of Madhusudana Das and Gopabandu Das⁸. The letter's poetry, prose and oratory swayed the masses of Orissa as never before nor since. His words sounded as though coming out of the inmost heart of a whole people. He founded a Vihara, a garden-school, at Sakhigopal near Puri, where highly educated scholars like Pandits Nilakantha Das, Godavarish Mishra and Krupasindhu Mishra worked on small pittances, foregoing lucrative jobs, under an alien government, which they could have got for the asking. This school was for about a decade, the cultural centre of Orissa. The entire staff, under the inspiring leadership of Pandit Gopabandhu, was devoted to reconstructing an ancient but fallen nation through education and literature. Essentially, however, it was a revivalist movement, harking people back to Vedic culture, the ideal of simple living and high thinking. But these ideals have never been very conspicuous in the life of any member of the band, except in that of the great leader. So, as a moral force in the national life, this institution left no mark at all. Its lasting memorial lies, however, in the little bunch of good literature that it produced during its short existence. In the pages of the monthly *Satyabadi* (The Truthful) and in the columns of the weekly *Samaj* that he founded, Gopabandhu poured out his passionate feelings, aspirations and soulful benedictions, in a style of prose that, for dignity, chasteness, elegance and the nobility of thought

See separate articles.

with a genuine, poetic flavour, remains unrivalled in Oriya so far. His "Soliloquy of a Prisoner" written in Hazaribag jail is as widely known as folk-poetry.

Pandit Nilakantha Das preached the Vedic ideal in his prose masterpiece—*Arya Jivana* (Aryan life), in the befittingly recondite style of a Pandit. He also wrote a virile and wildly beautiful *Kavya* on Konarka, prefaced by a scintillating and thought-provoking resume of Orissa's history through the dreams of the students of the *Satyabadi Vihar* whom he had taken there for an educational trip. Pandit Krupasindhu Mishra of the *Satyabadi* school produced first-class historical literature in his two books *Konarka* and *Barabati*. And Pandit Godavarish Mishra, another brilliant man in the band, wrote stirring patriotic plays, poems and matchless ballads. All told, this is the finest little bunch of literary achievement collectively produced so far, in Orissa. Whatever be the reasons for the disappearance of the *Satyabadi* School, there is no doubt that it has left a void in the national life of Orissa that has not yet been filled up. During its short span of life it was to Orissa what Santiniketan has been to Bengal.

DRAMA AND THE THEATRE

During these years the drama was slowly building itself up as not only a respectable branch of literature but also as part of the national life of Orissa. It was born out of patriotism, as an answer to the challenge of Bengali plays staged by the Bengali societies in Orissa. Very soon, Ramasankar Ray, Kamapala Misra, Vikaricharana Patnaik and Gobinda Surdeo gradually made the Oriya theatre a strong and respected influence in the country, making the stage not only a place for amusement, but also a pulpit for social reforms as well as platform for national regeneration. While Bengali playwrights had to search the annals of Rajasthan and Maharashtra for materials of their historical plays, their Orissan counterparts found

adequate material in the those of Orissa's—the heroic kings Kharavela, Kapilendra, Purusottama and Anangabhima, under whose banners the Oriyas had once conquered and ruled empires. This was naturally a favourite look-back for a long-dismembered race like the Oriyas.

During the same period, Vaishnav Pani revolutionised the village-drama in the whole of rural Orissa, by modernising "Yatras," making them reflect contemporary conditions and bringing them closer to a formal stage-play, while retaining their charming operatic quality. What this talented man has accomplished single-handed in Orissa's village may well be a unique record in the whole of modern India.

GANDHI, TAGORE AND THE "GREENS"

By this time the political storm of Gandhian movement had swept the country. Pandit Gopabandhu and his band of educators plunged into the national resistance movement forgetting the ancient demand of the Oriyas for a united existence and breaking up even the *Satyabadi Vihar*, their most expectant cultural creation, for the sudden discovery that it was, after all, the seat of "Satanic" English education ! It was one fo the silliest acts of cultural vandalism ever committed. Orissa lost the only cultural centre it ever had, after the temple of Jagannatha, which, however, had long ceased to be so, for many reasons. The pandits and poets of the flourishing sylvan Academy were now made to look after spinning centres at different places instead of writing plays and poems which was their *Swadharma*. They were willy-nilly dragged into politics, elections, and squabbles for party-positions. Apart from potentially fertile lives thus wasted and frustrated, this cultural debacle created a break, a vacuum, in the intellectual life of Orissa, whose disastrous effects have not yet been properly remedied.

With the Satyabadi group thus out of the picture, a group of undergraduates of the Ravenshaw College, Cuttack, came out with some new literary haberdashery with Bengal trademarks. At that time Rabindranath was at the peak of his fame and popularity. It is true that Tagore's impact on readers is irresistible. But those young Oriya enthusiasts let themselves be swept off their feet with the heady Tagore-wine. Nor did they bring anything really valuable into the rich ancient Oriya literature from the great storehouse of wisdom and poetry that Tagore really is. They only tried to imitate a few of his sensational non-essential externals such as his new rhyme-schemes, his apparent lack of logic and consistency and a little obscurantism of which he is often wrongly accused. The imitators styled themselves as *Sabujas* or 'Greens', borrowing the very same nomenclature which Tagore and Pramatha Chowdhury had coined and publicised in Bengal at one time, as a counterblast to the senile and the narrowly orthodox in Bengal society.

The group however was a sensation in Orissa's literary world for about six years, on account of the novel wares they served, although every reader knew their wares to be mostly imported stuff, without roots in the soil of Orissa. They set up their own publishing firm also, called *Sabuja Sahitya Samiti* (The Society of Green Letters). But the group vanished as suddenly as it had risen. In too short a time the Greens became yellow.

The Greens, nevertheless, exercised some influence on the younger generation for at least two decades. They made a few Tagorean rhyme-schemes stay in Oriya literature in amity with the indigenous ones. Many poems of Anandasankar Roy and Baikunthanath Patnaik of the group, written in those early days are accepted by all critics as welcome additions to the treasury of the Oriya language. In these poems we

do indeed enter a new world of magic and word-music, of new visions of Love, Beauty and Life, and of new imageries, apart from new-fangled rhythms which had sounded so strange and outlandish to the ears of the cultured Oriyas, attuned to the versepatterns of the long line of their own poets from Sarala Das to Gangadhar Meher or Nilakantha Das whose creations were indigenous products of the soil, true to the idiom of the language and the soul of the people. The novel, *Basanti*, collectively written by the group, was once a sensation and had some influence on young novelists coming up soon after. Kalindicharan Panigrahi's novel "Matira Manisha" (Man of the soil) written in the heyday of the group and some of his stories have been deservedly popular.

THE CONTEMPORARY SCENE

"PEOPLE'S POETS"

Close on the heels of the Greens came the Socialists and Communists, by about the mid-thirties of this century. With them, the shadows of Freud and Walt Whitman and Karl Marx entered Orissa literature. Though Orissa was and even today is, a predominantly agricultural state and till yesterday, her only industry consisted of only a few rice-mills, these harbingers of the New Age wrote fiery, violent poems on class-war which in no sense did exist in Orissa. Among a host of such leftist writers, however, the one who might be called talented is. Shri Sachi Routroy whose "Pallishree" (Beauties of the village) has been deservedly popular and some of whose short stories and some poems reflecting the frustration of modern life are likely to survive. But with the Leftists also came into the arena of Orissa literature, for the first time, all the evils of party politics, of labels and slogans. Whosoever showed the slightest disrespect for their banners, was doomed. The label was the

main thing in literary evaluation. They styled themselves as "People's Poets" or "Progressives" with fellow-travellers and party mouth-pieces, to boost them and their theories, although the jargon they paraded unashamedly, would require nothing but Soviet hammers to break them to extract whatever precious little sense there was at all. But these socialistic fires also gradually died down, although the ideology itself has by now become the common fare. The socialistic tendencies in writings are there, in prose and poetry, but the screaming panegyrics of Stalin and Lenin and of the poor rickshaw-wala who, quite unknown to himself, became the only fit hero for short stories, are no longer the usual stuff in current literature, as it was a few years back. Now, shadows of Eliots and Ezra Pounds seem to walk the stage, as we come across month after month, just bald prose deliberately made incoherent and illogical and cut into verse-form to enlighten us the benighted.

But there are other writers, most fortunately, who for the last thirty years or so, through the rise and fall of successive literary sensations, are courageously resisting any political affiliation, right or left, and have been patiently devoting themselves to literary culture as such. To this devoted group belong Shri Ananta Prasada Panda who, though not dazzling, has been shedding a quiet and steady light of his own, bringing to light in an unsophisticated style a typical middleclass man's attitude to problems of contemporary life, through devotional poems and particularly stories and novels highlighting in them the unique value of the co-operative movement as a solvent to much of our social vexations, Shri Panda having been a top-ranking officer of the co-operative department of the State Government of Orissa. To this belongs also Shri Radhamohan Gadnayak, who is celebrated in Orissa for his poems of beauty and love and heroic anecdotes in faultless rhymes as well as for his deep study of

old literature and the art and science of metres. To this band belong also Shri Krushna Chandra Tripathy, who from his quiet rural retreat has been producing anthologies, year after year, without waiting for public approval. The late Godavarish Mahapatra had been a monthly sensation in Orissa continuously for thirty years or so, for his widely read satirical monthly *Niankhunta* (The Poker), lapsing, unfortunately, however, often into personal character-assassination. Mahapatra's immortality however, remains assured through some of his short stories and some of his child-poems and short verse satires.

But, on the whole, the market for poetry has been on the decline, with the exception of those of one or two poets. The last decade in Orissa has been one predominantly of novels and plays.

FICTION AND DRAMA

After Fakirmohan, there was a long void in novels in Orissa. Though a dozen or so did keep coming out every year, they were not particularly remarkable. The phase next to Senapati's in fictional literature was marked by the Greens, with two of their novels *Basanti*, and *Matira Minisha* already referred to above. In the last few years or so, however, there has been a flow-tide of fiction in Oriya literature, with the rise of the Mahanty brothers—Gopinatha and Kanhucharan, and Nityananda Mohapatra, Patnaiks Rajakishore and Bibhuti and others. The cheap thrillers apart, which are now a problem in Orissa as elsewhere, we do find a serious purpose in the novels of Kanhucharan, Gopinath and Nityananda. Gopinath has gone to Adivasis for exploring new fields, while Kanhucharan, his elder brother, is busy with social problems. So was Nityananda, though not with much success. The Mahanty brothers have turned out to be phenomenally prolific in their productivity.

After the formation of Orissa as a separate state, the stage received an impetus to establish itself as a permanent feature in the flourishing urban life of Cuttack. Now, there are at least three live and thriving permanent theatres in Orissa, one of them the "Janata" being a co-operative organisation of the artistes themselves. The Oriya playwrights are finding their profession quite lucrative. Plays are in as great demand as novels. The tradition of the Oriya drama was kept unbroken by Shri Aswinikumar Ghosh and Shri Kalicharan Patnaik from the point where Pandit Godavarish Mishra and Govinda Surdeo left it. The days of the mythological and historical plays are over, Now the social plays rule the stage.

Prose, in general, may be considered to be fairly high-developed in Oriya, thanks to the novels of Ramasankar Roy, Fakirmohana and their successors as well as to the essays of Shri Ratnakar Pati,shri Bipinbihari Roy, Pandit Nilakantha Das and Shri Sasibhusan Roy (son of Shri Radhanath Roy) and to the biting satires of Shri Gopal Chandra Praharaj and the poetry-charged essays and addresses of Pandit Gopabandhu Das. The great lack of scientific content is also being rapidly filled up. The publication of the *Purnachandra Oriya Bhasakosha* by the late Gopal Chandra Praharaj and recently that of the Oriya Encyclopaedia, under the auspices of the Utkal University, are landmarks in the development of scholastic literature.

Orissa had some notable women writers in old and medieval times, and we have some in modern time too. Of them, to deserve special mention for their undoubtedly talent. The late Dr. Kuntala Kumari Sabat who lived and died at Delhi, was a sensation in her times as a poet, a novelist and a patriot. At present Srimati Bidyutprava's lyrics appear outstanding for their natural flow, faultless rhymes and vivid imageries as well as Shrimati Tulshi's for their sobriety, Shrimati

Brahmotri's for warm feelings and Shrimati Manorama Mohapatra's for true feminist touches.

The picture of Oriya literature, on the whole, is brighter than it was before the formation of Orissa as a separate State. Till the thirties of this century Orissa was content with only one or two weekly papers. Now there are half a dozen dailies. There are nearly a dozen monthly magazines, in place of one or two just a decade back, though none is up to the standard once reached by the *utkal sahitya* of Viswanath Kar or the *satyabadi* of Pandit Gopabandhu Das. Book trade in Orissa, on the whole, now offers, however, prosperous lines of business for small investments and is rapidly expanding.⁷

7. For Orissa's contribution to sanskrit literature, See Appendix II;

CHAPTER VIII

ORISSA'S OWN DANCE-STYLES

As far back as the first century B. C. the capital of the Orissa (Kalinga) empire, which stood on almost the same soil as the present capital Bhubaneswar, was a centre of dance, music and theatricals. Unique as a historical record in the whole of India, the Hathigumpha inscription of Emperor Kharavel of the 1st. century B. C. makes proud mention of this aspect of the national life of the Oriya people. In a document palpably meant for mass-communication of the king's munificence and military glory, the royal proclamation states : "In his third regnal year, the King Kharavela, who himself was a master of dance and music, entertained the citizen by organising wrestling matches, dances as well as musical and theatrical performances,"

And this two-thousand-year-old statement may be taken to be in perfect keeping with the national character of the Oriyas even today, in spite of admitted degeneration and decadence. The Oriyas are now definitely a race of weaklings. They have completely forgotten their old tradition of stamina-giving physical culture which was universal throughout the land, till yesterday. Then every village had its own akhada where every male child was given a graded course of physical training over years, making his soft limbs tough and mobile for life. The "wrestling matches", which Kharavela's royal proclamation so gleefully mentions, were an everyday sight in Orissa's fifty thousand villages not long ago. Similarly, the residents of Orissa's sacred Brahmin villages, the unique sasanas, have forgotten their devotion to Sanskrit studies, for which the ancient *rajas* of Orissa

CHAPTER-VIII

ORISSA'S OWN DANCE-STYLES

The following eight pictures demonstrate the unique and age-old dance-traditions of the Oriya people.



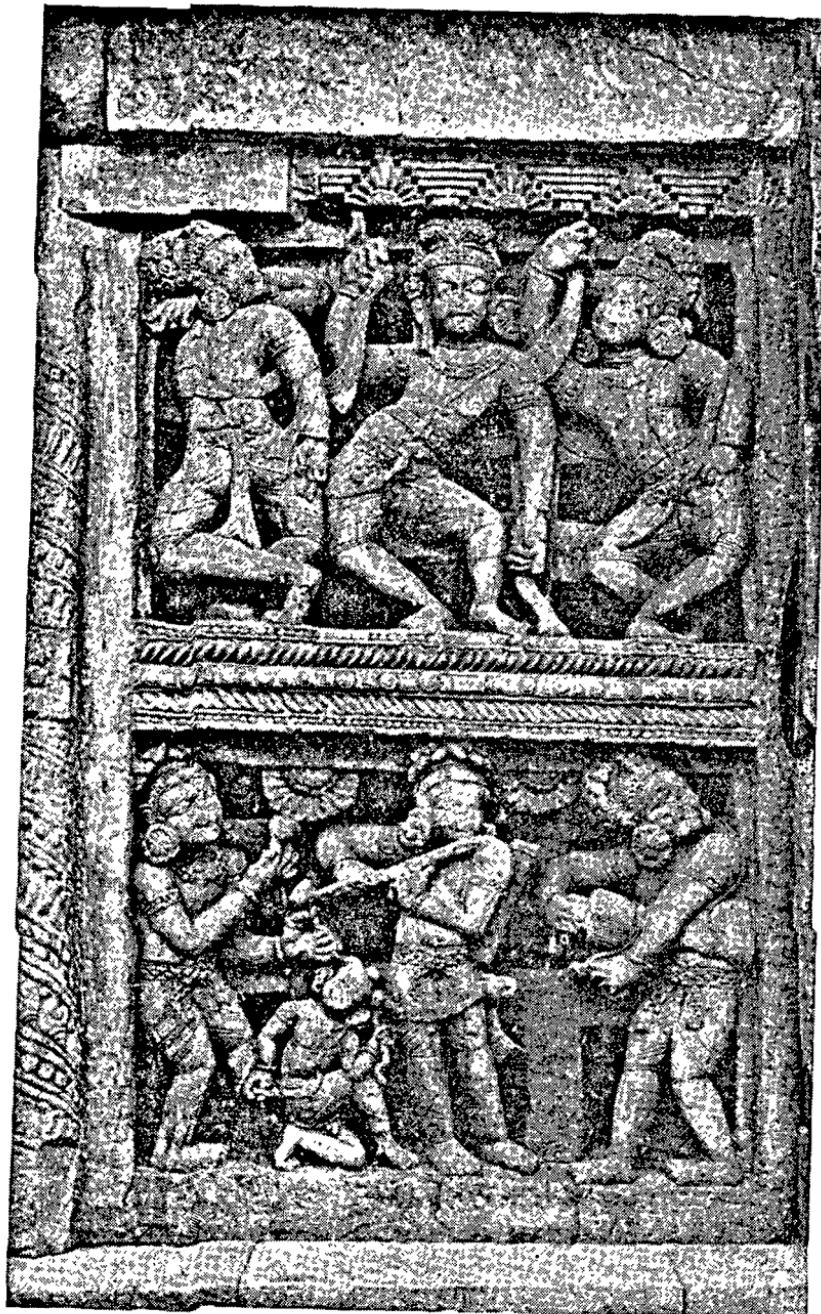
The earliest sculpture (1st. century B. C.) in India of a Hindu Theatre, with a dancing ballerina on the stage and with accompanists behind. This was first brought to light from one of the obscure friezes on a pillar of one of the caves of Udayagiri (near Bhubaneswar) by the late celebrated Hungarian Art-critic and Indologist, Dr. Charles Fabri.



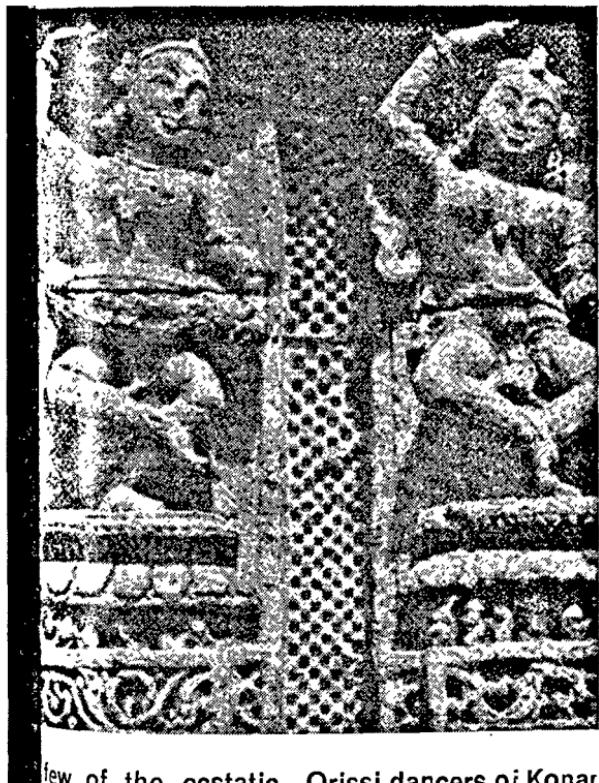
By the sixth century A. D. or so, dance that was purely secular in the first century B. C. as depicted in a bas-relief frieze in a Khandagiri cave, had become part of sacred rituals in temples and monasteries all over Orissa. Here is Baudhha-Tantrik Heruka from Ratnagiri (6th-7th A.D.) dancing her religious ecstacies away. Soon, Dance Halls became part of temple-complexes all over Orissa.



The Dancing Nataraja (Shiva) in the individualistic
Orissan style on one of the temples of Bhubaneswar.
(12th century)

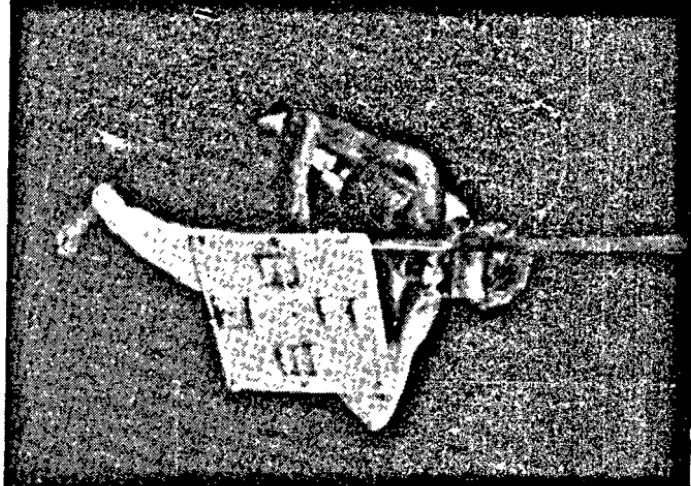


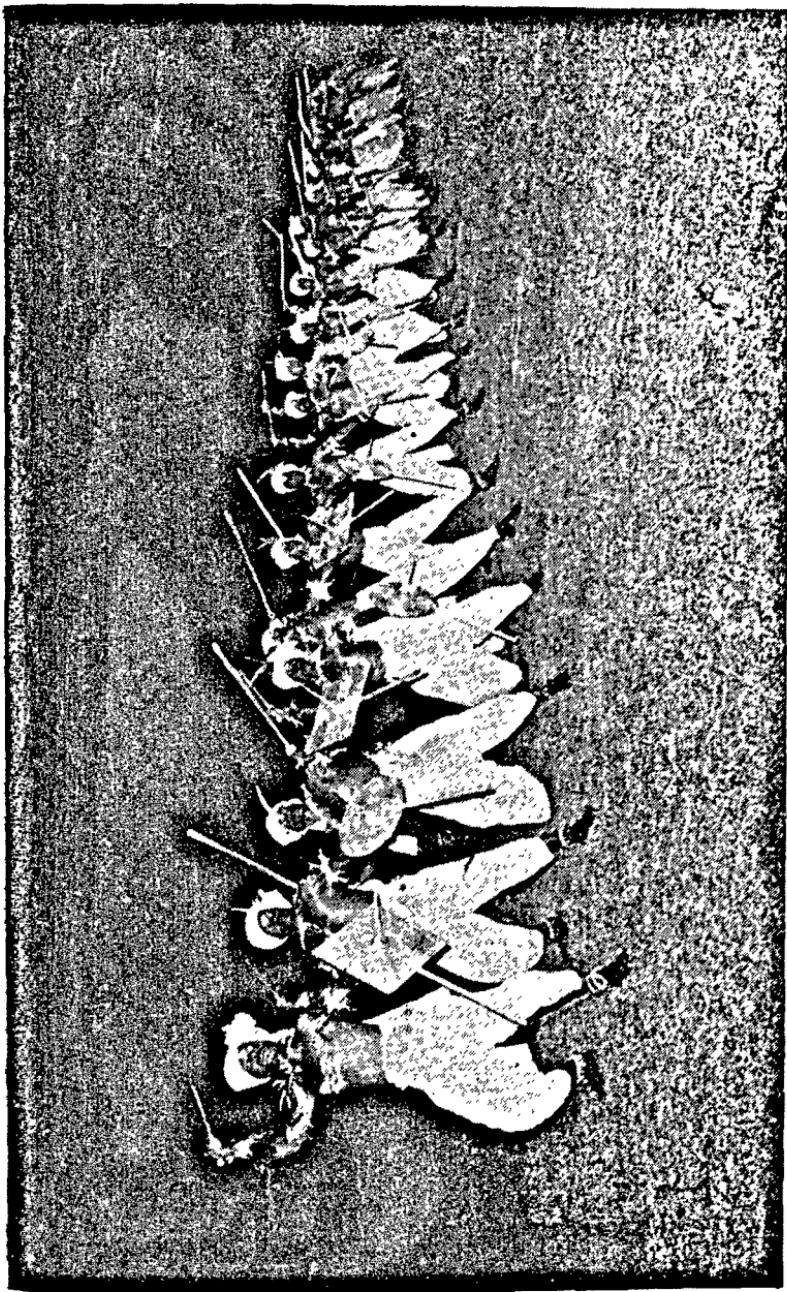
The merry dancers of Mukteswar Temple (7th century A.D.), Bhubaneswar, which Percy Brown describes as undoubtedly the work of a genius.



A few of the ecstatic Orissi dancers of Konarka.

Different significant poses of the virile Chhau Dance of Orissa. (By the courtesy of the author's young poetfriend Jibanananda Fani who has made a special study of this glorious art of his home-district of Mayurbhanj)





A stylised military procession as part of a Chhau ballet,

These Odissi Dance poses carefully drawn on palm-leaves, as illustration to texts, along with tell-tale dance-sculpture on the walls of Konarka and other well-known Orissan Temples, reveal that, centuries back, Orissa's own dance style had already developed its final classical stylisation and maturity.



had made such thoughtful material arrangements. But what still remains of the ancient culture of the Oriyas as an integral part of their national behaviour, is their love of dances, songs and theatricals. Incalculably impoverished though the Oriyas are, compared to their general prosperity before the advent of the British, a visitor to any important village in Orissa may be surprised to find a street-play set up by the villagers, in an hour's notice. Any modern man will be astounded to find how the semi-starved Oriya villagers gladly contribute their mites for hiring a celebrated dance or theatrical party, for having the rare aesthetic-spiritual joy for a night, caring little for the morrow's food for the family. And the dumb silence in which the illiterate Oriya peasantry, otherwise a noisy, loud-mouthed lot, sits out whole nights for such cultural performances, is truly amazing.

DISCOVERY OF ODISSI

No wonder then, that the poor but innately artistic Oriyas had developed dance-styles of their own, as they had developed also their own individual styles in painting, sculpture, architecture and music, completely unrelated to what their neighbours all around, had.

But the Oriyas had lost faith in themselves and their grand national heritage, because of suppressed national existence for the last two centuries, thanks to their big brothers all around, who had grown vociferous, powerful and aggressive, with the initial advantages of the British rule. And so some most graceful and individualistic dance-arts of India, like many other sister-arts, in which the Oriyas had exhibited remarkable technical insight, excellence and imagination, remained neglected and unknown. The Oriyas should therefore be eternally grateful to that great discerning Western Indologist and art-critic, Dr. Charles Fabri, who, after having witnessed the

till-then-unknown dance-form, now known as "Odissi", in an Inter-University Youth Festival at Delhi in 1953, immediately proclaimed its peculiar aesthetic value and importance in the Press.

Dr. Fabri says : "When I first wrote of Orissi (the same as Odissi) and ventured to call it one of the most perfect classical systems of Indian dancing surviving, I met incredulous people who shook their heads dubiously. No one ever heard of it and as far as I know I was the first person ever to print the name 'Odissi dance' How is it that so splendid a system of dancing remained so long unknown to all, except the Orissans ? Perhaps, the Orissans are not very vocal..... I have many reasons to conclude that the Bharata Natya of today is a more evolved form because it is a later development ; whilst I have also reasons to conclude that Odissi is a more pristine, a more carefully-preserved primitive form of *natya* and is nearer to the ancient Indian classic temple-dancing as it was known 700 or more years ago. The discovery of Odissi should be hailed as one of the great events in recovering a much lost heritage".¹

AN ANCIENT ART

That this indigenous dance-art of Orissa is no offshoot of something found among her neighbours but is as ancient as Orissa's world-famous architectural and sculptural glory, is amply borne out by the irrefutable evidence of several historic structures and inscriptions.

We cannot expect a contrite and ascetic Asoka, whom Orissa, after the famous Kalinga War, had converted to Buddhism, to have left any signs of national merriment during his reign. But soon after Asoka, Kalinga (Orissa) appears

to have not only got back its political independence but also gone back to her pre-Asokan faith of Jainism. It is a Jinanatha, a Jaina god, who probably developed into Jagannatha.

The Jaina king Kharavela, in bold contrast to his ascetic royal predecessor Asoka, loved life, glorying in military achievements as well as in exhibitions of social arts, as described above. In one of the bas-reliefs on the inner walls of his two-storeyed meditational cave-palace on the Udayagiri hill, near Bhubaneswar, Kharavela is seen witnessing some performance with a queen on either side. On another frieze round a verandah-pillar of the same structure Dr. Charles Fabri has discovered the earliest sculptural representation of a theatre, as described in Bharata's *Natyashastra*, with a ballerina dancing, a band of instrumentalists giving her the necessary accompaniment, with gusto.

BUDDHIST ORIGIN

Though it cannot be asserted that the dance of the 1st. century B.C., as represented in Kharavela's cave-palace at Udayagiri, is the Odissi dance of today, some ancestral link, naturally grown thin with the passing of twenty centuries and undefinable today for lack of records, cannot be dismissed altogether, as illogical or hyperbolical. Otherwise, what we come across in the next stage of Orissan temple-art, after a tantalising blank of nearly five centuries, cannot be explained. While the first Hindu renaissance in northern India under the Guptas was blazing brightly, there was the first flowering of national life of the Oriyas under the Bhaumas through the warm, joyous and hopeful faith of Mahayana

Buddhism. And in the recently excavated ruins of the Ratnagiri *mahavihara* in the district of Cuttack, dated 6th century A. D., we are surprised to find, among superb figures of the Buddha and Mahayanic deities, representations of dance with distinctive Odissi—dance touches.

And so, rightly says Dr. Nabin Kumar Sahu, a specialist on Buddhism in Orissa : "With the blossoming of Mahayanism, the religion of the Buddha considerably stepped down to the stage of the common man, from its high pedestal of exclusionism. Orissa, as the cradle of Mahayana, is known to have evolved an intensely human ideal in her socio-religious system and presented it in tangible forms through literature, art and stone-masonry.....Mahayana Buddhism, in embrace with Tantric idealism, had its stronghold in Orissa at the Assia range of hills, including Udayagiri, Lalitagiri, Ratnagiri and Alatigiri, the *Chatuspitha Parvata*, representing the four celebrated *pithas* : Uddiyana, Purnagiri, Kamakhya and Sirihatta. Buddhism, then a supremely aesthetic religion, expressed itself not only in architectural and iconographic plasticity, but also in artistic excellence of dancing and music for serving the purposes of innumerable devotees and art connoisseurs. The art of dancing adumbrated by the Buddhists can be found today in visible form at various art-centres of Orissa."

Dr. Sahu adds : "Buddhism and Saivism evolved a mystic idealism of dancing by acting and reacting against one another, in course of several centuries....The Saivite dance is based on the *Natyashastra*, composed by the sage Bharata and commented upon by Abhinava Gupta, the celebrated Saiva scholar of Kashmir. But the Buddhist dance was originally inspired by *Theragathas* and *Therigathas* and later on became invigorated by the writings of Buddhaghosha

and others. The remarkable advancement in dance in Buddhism can be noticed in Vajrayanic phase of its development.....It is in this background of the dance culture of Orissa that the antiquity of Odissi dance may well be sought for. The Odissi dance with its *hastapracharas*, *mudras* and *bhangas* has a characteristic of its own which finds a greater resemblance with the dance depicted in the Buddhist panels and icons of Orissa than that engraved in the grilles of the Saivite temples noted above. Even the costumes and ornaments of the Buddhist dancers have striking similarity with those of the Odissi dancers".³

HEYDAY OF THE ART UNDER KESARI KINGS

However, the Kesari kings of Orissa, who succeeded the Bhaumas and brought a Brahminical revival in about the 7th century, appear to have developed Orissa's dance-styles to perfection. Being Siva-worshippers, the Kesaris had absolutely no religious scruple in taking up the threads of dance and music as temple rites, which had previously been accepted by the Buddhists in their *Viharas*. For, unlike the Buddha, his Hindu counter-part, Siva, the new national deity of Orissa, was a master-dancer himself, frequently depicted as regaling men and gods with dances, either solo or in the company of his beauteous consort, Parvati. To many, he is Nataraja, the lord of dancers. No wonder, therefore, that the Saivite Kesari kings prided themselves on being dancers, like their divine lord and his family. One Kesari king is unabashedly known as *Nrutya Kesari* or "Kesari, the Dancer". Unique in the whole of India and, may be, in the world, this tradition of kings, queens and members of royal families showing themselves as dancers, is still alive in Orissa. The Raj-family of the

³ Kalavikash Kendra Souvenir, Cuttack, 1958, pp. 7-10.

former Princely State of Sareikala (now unfortunately in Bihar State), celebrated for the masked variety of Chhau dance, another national dance of Orissa, is an irrefutable and glorious illustration. This noble custom, stemming perhaps from the Kesaris, is pleasantly corroborated by the dedicatory inscription of the Ananta-Vasudeva temple at Bhubaneswar. In it the royal patroness, princess Chandrika, sister of king Anangabhima Deva of the Ganga dynasty, which succeeded the Kesaris, is proudly described as "an expert in dancing and one who knows how to play all the known musical instruments".

In nine niches of the Ananta-Vasudeva temple, the artistic princess got sculptured nine lovely *nayikas* in true Odissi dance style, expressing the nine poetical moods of Indian rhetorics, of which only a few have survived up to date.

ORISSA'S OTHER DANCE, CHHAU

Indian dance-art, as we all know, is divided into two broad divisions, *tandava* for males and *lasya* for women. In Orissa, the *tandava* style is represented by the indigenous Chhau dance, the *lasya* variety being represented by what is known today, as Odissi. The Chhau is splendidly amenable to vigorous ballet, whereas Odissi is exquisitely feminine solo. In Orissa's innumerable Paika and Khandayat villages, movingly zestful Paika or military dances are still alive. Chhau is the more elegant development of those spirited male dances, trying to tell a story and associating itself with the Siva-Sakti cult as sources of energy and prosperity. It is masked only in Sareikala, whereas, in all the neighbouring ex-Princely States, such as Mayurbhanji, Nilgiri,

Keonjhar and Bonai, where this dance had been kept alive under royal patronage, it is unmasked. Probably *chhau* is a corruption of the Oriya word *chhauni*, a military camp, and it was perhaps born in war-camps among ancient Oriya soldiers to kill time during periods of lull.

The fact that this dance is closely associated with Siva-Sakti worship, is good enough reason to suppose that it also originated under the Saivite Kesari kings of Orissa.

In 1912 the Chhau dance of Mayurbhanj was performed in Calcutta as part of the reception accorded to Their Majesties King-Emperor George V and Queen-Empress, Mary, by the Government and people of India and it turned out to be the most spectacular part of the whole imperial pageant. *The Statesman* of January 3, 1912, reported : "The dance drew universal appreciation. The Oriya Paika was a great spectacle". And on the same day another newspaper, of Calcutta, *The Englishman*, wrote : "The war dance of the Oriya Paikas, it is understood, was much admired by Their Majesties. The Paikas danced their best and furnished a relief from the monotony of the silent procession."

ORISSAN DANCES AND TEMPLE SCULPTURE

The tempo of temple-building that had been initiated by the Buddhist Bhaumas, was vigorously accelerated by the equally zealous Brahminic Kesaris. It is they who turned Bhubaneswar into the glorious cathedral-city that it has ever remained, down to this day. And on all the temple walls of Bhubaneswar, the discerning onlooker may find innumerable sculptures of dances of both the male and female varieties, which would remind him of one or other of the lovely postures of Odissi or Chhau

as we know them today. Orissa's own variety of Nataraja Siva, distinct from the well-known south Indian one, may be found on almost every temple of Bhubaneswar. Exquisite *danseuses* on the walls of Rajarani, Mukteswara and Brahmeswara may be said to have been dancing the lovely Odissi dance of Orissa, as a dedication to their deities, across all these ten centuries or so !

About the total value and importance of these dance-sculptures on Orissa's temples, vis-a-vis the ancientness and classicality of the Odissi dance, the views of Mr Mohan Khokar, the well-known expert and exponent of Indian dance-art, may be quoted. Says he : "The Odissi dance has found extensive representation in the temple sculpture of Orissa. This is a fact of more importance than is generally realised, for the extent to which and the accuracy with which Odissi dance-poses have been used to provide decorative sculptures of Orissan temples are truly remarkable. There are hundreds of dance-sculptures at Bhubaneswar, Puri and Konarka, apart from those at less important places. Konarka, in particular, has a bewildering variety of dance sculptures ; the *natamandir* alone at this place, has enough carving to make one speak of it as a comprehensive lexicon of Odissi dance. There are of course dance-sculptures on temples in all parts of India, and I happen to have seen a good deal of them. It is my contention that Odissi is the *only* traditional or *shatracic* dance of India which has many of its technical poses and attitudes preserved faithfully and accurately in the form of temple-carvings. Of course, in the South, there is an abundance of temples and of dance imagery, but the poses there, are mostly imaginative..... I do not think there are any temples or carvings in Tamilnad which present, faithfully and accurately, any of the basic poses of Bharata Natya..... Other major dance-forms, such as, Kathakali, Kathak and Manipuri, have

hardly anything of them represented in sculpture. From what I know and from what I have seen, I find that Odissi dance is fairly extensively represented in the temples sculpture of Orissa. And, as most of these temples were built several centuries ago, it becomes evident that the art of Odissi dance must have achieved maturity and perfection even earlier. While seeing samples of Odissi dance and discussing the techniques with *gurus*, I found that there were certain differences of opinion among them regarding the manner in which certain poses were to be executed. Later, when visiting the Orissan temples, I found that there was only one way in which any particular pose was depicted, no matter how many times the same pose was repeated, in one temple or in different temples. The inference is obvious : there is only one correct way of rendering every pose in Odissi, and if that pose is represented in a temple carving, it shows the correct way of presenting it".⁴

DANCE-HALLS OF ORISSAN TEMPLES

Orissan temples consist of four sections viz., the *deula* or the *sanctum sanctorum*, the *bhoga-mandapa* or the hall of offerings, the *nata-mandapa* or the hall of dances and the *jagamohana* or the hall of world-attraction, which, in simple terms, is the hall of the devotees.

But as is evidenced by the oldest extant temple in Orissa, that of Bharateswara at Bhubaneswar, the Orissan temple was, in the beginning, only a single tall, square-angled structure, with a circular top. Later on, this main structure shed its angularities to become gracefully curvilinear and added unto it an all-purpose hall, as in the sixth-century Parsuramewara temple of Bhubaneswar. This innovation seems to have been brought about by the dance-loving Kesaris for presenting dance as a permanent daily rite before

4. *Kelavikash Kendra Souvenir*, Cuttack, 1958, pp. 13-14.

their dear Lord Siva, the Nataraja, the Lord of dancers. Later on, this all-purpose hall seems to have given way to the twin or triple structures of *bhoga-mandapa*, *nata-mandapa* and *jagamohana*. By the time the grand temple of the Sun God was built at Konarka, dance seems to have become so universal a craze in Orissa and so intimate and integral a part of temple rites that king Narasimha Deva had the *natamandira* of the Konarka temple built separately, so that at any time a whole crowd of devotees could witness performances by star Maharis.

THE MAHARI

It was at about this time that *Abhinaya Chandrika*, the classical code of Odissi dance was compiled by Maheswara Mahapatra and the system of female dancers being attracted to temple seems to have been firmly stabilised. A whole colony was built for them at Puri. A Colony-Superintendent (*sahi nayaka*) and a Vigilance Officer (*mina nayaka*) stationed at either end of the colony were supposed to be guarding over their morals. But the strong prohibitive notes of a royal command recently discovered with an old surviving *devadasi* of Puri by Pandit Sadasiva Ratha Sarma clearly prove that the goings-on of the pretty dancers, recruited while young and forced to remain unmarried, had already alarmed the court as well as the public, though the Rajas themselves were the sources of corruption. For, among the six categories of the *deva-dasis* ("maids of the lord"), at least two, the *raja angia* ("they whose bodie are for the king only") and the *gahana mahari* ("those-meant-for-the-inner-apartments"), were certainly not fully dedicated to the sacred service of Jagannath. The very colony of *devadasis* was also called *anga-alasa-patna*, meaning "the place where bodies may enjoy relaxation," thus veiledly providing clandestine sex-pleasure for the non-gods. The

myopic rajas also seldom remembered that what they thought to be their exclusive pleasure was often shared secretly by their officials or even by men-about-town, who could always manipulate ladies, however meticulously guarded. Are we going to believe also that even the Colony-Superintendents and the Vigilance-Officers, stationed at the Devadasi Street of Puri, led immaculate lives with a whole street of lovelies at their command, made devastatingly more seductive with the additional embellishments of music, dance and poetry ?

On the other hand, it seems, that it is their very segregated existence, combined with their secret goings-on under the camouflage of sanctity, that soon led to the whole class being called by the most contemptible term in Orissan Hindu society, *mahari*. It has but one meaning in Oriya, namely, a scavenger-woman, and by no stretch of imagination or etymological twisting, can it have any association with art.

The *devadasi* system was kept alive by random recruitment of young girls, most probably from poor families. That might be another reason also the why the noble art declined. If the system were hereditary, things might have been vastly different. But a *devadasi* was not expected to marry, being supposed to have been wedded to the Lord,—a most hypocritical as well as unnatural and illogical supposition. Naturally enough, immoralities crept in, and a new generation of *devadasis* had to be gathered, at least to prove the ascetic character of the practising ones, if not for anything else. This explains the surprisingly uneven qualities among the few surviving Maharis, though the one this writer saw as a school-boy in the very temple of Jagannatha while listlessly wandering about one winter afternoon about four decades back, was supremely beauteous. She was fully Aryan in complexion, with the lovely tan

of the Puri climate. She wore gold jewellery all over her body and was looking almost like a damsel strayed out of medieval poetry. She danced in absolute silence for about half an hour, to the simple but exciting rhythm of a small *pakhawaj* played on by perhaps her *guru*, an elderly man. The whole performance, was a real piece of aesthetic dedication to the Lord, as she danced right in front of Jagannatha in the *nata-mandira* and just before the Garuda pillar where the great Chaitanya is said to have poured out his heart in tears of ecstasy, everyday, for eighteen years.

And after the dance was over, this writer was amazed to witness many devotees, young and old, men and women, rolling over the very ground that the young *devadasi* had danced on. The performance was really as sublime as it was aesthetical.

But all Maharis could not be that lovely, in the very nature of the system. Both religious devotion as well as artistic aptitude would also naturally vary from person to person, the recruits coming from all strata of society.

And it was perhaps to cater to the perverted tastes of the human customers, that the dance which was entirely just dance or the silent poetry of a lovely young female body, as this writer saw inside the temple of Jagannatha, became vocal outside, as is the Odissi dance of today.

But Maharis as a class, cannot be fully blamed for the inherent defects of a socio-religious system for which they themselves were not responsible. Even though biological heredity was not there, professional heredity was a fact, the rigorous process of training starting from the plastic years of childhood, as it should, for the sake of excellence

and perfection in the art. That somehow kept the great art alive amidst the vicissitudes of politics and religion, through which unfortunate Orissa has had to pass during the last four hundred years, the worst phase being under the British rule. And the art that moves the world today, even under conditions of indifferent survival, must remain grateful to the illiterate Maharis of the temple of Jagannatha. They deserve every syllable of tribute paid to them by the great danseuse Indrani Rahaman. Says she : "Although it was arranged that the Maharis' representatives would meet us, I decided to go personally to their residence, where a performance would be arranged for me. I was enchanted with what I saw at the Maharis and was moved deeply by the exposition of the *ashtapadis* of *Gita-Govind*. The Odissi interpretation of these *ashtapadis* has remained my favourite of all the dance forms in India since that day in a Mahari's house".

THE GOTIPUA OF CHAITANYITES

But perversion seems to have come on this noble and ancient art of Orissa not so much from the Maharis as from the devotees of Chaitanya. The Bengali saint had resolved not to look at a woman after he had left the householder's life. But his entire religio-mystical practice was based on the analogy of the wholesale surrender of a married lady to an extra-marital lover, as in the story of the cowherd ladies of Brundaban and young Krushna. Chaitanya went into ecstasies while listening to the narration of such episodes from the *Bhagabata* and other books. To please his master, Ramananda Patnaik, an ex-Viceroy of the southern territories of the Gajapati king of Orissa, who had left, his exalted office at Rajmahendri for close association with Chaitanya at Puri, is said to have fitted up handsome boys as substitutes for females (*devadasis*) and made them enact Krushna-

Gopi episodes through dance-recitals. This started the Gotipua or boy-dance system in Orissa, vulgarising a pure ancient art and reducing it to a series of acrobatics as well as making it erotic in character, which originally it was not.

A TRULY NATIONAL ART

But when Bharata in his famous Natyashastra mentioned "Odra-Magadhi" as one of the four main systems of dance in India, existing in his time, he certainly did not mean it to be a mere temple-dance or one confined to a disreputable class of boys or women. Even as early as Bharata's time, "Odra-Magadhi" signified a national system. Before the British came on the scene, what is now the Chota Nagpur plateau of the Bihar State, was definitely an integral part of historical Orissa⁵, all the *rajas* in the district of Singhbhum, including the ex-Native States of Sareikala and Kharawan, being Oriyas, even today. The Biharis (Magadhi) have no dance of their own, nor the Bengalis. Hence, Bharata's "Odra-Magadhi" signified a "sphere of influence" rather than an exact national territory, which meant that it was the dance of Odra-Desa or Orissa, with spheres of influence over neighbouring Magadha and other territories. In view of the fact that Orissa's kings, beginning from Kharavela in 1st. century B.C. to the Kesaris of the 6th-7th centuries, were proud to be known as masters of fine arts (*gandharva vidya*) and with that noble tradition continuing in the well-known ex-princely houses of Mayurbhanj, Sareikala, Nilgiri and many others, till yesterday, dance may be said to have been a real national art in Orissa. The writer still remembers how, in his childhood, the people of his small village, consisting entirely of small peasant-proprietors, staged Krushna-lila over many nights, attracting huge crowds from near and distant villages. The village folk were not even

5. See Chapter I

remotely connected with any dance-school. But Krushna's life cannot be properly enacted without dances. And, in the *Krushnalila* enactment in the writer's village, four decades back, the cowherd boys led by young Krushna, trooped out of the green room and slowly entered the arena in a lovely, vigorous and rhythmic dance-procession. Their dance-teacher was an uncle of this writer, who was celebrated in those parts as only a dexterous *mridanga*-player.

I do not think that this writer's little village situated in a thoroughly undeveloped part of Orissa on the south side of the Chilka lake was an exception. Unsophisticated Orissa was much different fifty years ago from what it is now, being closer to her ancient cultures and her own individual ways of living, unaffected by the vulgarity of Bengal imitation. And till then, dance was definitely as integral a part of Orissa's national culture as were literature, poetry, music and military exercises. A cultured Oriya in those days was expected to know something of all these. Left to itself, Odissi dance might also have continued in its pristine glamour, like the sister dance of Chhau. But perhaps the *devadasi* system introduced by the Gangas, with the best of intentions, spelled unenlightened stylisation, if not decadence, depriving the ancient national art, of the healthy, open-air flavour. Maheswara Mahapatra who composed *Abhinaya Chandrica* in the 13th century, as the first grammar of Odissi, could not have been a Mahari. Sadasiva Rath Sharma refers to *Devadasi Nrutya Paddhati* by Narayan Misra and to *Nachuni Bidhi* by Madhusudana Pattanayak as later commentators on Odissi, according to information from old Maharis, but the manuscripts are not available. It seems, therefore, that what is called Odissi, was once a truly national art with the Oriyas, not confined to a temple or a particular class of women, and that high-born Misras, Mahapatras and Pattanaiks were proud to practise and write about it.

FABRI AND INDRANI

Thank God, that despite all the historical, socio-economic and religious vicissitudes that Orissa and the Oriyas have gone through, this noble national art of theirs did not completely die down. Pankajas, Kelucharanas and Devadasas, the surviving old masters, had dance-experiences in their young days. Of them all, Kelucharana, who came to Cuttack in search of a job in the early thirties and got attached to a modern theatre, was able to attract some educated people to the inherent beauties of this dying national art. Priyambada Mohanty a born artiste, picked it up from Kelucharana and demonstrated it at Delhi as the representative of the Utkal University at one of the Inter-University Youth Festivals. In the audience was the late lamented Dr. Charles Fabri, the well-known Indologist and art-critic of *The Statesman*, the world-famous newspaper of Calcutta and New Delhi. He was filled with amazement as he witnessed this glorious dance, whose existence was, till then, unsuspected even by the most knowledgeable. Fabri's lusty encomia in the columns of *The Statesman* publicised this dance for the first time in modern times. This generated an irrepressible feminine inquisitiveness in his friend, Mrs. Indrani Rahman, the celebrated Indian danseuse, to master this new dance-style. This writer can never forget the thrill he felt when he received the first letter from Indrani, then a complete stranger, requesting him to arrange an Odissi *guru* for her. Thanks to Indrani, Odissi dance is now world-famous and is the finest piece in her repertoire. For, says she : "It (Odissi) is rich and classical and at the same time has the added grace and charm which the other classical forms lack."

Indrani adds : "In February, 1958, I danced the Odissi dance for the first time during performances in Delhi. Dr. Fabri wrote of these performances ; "Last night was an important milestone in the history of

Indian dancing, for this was the first time that a professional ballerina has presented true Odissi classical dances on the stage. "From that time onwards I have performed Odissi dances throughout the length and breadth of India and throughout the world, in all the five continents. Odissi has been a favourite part of my dance-programme for me, as well as the most favoured part of performances in India and abroad. Odissi has brought, besides, a great feeling of aesthetic fulfilment within me in dance, a great deal of good fortune and good luck. It has been my lucky charm." ⁶

No one should imagine that the dances with which king Kharavela entertained his subjects or his feudal chiefs in the 1st century B. C. at Bhubaneswar or those that princess Chandrika (12th century A.D.) presented to aristocratic audiences inside the Barabati fort at Cuttack, were the same as are now presented by Indrani or Priyambada and others. But the unique historic documents, strongly corroborated by temple sculptures both Buddhistic and Brahminic, conclusively prove that Orissa has been a land of superbly individual dances for at least twenty centuries. Odissi as well as Chhau are not mere pretentious parvenu in the society of arts, but are well-born entities originating in nothing less fertile and noble than a national genius, attracting to their warm embrace princes and peasants, men and women, rich and poor, with equal welcome, and flowing in a continuous stream of glorious existence from pre-Christian centuries down to modern times, when they are beginning to be counted as part of the total aesthetic heritage of Humanity.

6. *Kalavikash Kendra Souvenir*, Cuttack, 1964.

CHAPTER IX

ORISSA'S DANCE-SONGS

In India dance is generally a *tairyotrika* or troika, i.e., a combination of the song, the instrumental accompaniment and the dance proper. In the classical dance systems of Orissa, the song is now an indispensable part, even though it might not have been so previously, for which there is plenty of evidence. The songs now sung for Orissa's dances are generally no more ancient than 17th, 18th centuries, though composed on *shastric* lines, but with a local orientation. As a matter of fact, in Odissi-dance it is the song that turns the movement of the dancer into a poem of dimensions. It turns also each dance-piece into a little play, expressing either conflict or harmony, of human emotions. It supplies the very *raison, dêtre* for the performance of the dancer.

The tradition of songs in Orissa, as we know them today, began perhaps in the 11th-12th centuries with the well-known *ashtapadis* of Jayadeva. The exquisite Sanskrit songs of *Gita-Govinda* appear to be the direct ancestors of the songs and musical poetry of Orissa. The *talas* and *ragas* are the same in both varieties, so the theme, and so the tendency to ornate-ness through a profusion of assonance and alliteration. In medieval Oriya, the composers fixed the *tala* and *raga* of each song as in those of *Gita-Govinda*. This has greatly helped in the maintenance of the purity of the tradition.

The earliest surviving Oriya song makes its appearance in the one-act Sanskrit play *Parashuramvijaya* by the Gajapati-emperor Kapilendra Deva of the 14th century.



Gopala Knushna Pattanayak (1785-1862) of Parlakhemundi, Orissa's finest composer of songs, Vaishnavic as well as secular, which are often danced away in Odissi dances.

In the 15th-16th centuries, verse and music formed a close alliance in Orissa, ranging from little lyrics to epics of immense size. The *chautisa*, each couplet or stanza of which begins with one of the 34 consonants in consecutive order, was one of the most favourite patterns for the poets. These were mostly personal and secular. Some of these *chautisas* as well as some cantos of the romantic, ornate poetry in Oriya of the medieval period could be placed on the same level as the songs of the *Gita-Govinda*, not only as regards musicality but also for depicting poignancy of human emotions as effectively.

UPENDRA SONGS

In the field of secular songs, expressing erotic sentiments, Upendra Bhanja who heads the whole host of Oriya poets in the ornate genre, is outstanding. He is, in many ways, a pioneer in the field and the so-called "Upendra songs" are still sung, though the poet has been far outstripped in the field by others who espoused the Krushna-cult after him, who was a Rama-devotee.

THE TRIO OF ORISSAN COMPOSERS :

Of the many composers of Radha-Krushna songs, three dominate the field. They are Kavisurya Baladeva Ratha, Gopalkrushna Patnaik and Banamali Dasa. Of this trinity, Kavisurya is technically the most musical Gopalkrushna, the most poetic, and Banamali, the most devotional.

KAVISURYA

Unlike most of the tribe of poets and composers in Orissa, Kavisurya Baladeva Ratha (1789-1845) led a prosperous life. Composer, singer, linguist and handsome in person, he was favoured by a galaxy of contemporary *rajas*. It was one such royal admirer

who endowed on him the title of *Kavisurya*, "the sun among poets." His songs now cover a demy-size book of six hundred pages. And quite a number is yet to be collected and printed.

Catering to the tastes of feudal chiefs, the songs of Baladeva are, in the very nature of things, ornate, flamboyant, colourful and sensuous. They are also regarded as the first examples in Orissa, of intricate musical technicalities turned into excellent rhythm and harmony by a master-craftsman. The songs, by and large, are about the warm, romantic love of Krushna and Radha, leaving metaphysics or spirituality severely alone. In many a song the real human experiences of the poet seem to burst with natural beauty and intensity though foisted on poor Radha and Krushna.

But Baladeva's *magnum opus* is a slender volume of 34 songs, *Kishorachandrananda Champu*, composed to please one of his many royal patrons, Raja Kishorachandra of Athagarh, in south Orissa. There are many *champus* in Oriya. But the *champu* generally means this book of glorious songs of Baladeva Ratha. Mastery of the *champu*-songs is the final test of achievement for any musical aspirant in Orissa. And these songs are the favourite pieces for Odissi dance also. The songs in the *champu* come one after another in alphabetical pattern, covering successively each of the 34 consonants in the Indian alphabet, from *ka* to *ksha*, and narrating the breath-taking see-saws of romance between Radha and Krushna.

The theme is the same as in Jayadeva's *Gita-Govinda*. But in this Oriya counterpart of that Sanskrit lyrical drama, the story greatly gains in sheer human value. Divinity of the two characters is kept outside the earthly human drama of hopes, desires, frustrations and ecstasies, the book ending with a grand

salutation by the poet to his Deity. The change from the mawkishly sentimental, though insatiably sweet, atmosphere of the *Gita-Govinda* to one of vigour, action, wit, humour, conflict and consummation, is entirely due to the creation by Baladeva of a roguish go-between in Lalita. She practically twists the two impetuous, but inexperienced lovers by her little finger, before their union becomes possible through her own initiative and stratagem. She remonstrates with both the lovers for their apparently immoral and anti-social aspirations and tells each that the other cares, little for him or her. But yielding at last to the helpless emotional plight and piteous appeals of both, she arranges the first tryst. While taking Radha to the rendezvous, the two ladies, Radha and Lalita, observe the beauteous vision of Krushna from a distance. At the sight of that divine manifestation even the naughty go-between bursts into beatific lyrical raptures in the celebrated *bha*-song of the *champu* : "See, darling, that sight divine, by seeing which our human eyes are surely getting the worth of their creation. Lest you feel dizzy with intense ecstasy, will you hold on, darling, to my arm and put your lotus feet firmly on the ground ? Without any desire for the fleshy touch of his body, do merely keep looking at that marvellous beauty, will you !"

The lovers meet at last and in the last song (*ksha-song*) the poet puts up a grand, sublime hymn to his loving lord, Krishna :

"Oh thou ocean of mercy and forgiveness.
Who art in perpetual embrace with the full-
bosomed charms of Lakshmi,
Oh redeemer of the worlds,
Whose feet are the very jewels of all the Vedas,
And whose blessed servant is no other than
the great Brahma himself,
And the effulgence of whose toe-nails are
cherished even by the gods,

The rise and fall of hope in the hearts of young ardent lovers, their fears and aspirations, their mad seeking out of each other, oblivious of consequences, their moods of stark frustration, their complete spiritual abandon in each other, in the final consummation and all that gamut of experiences, realistically enlivened through the rogueries of a go-between, turn this little volume of 34 songs into a great book indeed. Lyrically as well as dramatically, this *champu* in Oriya is undoubtedly a masterpiece. Each song of this little book, set to a new tune, combining the best elements of both the northern as well as the southern techniques of the Indian musical system, expressing a new mood, that carries the love-drama a step further, each adequately and suitably adorned with verbal jewellery, is a joy not only to those who sing and hear, but also to all Odissi dancers, because of its dramatic and emotional possibilities for the proper display of their art.

GOPALAKRUSHNA

In the songs of Gopalakrushna Patnaik, the Radha-Krishna love reaches the high watermarks of sensual as well as spiritual love. Born in Parlakimedi, south Orissa, in a well-to-do and cultured family, Gopalakrushna was a devout Vaishnava. His birth date is uncertain, but he died in 1862. Pouring out his soul in unpremeditated songs as a holy offering to his Lord, the poet appears to have been completely indifferent to his creations. It is due only to the efforts of the poet's friends after his death that we are in possession of these precious flowers.

But though he was unconcerned about recognition as a poet and had apparently no plan of action, we are surprised at the remarkable method in the poet's madness. For, in the seeming confusion of hundreds of his songs, we get a complete picture of the growth of his deity from childhood to adolescence. Gopalakrushna is the only poet in Oriya literature, to sing enchantingly of a naughty childhood. We see the child Krishna slowly grow big enough to go out, tend cattle in distant forests, cause pitiful mental suffering to his doting old mother, Yasoda. He passes through pre-adolescence and adolescence till he hungers for and gets the first tastes of love. All these flash out before us in a procession of exquisite miniature paintings, in the songs of Gopalakrushna.

What distinguishes Gopalakrushna's song's is the purity and sublimity of emotions, expressed in a normal, natural way without any effort at ornamentation or deliberate effect. The moods and feelings are absolutely human, set in familiar situations of common Orissan life. And Gopalakrushna is the only poet in Oriya, among a whole tribe of them that sing of the romance of Radha and Krishna, who is free from any touch of vulgarity.

We almost hear the quickened heart-beats of the young bride Radha in the following song, as she undergoes a terrific mental agitation, natural enough before leaving her home, for the first secret meeting with her extra-marital lover. Says she to her confidante : 'Have you indeed given him an appointment ? Believe me, darling, terribly scared am I of what might happen to me when I meet him. I tremble all over even now. I go about in the house in constant fear of detection, lest somebody might guess the fearful throbings of my own heart. What was he about when you met him ? What exactly have you told him and what did he say in reply ? I hope, you are not really pulling my legs ? Could you not go again and cancel the appointment ? I am so panicky, darling, about the consequences."

But the lovers meet at last and they meet again and again. The ecstasy of the consummation of their desires is enchantingly expressed in many a song. In one such, Radha says.

"Family and society have I given up gladly,
for the love of him,
Whose love is indeed the single treasure
of my life.

I am an unknown wild flower and he,
its honey-bee;
May I be counting the rosary of his beauties
and virtues, for all eternity ! "

Then came the usual fits of jealousy of lovers and the determination to punish the erring partner. See, how love has transformed the little timid Radha of the earlier days into a bold, angry woman, when she could harshly rebuke her dearest Krishna in these lines :

"Don't touch me, Krishna,
Get away from here.

Heed my protests and stop behaving like a
naughty boy,
Keep your nasty jokes for other places please,
As friends round here might know and
taunt the life out of me, for nothing!"

But Radha's dedicated love soon rises above these petty feelings. How love sublimates the little human ego, making it possible for the emergence of a luminous and transcendent lover in the mere village girl that was Radha, rising above the gross delights of the body and the crude desire for the possession of the partner, is movingly described in many a song by Gopalakrishna. Here is one :

In another song Radha says :

"Ah, let this scandal of Shyama
Crown my poor head for eternity,
That I may pass my days with thoughts of him
and him alone.
Whatever the folks might say to me,
Sins of many births appear to Just float away !
if I but once look at His beauteous face."

This is the grand finale to this apparently immoral, but deeply allegorical and spiritual love story. In the hands of stupid mediocrities the story has become degraded with the grossest of vulgarities. In Oriya, Gopalakrushna alone, among a host of so-called Vaishnavite poets, conveys the poignant, penetrating truth behind this romance in a simple, natural, spontaneous manner, caring little for mere verbal effect. His songs are, for that reason dear to dancers and singers all over Orissa and still more to literary connoisseurs.

Two more of the popular Gopalakrishna songs are reproduced below.

ALL-FORGIVING LOVE

(A lady-friend to Radha)

Does not the bee, even after enjoying the charms
of the lotus, run to the wild jasmine ?
Can an elephant be prevented from enjoying a
toilet of dust, even after hundred baths ?
You may, my gazelle-eyed darling, rather carry
the fire of separation eternally in
your soul,
Than desire for the happiness of consummation
with him any more."

But says Gopalakrushna :
"The enchanter was at the doorsteps again !
And Radha stopped her friend's mouth with
her clothes,
Not to hear any more against her faithless
dearest !"

THE COMPLETE SURRENDER

(A lady friend to Radha)

**"Where have you left your mind again ?
Have you permitted your soul to be played
upon again, by that love-god of Brundaban ?
(Refrain)**

This being not any wilderness, but your own home !

And even with the words, 'Beware, I shall tell my friends about it', why do you shed such profuse tears?"

The jewel-among-young-ladies now awoke
into awareness at last, and hung her head
in shame.

And says Gapalakrushna, how could things be managed to her advantage, if such forgetfulness be the daily occurrence?"

BANAMALI

The songs of Banamali, who, unlike his two glorious predecessors, was a real Vaishnavite *sannyasi*, are not as numerous as those of Baladeva or Gopalakrishna. These are, however, simple and forthright and throb with the sincerity of a true zealot. He has been unlucky, so far, in not having a good collector and editor of his scattered songs. But his vision and spiritual flights are clearly revealed through the slender anthology of his songs that we already have. Here is a song, for example, that brings to mind its close identity of ideas with a famous song of Vidyapati.

Radha to a Lady-friend

**"I am now like the pincers of the blacksmith,
my darling,**

**Now in water and now in fire again,
He, delighting in both !**

**People hope for great happiness out of love;
But how is it, darling, I am so miserable, for it ?**

**There is no satiation for me,
However long I see him.**

And my eyes nearly burst,
If he just goes out of my sight,
I know not why also, the more you dafame him,
The gladder it makes my heart.

Which sinks the moment you start praising him,
 But when we meet, these eyes, darling,
 remain glued to his presence,

A year-long vision appears but a fleeting
 moment,
 While a moment's non-seeing seems like
 endless aeons.

Says Banamali, 'where indeed is the happiness in
 love ?

Am I not dying each moment,
 Thinking and thinking of Him only !'

THE TWINS OF ONE ART

Such are the songs that usually accompany Orissa's Dances and these are the song-makers of the land of the Oriyas. It is these songs that provide the entire verbal imagery for lovely transformations in the classical Odissi dance. These dances are intimately connected with the religion and literature of the people of Orissa. The philosophy behind is a process of dedication to the divine. Like everything associated with the Krushna-cult, the dedication has to be beautiful in words and action. Jagannatha at Puri is but the Krushna of the Kali era. According to tradition, he is but the transformed heart of Krushna which refused to be burnt up and was, therefore, thrown into the sea.¹ The great Vaishnava poet Jayadeva certainly did not compose his matchless lyrics in the *Gita-Govinda* to please any earthly potentate, but to please only this resurrected lord Krushna in Jagannatha. There is no point in trying to prove that he was the court-poet of some earthly king when there is not a single line of panegyric from his gifted pen for any king or emperor. He was or could possibly be the court-poet, so to say, of only Jagannatha. And most

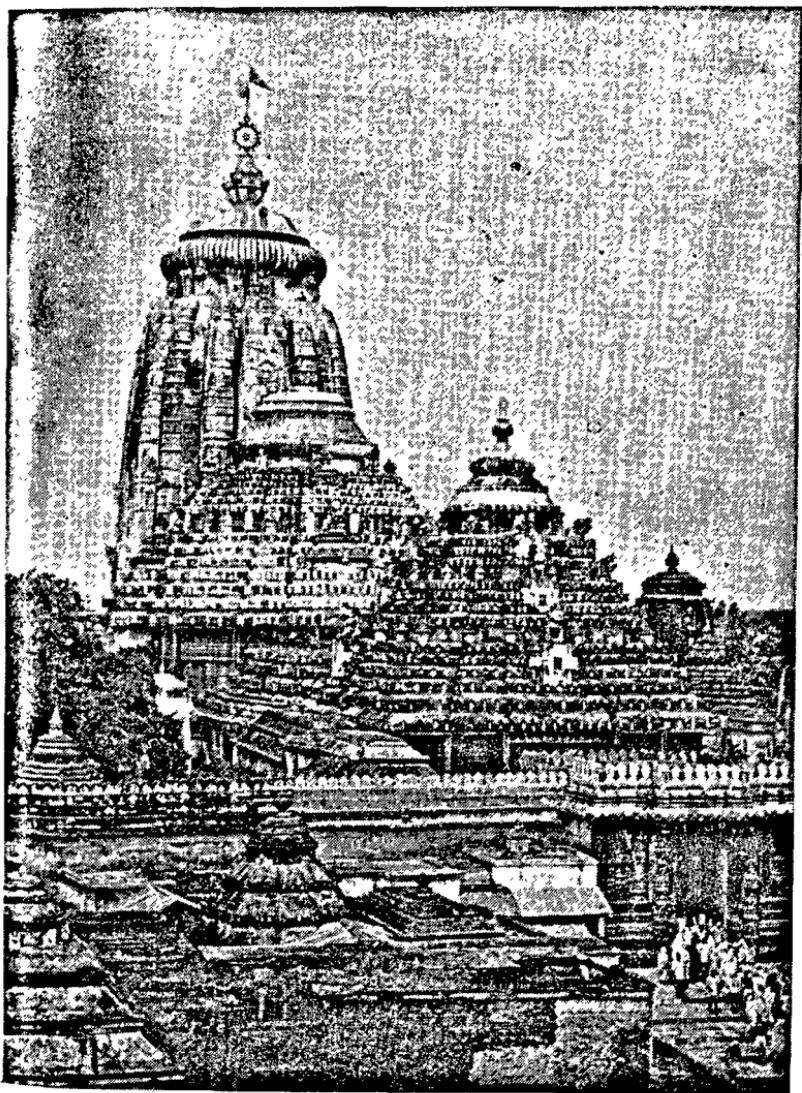
1. See Chapter X.

probably his great book, *Gita-Govinda* was composed, according to a plan for "dancisation" of the sublime Krishna-passion before Jagannatha, the reincarnated Krishna. And thanks to the cultured and enlightened royalty of ancient Orissa, Jayadeva's songs have become part of the daily rituals of the temple of Jagannatha for the last nine centuries or so. The medieval Oriya songs are nothing but the lovely offshoots in vernacular, of those divine love-lyrics of Jayadeva in Sanskrit. And these Sanskrit and Oriya lyrics together provide the entire emotional and musical repertoire for the sister-art of dance in Orissa.

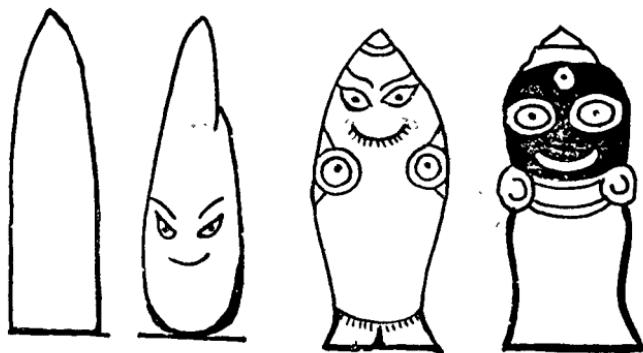
CHAPTER-X

JAGANNATHA, THE SPLENDID SYNTHESIS

The following four pictures try to hold up before readers the slow and significant evolution of Lord Jagannatha through the ages.



The Temple of Jagannath (Lord of the Universe) at Puri that has been stirring deep mysterious religious feelings in millions of hearts all these centuries.

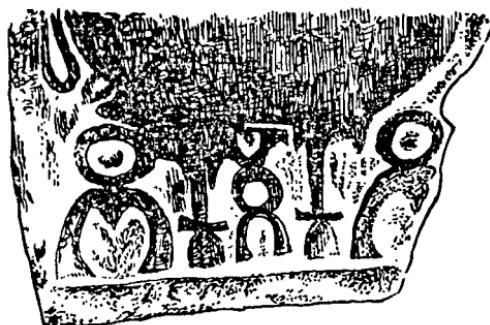


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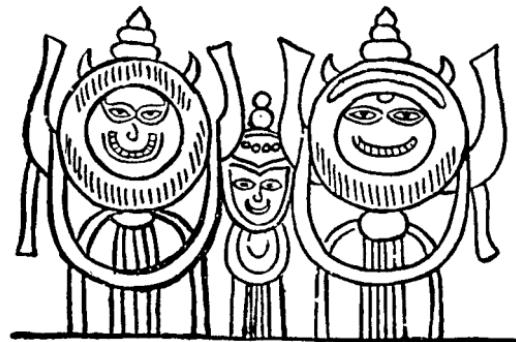
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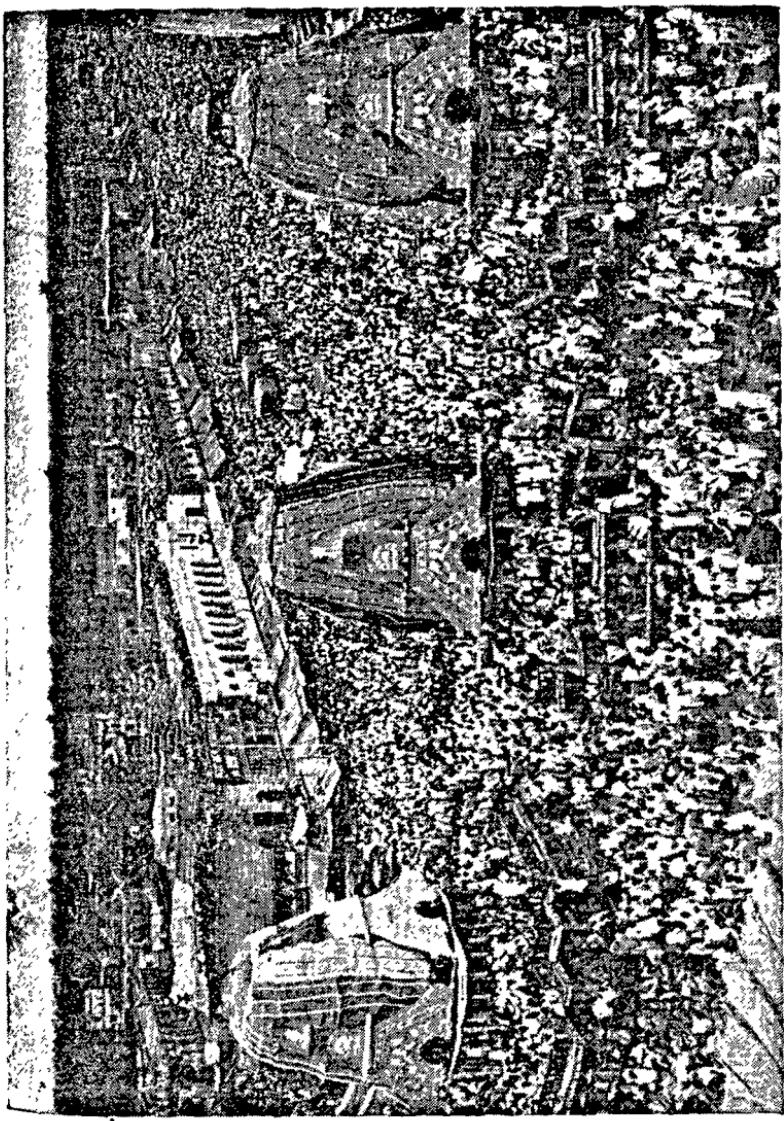


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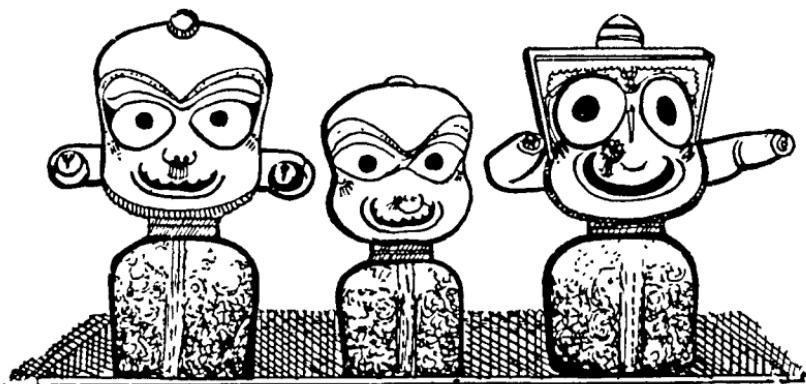


6

The supposed evolution of Jagannath from perhaps a Saivite one-piece lingam of blue stone to a Brahminic Trinity through symbolic representations of Buddhistic Tri-Ratnas or Three jewels, of the Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha.



The Car Festival, Puri, which is but a Journey of Compassion of the Lord of the Universe.



Jagannatha Trinity consisting of Balabhadra, the elder brother, Subhadra, the sister and Srikrishna (Jagannatha), the younger brother, as they are in the shrine of Jagannatha at Puri today.

CHAPTER X

JAGANNATHA, THE SPLENDID SYNTHESIS

Straddling the road between north and south India on the east coast, Orissa has naturally evolved an eclectic culture. The very symbol of this synthesis is Lord Jagannatha of Puri, the greatest deity in the modern Hindu pantheon. He has many names, besides the well-known Jagannatha, each suiting the role he plays in various situations. For instance, in that aspect of his which is associated with the world-famous car-festival he is called *patitapabana*, "the redeemer of the fallen". It is to make himself easily approachable to the unwashed millions that the compassionate Jagannatha ("Lord of the Universe") comes out of the mysterious dark chamber of his great shrine once a year during the car festival. As a matter of fact, this festival may be taken as the quintessence of the whole cult of Jagannatha. Though in his transcendental aspect he is also called *purushottama* (the Highest Self), embodying a concept of divinity propagated in the *Bhagavat Gita*, he is not really so much a god for monks and *mahatmas* as of the common man, and he has allowed himself to evolve solely out of considerations for the common man's needs. And in this historic process of adjustments, Jagannatha has assimilated strange contradictions in a manner that is most amazing in the history of religious thought.

Though Jagannatha is regarded as the greatest of Hindu gods, all sense of caste, which is part and parcel of Hinduism, vanishes as we enter his presence. The grandest line in the edicts of Asoka, *saba manisa me paja*—"all human beings are my children,"—could as well be most fittingly inscribed on the front-door of Jagannatha's great temple, of all temples in India.

The Jagannatha also is Krishna, Rama, Buddha and Narayana, all in one. He is also both Mahayanic *sunya* and Advaitic *Brahma*. In no other Hindu temple are worshipped two brothers with a sister between them, as here with Jagannatha. Krishna is worshipped either alone or with Radha, but nowhere, except in Puri, with his half-sister Subhadra. Two groups of attendants in the temple of Jagannatha are non-Brahmins and during the car festival, the deities are left entirely to their care. The crude figures of the Jagannatha-trinity do not approximate also to any anthropomorphic concept of the known gods or goddesses in the Hindu pantheon. The cult of Jagannatha, therefore, is unique in India in many respects, being a curious synthesis of many mutually-warring tenets. The analysis of Jagannatha's gradual evolution, assimilating all the strange elements that were thought expedient, is perhaps intellectually as rewarding as is a pilgrimage to Him spiritually, to any of his devotees.

THE BLUE STONE

This synthesis is colourfully narrated in the Oriya *Mahabharata* of Sarala Dasa of the 15th century as well as in the Oriya ballad of temple-construction, *Deula Tola Suanga* by Bipra Nilambara, dated about two centuries later,

The story in the Oriya *Mahabharata* establishes two facts. First, Jagannatha is no other than Krishna, and, secondly, he is the god, both of the Aryans and the non-Aryans. Here is the story :

Krishna died of the poisonous effect of the misdirected arrow of a Savara, named Jara. When his dead body was cremated, his heart, of all organs of his holy body, defied the action of fire. It was therefore thrown into the sea. Penitent Jara followed the holy heart all along the sea-board of the Indian

sub-continent and rescued it from the waves on the east coast of Orissa. By a miracle, the divine heart had turned, by that time, into a blue stone. Jara worshipped it with all the devotion he was capable of and after him his descendants did likewise.

Ages passed away. Then King Indradyumna of Malava wanted to revive Vishnu-worship in India. But where was the genuine deity to be found ? He sent emissaries to the four quarters. The one that went east was Visvavasu, the Brahmin. After a long search he came upon the Savara village of Jara, situated in the jungle-lands of the eastern shore. The headman of the village was most hospitable to him. As the young Brahmin was very handsome, the headman made him marry his daughter, though he was already married. It was through her, that Visvavasu came to know of the blue-stone deity of the Savaras that was secretly worshipped in the thick of the jungle, not far from their village. He also came to know from her that the piece of blue stone was really the heart of Lord Krishna. After this wonderful discovery, Visvavasu returned to Malava to bring down King Indradyumna himself to Orissa with a large army. But the king failed to persuade the simple but adamant Savaras to betray their own god to outsiders. So he had the headman arrested and the whole village besieged. But when he penetrated into the jungle as guided by Visvavasu, he could not trace the blue-stone deity in its secret recess. Then the king kept vigil and had a dream-message that the deity had vanished, because, he had felt vain over his success in finding him and had also used violence, not piety, in seeking him out. But he was pleased with him all the same, for the hardships he had undergone for his sake and said that he would appear the following morning in a cistern in the form of a stone-image which could be installed in a temple.

Next morning the image was found in a water-cistern. But neither the king nor his whole army could

lift it out of the water. The king again spent a night of prayers and got another message from the deity that he could be raised not by the king, nor his army, but only if the Savara headman would touch him at one side and Visvavasu, the Brahmin at the other. This was done, and the image was installed as that of Vishnu.

This is the first phase of the evolution of Jagannatha. It links him with Krishna or Vishnu and attempts an integration of the non-Aryan elements with the Aryan immigrants through the worship of a common god. But this Jagannatha that is Vishnu, the Rigvedic Sun-God, was declared later, to be no other than the Buddha of Kapilavastu, the arch-enemy of the caste-ridden and priest-ridden popular Brahminism. How could that happen ?

ORIGINALLY, A SIVA-LINGAM

Diving below the surface of this colourful legend, one would arrive at the only rational conclusion that originally, this so-called bluestone was perhaps nothing more than a *Siva-lingam*, the symbol of creativity, whose cult seems to be the earliest in India, as in most ancient lands. The *lingam* of the Orissan Savaras was most probably an imaginary replica of the famous *Siva-lingam* at Srisailam on the bank of the river Krishna in Andhra Pradesh. The Srisailam deity is supposed to be existing from pre-Vedic times.¹

In some remote period, Orissa was really the land of the Savaras, a very ancient tribe. They are now confined mostly to its south-western districts in close proximity to allied clans in the neighbouring Andhra areas, though they are found in scattered bunches in almost all districts of Orissa. The Kondhs and Savaras are the two aboriginal tribes that figure most in Orissa's mythology, folklore and literature. In ages

1. The Illustrated Weekly of India, October 14, 1962

past, the Orissan Savaras perhaps felt the need of a god. They had heard about the fame of the deity of Srisailam but could not easily travel that distance. It is difficult of access even now, being situated on almost pathless jungle-clad heights. The secret hideout of the blue-stone deity of the Savaras in the thick eastern jungles of Orissa, appears to be an echo of its difficult location in Srisailam. Anyway, probably through sheer imagination, the Orissa Savaras made a deity, in imitation of the Srisailam one, with a piece of blue chlorite, with which images of most gods and goddesses in Orissa, are made.

It is interesting to note that in this incipient stage of blue-stone, Jagannatha was known as *Nilamadhava*—a word whose logical and true etymological significance, still remains a mystery. But it may reasonably mean, "the god from the Nilamalai hills," —the range of hills, of which Srisallam peak is the most celebrated.

That *Nilamadhava* should mean Krushna, appears a little far-fetched. Krishna has nowhere been worshipped also as a piece of stone as the primitive deity of the Orissan Savaras is supposed to have been. The eminence on which the present shrine of Jagannatha stands, is often spoken of as the 'blue mountain' (*Nilasaila* or *Nilachala*). It is difficult to explain this, as it is not a mountain nor is it blue in any sense. It is presumed, therefore, that *Nilasaila* or *Nilachala* is a synonym of the word *Nilamalai* (*malai* and *saila* both mean a "hill") *Nilamadhava* being but the Sanskritised corruption of "the god of the Nilamalai hills."

The total area of the Jagannatha shrine is also sometimes described as *Srisaila* and the city of Puri, as *Srikshetra*—all reminiscent of the Srisailam tradition. The location of the original deity on the bank of the

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river Krushna was enough perhaps to fire imaginative Sarala Dasa into non-chalantly linking up the blue-stone *Siva-lingam* of Nilamalai with Krushna's heart and call it *Nilamadhava* and his new habitat, as *Srisaila* or Nilachala, This is indeed clever fancy. But what is nine-tenths of any religion, except clever fancy ?

JAINA AND BUDDHIST WORSHIP

How this single piece of blue stone was changed into three shapeless figures of the present day is explained by another legend, representing the second phase of Jagannatha's evolution. This we find in the Oriya ballad of temple-construction (*Deula Tola suanga*) by Bipra Nilambara of the medieval period of Oriya literature. In this story the earlier part is the same as in Sarala's *Mahabharata*, except that the Brahmin Visvavasu becomes Vidyapati and the Savara chief, who was Jara in Sarala's story, becomes Visvavasu. Visvavasu is a most unlikely name for a Savara, but, this only suggests a deeper Brahminisation of Orissan society by that time. Beyond this, the other differences are quite significant.

In this story, the newly-discovered Savara deity allows King Indradyumna of Malava to worship him on one condition, namely, that he build for him a suitable temple. The king did it most magnificently. But where was the competent priest to install the deity in such a temple with proper scriptural rites ? So the king went to Lord Brahma himself to request him to come down to perform the inaugural ceremony. Brahma at that time was in meditation and King Indradyumna had to wait for a little while. But during those few moments many earthly aeons passed away and the king's sky-scraping fane on the eastern sea-coast was completely buried under sands. A new race of people appeared on the scene and also a new dynasty of kings, completely unaware of Indradyumna's architectural achievement. A king named Galamadhava was passing that way

when his horse stumbled on some hard substance in the sands. The king dismounted and scraping the sands, saw the top of a temple peeping out. He then started excavation and, to the amazement of everybody, the gigantic temple stood out in all its splendour.

At this moment, Lord Brahma and Indradyumna came down from heaven. But they were taken to be strangers and intruders, Galamadhava claiming all the credit for the temple. The dispute was settled finally by the evidence supplied by the turtles of a near-by tank. They were formerly human beings, but, through the inhuman physical labour of carrying stones for years to great heights for building the temple, they had been turned into turtles. Even today, a big tank in Puri, with large turtles, is known as the Indradyumna tank.

With the dispute over, Brahma was now ready for the installation ceremony. But where was the deity ?

The same process as described in Sarala Dasa's *Mahabharata* was followed, but this time the deity promised to appear as a log of wood instead of as a stone-image. This is indeed significant, indicating a change-over from stone to wood, of which the three deities at present are made, and from an original hut or even open air, to a stone temple as the deity's residence. In this story, too, the king and his army failed to budge the divine log that was floating in a nearby estuary. Therefore, the king kept vigil as before, getting the same divine command to have Him carried, not by the royal army, but by the loving touch of His devotees, the Brahmin Vidyapati and the Savara Visvavasu, each holding one end of the log.

The Divine log was thus brought ashore. But Indradyumna's queen Gundicha, in true femininity,

desired for more reality than a mere log. She wanted beautiful images to be made out of it. So, the king sent for competent carpenters. But the log was so hard that all their sharp and heavy tools were blunted in the very attempt to cut it. At last Viswakarma, the divine architect, in the guise of an old carpenter, presented himself and assured the king that he would make nice images out of the log as desired by the queen, but on the condition that he should be closetted with it inside the temple, for full twenty-one days, during which nobody should disturb him. This was granted. In the beginning the strokes of the carpenter's tools could be heard. But gradually the sounds got fainter, to disappear altogether, long before the target date. The queen became impatient and anxious. In spite of the king's protests, she forced open the doors of the temple before the scheduled date and, lo and behold, there lay three unfinished images, but no carpenter. It is these images that are worshipped to this day in the temple of Jagannatha, representing Krushna, his elder brother and his half-sister. This has given rise also to an intriguing Oriya proverb: "it is for listening to a woman that even the Lord remains mutilated",—as a fling at too well known feminine caprices.

In this second phase of the Jagannatha legend, not only is stone transformed into timber, which represents perhaps a change-over from Saivite *linga*-worship to some sort of image-worship, but, strangely enough, a unitary god is transformed also into a trinity.

KHARAVELA AND JINANATHA

An analysis of the legend indicates that the imaginary replica of the Nilamalai Siva-*lingam* worshipped by the Savaras was perhaps later changed into a Jaina Tirthankara image, probably of Jinanatha or

Jineswara, and that king Galamadhava is no other than the historic king Kharavela of Kalinga who had recovered a Jaina image from Magadha and had installed it in a place "surrounded by the sea and kusha-grass steppes". This description in the Hatigumpha inscription fits in with the town of Puri, even today. The sudden disappearance of the deity in the legends, refers perhaps to the snatching away of the Jaina image from Orissa by a victorious Nanda king of Magadha. The Hatigumpha inscription proudly mentions its "recovery" by Kharavela after defeating the Magadhan king. In the national consciousness of Orissa, the historic Kharavela Meghavahana, therefore, appears to have been changed into legendary Galamadhaba as the great restorer. Kharavela also restored Jainism in Orissa in place of Buddhism, which was imposed as the state-religion by Asoka. A century or so after Kharavela, Orissa became, however, completely Buddhistic again. It is then, perhaps, that the single Jaina image (the same imitative Sivalingam of Nilamalai, but perhaps with a human face drawn over it) was changed into the Buddhist trinity of the Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha. At this stage the name Jagannatha, which implies a purely Buddhist concept and an easy conversion of the previous Jaina term *Jinanatha*, is first heard. Till then, he was known as *Nilamadhava*. 'the god of the Nilamalai hills.'

It is with the rise of Mahayana Buddhism that the worship of images became widespread in India and for a few centuries the Jagannatha temple was probably a Mahayanic shrine where the three images of the Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha were worshipped. As to the Buddhist origin of the present Jagannath Trinity, the following information appears to be curiously enlightening :

"In this connection, I would invite the attention of scholars to a stone image in the Orissa State

Museum of Bhubaneswara where we notice the depiction of a two-wheeled car dragged by a pair of bullocks. Three lotus-flower-like objects are the contents of the car, the driver being seated at the front, with a man in the car behind. Most probably these three lotus-flower-like objects represent the main symbols of the 'three gems' (of Buddhism), namely the Buddha, the Sangha and the Dhamma." (Origin of Lord Jagannatha and the Car Festival by Shri Arjuna Joshi, The Orissa Review of June, 1968).

It might be interesting to readers to know again, that in the last decade of the last century, a few hundred zealot mendicants of the Mahima (Alekhi) cult which perhaps is but a resuscitation of Mahayana Buddhism (see chapters XI & XII) tried to occupy the Temple of Jagannatha by force, snatching it away from the hand of the Hindu *pandas*, claiming Jagannatha to be their god (as the Avatar of the Buddha !) and not of the Brahminic Hindus. Pathetically enough the police intercepted the holy expedition at the entrance to the city of Puri and in the ensuing clash, many of the misguided enthusiasts lost their lives or were seriously injured. It is so heartening to know, however, that the great blind Khond poet, Bhima Bhoi (see chapter IXX), the very Voice of the Mahima cult, never supported this blind enthusiasm of his co-religionists, speaking volumes for this illiterate's uncommon insight even into worldly affairs. Indrabhuti, the 7th century royal sage of Sambalpur, is now definitely accepted as the original prophet of Vajrayana, the Tantric school of Mahayana Buddhism. This kingly prophet begins his famous esoteric book *Jnanasiddhi* with a salutation to Jagannatha, which may be the first scriptural recognition of the present Hindu god, as well as the amazing compromise that was being effected on Orissa's soil between Brahminism and Buddhism. It is a well-known historical fact that for several centuries, there was keen rivalry between Salvism, Jainism and

Buddhism to possess the mind of the Indian masses. That struggle is clearly visible in Jagannatha of Puri—Jaina, Buddhist and Saivite characteristics being present in the daily practices of this temple, even today.

VISIBLE STRUGGLE FOR SYNTHESIS

There is evidence of religious struggle in ancient Orissa between the followers of Siva and the Buddha in the Bhaskareswar temple at Bhubaneswar, where nothing but an Asokan pillar has been converted into a *lingam*, its very unusual height betraying the vandalism too obtrusively. On the other hand, we have proof of a most happy reconciliation between mutually-warring sects on the enchantingly-sculptured walls of the Muktesvara temple (8th-9th centuries A. D.) Here is a Siva temple where images of the Buddha and the Jaina Tirthankaras have been carved along with those of Durga, Lakulisa, Surya, Ganesha, Saraswati and many other sectarian Hindu gods and goddesses. Jagannatha, as he is at present was probably not known or had not caught the imagination of the Hindu masses by the time of construction of this temple, as its liberal-minded artists did not place him in the assembly of Orissa's gods and goddesses.² But in the Konarka temple (13th century A. D.) there is a remarkable piece of sculpture, proclaiming religious universalism. Here Jagannatha, as he is now, appears as the central deity, surrounded by Durga, Siva and other Hindu gods and goddesses. So we may be justified in supposing that it was the Mahayanic Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha that gradually became Jagannatha, Balabhadra and Subhadra, the present trinity in the shrine of Jagannatha, between the 8th and the 12th centuries A. D.

The initiative for this transformation, most probably, stemmed from the great Vaishnavite saint

Ramanuja, who stayed in Puri for long years, leaving behind the biggest monastery belonging to his sect. It is said that he also tried, though less successfully, to replace Siva-worship in the Lingaraja temple at Bhubaneswar by Vishnu-worship. He seems, however, to have been liberal enough to retain the Buddhistic relics of castelessness in the Jagannatha temple and the car festival, as well as the sale of holy victuals inside the temple, which is a general feature of Buddhist shrines, like the famous Shwe Dagon Pagoda in Rangoon.

THE SECRET OF SECRETS

As stated in the *District Gazetteer of Puri*, "The crude form of the images of Jagannatha, his brother Balabhadra and his sister Subhadra, with their round, shapeless heads and their arms represented by stumps only, is believed by some to be of Buddhist origin". General Cunningham says in *The Ancient Geography of India* : "The three shapeless figures of Jagannatha and his brother and sister are simple copies of the symbolical figures of the Buddhist triad, Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha, of which the second is always represented as a female. The Buddhist origin of the Jagannath figures is proved beyond all doubt by their adoption as the representative of the Brahminical *avatar* of Buddha, in the annual almanacs of Mathura and Banaras."

Once, in about every twelve years or so, the Jagannatha trinity change their bodies. The old images are cast into a pit at the back of the temple and new ones are installed. A blind-folded priest brings out a mysterious something that is well-padded with silk, out of a cavity in the centre of the image of Jagannatha himself and puts it inside that of his new image. Nobody can say what that exactly is. But some scholars speculate, with great amount of plausibility, that it might be nothing more than some Buddhist

relic, a later substitute, perhaps, of the holy tooth of Buddha that was taken away to Ceylon by the devout Kalinga princess Hemamala, to save it from Brahminic vandalism.

In this connection, the following remarks of Mr. M. M. Ganguly in his noted book *Orissa and Her Remains* (P-401) might be enlightening as well as interesting to the readers. Says he : "Puri seems to me to have been an intermediate place of pilgrimage where pilgrims from Ceylon used to stop enroute to Bihar. It was, as it were, between Bihar, the birth-place of Buddhism, and Ceylon. Pilgrims used to go hence to Bhubaneswara and Tamralipti and thence would proceed to Bihar by boats along the Rupanarayana and the Ganges."

Note :—Mr. Ganguly seems to have forgotton however that there always was and still is, a direct land-route between Orissa and Bihar, by which the Buddha's two earliest disciples, the merchantmen, Tapusa and Bhallika from Orissa, had travelled up to the present Bodhgaya, with their caravan of bullock-carts and met there the just-enlightened Gautama sitting alone, under a tree. By this road, most probably, Asoka rolled his military expedition to Kalinga. Later on, Chaitanya is known definitely to have taken this route for at least one of his many pietistic trips to and from North India. This route lies through the present Orissa districts of Mayurbhanja or Keonjhar and then straight to Bodhgaya and Gaya, through Chhotanagpur's hills and forests, and is still used by thousands. The fact of both the Orissa districts of Keonjhar and Mayurbhanj being unusually rich in Buddhist remains is another proof that the land-routes through these districts was at least as much used by the Buddhist pilgrims from Ceylon as the riparian route, suggested by Mr. Ganguly.

In the meantime the myth has been propagated among the masses in Orissa that the secret substance taken out of Jagannatha is nothing but the eternal Brahman, as though the Brahman that pervades the

whole Creation could as well be wrapped up in a little length of silk and stored away in a little cavity in an image.

The unfinished images of the Jagannatha *trinity*, therefore, probably represent a hasty transformation of the images of the Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha, into the nearest Hindu parallels that could occur to Hindu revivalists. The story of Galamadhava's excavations also suggests the reconditioning of an old Buddhist *stupa* and vihar into a new Hindu temple. According to Percy Brown : "The elevated position suggests that the Jagannatha temple occupies the site of some still more ancient monuments"³ The pedestal inside the temple of Jagannatha, on which the trinity now stand, is called *ratnavedi*, "the platform for the *ratnas* (jewels)". This has no particular relevancy to the present conditions, as any precious stone (*ratna*) is conspicuous there by its absence. Nor is there anything precious in the stone pedestal. Most probably, as a result of the usual shortening of syllables in common speech, the original expression *triratnavedi* (the pedestal of the three Buddhist *ratnas* or jewels) has become merely *ratnavedi*.

THE COSMOPOLITAN SERVITORS

The ballad-legend of temple-construction by Bipra Nilambara itself establishes also the strong Buddhist essence behind the Jagannatha cult. According to it, the three unfinished images were installed by Lord Brahma, and King Indradyumna was ordered by the deity to arrange the services in the temple in the following manner :

Firstly, during the nine days of the car festival each year, the Lord in his aspect of *patitapabana* ("redeemer of the fallen") shall be entirely at the

disposal of the descendants of the Savara chief who had worshipped him as a piece of blue-stone (*Nilamadhava*) in the very beginning.

This is done year after year during the famous car festival. The food-offerings to the Lord during this festival consist, again, of only fruits and uncooked legumes in keeping with the practice among the Savaras in the dim past. And though served by non-Aryans, the Brahmins eagerly partake of them, as they carry a special sanctity arising out of the supposed keener relish of the Lord for the food originally offered to him by the Savara devotees.

This is indeed unique, embodying revolutionary concepts of socio-religious egalitarianism in a society that is notoriously hierarchical, equalling the noble democracy of Islam, the nobler humanism of Christianity and the universal loving-kindness of Buddhism, but little noticed, as yet, by pundits of religion and sociology.

Secondly, the descendants of Vidyapati through his Brahmin wife would be his priests.

Thirdly, the descendants of Vidyapati through his Savara wife shall be his cooks.

The services in the temple of Jagannath are still arranged on these lines.

And when Jagannatha offered a boon at last to King Indradyumna, the royal devotee is said to have humbly replied, "My Lord, grant that my family might become extinct so as not to leave behind even one person to claim, in the distant future, that this temple was built by an ancestor of his!"

That magnanimous prayer was granted. And to this day, king Indradyumna remains a mystery.

But that mystery is tremendously meaningful in that it represents the finest example of absolute surrender to the Lord, the complete negation of one's

ego and the wiping away of the smaller self in the realisation of the universal Self, which is preached again and again in the *Bhagavad-Gita* as man's only proper attitude towards Purushottama, the Supreme Self, a name again of Jagannatha,

THE GRAND SYNTHESIS

And so stands Lord Jagannatha as *Purusottama*, the "Supreme Self" of the *Bhagavat-Gita*, in his Adwaitic aspect, as also as the *Patitapabana*, the redeemer of the fallen, in his Mahayanic aspect. It is not without significance also that in a land of superb sculptures this god has been kept deliberately shapeless. He declares through that shapelessness, to all the world, that no man-made image can ever pretend to represent Divinity except as a mere symbol. And even as a symbol of Divinity, the Jagannatha trinity is peculiarly significant. With only two large eyes dominating the whole representation, each of the holy triad seems to become the all-eye of the universe,-He who sees His whole creation at one sweep and from Whom nothing can be hidden in all the worlds.

THE TANTRIC ELEMENT

To all these Tribal, Jaina, Hindu and Buddhist elements in the broad-based personality of Jagannatha wonderfully assimilated and incorporated so as to present a unified whole, must also be added the Tantric aspect. One day in the year, an animal is sacrificed before the goddess Vimala (an aspect of Kali), whose temple stands behind that of Jagannatha in the same courtyard. This is unthinkable in the Vaishnavic cult, of which the temple of Jagannatha stands as the supreme citadel in India. But this, as well as the obscenities on the walls of the Jagannatha temple, are results of that grand compromise, which makes the cult of Jagannatha one of the most catholic in the world and his habitation the most sacred of Hindu temples, in spite of violent contradictions.

THE LORD OF THE COMMONER

Through that grand compromise, the visionary planners of this noble shrine have so designed it also as to make the presiding deity the most democratic god of all, living in his temple as a common husbandman with a household of his own and taking but the common man's food. Lest their god appear different from the people, Jagannatha's daily menu includes cakes made out of contemptible rice-bran and dishes of the commonest pot-herbs such as only the poorest in Orissa usually take. Jagannatha teaches us a lesson in patriotism too. In his hospitable kitchen sugar and potatoes are still taboo, as still not-long-ago they were imported foreign goods. Unlike the common Indian dishes which are boiled or fried, thus losing vitamins, the daily food of Jagannatha is steamed. This holds out before us an example of how a delicious, healthy and balanced diet could be easily had, out of common indigenous stuff.

Says the *Imperial Gazetteer of India*: "The true source of Jagannatha's undying hold upon the Hindu race consists in the fact that he is the god of the people. The poor outcaste learns that there is a city on the far eastern shore, in which the priest and the peasant are equal in the presence of the Lord of the World. In the courts of Jagannatha and outside the Lion Gate, thousands of pilgrims every year join in the sacrament of eating the holy food, the sanctity of which overleaps all barriers of caste, for a Puri priest will receive food even from a low-caste Hindu. The worship of Jagannatha aims at a catholicism which embraces every form of Indian belief and every Indian conception of the deity. He is Vishnu under whatever form and by whatever title men call upon his name. The fetishism of the aboriginal races, the nature-worship of the Vedas and the lofty spiritualism of the great Indian reformers, have alike found refuge here. Besides thus representing Vishnu in all his manifestations,

the priests have superadded the worship of other members of the Hindu trinity in their various shapes, and the disciple of every Hindu sect can find his beloved rites and some form of his chosen deity within the sacred precincts.'

Towering on the broad beach of the great eastern sea (*Mahodadhi*), Jagannatha thus moves the fancy of millions of devout people all over India as the most catholic of gods in the Hindu pantheon, the most democratic and the most human. He is great enough to nonchalantly absorb all faiths, and declares, through intelligent compromises, the most fundamental religious truth first uttered in human history, by a Vedic seer, namely, "truth is one, though pedants might speak of it variously," *ekam sat, biprah bahudha badanti*.

In historic times Jagannatha became also the imperial god of the Gajapati monarchs of Orissa. They could have easily arranged for the chariots, used during the car festival, to be dragged by royal elephants. But that would have been imperial, not religious or democratic. From imperial times to these days of democracy, the great chariots of Jagannatha are dragged by the devotees, the common folk, the eager pilgrims themselves. Jagannath is their god, not of any king or emperor. It was this significant aspect of Jagannath that inspired Tagore into writing one of his most moving one-act plays. And what is more, even the glorious Hindu monarchs of Orissa could not claim any special privilege before the Lord, except the enviable right to sweep the ground in front of the chariots, in symbolic demonstration of the equality of all in Jagannatha's eyes. And this great lesson of national and socialistic integration as well as national solidarity and democracy is demonstrated, year after year, by the Gajapati's titular descendants, the Rajas of Puri, at each annual car festival.

CHAPTER XI

THE UNIQUE ALEKHA CULT

Exactly at the time when Raja Rammohan Roy was carrying on his zealous campaign against the worship of many gods and idols in popular Hinduism and against other social and religious superstitions, an obscure person in the western jungle lands of Orissa, who seems to have remained completely illiterate and absolutely innocent of modern civilisation, was preaching the same heresies for which the great Raja has come to occupy so distinguished a place in the social and political history of modern India. That obscure prophet of Orissa has also left behind a new religion, a new church and a new literature, exactly like the celebrated founder of the Brahmo Samaj in Bengal. But while Rammohan's once sensational non-conformist religion is practically a spent-up force by now, the cult ushered in by his almost illiterate counterpart in contemporary Orissa is still a vigorously living faith, with an ever-growing number of adherents in and outside Orissa.

This mysterious prophet is popularly known as Mahima Gosain. It cannot be his name. It is probably a fond honorific endowed on him by his devoted followers, like the *Mahatma* for Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi. The expression *Mahima Gosain* means "the prophet of glory", because perhaps he preached the "glory" (*mahima*) of 'Alekha', the God that cannot be delineated", *gosain* standing for "master" or prophet in Oriya. The cult that he has left behind is also known as either *Mahima Dharma*, "the cult of glory", or simply *Alekha Dharma*, "the cult of the Alekha, or the Void". But as the reader shall presently see, this cult is no more, perhaps, than an unconscious

revival of Mahayana Buddhism. Hence it is easier to accept Mahima Dharma as a modern corruption of Mahayana, than as the "cult of glory" which appears a little too far-fetched or too naive. The word *Alekh* also is strongly reminiscent of the Mahayanic Sunya or Void. And Mahima Gosain is perhaps a corrupt way to describe a Master of Mahayana.

Viswanath Baba, the most learned mendicant-exponent of this cult, tells us an authoritative book that, after years of severe penance in obscurity, Mahima Gosain made his first public appearance at Puri in 1826, most probably to get his spiritual experiences verified and strengthened in the holy shrine of Jagannatha. But his spiritually-developed, though illiterate, mind revolted at the practices observed by the *pandas* there, in the name of religion. This drove him back to the comparatively pure, unsophisticated and more receptive people of the ex-Feudatory States of Orissa, till then completely untouched by either English education or modern civilisation. There he seems to have spent the remaining years of his life, moving from village to village and from one principality to another, converting large masses of orthodox householders to his supposedly heretic faith. He not only won the patronage of some crowned heads but seems to have been shrewd enough to discover and train talented publicity-men for his new cult, out of the rank and file of his followers. The valuable contributions to Oriya literature of this sect make this obscure prophet's cult the greatest single fact in the cultural history of Orissa in the 18th century, while remaining also the perennial source of virility of the heretical faith itself.

The prophet is supposed to have passed away at the village Joranda in the district of Dhenkanal, Orissa. Here has emerged around his sacred grave (*samadhi*) the headquarters of the growing church of the Alekh cult. It has an astoundingly democratic order, so

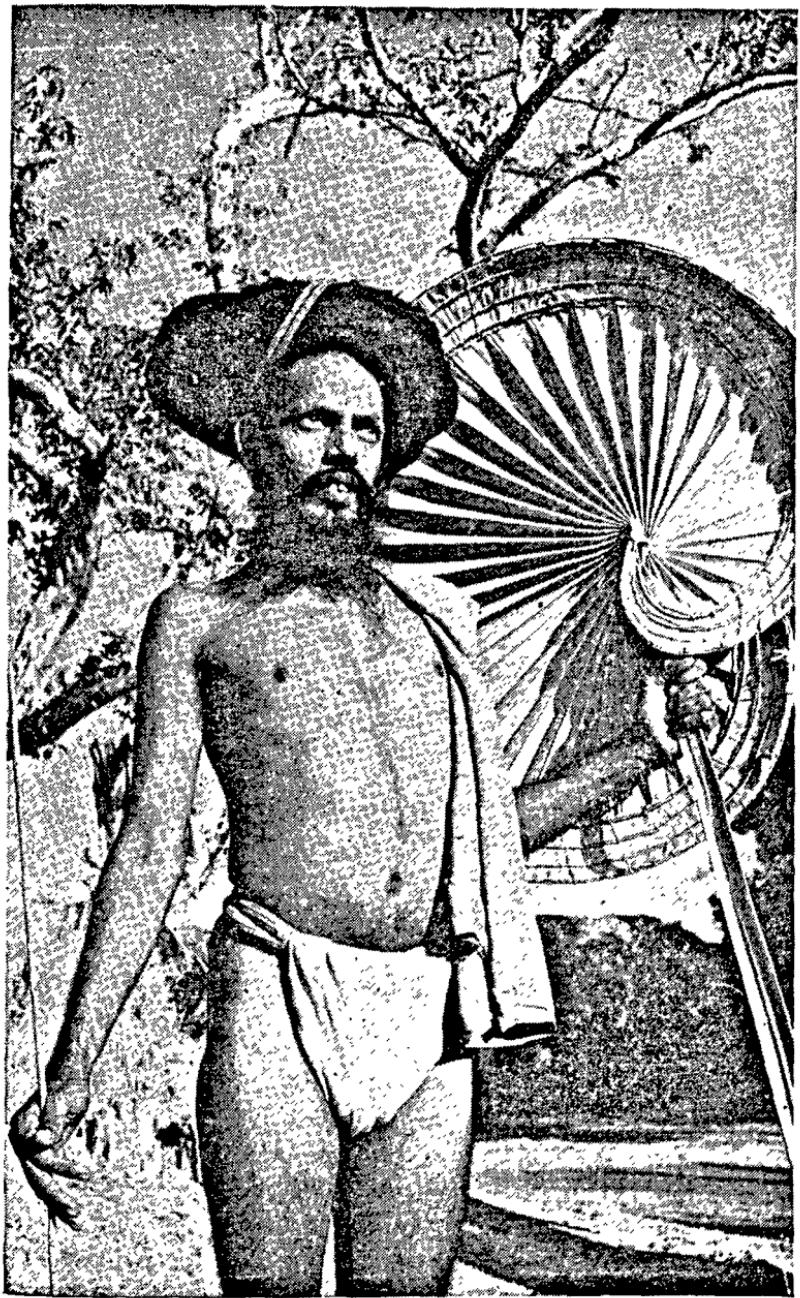
devised and set in motion by the prophet himself as to forestall the growth of any vested interests that are usually associated with churches in general.

RENASCENT BUDDHISM

The main outlines, however, of this heretic cult strongly remind one, as said above, of the Buddha of Kapilavastu and his Dhamma and Sangha, though it is most doubtful if Mahima Gosain had any historical knowledge of that great torch-bearer of humanity. But the Buddha and Buddhism have deeply percolated into the subconscious layers of the national mind of Orissa. The recently excavated ruins of the Ratnagiri Maha-Vihara, in the district of Cuttack have been hailed by scholars as the second Nalanda of India, and many similar Buddhist remains all over Orissa are still awaiting the archaeologist's spade. It was for sheer reasons of selfpreservation from the irresistible popularity of Buddhism that, at some unrecorded point of history, the Brahmin priests of Jagannatha were compelled to recognise him as none but the very Buddha of Kapilavastu, the arch-rebel against Brahminism, and accept within the precincts of his shrine Buddhistic caste-lessness so contrary to the fundamentals of the Brahminic social order. Moreover, Orissa is the only State in the Republic of India where Buddhists have been living all through the historic periods right up to modern times. Thanks to the persecution under the Ganga and Solar Kings of Orissa in the 15th and 16th centuries, the Buddhists were driven out of the coastal areas and are now mainly found living in prosperous villages in the ex-princely States, where not only was Mahima Gosain born, but which became also the field of his missionary labours. It is reasonable to believe therefore, that this modern prophet must have come in contact with these self-exiled Buddhist communities and been unconsciously influenced by their highly cultured and rational faith, in the midst of orthodox

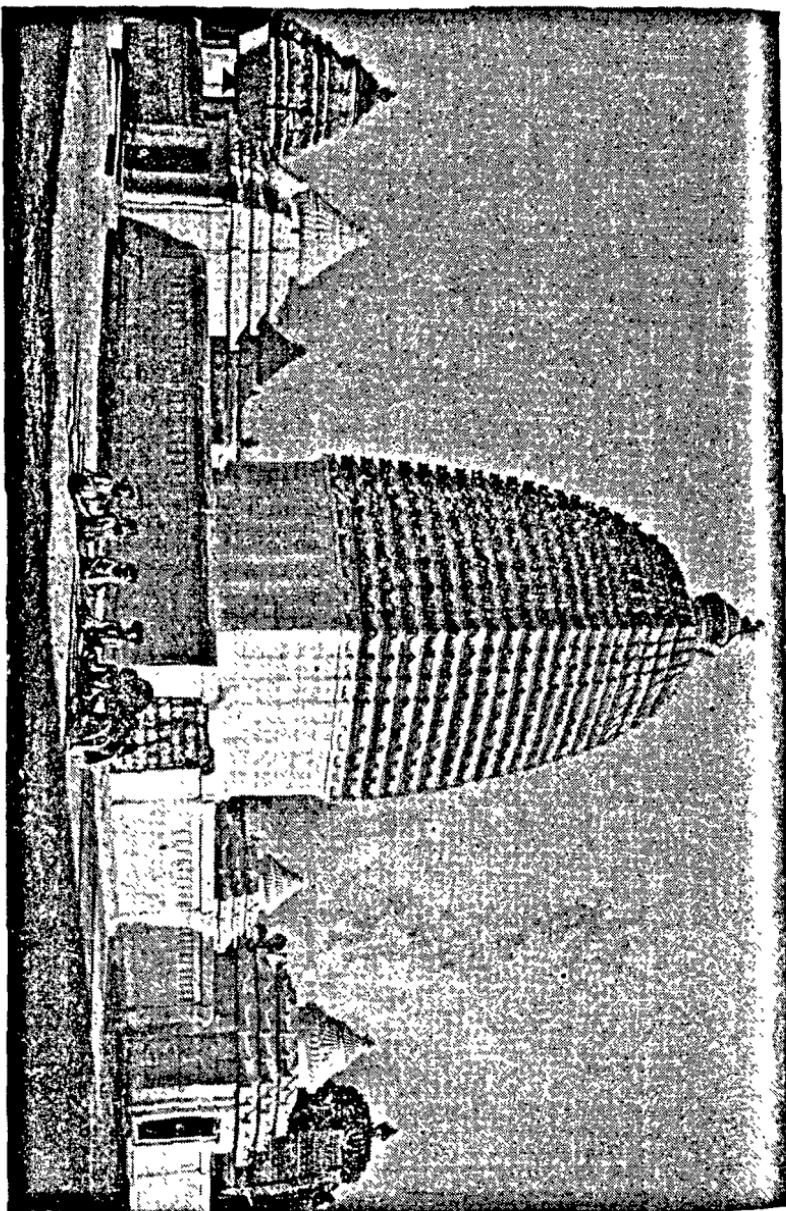
Hinduism, to which he was born, but to many of whose practices he could not reconcile himself. The very fact that Mahima Gosain himself is frequently described also, by his followers, as *Buddha* or *Prabuddha Goswami* speaks enough of the Buddhistic influence on his cult. In the lifetime of Mahima Gasain, his cult was simply called *Sat-Dharma* or "true religion",—a term used by the Buddha himself during *his* lifetime to describe *his* own heretical faith. The followers of Mahima Gosain, as a group, were described by the Master, as the *sat-sanga-gosthi* or "the holy fraternity", which has a strong flavour of the Buddha's Sangha. Devout followers of the Alekha cult begin their day with three *saranas* or "refuges", like Buddhists all over the world. Its mendicant monks put on ochre-coloured garments and go about with large palm-leaf fans, exactly as the Buddhist monks do even today in Ceylon and South East Asia. Abstaining from meals after sunset and the emphasis on non-killing among Alekhitas are other echoes of Buddhism,

All these resemblances show that the Alekha cult is not an absolutely new faith, as some of its followers or sympathisers make it out to be. Neither was Brahmoism set up by Raja Rammohan. That the prophet of the Alekha cult owes a great deal to the religions that flourished before him should be taken for granted with grace. Even the Buddha, Christ, and Muhammed were overwhelmingly influenced by the cults and ideas of their own times and of times before them. Mahima Gosain cannot be an exception. This does not detract from the greatness of his personality, nor from the value and vigour of his cult. On the contrary, the unfavourable environment, out of which this iconoclast and heretic sprang up, and the success with which he tried to establish a new moral order on earth, through self-culture and ethical discipline, sternly eschewing the worship of any external object, make this obscure, illiterate man out of the jungle-lands of Orissa, one of the most daring thought-leaders of India.



A typical Alekh Sannyasi with the palm-leaf parasol.

The headquarters of the Alekh sect at Joranda, Dhenkanal District, Orissa.



MAIN TENETS

The main tenets of the Alekha cult are (1) a casteless society, (2) recognition of one God who is Alekha or Void or 'He who cannot be described in words or figures' and who, therefore, should not be worshipped through man-made idols, (3) abandonment of all external rituals, like pilgrimage or ceremonies, as means of acquiring religious merit, (4) preparation for spiritual emancipation through only a strictly ethical way of living and through meditation on the Alekha, and (5) thinking always of the good of humanity as an essential part of the religious discipline.

While these tenets of the Alekha cult make it really revolutionary, in contrast to the popular Hindu faith in the midst of which it had its birth and development, they make it appear also as a revival of the Buddha's Dhamma, however unconsciously. What differentiates it from the latter, however, is the element of *bhakti* or devotion and the consequential concept of divine grace, to both of which the great Buddha was uncompromisingly opposed. But in Mahayana Buddhism, the Buddha himself became the object of *bhakti* and the source of grace. The Alekha cult appears to combine in itself the sternly ethical se-culture of Hinayana and the element of grace of the Mahayana. Moreover, the Alekha, the god-head of the Mahima cult, stands also practically undifferentiated from both the *sunya* (Void) of the Mahayanis and the *Brahma* of the Vedantins, thus reaching a grand synthesis of the two great religions of India.

WORLD REDEMPTION

But the particular tenet of this little known cult, which appears to be most admirable and astoundingly modern, is the idea of world-redemption. Religions, in general, promise only self-redemption, or salvation

of the individual soul of the devotee. It was the Buddha of Kapilavastu who appeared as the first world-redeemer. He preached his message, only out of an overflowing *karuna* or compassion for the suffering humanity. Later on, in Mahayana Buddhism, this idea took concrete shape in the concept Bodhisattwa who, even after he attained Nirvan, refused to leave, the terrestrial world, out of sympathy for the suffering sentient kingdom, till the last living being is released from the miserable rounds of existence. Five hundred years after the Buddha, this concept reached a grand crystallisation in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who gloried in calling himself the Son of Man also, and whose only object in coming down to our midst, was to redeem us, sinners and sufferers, through vicarious suffering by himself. There is no doubt that Jesus Christ of Nazareth stands before us as the greatest Bodhisattwa of humanity. But isn't it really surprising that in an obscure cult that had its origin in the dark jungle-lands of Orissa in the late 18th or early 19th century, this grand idea of the Bodhisattwas, as well as of world-redemption should find so prominent a place ?

When the National Academy of Letters (Sahitya Akademi) wanted to have a significant motto from each of the fourteen literatures of India, symbolic of its total ethos, the litterateurs of Orissa responded with a line from Bhima Bhoi, the great poet-laureate of the Alekha cult. It runs : "Let me stay in hell for ever, if, oh Lord, that saves the world".

No doubt, there is in Orissa, an enormous amount of religious literature. But there is not another single line like that of Bhima Bhoi quoted above, with its deep human and humane touch. The humanistic tendency is so pervasive in the Alekha cult that, if an itinerant monk of this order fails to get either food or shelter in a village during his evangelic wanderings, he is enjoined by his Church to drink three almsful of water at the

village tank and bless the village even for that much. This is a completely rare facet of the social image of India which is made up, mostly, of mutual hatred and exclusiveness.

Thinkers, like Albert Schweitzer, have, with an implied contempt, described Indian religious thought as generally life-negating. In strange contrast to that prevailing spirit of Hinduism, the Alekha cult appears to be profoundly life-accepting. It not only does *not* ask householders to leave their homes and professional duties, to realise God, but forbids, on the other hand, its monks to yield to the age-old Indian temptation of resorting to hills and forests for religious practices. It emphatically asks them to stay and move among the toiling and suffering humanity and help fellow-creatures. This is indeed something extraordinarily novel in the entire range of Indian spiritual tradition, with the single exception of Buddhism.

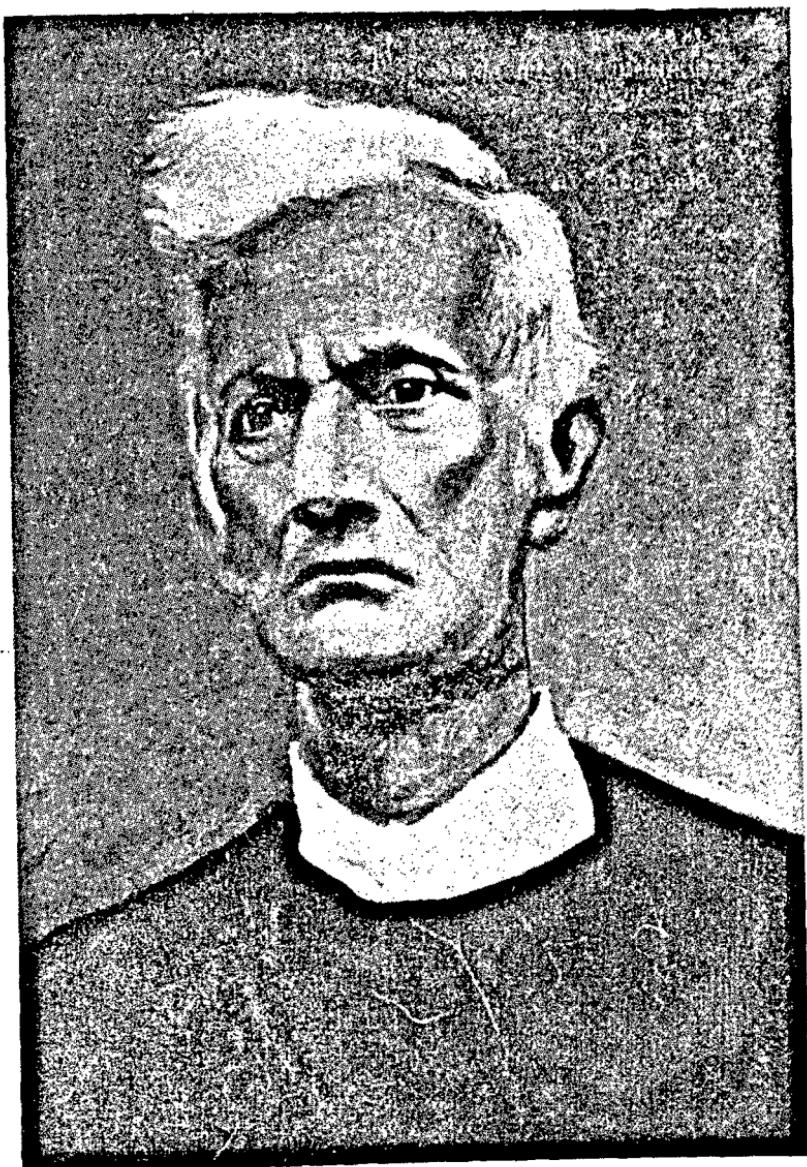
Section II

A state is not a mere cartographic expression, nor a people, a mere live-together of men and women. Basically, a nation is best known and represented by its leaders on top and by the quality of its common man at bottom.

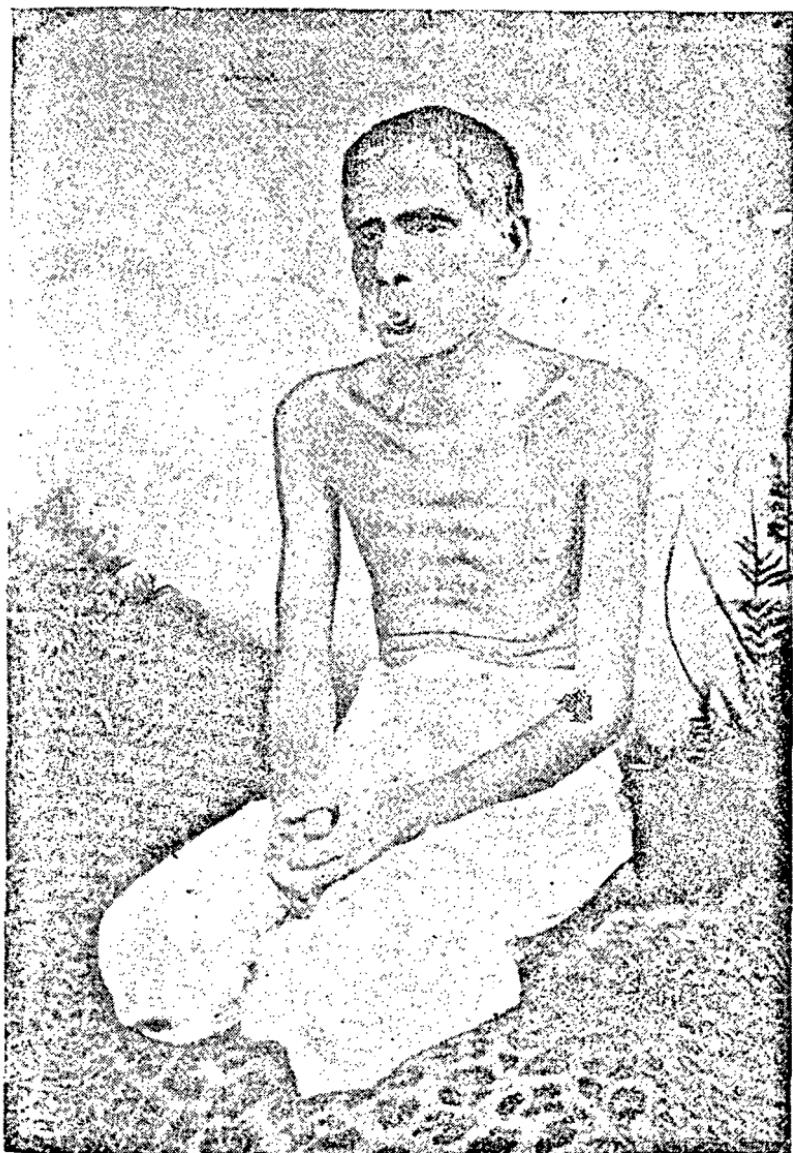
Brief life-sketches of some notable Oriyas from various fields of their national life, being presented in this section will convince readers, we hope, that Orissa's human monuments, little known outside Orissa for lack of publicity, are no less great, noble and admirable than those of their Arts, Religion and Letters.



MADHUSUDANA DASA
The great Christian leader of a Hindu people.



The General (Senapati) who saved a language.



RADHANATH RAY
He, who poetised the land of the Oriyas.



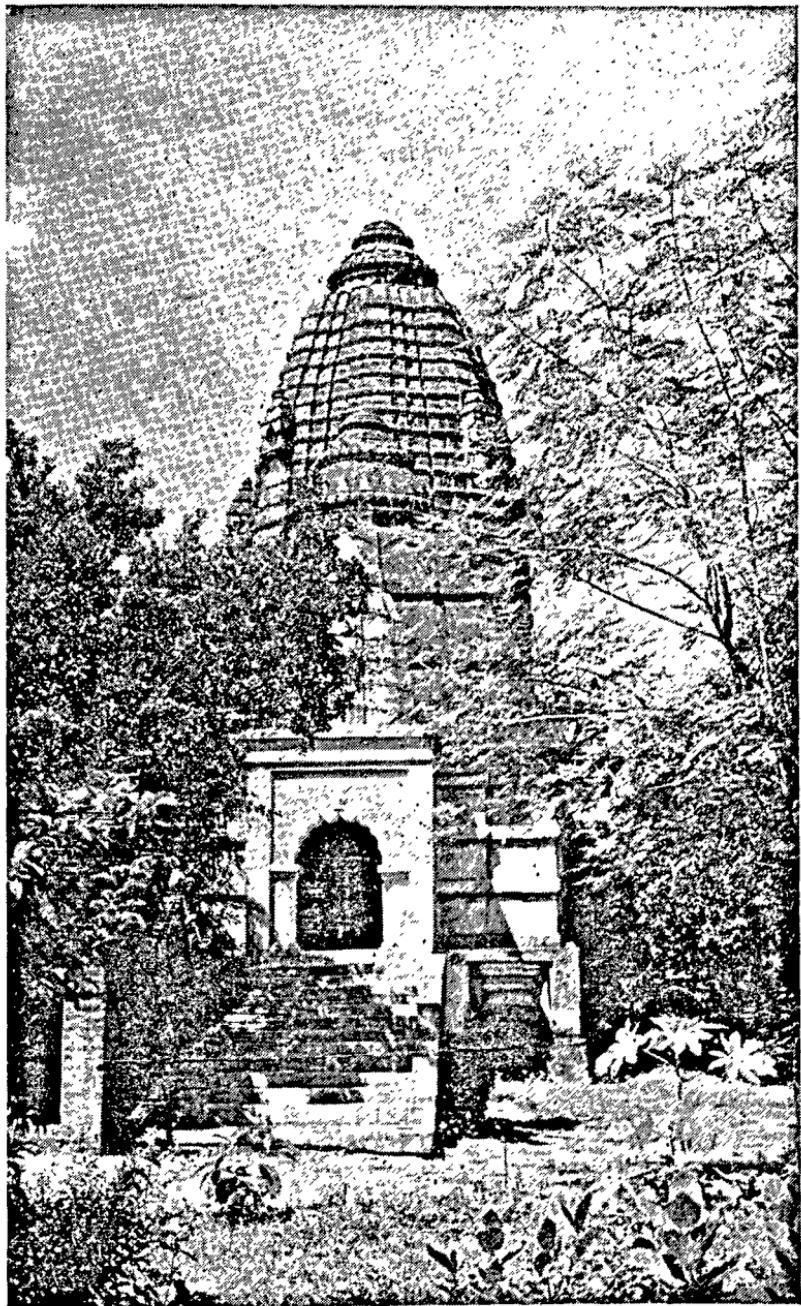
MADHUSUDAN RAO
Poet and educationist who taught modern
Oriyas to pray.



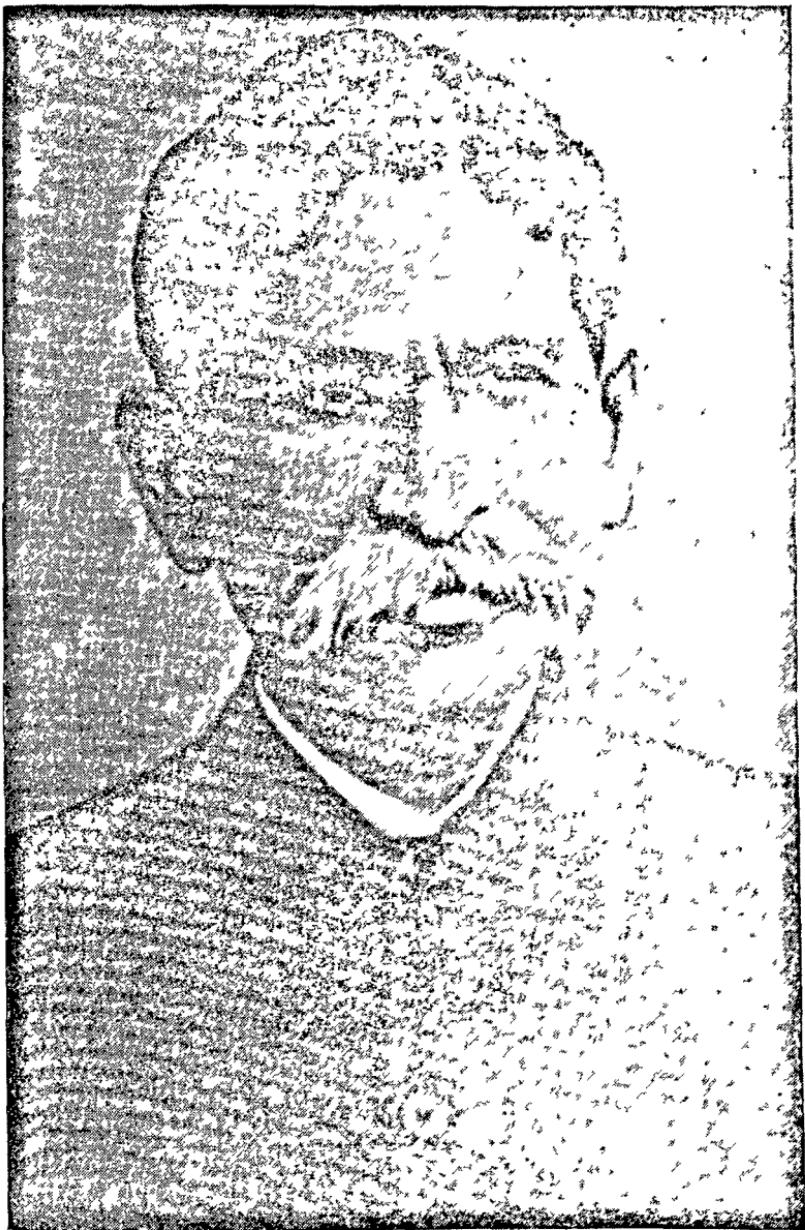
Pandit Gopabandhu Das
who bled for his people.



Samanta Chandrasekhar Sinha, worlds' last great astronomer without telescope.



THE SAMADHI
Shrine of 'BHIMA BHOI'
The greatest of India's Tribals.



GANGADHAR MEHER
The genius who worked a loom.



**Maharaja Sir Sudhala Deba C.I.E.
of Bamra**



Maharaja Sree Ramachandra Bhanja Deo of Mayurbhanj.



GAJAPATI KRUSHNACHANDRA DEO
(Maharaja of Paralakemidi)
The maker of the present State of Orissa.

Section II

The Modern Torch-bearers

CHAPTER XII

CHRISTIAN BUILDER OF A HINDU PEOPLE

The first Oriya graduate in Arts and Law, the first Oriya advocate, the first Oriya member of the then Viceregal Council, the first Oriya to be a Minister and the first Indian Minister to resign office over the ethics of democracy, — that is Madhusudana Das, not only the greatest patriot and the very maker of modern Orissa, but also a great Indian and a great humanitarian by any standard. And in keeping with the age-old tradition of catholicity of the Oriya people, over ninety per cent of whom are Hindus, this builder of modern Orissa and uncrowned king of the Oriyas for nearly half-a-century, was a Christian. As a lawyer, legislator, educationist, industrialist and a man of imperial dimensions, Madhusudana, in spite of being a Christian, has passed into the national consciousness of Hindu Orissa like a medieval legend.

Madhusudana was born on the 28th of April, 1848, of respectable middle-class parentage in a small village in the district of Cuttack, not far from the big city of that name. His great-grandmother had voluntarily committed suttee, to which fact Madhusudana was never tired of proudly referring, as his most glorious cultural heritage. He felt heroic over the fact that the blood of a suttee (virtuous woman) ran in his veins. And throughout his career, he did evince much of that indomitable determination, that glad adherence to principles without caring for consequences, and that cheerful courage to face dangers which must be abundantly required in a suttee, embracing living death with a smile, in the flames of her husband's pyre.

In those days, Orissa was only one of the many administrative divisions of the sprawling Bengal Presi-

dency and the most backward one, at that. By the time Bengal had her first university, Orissa was having only the beginnings of a middle school. The Bengalis dominated every aspect and every layer of the political, administrative and social life of Orissa, never missing a chance also to show off contemptuously their temporary superiority over the Oriyas. Madhusudana's entire political dream, therefore, naturally crystallised into an incessant battle to free his compatriots from that deplorable situation of abject subordination on their own soil, to intruding and aggressive neighbours. He saw his Oriya fellowmen scattered pell-mell in four different provinces, including Bengal, suffering in each, as an exploited and neglected minority. It is strange that even a visionary like Sri Aurobindo failed to see the logicality of young and brilliant Madhusudana's persistent battles for such down-trodden compatriots of his when he said : "It is a cause for gratification that Orissa is beginning to take its separate consciousness and to attempt to grow into an organized life under a capable and high-spirited leader, Mr. Madhusudana Das. But I believe that he is laying up for himself bitter disillusionment in the future."¹

It is so gratifying, at least to the Oriyas, that the future prophet's predictions have turned out untrue, as Madhusudana, instead of dying in disappointment and disillusionment, saw the final victory of his life-long lonely battles for his fellowmen. It is difficult to understand how such greatmen like Rabindranath and Aurobindo, while themselves madly fighting, not for any political benefit of the whole of India, but only against the partition of their dear Bengal, which has become a political fact again, after the British left, could parade themselves as not only large-minded Indian patriots, but also as cosmopolitan humanists, lonely Madhusudana, fighting for the elementary

1. *Vande Mataram*, December, 17, 1907.

political rights of his vivisected and bleeding historic race, exactly as the Banerjees, Tagores and Ghoses were supposedly doing for theirs, should be branded as parochial and small-minded. Self-interest does twist our logic, and which Bengali, howsoever pretending to be universal-minded, could desire separation of Orissa, a luscious pasture-land of theirs, from the then sprawling Bengal Presidency? They dreamed even of suppressing all neighbouring languages, substituting in their place the one great Bengali language in the whole of eastern India, including Orissa, for the most noble ideal of national integration!

That this man, admitted to be brilliant, even by men like Sri Aurobindo, completely ignored his own careerism in the broad political arena of India, pinpointing all his energy and attention to the problems of only Orissa and the Oriyas, does place him definitely on a higher pedestal than what Aurobindo conceded to him from the Parnassian altitudes of Calcutta, capital city of the then British Indian Empire and happy home of the Bengalis, from where they then dominated the whole sub-continent.

HIS SECOND BIRTH

Contrary to the expectations of his country-gentleman father, who might have been quite satisfied to see his first-born as a clerk in the Collectorate at Cuttack, young Madhusudana, after passing the Entrance Examination, ran to Calcutta, impelled as it were by latent ambitions, for higher education, which was not possible in Orissa in those days. Friendless in a big city, the young boy, with bitter memories of arrogant and supercilious Bengali fellow-students in his high school days at Cuttack, now naturally sought the shelter of Christian missionaries, for safety as well as perhaps financial assistance. His entire student-life in Calcutta was, therefore, spent in the London Missionary College and its attached boarding

house. Gradually imbibing the humane aspects of Christianity and moved particularly by the noble personality of Jesus Christ himself, young Madhusudana decided, even before he graduated, to discard his ancestral faith and embrace Christianity. Naturally enough, his Hindu father and mother started bitterly wailing over the fact of their very first-born turning a renegade to the faith of the family and ancestors. But young Madhusudana never flinched from any of his decisions. He, with a Bengali room-mate of his, was baptised in the L. M. S. Church at Calcutta. It is a daughter of this Bengali comrade-in-religion who later became celebrated as Miss Sailabala Das, the worthy adopted child of Madhusudana and his life-long helper.

THE DEVOUT CHRISTIAN

By the time Madhusudana passed the M. A. examination of the Calcutta University in English (1873) and took also the degree of Bachelor of Laws (1878), he had already distinguished himself in the circles he moved, as a clever debater and persuasive speaker. The missionaries, who had patronised him so far, now angled him for evangelic work in Orissa. But it speaks volumes for the innate nobility and clear-headedness of young Madhusudana that he refused to be a professional preacher on a salary, because Christianity had appealed to him as only a noble way of life and an article of personal faith, rather than as a means of livelihood. He said, he hoped to carry on invisible, but more effective, propaganda for Christianity through his personal conduct rather than by preaching as a professional priest. Madhusudana had also the moral courage to say to the mission authorities that he did not believe in a life of poverty and so-called sacrifices, but would earn as much as would be required to live a good life, meeting all social obligations. To the surprised query of the Christian missionaries as to why a young man like him required so much money,

Madhusudana replied that he wanted to clear off the debts of his father and make the last days of his ageing parents comfortable. To this, the intolerant missionaries objected, saying, that as he was a Christian and therefore already ostracised and disinherited by his Hindu father, he was a fool to worry about the latter's debts. Madhusudana replied that it was as a Christian that he considered it his first duty to look after the needs of his parents, no matter what their personal faiths might be.

A practical, levelheaded statesman, Madhusudana was never demonstrative of his new faith. He never uttered a word against any other religion. As a matter of fact, he was the most catholic of men. A Hindu-Christian, he was, for many years, the president of the Faiz-i-Am Sabha (Muhammedan Association) of Orissa and ardently preached Hindu-Muslim unity long before it became a plank in the Gandhian programme of the Indian National Congress. On his return from his first trip to Europe in 1897, he even organised at Cuttack an *Association of All Faiths* on May 6, 1898. He was, all the same, a devout Christian, trying to live Christ as much as was possible in his day-to-day life, though seldom attending church. He often told friends that he was converted, not to "Churchianity" but to "Christianity." He often said that it was the noble words of the dying Jesus on the Cross, "Father, forgive them, they know not what they are doing," that actually moved his young mind towards his great religion of love, compassion and forgiveness.

Madhusudana acted in 1915 as the chairman and in 1916 and 1917 as the president of the All-India Conference of Indian Christians and delivered memorable addresses, in one of which *he propounded for the first time*, the bold theory that Indian Christians should remain Indian to the core, in spite of their religion being the same as that of the ruling Britishers.

This seems to have been accepted as the guiding political principle of the Indian Christian community ever since. And even when he became the uncrowned king of Orissa, and was offered, in spite of being a Christian, unconditional entry into the world-famous Hindu Temple of Jagannatha at Puri, he refused, saying that he had accepted a certain faith out of the purest convictions and would not allow himself to be misunderstood by people, as being interested in the idolatry that Jagannatha represented, although this great patriot, later on, fought whole-heartedly for the management of the shrine of Jagannatha remaining under the full control of the Hindu Raja of Puri.

THE BRILLIANT TEACHER

Even till he passed his M. A. and Law examinations, the first Oriya to achieve such academic glories, Madhusudana, self-exiled in the vast city of Calcutta and ever struggling against poverty, was absolutely unknown to his Oriya countrymen. For having embraced Christianity, on the other hand, he had been much maligned in the Orissa Press. Hence, he dared not come back to his native land. To make a decent living, young Madhusudana had to try many ways, in the great city of Calcutta, one of which was the writing of a book on English grammar, perhaps because, his emoluments even in those days as Headmaster of the well-known Garden Reach High School there, were rather inadequate. This book, in the form of a catechism, with which the young author was familiar through Christian-mission literature, became sensationaly popular, dominating the book-market of an advanced State, like Bengal, for generations. In his oration at the funeral of Madhusudana, Shri Janakinath Bose, father of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose and his life-long colleague at the Cuttack Bar, referred to this *Model Questions and Answers in English Grammar* as the one book that laid the foundation for a good knowledge of English

for many, of many generations of young intellectuals in Bengal. While in Orissa, a well-qualified Oriya had to wait fifty years more to be considered worthy of being even headmaster of a reputed high school, the appointment of an Oriya as headmaster of a well-known high school in Calcutta, the imperial capital, was also a miracle which has not been repeated. And along with royalties of several thousand rupees, which Madhusudana's book brought him, he also had the proud privilege of being appointed as the private tutor of no less a pupil than the future Sir Asutosh Mukherjee, the Bengal Tiger and the greatest Vice-Chancellor that modern India has ever produced. The deep regard and reverence that Sir Asutosh cherished all his life for his 'master' has become a legend.

There was no reason why Madhusudana, who was so successful as an educationist in the very prime of his life, would not have continued in that line, expecting ever increasing rewards and honours as a matter of course. Back in his homeland of Orissa, he had to be a teacher again, even while practising as an advocate. But this time he taught not in a secondary school, but as the Lecturer of Law in the Ravenshaw College, Cuttack. The Law section of the college had fared so badly for years that its abolition was taken for granted. It was just to save it from extinction that Madhusudana, on the request of friends, stepped in as its new guardian and, lo and behold, the dying institution immediately had a glorious revival. Not only every candidate sent up for law examination of the University of Calcutta, passed, but some created even enviable records. Madhusudana remained the teacher of Law for seven years from 1883 to 1890, firmly establishing the institution he had undertaken to look after. It is in the fitness of things that the full-fledged Law College of the Utkala University is now named after Madhusudana.

But Madhusudana was not destined to die a mere maker of lawyers, however brilliant and successful!

He was born to be the maker of a nation, the architect of a modern State. And, most unexpectedly, the call came from strange quarters, reorienting his entire career from school-mastering and legal practice, towards politics and nation-building on all fronts.

BIRTH OF THE PATRIOT

Being the only Oriya Law graduate, that time, Madhusudana had been appointed Oriya translator in the Calcutta High Court on a part-time basis even while he had started legal practice at the Alipore Court, Calcutta. On the suggestion of a British judge that brilliant young lawyers, instead of crowding together in Calcutta, should go and enrich provincial bars, young Madhusudana wound up his affairs in Calcutta and came down to Cuttack, the head quarters of the then Orissa Division of Bengal Presidency. Public memory being proverbially short, his religious apostasy had long been forgotten. His ageing parents and family accepted him with open arms, now that he had returned home highly educated as well as prosperous. The bar at Cuttack at that time was Bengali to a man. And while even those supposedly highly-educated Bengalis could easily turn discourteous to that one unwanted Oriya lawyer and not permit him a seat in the Bar Association room, the British District Judge offered him a part of his own office, which in a way, raised his prestige all at once in the eyes of the common man. The very day Madhusudana joined the Cuttack Bar he addressed a public meeting at the Town Hall. The newcomer to the Cuttack Bar thus came to be looked upon, all at once, as the saviour of the Oriyas, as Gandhi found himself to be, in respect of Indians in South Africa, when he appeared at a Johannesburg Court and was similarly insulted. And the publicity the young lawyer quickly attracted, brought the needed grist to his mill. Princes and peasants flocked to Madhusudana with their legal problems and in no time he came to be known not only as the most shining

light at the Cuttack Bar but also as one of the most brilliant lawyers in the whole of eastern India.

At that time the British Government had been seriously considering to take over the administration of the temple of Jagannatha as the Raja was a minor, his father having been sentenced to transportation for life in the Andamans for murdering a *Sannyasi*, and as the temple's affairs were not satisfactorily managed by the Queen Mother, Shrimati Suryamani Patta-Mahadevi. This royal lady, however, seems to have been made of the ancient heroic stuff. Determined to fight out her case in the High Court, she unhesitatingly selected young Madhusudana, in preference to many a senior lawyer of Cuttack.

Madhusudana went to Puri at the Rani's call. In those days of strict purdah, he could be summoned to the presence of even the elderly Queen Mother only after mid-night when the whole town lay asleep, and he could talk to her, only across a screen. After being appraised of her plaint, wary Madhusudana could not vouchsafe any legal victory for her. Then the old heroine, true to the tradition of the family of the historic Gajapatis, blazed out from the other side of the screen, that brought out indeed the birth of a new patriot on this side. Said the irate heroine : "You hesitate, do you ? Woman that I am, and old too, if it were merely a question of a horse and a sword, as in the good old days, I could show to the whole world how I alone could settle the matter with the hated *Feringi*. They have taken our kingdom, sent my son to the Andamans and now think of taking away even the great temple built and run for centuries by my ancestors !"

Madhusudana could say no more than promise the Rani to do his best and went to Calcutta with a cartload of ancient documents. There he met several well-known barristers, including Mr. J. T. Woodroffe,

father of the celebrated protagonist of the *tantra*, but all of them said that the Rani had no strong case. This was rather shocking to the young advocate. How could he show his face in Orissa and, in particular, to the Rani ? He now set himself to the task of personally preparing a brief, spending days and nights over it. He had it printed also and distributed, among the same big guns of the Calcutta Bar who had turned down the case, with a fresh request to go through it. And when Madhusudana met Mr. J. T. Woodroffe a week later, he was greeted with the enthusiastic words : "Excellent ! The Rani is sure to win her case !"

The Rani ultimately succeeded in the Calcutta High Court, the temple of Jagannatha remaining under her control as before. When young Madhusudana came to Orissa with the glad tidings, he was given a thunderous welcome from a distance of ten miles from Puri. He was carried in the Raja's own gilded palanquin in a procession of elephants, horses and thousands of admirers, as the saviour of the temple of Jagannatha from the hands of the *mlechchas* (the Britishers), the Hindu enthusiasts completely forgetting that the victorious advocate was a *mlechcha* (non-Hindhu) himself !

Right up to his death, Madhusudana was taken to be a veritable wizard of the bar and it is as a miracle-working lawyer that he became a legend among the masses of Orissa. Whenever an Oriya rustic from a distant village would return home after his rare visit to Cuttack, the metropolis of Orissa, one of the queries from his curious village friends would surely be : "Did you see this, that, and Madhu Babu also, at Cuttack ?" And children in the village-streets all over Orissa used to dance, singing the following modern folk-song :

A scholar must I be
 To give battle, one day,
 To that Madhu Babu,
 Riding a black charger !

Madhusudana earned millions during his life-time, the Rajas and Maharajas and rich zamindars of Orissa being his sole clientele. But he became the idol of a nation for being also the sincerest champion of the distressed and the knight-errant against all sorts of injustice, irrespective of the status or wealth of the persons involved. In the words of Sir Hugh Macpherson, ex-Governor of Bihar and Orissa, "when question arose affecting the rights and interests of cultivators, he always championed their cause, in spite of the class of Rajas and Zamindars being the chief source of all his princely income."

With a staggering income in those days, when a rupee had four times the purchasing power that it has today, Madhusudana lived in Cuttack as its greatest and most dazzling citizen with a palatial garden house, horses and a most exclusive kitchen run by Kashmiri cooks, the topmost persons from India and abroad enjoying his hospitality. He himself, however, was one of the most abstemious of persons, almost an ascetic in diet and other habits, sitting with folded hands at the rich table, lavishly entertaining guests with an equally rich fare of witty and lively talk.

When he was Headmaster of the Garden Reach High School at Calcutta, Madhusudana had married a most pious Bengali Christian girl. But after a short but idyllically happy married life for only five years, the great lady Saudamini passed away leaving no issue. Spurning most tempting offers of marriage the young widower decided to remain single, wedded practically to his country and his people and living all the time for others, being most celebrated in Orissa, in modern times, for keeping open house.

But like Yudhisthira's weakness for the game of dice, it is the unworldly, spendthrift abits of Madhusudana that ultimately turned him into a tragic hero, crashing at last to the ground from the very excessive weight of his own virtues.

THE PIONEER INDUSTRIALIST

Along with his professional work, Madhusudana channelled his abundant surplus energy into other significant streams. Essentially, he seems to have been a creator, a go-ahead thinker, a reformer and a builder. His conversion to Christianity may be said to have stemmed also from this inherent impelling reformist spirit in him. Settled at Cuttack in his palatial garden-house and with any amount of money at his disposal, the creator and the maker in him showed themselves in full vigour. The practical, hard-headed lawyer turned now into a producer and dealer in arts and crafts.

Orissa has long been famous for its silver filigree work of gossamer delicacy. Sambalpur is unrivalled for its artistic textiles. But, thanks to the economic policies of the British imperialists and the ruthless inroads of the machine into cottage industries, these wonderful handicrafts of Orissa were slowly dying a cruel death. Determined to resuscitate and glorify Orissa's arts, Madhusudana set up a large factory inside the compound of his house for manufacturing improved art wares and a large building, close to the one where he lived, for their sale and display. He went abroad twice, taking with him boxfuls of his craft-products to give away as presents to notables in England and other countries of Europe, in order just to spread the artistic fame of his race. There are innumerable letters addressed to Madhusudana by British and Indian dignitaries, expressing wonder at those fine works of art. Wrote Sir William Wedderburn, the British M. P. and President of the Indian National Congress held at Bombay in 1885 : "I never saw a more artistic piece of filigree work." The

Culcutta newspaper, *The Statesman* and *The Friend of India*, wrote on March 2, 1901 : "The specimens of Orissa art that were shown to us in silver and gold, ivory and horn are in every way excellent. Graceful and original in design, they reflect the most credit."

Orissa's present fame for her silver-filigree work is really due to the impetus and inspiration that Madhusudana gave to this industry at the beginning of this century, when it was nearly dead. But Madhusudana's dream-child, the "Orissa Art Wares" met death only too soon, leaving heavy financial liabilities on the head of its noble founder, as the latter never looked into the commercial aspects and was always carried away by his patriotic and philanthropic idealism.

UTKALA TANNERY

During his first visit to Europe in 1897, Madhusudana visited Germany and saw how hides were taken from India and shipped back as shoes and other fashionable goods for Indians to buy at high prices. He observed also how enormous quantities of hide were being exported abroad every year from Orissa alone, bringing little gain to the people. On his return home he decided to start, therefore, a leather-factory of his own, initiating the illiterate and "untouchable" shoe-makers of Orissa into the modern ways of manufacture, to just set an example before his countrymen as to how the acceptance of the machine and modern scientific processes would improve their economic condition.

This venture, like the "Orissa Art Wares", was a resounding success so far as its products were concerned. Madhusudana's Utkala Tannery soon became legendary. He discovered and used indigenous ways of curing and softening leather with the help of modern mechanical appliances under German experts,

He was the first in India to use lizard and crocodile skins to make unusually lovely leather goods. These were in great demand in European and American markets. An official report issued by the Government of Bihar and Orissa in 1921 said : "The Utkala Tannery is the pioneer of modern tanning and leather-goods-manufacture in the provinces of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa and has incurred considerable expense in early experiments in training experts and labour." On receiving 1.100 pairs of military shoes from the Utkala Tannery on June 20, 1918, the Inspector of Army Boots wrote : "The general appearance, manufacture and finish of the boots is excellent and I consider, the firm should be commended and encouraged for the production of increased supplies of army foot-wear." Among the numberless satisfied customers of the tannery were Governors, wives of Viceroys and Rajas and Maharajas. Wrote Lord Sinha, Governor of Bihar and Orissa : "The new boots are the most comfortable I have had for years". Sir Edward Gait, another Governor of Bihar and Orissa, wrote to Mr. Das : "I have always been much interested in your efforts to develop the industrial resources of Orissa and in particular in the tannery which you have established at Cuttack. I have, as you know, placed orders there several times myself, and the articles supplied have invariably given satisfaction." Madhusudana got similar commendatory letters from Lord Morley and Lord George Hamilton, Secretaries of State for India.

Madhusudana was far ahead of his contemporaries in sponsoring such visionary projects for the revival of the economic prosperity of India which had been ruined by the imports of British factory products. The Swadeshi movement of Bengal raised its head on sentimental grounds, as an aftermath of the Bengal partition in 1905. It was based essentially on a negative approach. But even as early as 1896, Madhusudana had started his "Orissa Art Wares" with a positive approach to native products. Two years before the

Swadeshi cry was heard in Bengal, he had organised an association to develop indigenous industries in Orissa with such surprisingly far-sighted objectives as (1) the revival of the dead and the improvement of the dying industries of Orissa, (2) the utilisation of the natural resources of Orissa, either as raw materials or as industrial products, (3) the expansion of raw, materials or industrial products of Orissa, (4) the replacement of imported goods by goods of local manufacture, without appreciable loss to the consumer, and (5) the adoption of measures for discovering the natural resources of Orissa.

But Nemesis followed Madhusudana's glorious Utkala Tannery, as it had its predecessor, the "Orissa Art Wares", because of the same noble frailties of their great founder. On discovering the slightest blemish on a pair of shoes, Madhusudana would immediately order complete bonfire of the whole lot of hundreds, so keenly sensitive he was to any stigma on the fair name of Orissa. As a result of such idealistic eccentricities, his second dreamchild, the Utkala Tannery, on which the great patriot had spent a huge fortune, could never show profit, and ultimately went into liquidation. It landed the ambitious founder on insolvency and, even drove him, in the last days of his life, to the District Court, for earning his daily bread, after long years of princely living and after being the Minister for Local Self-Government, Bihar and Orissa.

UTKALA SAMMILANI

But these abortive but glorious industrial ventures of Madhusudana were only part of his life's main political mission. Though a Christian, the heroic word of Shrimati Suryamani Patta Mahadevi, the Queen Mother of Puri, had long ago roused the sleeping Oriya patriot in him. In the intervening years, as a member of both the Indian National Congress and

the Bengal Legislative Council, he had rubbed shoulders with the biggest names in contemporary Indian politics. For his forceful and idealistic speeches and his hatred of all kinds of sham, he had been enviably nicknamed, the 'Cato' of the Bengal Legislative Council.

But though equal to any in mental brilliance in any assembly, Madhusudana felt that he was forever shadowed by the political subordination and social backwardness of his own race, the Oriyas. As referred to above, he had bitter personal memories of the contemptuous behaviour of the Bengali students towards himself in his school days at Cuttack and of the Bengalis in general, towards the average Oriya. And though now he found himself equal to any big Bengali, he saw with his own eyes that the Oriyas in general were treated like slaves or even animals, not only in Bengal, but also in their own homeland, Orissa.

And so, soon after Madhusudana had settled down at Cuttack, he started the Utkala Sabha or Orissa Association in 1882, as a mouthpiece of the Oriyas and ran it for threee decades. It slowly expanded and merged later, into the celebrated Utkala Sammilani or the Utkal Union Conference. As a nepresentative of the Utkala Sabha, Madhusudana used to attend the early sessions of the Indian National Congress. But true to his grain, Madhusudana often raised the tragic case of the Oriyas who were lying dismembered in four different provinces and were neglected and ruthlessly exploited too, in each, as a backward minority. But the selfcentred Bengalis misunderstood and misrepresented him and coldshouldered his efforts. We have seen the perfect illogicality of Sri Aurobindo's remarks branding 'young and brilliant Madhusudana' as parochial.

In 1802, Madhusudana had a political *tete-a-tete* in the Grand Hotel, Calcutta, with Sir Surendranath

Banerjee who was then really the Indian National Congress. Banerjee requested Das to activise Congress in Orissa. To that, the latter replied in the following significant manner. "How do you expect a cripple to run, Mr. Banerjee, and that too as the equal of a healthy person ? The Oriya people lie vivisected in four different provinces, their limbs wrenched off the main body. You Bengalis not only live together under one administration, but are in great advance of the Oriyas in all spheres of life. How do you expect Oriyas and Bengalis to work together ? As an Oriya, my first objective should be, to see my people live together under one administration, feeling the sense of oneness just as your people are having. Will you help me in meeting this vital need of my people ? Will you support me in passing a resolution in the Congress for the unification of the Oriya-speaking lands ?"

Banerjee, the Bengali that he was to the core, replied diplomatically that the Indian National Congress was an all-India forum with pan-Indian objectives and did not bother about provincial matters, whereas with the immense fortuitous advantages of Calcutta as the capital of the Indian Empire and of the tremendous Impact of that Calcutta's Press all over India, the Pals, the Banerjees and the Ghoses could turn the local issue of Bengal partition into an all-India issue. What sophistries cannot those in advantageous positions, hammer down the throats of unthinking masses as specious truth, proving, on the otherhand, and condemning those, really honest about themselves, as undesirables ! Hasn't this happened age after age ?

But Madhusudana Das, a great Oriya that he was, told Surendranath Banerjee point-blank, that he should have no more vital connection with an organisation such as the Congress, which forgot the sufferings of the parts, in its wrong enthusiasm for the whole !

ANTICIPATED GANDHI IN MANY WAYS

Breaking away from the Congress spiritually, if not organisationally, Madhusudana ushered into existence the Utkala Sammilani or the Utkal Union Conference in 1903, exactly hundred years after the British occupation of Orissa, after his disappointing talks with Surendranath Banerjee. It was not a mere political body, clamouring for quick and spectacular political successes. It was, essentially, a socio-cultural association of the dismembered Oriyas. And the far-sighted Madhusudana, while not forgetting his life's single objective of bringing together all Oriya-speaking peoples in a single State of their own, made it the mission of his life to build up his race from the grass-roots, as befitting the modern times and unstintingly spent his own money for the purpose. Though not a poet, he composed inspiring patriotic songs, ran a theatre at his garden-house, set up various cottage industries and worked incessantly for the poor common peasant, exactly as Gandhiji worked decades later.

But smelling of a probable movement for the separation of Orissa from Bengal in the establishment of the Utkala Sammilani, the then Bengali Commissioner of the Orissa Division, Sir K. G. Gupta, saw red and went to the length, in his panicky nerves, of issuing an official circular prohibiting all public servants from attending its inaugural sitting at Cuttack. But thanks to the immediate counter-balancing steps taken by the redoubtable Mr. Das, the same Commissioner had to attend it personally, on peremptory orders from above. In reality, the Utkala Sammilani, in the hands of Madhusudana, the reformer and the builder, was a splendid cultural organisation of the Oriyas, which has not had a comparable parallel, so far, in any other part of India. In the very first session, resolutions were passed to

find ways and means of improving Oriya literature and Orissa's historic arts and crafts. And though it pertained naturally to only one of the many racial and linguistic groups in the vast subcontinent of India, the Utkala Sammilani, as it was shaped in Madhusudana's brilliant imagination, possessed admirable features and anticipated many of Gandhi's ideas by, at least, a quarter of a century.

Madhusudana invented, for instance, a beautiful sola headgear covered with pink silk, imitating the Indian turban, and made its use compulsory for everybody who attended the conference. It not only anticipated the ubiquitous Gandhi-cap of later days, but was artistically far superior to that *khadi* skull-cover and never had that stinking stigma of corruption which later became synonymous with the latter.

Madhusudana made the Maharaja of Mayurbhanj, Sree Ramachandra Bhanja Deo, the first president of the Sammilani². He wanted that a Maharaja (of those days) would address the commoners as "dear brothers" and thus generate by magic, so to say, the united national consciousness among his compatriots.

In the first session of the Sammilani, Madhusudana himself sat on the floor with all the "untouchable" artisans of his factories, leaving chairs to other delegates, thus anticipating Gandhi's Harijan movement long before it was even dreamed of. His emphatic speech on the amelioration of the depressed classes in Indian society, in the Imperial Council, as far back as March 16, 1916, is also most remarkable and memorable.

And, above all, Madhusudana had all the deliberations of this conference conducted *only in Oriya*, and not in English, as in the sessions of the Indian National Congress of those days and all other similar contemporary gatherings, thus anticipating by sixty years the

² See Chapter X X.

present-day emphasis on Indian languages, symbolising our political freedom. Motilal Ghose, the then Editor of the *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, who attended the first session of the Utkala Sammilani on invitation, felt astounded to see this miracle in the supposedly backward Orissa, of all places ! Till then, this had not even been thought of anywhere in India, not even in advanced Bengal.

During each session of the Sammilani, Madhusudana arranged an exhibition of arts and crafts, preaching again and again, the revival of the *charkha* from the Conference-platform, thus anticipating Gandhi again, by sixty years, even regarding this main plank of his political mission.

It may be a surprise to many a handicraft-lover in India, that the Mahatma, who often quoted Mr. Das's views on cottage Industries in his journal, *Young India*, wrote to him as follows, in his letter of August 12, 1925, from Calcutta : "You will, of course teach me how to spread the message of the spinning wheel in Utkala, Though the Congress has spent money like water there, it has made little headway." It should be notedt hat Madhusudana always attended Sammilani sessions in Indian habiliments (dhoti, coat and chaddar) which were hand-spun, hand-woven and hand-made, long before Gandhi's khaddar became the political watchword in india.

For more than two decades, Madhusudana and the Utkala Sammilani were one and the same. He never believed in begging bowls or subscription-books, which have become the fashion and means of livelihood for some, as well as, a veritable nuisance in indian public life, since 1921. Madhusudana met all the huge expenses of the Sammilani, including those of the annual sessions, from his own pocket, never asking any colleague or follower for financial aid, howsoever small. Justly had Motilal Ghose described the Utkala

Sammilani in his *Patrika* as a "one man show", for which, of course, Madhusudana is known to have mildly rebuked his editor-friend. For about thirty years, it was Madhusudana alone who drafted, printed and despatched numerous memoranda to the Government for unification of the Oriya-speaking people, who met Viceroys, Secretaries of State and MPs in India and England, and also the one man who gave parties, organised press conferences, and published and circulated brochures, for the one single dream and objective of his life, namely, to give his downtrodden Oriya people, a place under the sun.

And under his inspiring guidance, the Utkala Sammilani, combining all sections of the people of Orissa, including even Bengalis, Telugus, Marwaris, Moslems, princes and peasants, was indeed a unique national institution without parallel anywhere in India. But it was swamped, all of a sudden, by the tidal waves of the Mahatma's Non-Co-Operation movement, to the most tragic disadvantage of the Oriyas. The incontrovertible fact remains, however, that if the historic Oriyas have a homeland of their own at present, it is due certainly not to Congress-justice, but entirely to the efforts and sacrifices of two men,—Madhusudana Das who sowed the seeds, laid the foundation and kept the flame alive at enormous personal sacrifice, and Maharaja Krushna Chandra Gajapati of Parlakimedi ;⁸ who, as a member of the Round Table Conferences, rendered yeoman's service to this most vital of all Oriya causes. By the time of the Round Table Conferences (1930-32), Madhusudana, had grown too old for active politics. Otherwise, the services of the last of the glorious Gajapatis would not have been necessary. But like the great leader Moses of the exiled Jews, the Grand Old Man of Orissa had the spiritual satisfaction of knowing that his labours and sacrifices had, at last, brought his people to the

⁸ See Chapter XX.

doorstep of the promised land, though he himself was not destined to see how they utilised and enjoyed its privileges.

MAKER OF LAWS

Madhusudana joined the Bengal Legislative Council in 1896 and continued uninterruptedly as its member till 1912, when Bihar and Orissa were separated from Bengal. Thereafter, he became a member of the Bihar and Orissa Legislative Council till 1924. If in the Bengal Assembly he was called the Cato, in the Council of Bihar and Orissa, he was nick-named "the snake-charmer" as, in spite of being a forthright critic of the Government, he could, through his powerful advocacy, get from the Government whatever he wanted. In the Bengal Council, Madhusudana's remarkable achievement as a legislator was his revolutionary memorandum relating to the Orissa Tenancy Act which came on the anvil in 1911. It is surprising to find that half a century ago there was a visionary who, in his intense desire to improve the conditions of the Indian peasant, advocated, not the tinkering reforms and amendments attempted by timid legislators of to-day with their own vested interests at-heart, but total abolition of landlordism in the whole of India, even without compensation ! And that too, not on sentimental grounds, but on convincing arguments based on facts of history and economics ! Not for nothing did Sir Hugh Macpherson, the Governor of Bihar and Orissa, say about Mr. Das : "There were two causes that were always peculiarly dear to the heart of Mr. Das : one was the welfare of the cultivating *rayat* and the other was the independence of Orissa. Although he was the retained legal adviser of many Orissa chiefs and zamindars, he never wavered in his support of the cultivators' rights."

From the Bihar and Orissa Council, Madhusudana was elected to the Imperial Council in 1913 where also,

as a colleague of such famous men, as Gokhale, Jinnah, Malaviya, Surendranath Banerjee and C. Vijayaraghavachari, he made his mark, making lively, intelligent and shrewd observations whenever he stood up to speak. His speeches relating particularly to the Indian Penal Code and the Criminal Procedure Code were impressive and illuminating.

But it was in the Bihar and Orissa Legislative Council that Madhusudana left a permanent mark as a legislator. Lord Sinha, the first Indian Governor, appointed Madhusudana as his Minister for Local Self-Government in 1921. Madhusudana remained at this post for only three short years. But his outstanding righteous conduct as well as efficiency and the reforms he introduced in the administration during those three short years have never been paralleled by any single one of the ever increasing hordes of ministers in India, even though enjoying tenures ten times longer than Mr. Das's. As the Minister of Local Self-Government, Mr. Das prepared and piloted the Bihar and Orissa Municipal and Local Self-Government Acts which are still in vogue, in the spirit, if not in the letter. Referring to these legislative achievements, Sir Henry Wheeler, who was then the Governor of Bihar and Orissa, remarked at the East India Association in London ⁴: "Mr. Das, who was Minister in Bihar and Orissa, carried out reforms of the Municipal and District Boards Act that went far beyond what cautious officials regarded with favour and which had put powers in the hands of local bodies to a far greater extent than in England."

Another legislative colleague of Mr. Das, Sree Sachidananda Sinha, says : "During his term of office as Minister, the enactment of two liberal measures (Municipal Act and Village Administrative Act) relating to local self-government, was his most notable achieve-

ment.....He made his mark as a skilful debater in the Bengal and Bihar and Orissa Legislative Councils. When he ultimately came to occupy the position of a Minister, he soon made the Heads of Departments rather uncomfortable by reason of his strict supervision of their work."

THE CHRISTIAN SPIRIT

Mr. Das was seventy-three years of age when he became a Minister. Sir Ganesh Dutta Singh, a notable Bihari colleague of his, wrote that on account of his advanced age, Mr. Das's appointment as a Minister was a little surprising to many, but he found him bold and independent, "which was a rare quality in a Minister under dyarchy." Madhusudana brought into his ministerial sphere not only a sense of bold independence, rare vision and unusual mental brilliance, but also the still rarer Christian spirit of human sympathy and personal sacrifice for the good of many.

During his short tenure as a Minister, plague broke out in the Gaya district of Bihar, in epidemic form. The Hon'ble Mr. Das, as Minister of Health, took prompt and efficient measures to stamp it out as quickly as possible. But not content with merely giving orders, he decided, in the teeth of opposition from all concerned and in spite of old age and failing health, to visit the plague-stricken villages himself and stand by the bed-side of the poor sufferers. Nothing could ever stop him from doing a thing, once he was determined to. Though it was the hottest part of Indian summer, he did visit the plague stricken areas, walking miles through trackless paddy fields from village to village, under the blazing sun and taking immediate steps for improving matters as these came to his notice.

202 THE SAGA OF THE LAND OF JAGANNATHA
HE RESIGNS FAMOUSLY

All his life, Madhusudana was famous as a most hospitable man, giving lavish parties, although he himself lived, being cursed with ulcerous intestines, on only a few handfuls of rice-pops. As a Minister at Patna, he continued his hospitable habits, his daughter the late Miss Shailabala Das playing the hostess. There was a conference of Chairmen of Municipalities and District Boards, convened by Mr. Das as the Minister of Local Self-Government, and he had invited them all to a tea-party. Madhusudana spoke to them informally of how they should show a little more sincerity and sense of responsibility and give a little more time and attention to the public trust placed in their hands. As is the Indian habit, all received the good advice in silence, but Miss Das overheard some of them say at a safe distance that it was funny for a Minister, drawing a salary of Rs. 5,000 per month, to sermonise to those who worked without pay !

Later on, Miss Das reported this matter to her father. Any other man might not have taken notice of it at all. But in Madhusudana's pure conscience this immediately started a moral dilemma of the first order. Deeply analysing the whole situation in the light of the remarks, he decided to work as a Minister without salary. In his famous letter to Sir Henry Wheeler, the Governor, he said most cogently : "A salarised official over the head of thousands of honorary workers is an anomaly. He cannot command their respect and consequently his appeals to the patriotic and benevolent feelings of the people will make the scheme a subject of ridicule."

The steel-frame British Governor did not agree. And in spite of appeals from all quarters, Madhusudana resigned the most-wished-for and the most enviable

post of a Minister, then and there, without a moment's hesitation.

In the ever-expanding world of Indian politics, such a noble and grand spectacle of throwing away a great office on purely ethical considerations has not occurred a second time during these several decades, except perhaps in the resignation of Mr. Lal Bahadur Shastri, India's the then Minister of Railways, because of too many Railway accidents during his tenure. On the other hand, we see the nauseating scenes, all around, of scores of unworthies grabbing and sticking to elected offices, by any means, fair or foul, vitiating society and demoralising the whole administration of this new Republic. In contrast to the dark days of insolvency and poverty which he very soon had to face, this kicking away of a salary of Rs. 5.000 per month should make Madhusudana's total personality appear all the nobler and grander in our eyes today.

THE LAST DAYS

By this time, the affairs of the Utkala Tannery had grown most distressing and it was at last auctioned off, because of heavy liabilities. To fill the cup of his sufferings, Madhusudana's palatial house also had to be sold away to meet personal loans and he had to declare himself insolvent in the court of law. He agreed to stay on in his own building on the self-imposed condition that the purchasers accepted regular monthly rent from him. This he did till his last day and also continued his customary charities out of whatever he earned from his practice at the courts,

At last the frail body, sustained so long on only a few handfuls of rice-pops, could stand the strain no longer. He was operated upon in a Calcutta hospital for enlarged prostate. But in a letter to a friend, professor A. C. Ganguli of the Ravenshaw College, he could write : "Atul Babu, I was lying in a hospital in Calcutta, bedridden and suffering from severe pain on account of enlarged prostate gland when the news of the Secretary of State's declaration (about Orissa being a separate State) reached me. Such was my exhilaration that I felt as if I took a bottle of alcohol and all my pains vanished at that time."

Thus, in full knowledge of the fulfilment of his life's mission, Madhusudana passed away in Cuttack, on the 4th of February, 1934, mourned by the whole nation.

Lest this great soul look rather small and parochial for working all his life for the amelioration of one section of the vast humanity of Mother India, as he did appear to a person of even Sri Aurobindo's stature and vision, the following remarks of a well-known Bengali lady, Shailabala Choudhurani, niece of the poet Rabindranath, who came in very close contact with Madhusudana, are really significant and tell-tale : Says she, "Mr. Das struck me as a curious Christian, for none of the bigotry associated with Christian missionaries and their converts, I could discern in him. He was as broad-minded as any born Hindu should be. He conceded to others their individual ways to realisation, while accepting for himself, the way of Christ.....I was warned also that he was a Bengali-hater. I could not reconcile this charge with his adoption of a Bengali girl as his daughter and his acting as benefactor to all the members of that daughter's family. I found, moreover,

that most of the domiciled Bengalis of Cuttack were his respected personal friends. I discovered, it was not that he loved Bengal and Bengalis less, but that he loved Orissa and the Oriyas more and that his love and admiration for the Bengalis stimulated his desire to bring the Oriyas up to their level. He had the insight and acumen of a true statesman. Not only Orissa but India should honour him and give a place in the hierarchy of its true patriots."

CHAPTER XIII

THE GENERAL WHO SAVED A LANGUAGE

In the fifties of the last century, a semi-literate sickly-looking, long-necked lad of twelve or so, with a quill-pen tucked behind his right ear, would be found walking up and down the quay-side at Balasore, which in those days of sailing ships, was an important port and trading centre in the east coast of India. Orphaned at the age of one and a half years, the lad, an impecunious scion of a noble family, whose fortunes had changed with the political eclipse of the Marathas and the advent of the British in Orissa, was being looked after by his devotedly loving grandmother. Early in life he had to discontinue his studies and work for a living. He supervised the repairs of sails and riggings of ships on behalf of his uncle, who was a petty contractor for such jobs.

THE GREAT PIONEER

This penniless, orphaned, unpromising, semi-literate sickly lad, born in 1847, is now accepted as the father of Modern Oriya Literature. Poet, novelist, administrator, soldier, social reformer, printer, journalist, businessman and patriot, he had a romantic career which appears stranger than the fiction with which he has so gloriously adorned his mother-tongue, the Oriya language. Fakiramohana Senapati, who had only about two years' formal education to his credit, later became an erudite scholar in at least four Indian languages and also acquired an excellent working knowledge of English. Through his mental brilliance and outstanding abilities, he became friends with British civil servants of the highest rank and rising from teaching

in a primary school on Rs. 2-00 a month, worked as Dewan of several ex-States of Orissa, big and small, making his mark as an administrator wherever he was posted. The boy who was looking after the repairs of sails of medieval sailing ships, ushered in the modern era in Orissa.

Born and brought up in a medieval environment and with no regular education, Fakiramohana was wonderfully receptive to new ideas. When the waves of religious reform began to flow out from Bengal to other parts of India, under the auspices of the Brahmo Samaj, in the last quarter of the last century, he was among the first in Orissa to accept the new heretical faith, giving up the ancestral religion, encrusted as it was and still is, with castes, idols and priests. All his life, he courageously campaigned against social evils, through stories, novels and satires. He was among the first to sponsor and propagate, in popular verse, the ideas of the co-operative movement which were just reaching this country from Europe. He was the first among the Oriyas to set up a printing press as a private enterprise. He was the first to start and run a newspaper in Oriya on modern joint-stock lines, taking the then British District Magistrate of Balasore, Mr. John Beames, and Mr. T. E. Ravenshaw, the Commissioner of Orissa Division, among its share-holders. He says in his autobiography that on the day it was announced in Balasore that a printing press would start operating, the entire bazaar closed down and half the government officials took casual leave to see the miracle. It was brought all the way from Calcutta to Balasore, a distance of more than a hundred miles,—in bullock carts, as railway trains were still a far cry. The journey took twenty-two days, now a matter of a few hours. Rich folk from the distant countryside came in palanquins to see it in operation.

THE PLOTTING NEIGHBOURS AND ORIYA REACTION

The Oriyas were passing through a dark period of their history during those days. For almost the whole period of British rule, they lived scattered in four different provinces and were deprived of the administrative benefits enjoyed by luckier neighbours as a matter of course. The largest fragment of the Oriya land was tacked to the tail-end of the Bengal Presidency for more than a century. Taking advantage of the political backwardness of the Oriyas and their administrative insignificance, some over-imaginative Bengalis tried to wipe out the Oriya language and plant their own language in its place, not to speak of other acts of disservice to Orissa, and the Oriyas. But justifying his title of "Senapati" (General), Fakiramohana, who was then a mere primary school teacher, became the spear-head of the Oriya agitation against this sinister and diabolical move of the factitiously lucky neighbours. Thanks must go to Mr. John Beames and Mr. T. E. Ravenshaw for their strong official support to the Oriya cause, as a result of which the British Government unequivocally declared Oriya to be an independent language and the only language of Orissa and not a mere dialect of Bengali, as was being attempted to prove. Young Fakiramohana thus saved his mother-tongue, spoken by twenty million people, from impending political assassination by noble-hearted big brothers, who were perhaps trying to anticipate the present cry of national integration in the easiest way, namely, the way of the python. But though heading the anti-Bengali agitation, Fakiramohana retained a warm friendship with all the leaders of the contemporary Bengali community in Orissa. The Oriyas are still a comparatively simple-hearted and unsophisticated people. They abundantly reciprocate any little good that is done to them. Their age-old tradition of catholicity has had the clearest

demonstration in modern times in their acceptance of the Christian Madhusudana Das as their unquestioned leader, and in electing a Bengali, as one-time Chief Minister of Orissa and in their throwing open the Dandakaranya area for settlement by Bengali refugees from East Pakistan.

But the Oriyas in general have a grouse that their liberal-mindedness is not reciprocated by their elder brothers, who still betray a regrettable tendency to exploit their less advanced, less developed and less vociferous little neighbours in return for their generosities.

THE VERSATILE GENIUS

Fakiramohana's glory does not lie, however, in his being merely a successful agitator. He lives in the memory of his race for having adorned the language he saved as none else has done so far. For removing the stigma of its backwardness, he went on writing and publishing almost incessantly all through his long life on all manner of topics with amazing versatility. He wrote poems by the hundred, covering tell-tale satires, lyrics of all varieties, and also poems for children. Single-handed, he undertook literal translations into Oriya of the immense Sanskrit epics, *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*. He wrote text-books on history, mathematics and other subjects for the new-fangled schools opened by the British and got State awards for the same. He contributed articles on matters of public importance to the Press. He also wrote an excellent epic on the life of the Buddha.

But his most significant and valuable contributions are his unique short stories and novels. He is the first writer of modern short stories in Oriya, which are now available to the reading public in two volumes under the title *Galpa-Swarpa* ("A Few Tales"). His ear'iest story was published in 1868. supposed to be among the earliest stories in modern Indian languages,

His stories, no less than his celebrated novels, are a lively picture gallery of contemporary Orissa, touching the salient aspects of the Orissan social set-up. His novel *Chhamana Athaguntha* ("Six Acres and a Half") is a masterpiece of realistic fiction, depicting the sad victimisation of an innocent couple of weavers through the petty, sordid ambitions of a village money-lender and a wily, unscrupulous woman who was his accomplice and concubine. His novel *Prayaschitta* ("Atonement") depicts the tragedy of the non-chalant defiance of the old order by youth, which this great writer saw in his life-time (and probably in his own family, his only son being a declared atheist) as a result of the impact of English education on Indian society. His *Lachchama* is a realistic historical novel bringing to life the horrors of guerilla warfare between the Marathas and the Moslems for control over Bengal and Orissa in the 18th century. Through ever-shifting military exploits and political manoeuvres, the character of lovely Lachchama, the heroine,—an up-country lady who on her way to Puri on pilgrimage lost her whole family in a skirmish, fills the readers' mind not only with compassion and sympathy but also admiration, when at the end of the story, she avenges the death of her near and dear ones, as an aid, in the murder of the notorious Bargi leader, Bhaskara Pandit. Senapati's major novel *Mamu* ("Maternal Uncle") is another social picture-gallery of Orissa, besides illustrating the battle between good and evil and the redemption of the fallen human soul through repentance.

CHARACTERISTICS OF HIS NOVELS

The novels of Senapati are unique in many ways. These major creations in the right Western style were written by a man who had no English education to his credit. Strangely contradicting his medieval up-bringing, these were written also, not in the Sanskritised prose of Ishwara Chandra Vidyasagara or Bankima Chandra Chatterjee of Bengal, who were

almost his contemporaries, but in the genuine but till-then-contemptible common speech of the masses. Senapati drew all his characters also from the great store-house of the Orissan Society which he knew so intimately. Hence both his style and characters vibrate with the rough, rustic vitality of the common man. Tinged with the humour and criticism of contemporary life and illuminated by a broad, non-sectarian idealism, these novels have remained unequalled in Oriya language so far. And for taking the common man as his subject and giving the common man's rough but racy speech the dignity of literature, Fakiramohana may be regarded as the first proletarian author of India. His novels do not preach anything except suggesting, through his exhilarating and inimitable art, the need of a balanced ethical life. On the other hand, his fiction represents the life of rural Orissa in flesh and blood, as one would encounter it even today, although more than half a century has passed away since his books were written. For that reason only Senapati has become part of the national consciousness of the Oriyas.

THE COMMANDER

Fakiramohana, the creative writer, proved himself an able administrator also. For some years he was the Assistant Dewan of Keonjhar State, which is now getting well-deserved celebrity for its extraordinarily rich mineral resources. During his tenure of office, the Bhuinyas, an aboriginal tribe, rose in rebellion: The Raja fled to Cuttack leaving his family at the State Capital to shift for itself. But Fakiramohana stayed at his post to protect the Rani and other ladies in the palace. To forestall an invasion by the rebels he marched at the head of a small battalion of state militia towards their hide-outs, but was over-powered by the numerically superior enemy and taken to their jungle headquarters. But he cleverly won the confidence of the leader of the rebels and managed to send a letter

to his servant at home for some betel leaves and areca nuts. The significance of this letter was understood by the authorities, who sent a strong force and succeeded in quelling the rebellion and saving the life of Fakiramohana himself.

UNIQUE AUTOBIOGRAPHY

Much of this uniquely romantic and exciting career would have remained unknown to posterity, had not Fakiramohana cared to write down his own eventful life. This autobiography, which is full of exciting episodes, is as interesting as a book of fiction. It is perhaps one of the few really fine autobiographies in Indian literature. Here is an extract describing life in the early fifties of the last century, which is apt to make our thoughts wistful and stir up nostalgic feelings for the golden age that is never to come back. He says :

"The pay of the officers in the Revenue Department ranged from three to ten rupees. The Superintendents alone enjoyed a salary of Rs. 10. But with these small salaries people lived happily. Goods of daily use were cheap indeed. Here are some samples; rice $1\frac{1}{2}$ maunds per rupee, *moong* dal, ten annas per maund; oil, seven seers per rupee; and fish, one to two seers for a pice. Only the high officers and rich folk wore fine cloth manufactured at Balasore. The people in the villages used rough homespun, each family spinning its own yarn, only those who had no ladies in the family to spin, purchased clothes in the market. In the countryside, everybody had a small cotton plantation at the back of his house and every lady in the family owned a *charkha*. The yarn was handed over to the local weaver who wove the cloth at the rate of a pice per cubit."

Fakiramohana lived up to a ripe old age, honoured by all sections of people in his land. As a mark of

gratitude for his most precious contributions to the national life of the Oriyas and their language, he was elected president of the Utkal Sammilani or All Orissa Union Conference in 1917, which is an unusual and unique honour for a man of letters. His well-planned garden-house at Balasore is now a place of pilgrimage for the Oriyas. He died in 1918.

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CHAPTER XIV
HE WHO POETISED
THE LAND OF THE ORIYAS

Orissa is richly and abundantly endowed by Nature. It is one of the most picturesque States in the Indian Republic. A land with a long, lovely seaboard, blue, gold, and verdant, with thick belts of cocoanuts and casurinas, with its extensive hinterland picturesquely intersected by well-wooded mountains and mighty rivers, its wide valleys covered with either thick forests or rich, intensely-cultivated paddy fields or shady orchards. Orissa's colourful and peaceful hills and dales, noted for their jungle products and picturesque tribals, are now being transformed into the Ruhr of the Indian Republic as they possess one of the richest mineral belts in the world. The deltaic half, on the other hand, is still a poem of thrills, with endless chains of blue mountains standing in serrated rows, with smiling, cultivated fields extending uninterruptedly up to the sky-line, with peaceful little villages nestling amidst evergreen clusters of giant tropical trees, and with rivers, big and small, meandering their capricious courses down to the sea. The enchanting Chilka lake, studded with blue, grey and emerald islets, swarming with aquatic fowls, and picturesque with little boats sailing in all directions with oblong sails, seems set like a lovely pendant in this long loose colourful garland of Nature. Any traveller on the South-Eastern Railway with an eye for landscape-beauty is sure to get sensations out of the kaleidoscopic glimpses of Orissa's charms which cannot be easily forgotten.

In keeping with this fascinating colour and design of Nature, magnificent temples, historic events and legends of a bewildering galaxy of gods, goddesses, heroes and

heroines have lent additional flavour to the story of the ancient Oriya People.

But all these natural charms and romantic associations had, strangely and surprisingly enough, made no impression on the minds of the long line of Orissa's poets from the 10th up to the 20th centuries. The description of Nature by these writers of Epics, *Puranas* and ornamental tales, was stereotyped and stilted, lacking in significant personal appreciation or observation. One gets only the conventional narration of seasons with their erotic reactions on the sentimental heroes and heroines, glorying in puns and quips out of stylised phrases.

But in the last quarter of the 19th century, a poet started singing, in whose well-chiselled, well-chosen diction, the History and Nature of Orissa startlingly got the long-awaited release of expression. That poet is Radhanatha Roy, whose poems have turned out to be the greatest single factor in making Orissa cease to be a mere administrative and geographical term. If she is enshrined now in the hearts of the Oriyas with the spell of a dear, living personality, the poems of Radhanath, poetising this ancient land, should be taken as a vital factor.

EFFICIENT PUBLIC SERVANT

Radhanatha was born of cultured parents in 1848, in the village of Kedarpur in the district of Balasore. He was sickly all through life and could not have, for that reason, University education for which he was mentally so well equipped. He was one of the first few in Orissa to face the Matriculation Examination of the Calcutta University. Fakiramohan Senapati says in his autobiography that when the news reached the Collectorate of Balasore that the sickly child of Sundara Babu (Radhanatha's father who was a clerk in that office) had passed the awe-inspiring Matricu-

lation examination, a whisper is said to have gone round the clerks that passing that examination of the newly-established Calcutta University was not then a very extraordinary feat, after all :

Radhanatha studied up to the junior degree examination at Calcutta but could not proceed further because of poor health. He then became a teacher and, rising steadily up the official ladder, retired as a Divisional Inspector of Schools with the title of Rai Bahadur conferred upon him by the British Government as a mark of appreciation of his services.

Inspite of a haphazard education, Radhanatha was a profound scholar in Sanskrit and English with extensive studies in Oriya, Bengali and Hindi literatures. This deep scholarship complemented his poetic talents in no small way.

THE GREAT NARRATIVE POET

Radhanatha is pre-eminently a narrative poet and a great one at that. Ancient and medieval periods of Oriya literature teem with narrative poetry of many varieties, but Radhanatha broke new ground. He freed the tales of mere conventionalities and shunned the ambition of most medieval metrical romancers to show off their capabilities in verbal jugglery and dexterity in versification. He introduced the style of telling a story in the direct, forthright manner, not forgetting, however, such of the simple dictional embellishments as alliterations, assonances and pretty, fitting rhymes. These are indispensable to poetry as an art, in any language, in any period, but he used them with masterly and befitting restraint and elegance. He also meticulously maintained the precision of words and phrases employing the aptest of adjectives and the most telling epithets. He had probably unconsciously absorbed this finesse from his extensive reading of Sanskrit, particularly the works of Kalidasa, whose famous work *Meghadutam*

he translated into Oriya,—supposed to be the best translation in any Indian language of that lyrical masterpiece,

HE HELLENISES ORISSA

In addition to the simple, elegant and soothing narrative style which he adopted, Radhanatha made for the first time, Orissa's picturesque landscape the background of his romances and dexterously transplanted Greek and Roman myths on his stage. As a result, various places, monuments and temples in Orissa have come to be known by now, according to their treatment by Radhanatha in his poems. Indeed he may be said to have Hellenised the land of the Oriyas by setting up legends from Greek and Roman mythologies on the old stage of Oriya literature, reconditioned with the flesh and blood of Orissan history.

To illustrate this clever artistic transformation, his earliest, smallest and most charming of poetic pieces, the poem "Chandrabhaga" may be outlined here.

CHANDRABHAGA

In this poem, Radhanatha has tried to give a poetic explanation to the dilapidation of the Sun Temple of Konarka. In broad outline, it is nothing but the story of Apollo and Daphne celebrated in European mythology. Radhanatha has turned this Greek mythological pair into the Hindu god Surya and the shy maiden Chandrabhaga, the pretty daughter of a hermit named Sumanyu who had his hermitage not far from the Sun Temple of Konarka. The story starts with a full-moon festival in the temple of Jagannatha at Puri, when all the terrestrial and heavenly

gods and goddesses are expected to pay their homage to Jagannatha, "the Lord of the Universe." The goddess Samalai from Sambalpur had come, along with Kalijai of the Chilka lake, and so on. Kamadeva, the Hindu Cupid, was standing at the main gate and all the divine visitors bowed to him before they went inside. Who was not afraid of the pranks of that mischievous divinity ? But the last to arrive was the Sun God, Surya, surrounded by his nine planets. Ignoring the existence of Kamadeva at the gate, he went straight towards the *sanctum sanctorum*. This infuriated Kamadeva who decided then and there on having vengeance on the haughty Surya, who perhaps had thought himself to be above his notorious tricks. And so, the pretty Chandrabhaga, daughter of the sage Sumanyu, who used to play nonchalantly on the lonely sandy beaches, found herself one day, not long after, being pursued by an extraordinarily handsome youth with appeals for her grace. He was no other than Surya in human guise, mad for the love of this beauteous, earthly damsel under the demoralising effect of Kāma's arrows. The girl, unused to other male contacts, except that of her saintly father, started running from the impetuous lover. She ran and ran until she plunged headlong into the sea and disappeared. A disappointed and repentant Surya returned to his temple to find it in ruins as a result of the curse of Sumanyu for his sins against an innocent maiden.

Actually, a river named Chandrabhaga once flowed close to the temple at Konarka. The flowing waters of the river were constantly pursued by the Sun's rays. That is the natural substratum of this romantic myth and indicates the power of Radhanatha's imagination in transcreating myths of distant land and times in Orissa's natural set-up.

THE CHILKA

While in his metrical romances Radhanatha used Orissa's Nature as the fitting background of his characters, in his poem *Chilka*, describing the graces of the lovely Orissan lake of that name, he appears as the most devout lover and worshipper of Nature herself. The abandon with which he describes his ecstatic emotions over her charms, the lively pen-pictures he gives of the surrounding hills, islets and forests, the way he stirs up historical associations, imagining the role of a patron-which the lovely lake-lady played in the history of Orissa ; his predictions about cultural and economic advancement along her shores, which are coming true in an astonishing manner, and the mellifluous and elegant couplets in which the whole poem is written,—all these make Radhanath's *Chilka* a poem unique, perhaps, in the whole of Indian literature. We have yet to know of an entire *kavya* in another Indian language written on a geographical entity such as Radhanatha's "Chilika."

THE MAHAYATRA

Radhanath's *magnum opus*, however, is supposed to be the epic *Mahayatra* ("The Journey's End!"), written in blank verse on Miltonic lines, describing the last journey of the Pandavas to the upper Himalayas. Like his predecessor Sarala Dasa, the poet puts Orissa in their itinerary, during which the Pandavas meet the Fire God (Agni) at Puri. He becomes their guide and takes them to the heights of the Western Ghats and unfolds before them the vast panorama of future events which were to happen in the land of the Aryas India, in the style of Archangel Gabriel describing the coming events to our first ancestors in Milton's *Paradise Lost*.

But the poet could not complete this grand work. Planned to be finished in twenty-one cantos, only seven are now available, bringing the story to the

fateful first battle of Panipat. But, though unfinished, this epic written in majestic and stirring blank verse, remains magnificent like the runis of Konarka, both in conception and execution.

THE DURBAR

No review of the works of Radhanatha will be complete, however, without special mention of his *Durbara*, the poet's biting verse-satire on the contemporary dignitaries of Orissa, attending one of the Durbars of the local British Satrap: Radhanatha had the courage of a genius to defy power and privilege and ruthlessly whip both, with his powerful pen. Behind his quiet, cultured and gentle exterior, the poet had always kept the holy fire of righteous indignation, burning. In the *Durbara*, Radhanatha has torn to pieces, through taunts, satires and direct condemnation, the contemporary *rajas*, *maharajas* and bureaucratic nincompoops temporarily glorified for all their arrogant pretensions and hypocrisies. And he sets off against them all, the great Oriya astronomer Chandrasekhara¹, the only one worthy of admiration in the assembly of those padded nothing, in plentiful supply in all ages. The soulful tribute that the poet pays to Chandrasekhara should be the envy of any genius.

Radhanatha died in 1908, leaving behind an unprecedented literary and human legacy to a historic nation.

¹ See Chapter XVII

CHAPTER XV

HE WHO TAUGHT THE MODERN ORIYAS TO PRAY

If a traveller happens to stop at a school in any part of Orissa, he will see boys reciting prayers and hymns after they have lighted their oil-lamps in the evening. And sure enough, he will hear a hymn ending with these lines'.

"Lead me on the path of truth and piety, oh Lord,
Bathe me with the showers of Thy love,
Be my refuge absolute,
And accept the complete surrender of this life of mine,
At Thy feet."

Those lines are by Madhusudana Rao, Orissa's great modern spiritual poet. He is on a par with Jagannatha Dasa, Arakshita Dasa, and Bhima Bhoi, whose poetical contributions have kept up the ethical and spiritual fertility of Oriya literature through centuries. Madhusudana's songs, lyrics, odes, sonnets and essays have exercised a purifying influence on generations of students 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. In whatever he wrote, ranging from little couplets and quatrains in children's primers to serious literary and patriotic odes, hymns and sonnets, there is an atmosphere of purity and loftiness, breathing the air of high idealism and life divine. Because of this inherent dignity, even his A.B.C. Primer in Oriya, *Varnabodha*, has become a classic in its category. No change in methodology and no amount of new-fangled substitutes have been able to affect the popularity of this work which has been sold by the thousands every year, for the last

sixty years or so, defying all attempts at innovation and initiating millions of Oriyas, decade after decade, into the mysteries of Oriya letters. And even in this book, the poet-saint puts highly elevatting lines like these into the mouths of the tiny tots :

"The great Lord of the world sees every moment
Whatever I do and say or even think,
He being never away from me !"

Madhusudana was born in 1853 in a devout Hindu family in Puri. But in early youth he renounced his ancestral faith of popular Hinduism and embraced the new heretical Brahmo faith. For about half a century he was not only the finest representative of that non-conformist faith but was associated with all social and religious reforms in Orissa. He studied up to the First Arts examination 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, the literary institute of Orissa with a house and office of its own in Cuttack. Two high schools, one at Cuttack and another at Bhubaneswar, are named after this great teacher and educationist.

It was out of the spiritual interaction of three friends, Fakiramohan, Radhanatha and Madhusudana living at Balasore that the new era of Oriya literature was ushered into existence with the publication in 1873 of *Kabitabali* ("The Poems"), an anthology of poems by Radhanatha and Madhusudana. The majority of the poems in this collection were by Madhusudana. Even these early poems indicated that 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 teacher, who made

"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 in but darkness ;
 When Eternity had no ripples on it,
 And no happening in the sea of time,
 The creation was formless, without ever 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, however,
 Spread in vast expanse,
 Did exist that time,
 Surrounding the all-pervasive primeval darkness,
 Co-eval 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 the scriptures. Because of the purity of his life, scholarship and religious enthusiasm, Madhusudana was generally referred to as *Bhakta-Kavi* ("The poet of devotion") and was almost worshipped by the educated masses in Orissa.

He was also the only sonneteer in Oriya in his times. His sonnets were published in one volume under the title of *Basant-gatha* or "Vernal Songs". Technically they are mostly in the Petrarchian pattern, though no sweet Laura is there to cast her magic spell on the readers. Their subjects are reflections on life and 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 lines :

"He who has not lost anything precious
 Is indeed a destitute in this world,
 Poorer still being the wretch

Who forgets the dear thing he has lost,
And the greatest wretch of all is he, who,
Having lost something precious, tries to forget it.
But rich beyond measure is he
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, which were the only literary readers in Orissa for generations, is still accepted as the norm for good literary style, its old-world elegance and dignity being beyond dispute.

Madhusudana has left an excellent translation of the Sanskrit play *Uttararamacharita* by Bhavabhuti. His other important book are all collections of poems, namely: *Kusumanjali* and *Utkala Gatha*, which are songs and poems on Orissa, and *Brahmo Sangita*, which may be taken as the Book of Psalms of the Brahmo Faith in Oriya.

CHAPTER XVI

HE WHO BLED FOR HIS PEOPLE

Pandit Gopabandhu Das might be known to many in India as just the provincial lieutenant in Orissa of Mahatma Gandhi. But to the Oriyas, he is great even without the Gandhian feather to his cap. He became a Gandhite only late in life. He was the every embodiment of the national sentiments and culture of the Oriyas long before this political conversion.

Gopabandhu was one of those Emersonian representative men of history who did not spring out of a particular set of circumstances, but who brooding over their people's miseries shaped their careers accordingly. While still a student, Gopabandhu used to spend all his vacations in organising bands of social workers for rendering service wherever called for and in propagating the cult of ascetic living among friends and village folk. At the age of twenty-seven, he lost his wife and never thought of marriage again, as by that time he was already wedded to his mission in life. He had already attracted public notice *even as a student* as a promising poet through his odes and lyrics published in contemporary Oriya periodicals. Even in those early products one finds the young patriot's nostalgic feelings about the historical glories of the Oryiya, his broodings over their political and economic plight and his soulful prayers to his divine Father to redeem his fallen compatriots *from their present wretchedness*. This sort of poetry was, of course, the popular genre in those days in India, but Gopabandhu's was marked out from the rest by the purity of his feelings, the warmth of his emotions, and the simple beauty of his diction. He never desired for mere embellishment as such, as

poetasters do. For these remarkable qualities in a young poet, Radhanatha, the uncrowned king of Oriya literature at that time, had openly praised Gopabandhu's poems, contrasting them with the imitational rubbish that was being foisted on the public from the pens of unworthies aspiring for poetic fame.

THE LIVING POETRY

But as he became slowly immersed in social and humanitarian activities, Gopabandhu's Muse gradually ceased singing, to the regret of all lovers of poetry in Orissa. But the young humanitarian started writing poetry in a style other than the usual verse-fashion. While all his companions slept, this young ascetic was often found sitting up whole nights praying for the mass of miserable under-dogs that were his people with tears rolling down his beautifully-bearded cheeks. He was born in a land whose poverty had by that time become proverbial and which was also dismembered in four different provinces, neglected and exploited by the big brothers in each. It was the happy haunt also of annual floods and famines, instead of being the surplus state that she is now. The pathetic picture of the once-glorious Oriya people, so lost and so down at heels now, without a political home of their own, without even a consciousness of their past, wretched victims of poverty, ignorance, death and disease, constantly harrowed young Gopabandhu's sensitive soul. Collecting alms from places far and near, and feeding the famished with tears of pity and love streaming down his cheeks, what else was Gopabandhu doing except writing splendid humanistic poetry in letters of precious pearls ?

THE ORATOR AND PROSE-POET

And though he forgot to compose verses, there opened out other ways of expression for Gopabandhu's noble spirit, along with humanitarian activities. Not

through practice in debating halls of schools and not for the allurement of oratorical glory, but through the very passion, urge and ardency of his soul to pour out the whole inside world of his feelings before his compatriots, Gopabandhu became the finest orator in Orissa. He was not a commonplace demagogue, depending on clap-trap shibboleths. He spoke literature like Gandhi or Lincoln. He spoke in fine diction and in rolling periods, breathing poetry culture and deeper verities of life in his words. When he described the horrors of Orissa famine of 1919 in the Bihar and Orissa Legislative Council, with his noble face bathed in tears, there was not an eye that was not wet in that assembly of elders. Even the British Governor, Sir Edward Gait, was so moved that he could not help personally visiting the famine areas for participation in the amelioration of those human sufferings as described by Gopabandhu.

With a view to having a succession of dedicated workers for resuscitation of his unfortunate people, Gopabandhu had dreamed, even from his student days, of a suitable educational centre, embodying the hoary Indian ideal of plain living and high thinking. Attracted mainly by his magnetic personality, the very best brains available in contemporary Orissa gathered round him, making tremendous sacrifices of security and comfort. Gopabandhu, with this enviable band of co-workers, consisting of Nilakantha Das, Godavarisha Mishra, Krupasindhu Mishra and Harihara Das, settled down at the romantic *bakula* grove Satyabadi and in no time did he see the simple hutments of his nascent school become the very heart of historic Orissa's national consciousness. This is excellent proof of what magic a noble personality is capable of and what miracles can be produced by soulful enthusiasm for great objectives. Though, unfortunately, Gopabandhu's sylvan academy fell a victim to infant mortality, even in

the short span of six years or so, it left a lasting impress on Orissa's national life, through excellent teaching, corporate living and creative writings in plays, poetry, journalism and historical research that have had no parallel in Orissa so far. This abortive attempt at establishing a sylvan *vihara* should be considered as nothing but a poetical product of Gopabandhu, not in verse though.

But the greatest poem that Gopabandhu ever wrote was his own life. A blue-blooded Brahmin, he had given up his caste—prejudices and fathered untouchable boys long before Gandhi's Harijan movement was even heard of. He always had a non-Brahmin for his cook. Long before Gandhi hit upon the iniquity of the salt tax as the symbolic target of his civil disobedience movement, Gopabandhu had been fighting most movingly and convincingly in the Bihar and Orissa Legislative Council for the revival of salt manufacture. *He wanted it to be* a subsidiary industry for the poor peasantry along the Orissan sea board, as was the practice for centuries till the British killed it in the interests of Lancashire salt. Long before Gandhi appeared in Indian politics as the prophet of the spinning wheel, Gopabandhu had been fighting a desperate battle for the resuscitation of the once-famous and prosperous, but now helplessly dying, handloom industry of Orissa. He had entirely discarded mill-made cloth for his personal wear even in his schoolboy days. The way he spoke and wrote about the plight of Indian or Orissan weavers following the imports of mill-made British textiles, would bring tears to any one's eyes. That was Gopabandhu's muse turned to the poetry of noble politico-humanitarian action.

For broadcasting his ideas among the classes and masses of Orissa, Gopabandhu now published a weekly, *The Samaja*, and a monthly, *The Satyabadi*, both in Oriya. In the prose that he wrote in the columns of these journals, the poetry which was

in his blood came out in profusion, In *the natural* proportion of the classical, the colloquial and the romantic, in elegance of diction, in nobility of ideas and in genuine humanity, Gopabandhu's prose stands as a model of *excellence* in Oriya to-day.

Patriot, social worker, servant of humanity, grand orator, noble educationist, distinguished journalist and great legislator,—that was Gopabandhu, the living poetry, the embodiment of the dreams of an entire people.

AN IMPRISONED POET

In 1924, Gopabandhu, the Gandhian non-cooperator, was put in prison by the British Government. His sentence was for two and a half years. To one so busy in so many ways, this forced idleness became extremely galling. He could not bear separation also from his dear people. He was never so pessimistic and despondent about life as when he was undergoing this long period of incarceration. "Two years of idleness!" he would say, "What am I to do in these precious two years of life within the four walls of a prison, while my people are suffering so much down there!"

At first he was lodged in the Cuttack jail where among familiar faces and understanding souls he spent his time more or less pleasantly. But a few months later, he was wrested away from this congenial environment to the distant and unfamiliar Hazaribagh Jail in Bihar. Thus uprooted absolutely from Orissa, Gopabandhu's emotional spirit seems to have broken down. But deeply religious as he was, he was soon reconciled to his new conditions. In order to free himself from the tortures of loneliness, he started keeping a diary and wrote poetry again after a lapse of several decades. His incarceration, therefore, was a great blessing to his people and his language. For what

little poetry Gopabandhu wrote in the loneliness of a jail, away from his land and people, is counted among the most popular in modern Oriya literature. Among the many lyrics and odes which he wrote, *in imprisonment*, "The Soliloquy of a prisoner" and the ballad *Dharmapada*, based on the Konarka—legend, have become household words in Orissa. Almost every educated Oriya reads these two poems, one upholding the spontaneous eagerness of an individual who gives himself away for the good of the many, and the other pulsating with the noble feeling of one who loved his people more than parents love their children and who died inch by inch for their sake.

THE GREAT HUMANITARIAN

Gopabandhu loved Orissa and the Oriyas, but there was never the slightest touch of exclusiveness or parochiality in the workings of his noble soul. Even as an under-graduate, he wrote as follows in a poem addressed to the students of the Brahmin Association Hostel at Puri :

"A Hindu's birth is not for himself
Each drop of his blood being dedicated
For universal welfare,
Examplify this truth in your own lives
And preach it among all other castes,—
That we all are but the children of one God,
Try to serve the whole of humanity,
Giving up all concepts of separateness."

This note of splendid universality is found in almost whatever Gopabandhu wrote or spoke. In his magnificent address as President of the Utkal Union Conference held at Cuttack in 1910 he placed this noble humanitarianism as the basis of his love for Orissa. That was his political credo. He said that his love for Orissa was only a part of his love for humanity, because

no servant of humanity would find a more suitable field for his activities than Orissa where human misery was at the worst.

Gopabandhu, as a matter of fact, never loved a mere geographical unit or a mere country. He really loved the people or that part of humanity in which he was born. The writer vividly remembers, the grand spectacle of Christian C. F. Andrews and Hindu-Brahmin Gopabandhu, both true servants of humanity, embracing each other in front of a large spell-bound audience gathered in the Town Hall at Cuttack to listen to their appeals for funds for *distributing relief* to flood-stricken people in Orissa.

THE ROMANTIC

That under the stress and strain of an ascetic life, practised by him ever since he started his career of service to his people, the poet in him had never died, although he had made vain attempts to stifle it, is intriguingly demonstrated by his jail-poems. In one of them, "A prisoner's thoughts away from his land", he imagines the southern monsoon-wind blowing across Orissa towards Hazaribagh to be a messenger of his people and draws out of it imaginary answers about the conditions of people in different parts of Orissa. He says with reference to Sambalpur :

And aren't the women folk, there,
 As fair as *Champak* flowers,
 With smiles bewitching enough
 To win any male heart,
 So blooming with graces,
 So radiant with happiness,
 Adorned though,
 With only the simple local costumes and
 jewellery ?"

If this puritanic patriot had such admiration for beauty in women, he loved no less the beauty in Nature, Nature in the total as well as in particulars. The titles of his many poems speak for themselves,— "On the bank of the river Kathjuri", "Evening on the Kathjuri", "On the bank of the Kathjuri in moonlight", "To the river Bhargavi" (the river that flows by his village), "On the heights of Khandagiri hill", "Chilka from a Railway train", "Naraja after a shower", etc. A few lines from the "Chilka from the railway train", a poem of his undergraduate days, may be quoted here as testimony to his almost devotional affection towards Nature, and not merely as poetic fashion. Says he :

"Stop, for a moment, will you, O, fire-chariot,
 Enabling me to have a contented look
 At the Chilka's panoramic charms.
 Methinks it is a dream-picture, no reality—
 Could any earthly thing be so beauteous !
 Ah, this insensible vehicle
 That speeds me heedlessly along,
 And places the obstruction of trees and rocks
 Between me and the Chilka,
 Holding out the lovely picture for a moment
 To be but taken away the next !
 Just like the image of a dear one in dreams.
 This soul of mine, ever hungering for beauty,
 Once did plan, in the midst of busy hours,
 To roam about your shores and enjoy you
 All alone, oh dear Chilka,

But here was an opportunity
 That came to me after so long a waiting,
 But, alas, this too
 Is just slipping away through my fingers."

But lover of humanity that he was, Gopabandhu's love of Nature was inextricably mingled with the love of his people. With what passion he loved the people may be realised from the following lines from his "Soliloquy of a Prisoner" :

"My train has reached Jenapur,
 Whose people are so well known to me.
 I visited the place two years ago,
 When it was under flood-waters,
 That destroyed many a home and much else of
 great value.

And tears flowed from my eyes to see
 Cattle and humans in miserable plight,
 Both dying slowly for lack of sustenance,
 The very memory of which happenings
 Agonises my whole soul even now.
 The train is already signalled to leave.
 The last bell rings, the green flag is being waved.
 How I wish I were free to get down here
 To meet the people of Jenapur once again,
 And walked from village to village
 On the banks of the Brahmani
 I speaking a word to everybody before I parted !
 I so desire to see how my folk fare,
 Bravely facing the cruel buffeting
 Of both Nature and man.
 And in an assembly of the people
 On the sands of the Brahmani,
 How I would have liked to pour out
 These my unspoken feelings !"

DEEPLY RELIGIOUS

Widely read in religious scriptures, Pandit Gopabandhu was a deeply devout man. He acted all

through life as though he was the humble agent of his heavenly Father. His theology, however, was the simplest and the most rational conceivable. In his poem *Sivaratri* we get a glimpse of the vision of his God, when he says :

"Where can I see the vision of the True and
the Good ?

And with what lamp shall I dispel also
The surrounding darkness ?

From the depths of my soul the divine voice
answers in silence,

'Why indeed are you so perplexed with doubts ?
For, even that which appears to you

As lifeless matter,
is impregnated with power incalculable,
And nothing in Creation being without energy,
Look upon the whole world
As pervaded with only God.

You need never journey to distant temples
In search of Divinity,
But open your eyes and look within,
And there you will find inside your heart
Lord God, self-born and merciful."

In his admiration for Gopabandhu, this writer is not so blind as to call him a great poet or rate his poetry very high. But there is no doubt that if in any modern Indian literature a man created folk-poetry of high order, it was he. Like folk-poetry, Gopabandhu's verses appear to come directly out of the soil,—simple, naive, spontaneous. He was a great soul trying to reach innumerable little souls, out of sheer innate compassion and pity. There is nothing of conscious art here. The beauty lies in his directness and simplicity of approach, like motherly love. That is Gopabandhu's precious contribution to his literature, apart from his other contributions as patriot, orator, journalist, legislator, educationist, social reformer and social worker. The great dedicated Brahmin has blazed a trail of noble human behaviour which will remain an inspiration for ages to all those playing the glorious role of living and dying for others.

CHAPTER XVII

WORLD'S LAST GREAT ASTRONOMER WITHOUT A TELESCOPE

In these days of giant telescopes and space-trips, people are apt to forget these brilliant pioneers of humanity who, even as late as a century back, studied the heavens and accumulated knowledge of the heavenly bodies with no better instruments than a pair of naked human eyes. The length of the year, the obliquity of the ecliptic, the fact and amount of precession, the chief lunar inequalities, the inclinations of the planetary orbits and their relative dimensions were all determined not only by direct eye-observation, but with remarkable approximation to the truth, at that.

The British author, E.E. Maunder, in his *Astronomy Without Telescope*, published in 1904, wrote : "As readers of the *Knowledge* (November, 1899, in which issue the book *Siddhanta Darpana* of Samanta Chandrasekhara was extensively reviewed) will remember, there is still living in Orissa the Hindu astronomer Chandrasekhara, who, with home-made instruments and without any optical assistance, has re-determined the elements of the chief members of the solar system with a most astonishing accuracy,".

Who is this Chandrasekhara ?

Being born in a backward State like Orissa, which pathetically enough lacks, even to-day, a tiny fraction of the means of publicity possessed in such abundant measures by her next-door neighbour

Bengal, this great pioneer and savant still remains a *comparatively* unknown quantity in his homeland, India, although his work and worth were appreciated by contemporary foreign scholars, thousands of miles away.

Chandrasekhara Sinha Samanta, to use his full feudalistic name, was born in the royal family of Khandapara, a small ex-Native State of Orissa, in the year 1835. But for some legal impediments, the future astronomer might have himself been the Raja of that little principality. But subjected to the continuous tyranny of the jealous and unforgiving Raja, the successful rival claimant to the throne, Chandrasekhara had to carry on a life-long struggle against poverty and debt, along with chronic physical disabilities. Orissa being still a backward State, its condition more than a century back could be easily imagined, and that too in one of the Native States, notorious till yesterday for their medieval and feudal environment. Even as late as a decade or so back, there was no all-weather road to Khandapara, Chandrasekhara's birth place. When late in life the great astronomer had to visit Cuttack, the chief town of Orissa, to receive the honours conferred on him by the appreciative British Government, he had to sail all the way down the Mahanadi from his home 60 miles away, as no other means of transport was available to him to reach the outer world. And no wonder the great man arrived a day late for the durbar. But the admiring English Commissioner readily organised a special function to confer on him the enviable title of Mahamahopadhyaya, which had not been awarded to a non-Brahmin till then.

As was customary in those days, the sons and daughters of the Hindu aristocracy had to have a sound education in Sanskrit, along with the classical literature of the regional language. Whatever may be the political charges against the erstwhile Rajas, it has

to be admitted that they did keep the flames of genuine Indian culture burning right up to their doomsday in 1948. Thus Chandrasekhara's home, though absolutely untouched by anything Western, had an atmosphere of high indigenous culture about it. His father and his uncle were both erudite scholars in almost every branch of Sanskrit learning, as was not unusual until recently among upper class people in India. After giving his brilliant son a good grounding in Sanskrit grammar, rhetoric and literature, Chandrasekhara's father initiated him into the mysteries of astrology. And that sparked off astronomical aspirations in the dormant genius.

By this time, Chandrasekhara had so mastered Sanskrit as well as the main principles of Indian astronomy so as to be able to study the ancient *Siddhantas* all by himself. His father's astrological instructions had acquainted him with the stars. He now started observing their positions and movements. To his surprise, the young astronomer found that his observations differed considerably from those contained in the hoary astronomical treatises. Like his father and uncle and almost all educated men in Orissa a century ago, he knew no other language except Oriya and Sanskrit. And there were not many printed books also, except with the handful of Christian missionaries confined to a few towns. It speaks volumes for the very high level of culture and learning in those days that Chandrasekhara found all the great works on Indian astronomy by his great predecessors, like Aryabhatta and Bhaskaracharya, in his family library of palm-leaf manuscripts written in Oriya characters. In these so-called progressive times one cannot easily get at the works, say of Bhaskaracharya, even in Cuttack, the premier city of Orissa. What progress have we made indeed !

In that jungle village of Khandapara there was not however another single soul, who was scholarly

enough to answer young Chandrasekhara's queries or remove his doubts. His father and others could not even distinguish between astrology and astronomy. And inspite of all the honours he received late in life as a great astronomer, to the common man in Orissa, Chandrasekhara was never more than an obliging astrologer, who was pestered all his life for reading horoscopes.

Chandrasekhara had thus to fall back upon his own unaided resources. Following the ancient *Siddhantas*, he made some simple instruments of his own. Piercing a few holes in the thatch of his ancestral house, he spent sleepless nights observing the rise and movements of the stars and planets, noting the irregularities in the old *Siddhantas* as against his own discoveries. When his notes became sizable enough, he wanted to compile them in a systematic manner for the benefit of others. And thus came about the *Siddhanta Darpana*, the last in the great chain of India's astronomical *Siddhanta*. He wrote the book on palmleaves with an iron stylus in splendidly alliterative and sonorous, though highly scholastic, Sanskrit verses. But all that was written in Oriya characters, as the great savant did not know even the Devanagari script, the usual script for Sanskrit-writing.

By the time he reached middle age, Chandrasekhara's fame had spread all around, particularly because of his aristocratic lineage. It was very unusual for a man of his clan to so completely give himself up to the pursuit of knowledge, in contrast to a life of shikar and concubinage which was the general pattern of aristocratic living in those days.

The great Oriya poet Radhanatha Roy was Inspector of Schools of the Orissa Division of the Bengal Presidency at that time. He was not only a great literary creator and a brilliant educationist, but also an erudite scholar in many fields of knowledge.

He did not hesitate to patronise talent even in his worst enemy. While touring on official work in the ex-Native States of Orissa, he heard of Chandrasekhara's great reputation. When he visited Khandapara, he made it a point to meet the famous man. A modern Western-style scholar, Radhanatha was taken aback by the amazing scholarship of that uncouth rustic, who was absolutely innocent of English or of any Western knowledge. He felt almost a pigmy before Chandrasekhar. On his return to Cuttack, Radhanatha started talking to everybody about his discovery of a genius in a jungle-village of the Orissa State. And that was the beginning of Chandrasekhara's recognition.

The Professor of Physics at that time in the Ravenshaw College, Cuttack, was Jogesha Chandra Roy, a celebrated Bengali scholar and writer. On hearing about this unknown jungle-genius, he undertook the long and difficult journey to Khandapara in a bullock cart, and, like Radhanatha, returned full of worshipful admiration for that savant. It was he who now arranged the publication of the *Siddhanta Darpana*. The Raja of the ex-Native State of Athmallick offered to meet all the expenses of printing it and Jogesha Chandra Roy added to its value by an 80-page scholarly introduction in English. The publication of *Siddhanta Darpana* made the unknown Chandrasekhara famous not only in India, but also in other countries.

Completely agreeing with Professor Jogesha Chandra Roy, learned reviewers in astronomical and scientific journals abroad hailed Chandrasekhara as the veritable modern Tycho Brahe. But as pointed out by Professor Roy, the comparison "fails when we remember that Tycho had the benefit of a university education, of the patronage of kings, and what is more important, that he had instruments as delicate as he could desire. Chandrasekhara had spent his life

among native hills, had seldom been five miles away from his native village and did not receive any encouragement from anybody in respect of his work. Tycho had the friendship of Frederick II of Denmark who gave him an Estate in Norway, a pension of £ 400 a year for life, a site for an observatory and £ 20,000 to build it with. And what did our Indian Tycho receive ? He met with sneers from his equals in position, because he shook off the aristocratic prejudices against star-gazers and fortune-tellers. He had no one to encourage him in his pursuit and no notice was taken of his work."

Says also Maunder in his *Astronomy Without Telescope* : "In this recluse of the Orissa village we seem to have reincarnated, as it were, one of the early fathers of the science, long centuries ere the telescope was dreamed of. To have obtained such important results and so high a degree of accuracy by naked eye-observations with entirely home-made instruments and in the utter absence of modern book-learning, is a striking illustration of what resolution can effect."

In personal life, Chandrasekhara Sinha Samanta was simple as a child, and a pious Hindu to his finger-tips. But though extremely ascetic in his habits like Mahatma Gandhi, the great astronomer enjoyed jokes better than the most worldly of men. He was so esteemed for truthfulness and rectitude that in a dispute between his own State and a neighbouring one, his word was taken to be final by top-ranking officials. As his evidence spoiled the claims of his own State, the Raja who was his nephew, never forgave him and so subjected him to all sorts of petty tyrannies that his life became an unending stream of worries. But even after he became a national hero and could easily have obtained rightful remedies through the Government, Chandrasekhara was too noble ever to speak a word against that stupid Raja. That mean feudal nincompoop has had eternal condemnation through the shattering

satire of Radhanatha's famous poem *Durbar*, which contains the severest lashing at the Raja in contrast to an encomium for the great astronomer which any genius should envy.

Chandrasekhara is the only Hindu astronomer to have the credit of detecting all the three important irregularities of the moon. In his own way, he made a creditable improvement in measuring the sun's parallax, without being aware of the progress made in Europe in the line. His extraordinary accuracy has been praised on all hands. Says Professor Roy : "It will be seen that while the Bengal almanacs may be in error to as much as 4", the error in the ephemeris by *Siddhanta Darpana* is limited to only half-a-degree. This compares favourably with the ephemeris of the Nautical Almanac !" Says also Mr. Maunder : "He (Chandrasekhar) has been able to obtain a most astonishing degree of accuracy in his results. Thus, the sidereal period for Mercury is only 0.0007 days different from that adopted by European astronomers ; for Venus it is only 0.0028 days. The mean inclination of the orbits of the planets to the ¹⁷⁵₁₇₆ ecliptic are correct to about a minute of arc. The errors of the ephemeris computed from his new constants are reduced to about one-tenth of those in some of the most widely circulated in Hindu almanacs. In his discussion of the moon's motion, he made the discovery—¹⁰¹₁₂₆ independent and original, on his part,—of the lunar evection, variation and annual equation, which found no place in the earlier *Siddhantas*."

Professor Roy writes that he showed a telescope to Chandrasekhara for the first time. He adds : "He had heard of its wonderful powers, but had no idea of its performances. He requested me to show him the planets through one. Unfortunately, I had with me then a telescope no bigger than one with a reflector of $3\frac{1}{2}$ " diameter. This was adjusted for him with a

power of 80°. The keen delight with which he looked at the varied and picturesque appearances of the moon, absorbed for some time, can better be imagined than described. When the novelty of aspect had abated a little, he wanted to know the magnifying power. He was told to find it for himself, if he could. The question is itself puzzling and I did not expect an answer. But he startled me by saying that the instrument magnified about one hundred diameters. He had measured the image of the moon as seen through the telescope and had compared it with the apparent diameter well-known to him.....He gave vent to his bitter regret that he had not had the advantage of such instruments in his younger days."

The great savant died in 1904 in the holy city of Puri in fulfilment of his life-long aspiration as a pious Hindu. The *Siddhanta Darpana*, his *magnum opus*, is also dedicated to no earthly potentate but to Lord Jagannatha of Puri, the supreme Lord of the universe. For, to the great astronomer, knowledge was but an aspect of Divinity, and he sought knowledge of the universe as the best means of worshipping the Lord.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE GREATEST OF TRIBALS

The Khonds (Kandhas) of Orissa were notorious for the practice of human sacrifice for increasing the production of turmeric, their chief commercial crop. The British administration not only ended this barbarism but took steps also to get the turbulent Khonds settled as law-abiding agriculturists. A separate administrative unit, called the Khondmals, was created in central Orissa to enable the Government to maintain direct over-all control over these ebullient tribals. But even the British administrators were amazed not only at their bravery but also at their unflinching loyalty to their tribe, their chief and the plighted word.

It was perhaps this love of truth in these tribals that turned an illiterate, poor and blind Khond in the last half of the last century into an uncompromising socio-religious iconoclast as a poet, saint and prophet with profound influence on large masses of people in Orissa. He is Bhima Bhoi, the poet laureate of the Alekh cult,¹ whose vigorous ethical and monotheistic *bhajanas* in Oriya, have been thrilling and edifying the minds of millions all over Orissa even today. The average Khond is still an animist. It is therefore amazing how from a primitive, animistic society there sprang up a man who, spurning the specious ways of idolatory of common Hinduism, rose straight into the pure thin air of Vedantic abstraction and Buddhistic self-culture, which even the average Indian intellectual finds a little uncomfortable.

Fortunately for us, Bhima Bhoi has not yet been turned into a mythical figure by his co-religionists, as

¹, See chapter XI,

they have done in the case of his *guru*, Mahima Gossain, the founder of the Alekh cult. There is enough evidence to show that in his daily habits and common behaviour this genius was an average human with virtues as well as weaknesses. The village where he was born and the one where he died are still identified. His last home in the ex-State of Sonepur in Orissa, still exists. His last descendant also died at a not very distant date.

Bhima was born in an interior village of the ex-State of Rairakhol in Orissa,—a very undeveloped area even today. He spent his entire childhood tending cattle for a living. It was at this time that the poor boy completely lost his vision due to an attack of small-pox. But blindness might have helped the sensitive and introspective mind of the future saint to probe into the mysteries of existence, starting from his own misfortune. While in this psychological state of mind, the sensitive genius appears to have come in touch with the wandering preacher, Mahima Gossain. This contact with a holy and developed soul seems to have sparked the dormant genius in the illiterate young tribal and turned the servant-boy into an inspired poet, which was a matter of great significance in the entire field of Indian literature. The story of the meeting of Bhima and Mahima Gossain and the former's development as a poet-saint, clearly remind us of a similar meeting in the last century in the Kali temple at Dakhineswar, near Calcutta, between the saint Ramakrishna and the young Narendranath Dutta with consequences of almost the same character.

Having no opportunity whatsoever for schooling, Bhima Bhoi remained completely illiterate all his life. Hence, his several hundred psalms, hymns, prayers and prophecies were absolutely extempore compositions. These are generally sung to the resounding

rhythm of a *Khanjani* (castanet) and are among the finest religious poetry in Oriya literature. Though expressed in the colloquial, unpolished speech of the illiterate mass, they lift the audience to a high stratum where one breathes the air of purity, holiness and unadulterated truth. They are not denominational, though the poet was the very mouthpiece of the Alekha cult. Truly inspired poet that he was, Bhima's outpourings are not the dogmatic propaganda of a sectarian tenet, but a telling record of his own soul-searches, his own spiritual agonies and his own vision. Their universal appeal comes out of the deep personal passions of an unsophisticated genius.

Here, for instance, are lines which unashamedly express his sense of utter frustration, bringing to mind similar words of Jesus Christ on the Cross : "Oh my Lord, why don't you help me ? For preaching your glory, my own reputation is broken to pieces. For preaching you as the unknown one, they taunt me as a Christian and put me to untold sufferings. Though covered with sin, they denounce me if I talk to them the religion of truth. They shout, 'Drive him away, drive him away, let us see how his Master protects him. He is a d-n sinner, refuse him food or shelter'. And when I preach of equality, they retaliate by treating me like a dog. My Lord, this is my fate wherever I go. I feel I should henceforth stop going about. In the face of these tyrannies where shall I go ?"

But inspite of his poverty, blindness and homelessness, the poet never ceased to feel deeply for the suffering fellow humans. In one of his *bhajanas* he says in a passionate prayer to his God :

"The twins of happiness and misery, bondage and freedom, are all your creation. Who can carry with ease this heavy burden of sin which is your crea-

tion ? Let me, therefore, lay them at your own feet, Why should'nt you finally settle this matter ? Where else shall I go for a solution ? I have been hoping to collect my sins in a tray and place it at your feet. Those devoted to you get wasted, praying and weeping. Why don't you forgive people their sins or run the world in an equitable manner ? Who, like you, could indeed be so heartless as not to have compassion for sentient beings in their endless sorrows and sufferings ? As for me, I would prefer to stay in hell forever, if that would save the world,"

As stated elsewhere², when the National Academy of Letters (Sahitya Akademi)asked for a line or a couplet from each of the 14 Indian languages, symbolic of its total ethos or representing a fine sense of humanitarianism, the litterateurs of Orissa selected the last line of the above quotation, thus endowing on an illiterate, poor and blind tribal, a unique national honour.

The illiterate poet's taunts against the idolatry of the Hindus is expressed in many a *bhajana*. Thus he says in one of them.

"It is in sheer ignorance that people worship icons, offering cakes, sweets and puddings, and appealing to them for protection. They do not realise the simple fact that those are mere figures, without souls. How can they grant them their wishes ? People do not worship Him who created them but run to statues of wood and metal and say, 'save us, save us' ! How unthinking is this approach of living human beings to dead idols ! And how strange that He who created humanity out of nothing is so clean forgotten !"

The poet-prophet spent the best part of his life wandering from place to place, preaching his non-

² See Chapter XI

idolatrous and monotheistic cult to all and sundry, and bravely facing insults, discomforts and tyrannies like early Christian evangelists. But at times, he seems to have lost patience with the slow pace at which his "true religion" was making headway. Overwhelmed with the pervasive paganism all around, he burst out in many *bhajanas*, like the Hebrew prophets, in righteous indignation. Says he in one of the *bhajanas* :

"These tyrannies shall end. The time is not far off when the great Master will break the ego of these tyrants. He will get things done in such subtle ways that the sinners will disappear one by one without the others being even aware of it. They are immersed in such sins and immoralities and so involved in hypocrisies that no religion can save them in any way. Some of those sinners will be burnt in fire, some will be drowned in water and some will just drop off and die. Some will be stung to death by serpents and others will meet death with halters round their necks. Still others will suffer from unknown diseases, their bodies shaking with palsy, and those that survive will be lacking in vitality."

Completely unlettered, this tribal saint's concept of God, which transcended the limitations of icons and personalities, reaches amazingly universal and progressive heights. He says : "God himself is going through sufferings to keep the world He created, going"

The cosmological vision of this blind tribal very strongly brings to our mind the famous Creation hymn of the *Rig-Veda*.

"The earth, rocks, air and water did not exist then. Only the great pervasive Void overspread the soundless existence. Neither the myriad stars nor the sun nor the moon existed. Day and night were one. There was neither Heaven nor Earth nor Hell nor any

of the Trinity. Not one of the three hundred and thirty-three million gods was there, nor even sound. Nor any of the five elements. Listen, wise men, therefore, how things originated. And carefully store the information in your mind."

Late in life, the blind poet probably became tired of constant wanderings. By that time he had acquired such reputation as a saint that blue-blooded Brahmins came forward to give their daughters in marriage to this swarthy-skinned tribal. He is said to have consented to marry only two helpless Brahmin widows, one after the other. The last phase of his life, in contrast to his childhood and youth, is supposed to have been full of honours and amenities. There is no doubt whatsoever that this illiterate tribal was a unique personality, perhaps the greatest tribal of India and one more shining example of India's marvellous heritage of unlettered wisdom, like Ramakrishna Paramahansa and his wife Saradamoni.

CHAPTER XIX

THE GENIUS THAT WORKED A LOOM

The saying that poets are born, not made, is best illustrated in the life of an Orissan poet who plied a loom for his living. There now stands one of the biggest colleges of Orissa dedicated to his memory, although his own formal education did not go beyond the primary stage.

His centenary celebrations were observed all over Orissa close on heels of those of Tagore. It is this close contemporaneity that suggests a comparison between the world-poet of Bengal and the regional poet of Orissa. Gangadhara Mehera, the Oriya contemporary of Tagore, possessed not even one of the many appurtenances that certainly help talent, such as, ancestry, education and a prosperous family, with all of which Rabindranath was abundantly endowed. The Oriya Poet had to work his ancestral handloom till late in life for his subsistence and carry on his shoulders the finished products to the local market. After an elementary school education, the future poet had entertained the ambition of getting himself trained as a primary school teacher at a Training school at Sambalpur, fifty miles from his weaver-village of Barpali. But his family set their face against this risky adventure and, on the boy's mildest insistence, the womenfolk started loud lamentations, as though some catastrophe was imminent. That was his sombre, dark-age background, in contrast to Tagore's spacious, prosperous and enlightened environs in Bengal. And so, the weaver-poet, whose poetry is studied now by professors in post-graduate classes, and after whom the second largest college in Orissa is named, failed in his dreams of ever becoming even a primary school teacher.

But before Gangadhara became famous all over Orissa as a poet, he was definitely celebrated in his rural area as an artistic weaver, his textile products being in great demand for their elegance and strength. He was noted also for drafting neatly-written legal deeds. These exercises seem to have subsequently shaped and coloured his writings, which are well-designed and well-woven, like the artistic cloth that he produced and the deeds he drew up. But he would have ended as a mere clever artisan had he not attracted the attention of the celebrated poet Radhanatha¹. The young weaver of Barpali had sent him a few of his early trials at poetry-making while plying the shuttle of his handloom in his dingy, ancestral cottage, which still stands, proclaiming that no adversity can suppress the flowering of a genius. The elder poet at once discerned the latent genius even in those faltering poetic attempts and encouraged him in terms almost of wonder and worship. That put sufficient confidence in our semi-literate craftsman. With the publication of his very first *kavya* (long poem) *Indumati*, the unknown weaver of Barpali was hailed all over Orissa as a poet of high order. With this sudden State-wide celebrity, he began to be looked up to by his village compatriots and the kindly local squire relieved him of the drudgery of weaving by appointing him as a factotum in his estate, at the princely salary of Rs. 7 per month. Thereafter, the poet remained at least a few rungs above the level of a manual worker and was respected by the great in the land till his death.

The secret of the deep and instantaneous impact of the writings of Gangadhara, on Orissa's reading public is that, he combined in his genius the classical and the romantic, the medieval and the modern, the nobility and the commoner in a proportion that can never be acquired by training. He was really a gifted

¹ See Chapter XIV

craftsman. Whatever he lay his fingers on, turned into a product of beauty, elegance and colour. He also gathered his colours and patterns from the very soil on which he walked. The roots of his soul were too deep in the local soil to seek and get substance from elsewhere. For instance, he is absolutely unaffected by Rabindranath Tagore who was a close contemporary, and shines brilliantly in his own native light.

Taking up classical subjects, Mehera presented them in terms of modern understanding and naturalness, but not without the music and colour of medieval art or the burning human fire of the romantic. Here is a sample of Mehera's art from *Tapaswini*, his masterpiece. This is a *Kavya* in 11 cantos and of varied metres, dealing with the last days of exiled Sita in the hermitage of Valmiki. Redolent of sylvan peace and charm as well as of the holy sacrificial fires of an ancient Vedic hermitage, the whole poem may be regarded as a literary hermitage in itself, with the saintly Sita as its presiding deity.

In its third canto, King Rama, a few hours after having exiled under a subterfuge his dearest one on earth for appeasing a volatile mob, is seen sitting on the terrace of his palace, a desperate, lonely and pitiable figure, exploring his mind under the piercing gaze of the myriad denizens of the heavens. And the good king thus muses on the problem of rights and duties as might any conscientious Head of State or political leader of today, under similar circumstances.

"What else is so-called royal power except slavery to the mob ? And when one is installed by them on this high pedestal, what else could be expected of the chosen one, except keeping the electors perpetually humoured ?"

"If hundreds of them together start telling a lie, a king, knowing the lie fully well, cannot but mechanically echo, 'It is true !' 'True it is !'

"In this sacrifice of appeasement to the common-folk, what else is a king but the sole sacrificial offering ? Bound as he is on all sides by the law, what liberty has he to take even one free step ?

"A king may be taken as no more than a cloud, moving skyhigh but made of the watery blood-particles of the people of the earth. The cloud, even though its heart is incinerated by the fire of lightning, is expected to deliver water. And so a king may hope to remain popular only so long as he keeps his people pleased at the expense of his own happiness."

The first days of Sita at the hermitage of Valmiki are also thus described :

"The feet of the greatest of virtuous women, which had humbled the effulgence of all the gems on the ten heads of the king of Lanka, were now scattering away the pride of the same jewels as she moved about in the garden of Valmiki's hermitage.

"As the great lady's heart was full of thoughts of the *green-coloured* Rama, the trees and plants of the hermitage stole her heart and became more green, and the grace of her lovely limbs were stealthily snatched away by the flowers.

"The *Champaka* appropriated the colour of her skin ; the hibiscus, the loveliness of her lips ; the bee, the black grace of her tresses ; and others claimed other graces according to their fancy.

"It is by taking on themselves the nectar-sweet charms of the great lady that the honey in the flowers became so sweet. It is only the softness and delicacy borrowed from her which have become permanently attached to all flowers. And the great suttee herself, bereft of all her former grace, started living the austere life of a mendicant woman like any other inmate of Valmiki's forest retreat."

The *Kavya Tapaswini* of Gangadhara Mehera, among half a dozen of his excellent creations of the same category, is worthily taken as a literary masterpiece in Oriya, combining in unique blends the classical and the modern. The *Kavya Padmini* might well have been his *magnum opus* but, alas, it remained unfinished. But here are some remarkable lines with which the great poet inaugurates his contemplated epic :

"The fort of Chittor stands on high hills like the crown of glory of the Indo-Aryan race. And the souls of the people inside the fort were no less high than the fort itself. Appropriately higher ambitions had also made permanent homes therein, unchallenged by any man."

But the poet's great personality, his warm but critical patriotism and his broad humanity have been best expressed in his innumerable small poems and lyrics, which, impeccable in the selection and juxtaposition of words, reveal the poet's unimpeachable subtlety of senses and are perfectly faultless in their rhymes. And, though poor and materially at a low rung of the social ladder all his life, Mehera, the true genius, did not hesitate to lash ruthlessly at the corrupt big-wigs of contemporary society. Says he in his famous poem. "They too are addressed as Right Honourables" :

"They, who use their education to trample all social ethics underfoot, they whose intelligence turns hundred truths every day into as many lies, they whose

judgement could easily be twisted for trivial material gains, they too are respectfully addressed in society as Right Honourables."

Worried over India's perpetually poor and illiterate peasantry, the poet attempted, late in life, a series of songs for the cultivators. In them he put in the ideas of scientific agriculture with a view to raising the productivity of the soil and the standard of living of the peasantry, long, long before our much-abused grow-more-food campaign in post-independence India. The Indian peasants generally sing while cultivating the fields. The poet hoped that the peasant might be made to sing his songs, along with the old folk-songs, so that the progressive ideas of agriculture might seep into his subconscious. This unique anthology, called *Krushaka Sangita* ("Songs of the Peasant"), reminds us of Virgil's famous *Georgics*, with this difference that while both present the charms of rural life, the former aims at sound and benevolent reforms, to which the latter had no pretension. This book of poet Mehera may be unique in the entire field of Indian literature, ancient and modern. It demonstrates the master-craftsmanship of Mehera for composing excellent, elegant verses on such un-poetic subjects as groundnuts, tobacco and cauliflowers, all in the right folk-song style. And the advice offered in these lyrics by the dreaming genius to the peasantry is as correct as in any text-book on popular farming written by a professional writer could have been. Mehera, similarly, has left behind a superb poem on the socio-political benefits of the *Panchayat*, fifty years before *Panchayati-raj* was talked of in independent India.

Semi-educated, poor and born to a backward and depressed class, this creative genius has not written

also a single line which reflects despair, self-deprecation or angry tirade. On the other hand, his writings vibrate with colour, beauty and grace, with an amazing zest and respect for existence, and with an unfaltering faith in uncompromising idealism. In and through them the poet keeps on sending to his readers throbbing messages of hope, charity and faith that move every heart. In the poem *Ah, this sweet world!* he says :

"Out of the caves of the Lord's mountain flow out streams of sweetness. Oh traveller, if you climb the hill in search of them, you will not only find them but shall discover also the very peak of His Mercy."

"Hence, oh Life, realise the pervasive beauty of His creation. Sure enough, all your fears of sin and death shall be washed away by the waters of His grace."

In another poem of great spiritual significance he says :

"Nothing but a drop from the ocean of
Immortality
That had floated up the sky out of that
ocean-bed,
I flow down now also in a stream of death-less-ness
On the way back to my home-sea.

In personal life, the great weaver, though poor, was a prince among men. For his stern uprightness

and his fearless chastisement of evil wherever found, he was the terror of the corrupt, though highly popular with the general public. Just before his death he had organised a conference of the scattered and backward community of weavers to tell them how they should change their old ways and get adjusted to modern conditions.

As years roll by, the poet is receiving greater and greater honour from his people all over Orissa for his genius and purity of life. In Western Orissa, in particular, he has become a national hero. He is its greatest contribution in recent times to the glories of the Oriya people. This gifted weaver of Barpali should unhesitatingly be counted as a hero in high Carlylian sense and among the half-a-dozen modern torch-bearers of the historic land of Orissa, Utkal and Kalinga,—the home of Raja-Rani and of Konarka and, above all, the holy seat of Jagannatha, "the Lord of the Universe."

CHAPTER XX

ORISSA'S PATRIOTIC PRINCES

Orissa owes not a little to her Rajas, Maharajas and the fairly extensive tribe of landlords, big and small. Few indeed are the instances, in the long story of Orissa's royal dynasties or her aristocracy in general, of extortion of the peasantry or sadism or other disreputable practices covered by the notorious expression 'oriental despotism'. On the other hand, the story is rather of enlightenment, humanism, scholarly attainments and unstinted patronage of arts and letters. The way Orissa's central government as well as feudal chiefs set up large land-endowed but rent-free settlements of Brahmins, called *Sasans*, so that intellectual culture might continue unhampered by the eternal worries of the pence, is indeed a unique example of social planning and should be taken seriously into account by the modern planners of the Indian Republic. Orissa offers few sordid stories of harem-cult or organised debauchery which are common in other Asiatic countries. On the other hand, dedication to the divine was the glory of Orissa's nobility. Emperors Kharavela of the 1st century B. C. and Kapilendra Deva of the 14th-15th centuries, who were great conquerors, builders and rulers of sprawling empires, were also men of God. An inscription of Kapilendra Deva on the walls of the temple of Jagannatha states that he held his empire only as a trustee of Lord Jagannatha. The contribution of Orissa's feudal houses to Oriya language might amaze any student of literature. Abhimanyu Samanta Simhara and Upendra Bhanja are household words all over the Oriya-speaking land for the way these aristocrats made their mother tongue rich and colourful, as others of the tribe enriched their native soil with wonderful specimens of architecture and sculpture.

No story of Orissa's culture can be completed, therefore, without pin-pointing how her Rajas and Maharajas have liberally contributed to the national life of the Oriyas. We give below the sample life-sketches of only three, the list of Orissa's royal worthies being pretty long. It was due to the generous patriotism of the Maharaja of Sonepur State in Western Orissa, Sir Biramitrodaya Sinha Deva, that the first Chair for post-graduate studies in Oriya in the Calcutta University and the first Chair for post-graduate teaching in English in the Ravenshaw College, Cuttack, were possible. Every educated Andhra must owe a deep debt of gratitude to the Oriya Maharaja of Jeypore, Sree Vikrama Deva Varma, for his generous endowments to the Andhra University for over a quarter of a century. Both these Maharajas were deep scholars in Sanskrit and Oriya and liberal patrons of indigent litterateurs as well. Vikrama Deva Varma occupies a respectable niche in Telugu literature, as he is entitled to one in his mother tongue, Oriya. If the Oriya people, after a vivisected existence for four centuries, are in a home-state of their own, it is really as much due to the efforts of many an Oriya Raja, and in particular to those of the Maharaja of Parlakemidi, the last of Orissa's glorious Gajapatis, as to those of some political leaders.

The Royal Trio of Orissa, presented here, are Maharaja Sir Sudhala Deva of the ex-State of Bamra, Maharaja Sree Rama Chandra Bhanja Deo of the ex-State of Mayurbhanja and Maharaja Krushna Chandra Gajapati of Parlakemidi. Though Madhusudana Das may rightly be called the Father of modern Orissa, Sree Rama Chandra Bhanja Deo was his first lieutenant and Sree K. C. Narayana Gajapati, the Maharaja of Parlakemidi, was his last. If Maharaja Sree Rama Chandra Bhanja Deo of Mayurbhanja presided over the first session of the Utkal Sammilani (Utkal Union Conference) and sent a thrill of joy down the spines of

the Oriyas by addressing them there, for the first time, as "brothers", three decades later, Maharaja K. C. Gajapati of Parlakemidi graced the same conference as its last president. Despite the stiff opposition of powerful vested interests, and the apathy and even jeers from Congress leaders and forums in Orissa for supposed cooperation with the Satanic British, the Maharaja of Parlakimedi made possible a separate Orissa State through his persistent efforts at home and abroad. The three Maharajas sketched out here would be honoured as great national heroes by any people. We begin with the seniormost.

SIR BASUDEVA SUDHALA DEVA

Sir Basudeva Sudhala Deva, K. C. I. E. of Bamra was born in 1850. In accordance with the traditions of the family, young Basudeva had a thorough training in Oriya, Sanskrit and matters of statecraft, but not in English. But it was this English-ignorant ruling prince of a small jungle-state who was the first to introduce electricity in Orissa for light as well as industry. He set up his independent hydro-electric plant, utilising the picturesque waterfall in the suburb of his capital, Devagada. The whole project was entrusted to the brilliant Oriya writer Jalandhara Deva, a kinsman of the Raja, who, though he had no technical education, could successfully install the turbines with knowledge gained only from books. Sir Sudhala was also the first in Orissa to possess and use a motor-car. He had the longest telephone-line in India for many years, extending for eighty miles from the nearest railhead to his headquarters. His whole State was linked by telephones nearly a century ago. Without any formal initiation into the Western languages or science, his insight into and ready acceptance of all the modern discoveries looks amazing in retrospect and reminds us of Mikado Meiji under whom medieval Japan became a modern super-power in a few years.

Through modern methods of development and management, Sir Sudhala changed his primitive state into a modern one. By wise husbanding of the agricultural and forest resources he increased the State revenue many-fold. Almost a century back, he had introduced modern methods of agriculture and animal husbandry. As Educational Adviser to the now-defunct Eastern States Agency, this writer was surprised to find throughout the ex-State of Bamra the cleanest of villages in Orissa, the healthiest cattle and also people with the cleanest habiliments. This was the happy heritage that Sir Basudeva had left behind. It may surprise readers to know that almost a century back this native prince had introduced and strictly enforced prohibition. When he held the thread-ceremony of his heir, to which the entire contemporary elite of Orissa were invited, he had it mentioned in the invitation-letters that no guest should request for any alcoholic drink or intoxicating drugs of any sort.

Sir Sudhala was not only a great scholar in Oriya and Sanskrit, but also a writer in Oriya, and, what is more, an eminent patron of Oriya literature. His small poem *Chitrotpala* describes the river Mahanadi, Orissa's mighty river of beauty and utility, from its source in Madhya Pradesh to its mouth in the Bay of Bengal. He was the first also to write a book on rhetorics (*alankara*) in Oriya. The subject of his poem *Biravama* ("The great heroine") is no other than Rani Laxmibai of Jhansi. It is probably the earliest poetic treatment of that great romantic personality in the whole of Indian literature. It shows the Raja's natural appetite for the modern, the exotic and the unfamiliar as well as for whatever was great, good and noble. It was during his reign as well as that of his worthy son and successor, Shri Sachhidananda Deva, that the small jungle-village of Devagada became, in a way, the Weimar of Orissa, where poets, writers and intel-

ctuals not only of the whole of the Oriya-speaking land; but also from other parts of India, could gather and be respectfully treated. Hence Radhanatha, Orissa's great national poet, fittingly described Sudhala Deva's small capital as Orissa's "pleasure lake of intellectual swans".

From the jungle-village of Devagada Sir Basudeva started publishing also a weekly named *Hitaaisini* ("The Well-wishing") under the able editorship of Pandit Nilamoni Vidyaratna, which not only roused and kept up the tempo of Oriya nationalism in Western Orissa, but was also one of the instruments of the renaissance of Oriya literature.

Father of a good number of sons and daughters, Sir Sudhala had all of them properly settled long before he died. He had the rightful pride to see half-a-dozen Maharajas as his sons-in-law. In recognition of the wonderful achievements and immaculate personal character of the Maharaja, the British Government showered on him the enviable titles of Sir, Maharaja and C. I. E. He was revered even during his life-time all over Orissa as an ideal ruler and administrator and a great Oriya patriot. When he died in 1903, his death was mourned not only by his beloved subjects but by the entire Oriya nation, poets pouring out their tributes in long, dignified odes and editors in their leading articles.

MAHARAJA SREERAMA CHANDRA BHANJA DEO

The largest and oldest medical institution of Orissa, standing at Cuttack and attracting patients from all corners of the State and beyond, is named Seerama Chandra Bhanja Medical College. The building in Cuttack that houses the oldest Literary Association of Orissa is called Seerama Chandra Bhavan. But memorials such as these are

no more than mere symbols of the total impact that the personality of Maharaja Sree Rama Chandra Bhanja of Mayurbhanja made on the Oriya people during his tragically short life. Born in 1870, he died in 1912 in a shooting accident, at the young age of 42, ruling Mayurbhanja for only 20 years. But the dynamic Maharaja packed that short reign of two decades with spectacular achievements in administration which were not even dreamed of in British India for many years to come. An officer of the Central Government sent to Mayurbhanja to smoothen its merger with Orissa, publicly declared his astonishment as to how Maharaja Sreerama Chandra Bhanja had introduced most progressive measures found nowhere else in India. The Maharaja, though the unquestioned sovereign of the whole State, had deliberately reduced himself to the position of a mere constitutional ruler, completely subordinate to a council of ministers created by himself. He toured the State in bullock-carts, drawing his travelling allowance like his officers, and it was with great difficulty that he could be persuaded to accept the hospitality of his subjects during those official tours. He introduced liberal tenancy laws which were far ahead of his times and built a railway of his own to open up the immense mineral and forest resources of his State, to the outside world. Thanks to the woeful lack of publicity from which the Oriyas have all along been suffering, few in India know that the famous Steel City of Jamshedpur owes its very existence to this great Indian patriot. It became a glorious industrial venture mainly because Maharaja Sreerama Chandra gave away the vast iron-ore deposits of his State to the Tatas on the easiest of terms in the interests of industrial development of India.

The Maharaja was an extraordinarily handsome man. He met in Calcutta as a young man, Sucharu Devi, the beauteous youngest daughter of Keshaba Chandra Sena,

the famous religious reformer of Bengal, resulting in deep mutual attraction. But the elders in the Maharaja's family at Baripada put up a stiff opposition to this rather unconventional marriage. The young Sreerama Chandra took that as the voice of his subjects and sacrificed his personal desire so as not to ruffle their feelings at the start of his career. He married, instead, a daughter of the Maharaja of Chhotanagpur. She died after giving birth to two handsome princes, Purna Chandra and Pratapa Chandra. Both of them succeeded their illustrious father as rulers of Mayurbhanja, adding to the glories of their noble house in their own ways. Faithful Sucharu Devi had waited all the while, nourishing the single love of her young heart. The widowed Maharaja's renewed appeals to his elders melted their hearts and the two were united at last through the Maharaja's second marriage.

It was under the munificent patronage of Maharaja Sreerama Chandra Bhanja that the first good Oriya monthly *Utkal Prabha* saw the light of day and had a dignified career till it was closed down after his premature death. He also set in motion many other projects for the advancement of Oriya literature, one among them being an authentic prose-translation of the Sanskrit *Mahabharata*, which has recently been published by the Orissa Sahitya Akademi, thus fulfilling the patriotic Maharaja's dream nearly half-a-century later. The Maharaja, trained under British administrators and educationists, was outwardly every inch Western and spoke and wrote excellent English. When the Bengali elite of Calcutta arranged an ovation for him on his return from a world tour, it was expected that he would reply to the eulogistic speeches in English or in Bengali. But he sprang a surprise on all by replying in the most elegant Oriya. No wonder, therefore, that this enlightened and intensely patriotic Maharaja was unanimously invited to preside over the deliberations of the first session of the Utkal

Sammilani, convened at Cuttack in 1903 where he delivered a nice, statesmanly address, all in Oriya.

That the history of the Bhanjas of Orissa, as a ruling race is older and no less glorious than that of the Rajputs, has been unambiguously stated by non-Oriya historians like R. D. Banerjee and others. If the Bhanjas of Ghumsar are well known for their contributions to Oriya literature, those of Mayurbhanja are glorious as model rulers. And among the Bhanja rulers of Mayurbhanja, Maharaja Sreerama Chandra has most deservedly become a legend for his noble humanism, his spiritual closeness to the common man, his patriotism and, above all, for the way he modernised his State and established there the Rule of Law. On his tragic passing away in 1912, the whole of Orissa was plunged in deep sorrow and poets of the land burst into dirges, among which the long ode by the great poet-educationist Madhusudana Rao, has become classic in Oriya language.

MAHARAJA K. C. GAJAPATI OF PARLAKEMIDI

Worthy scion of the historic Ganga-Gajapatis of Orissa, Maharaja Sree K. C. Narayana Deva was born in 1892, as heir to the large estate of Parlakemidi which, along with the Ganjam and Koraput districts, was then in the old Madras Presidency. Adequately trained for his future responsibilities by British administrators, the Maharaja, ever since he assumed the reins of management of his sprawling estate, has been in the forefront of the national life of the Oriyas. He was regarded as a V.I.P. even in the then Madras Presidency, every Governor being his friend and guest. Above all, under the young Maharaja, his estate and got rapidly modernised and was efficiently managed. To his just and impartial administration, the finest testimony is contained in the report of the O'Donnell Committee appointed by the Government of India to enquire into the amalgamation of the Oriya-speaking tracts under one

political unit. It says : "The Telugu witnesses, without a single exception, have stated, in no uncertain terms, that they are happy and contented under the (Oriya) Raja and have been living peacefully with the Oriyas within his territory. There has been no complaint that at any time preferential treatment had been given to the Oriya tenants. The Telugus and the Oriyas equally and entirely depend upon their Raja for all comforts and conveniences and for their well-being generally."

If, in spite of long separation from the mother country and the powerful impact of South Indian culture and literatures, Parlakemidi has made notable contributions to practically all sectors of Orissa's national life, it was because of the warm encouragement of talent by the historic house of Parlakemidi and particularly, by Maharaja K. C. Narayana Deva. Parlakemidi is not only the hometown of Gopala Krushna, Orissa's nightingale, but also of Pandit Gopinath Nanda Sharma, the linguist, of Shyamsundar Rajguru, the literary critic, and of Satyanarayan Rajguru, the historian. Besides these, Orissa's administrative and educational world has several brilliant Parlakemidians, who are all deeply indebted to Maharaja K. C. Narayana Deva in one way or another for their rise in life. The Maharaja maintained a first-grade college at Parlakemidi, manned by a reputed staff and had a hostel with free boarding and lodging. He ran a Sanskrit College, a Training School, an Industrial School and his own railway from the nearest railhead on the South-Eastern Railway to his capital. He established a model agricultural farm and is reported to be an excellent and hardworking farmer himself. It is for his interest in modern agricultural processes that he was taken as a member of the Royal Agricultural Commission set up under the Chairmanship of Lord Linlithgow. But true Gajapati that he was, he gifted away all the emoluments arising out of this membership, amounting to more than a lakh of rupees, to a research institute at Coonoor.

It was to the sheer good luck of the Oriyas that this worthy scion of the glorious royal house of Gajapatis applied himself heart and soul, late in life, to the formation of a separate Orissa State. It appears that his blood had been simmering perhaps to find himself and his territory in political separation from the Oriya people and to see the empire of his great ancestors lying in pitiable bits in four different provinces. It may be, that it was out of deference to his own historic heritage, he felt that he should remedy this state of affairs. And once the idea was fixed in his mind, he pulled his full weight towards giving shape to it. Attending two Round Table Conferences mainly for this single national objective, he spared no pains, no expense and no strategy to see his life's noble mission through. The British Government at last in 1931 declared that the Oriya-speaking areas after nearly four centuries of dismembered existence, would be brought together in one single political unit. Undoubtedly, that happy consummation became possible only for the ardent patriotism of the last of the Gajapati rulers who for at least four centuries ruled a sprawling empire right from the right bank of the Ganga down to the left bank of the Godavari and beyond.

But true aristocrat that he is, Maharaja K. C. Narayana Gajapati has never indulged in vulgar publicity of the great good he has done for his people. Indeed, there is still some sort of mystery hanging about what he did for the formation of the modern Orissa State. He has neither expected nor asked for any recognition or reward for his unequalled services to the nation. The State that Gajapati K. C. Narayana Deva was mainly instrumental in making, soon became the playground and pastureland of Congressites. And lest they lose face before the nation, they never uttered the Maharaja's name as the real architect of this State appropriating tacitly or openly, for the achievements all around, all the credit to themselves and their party. Any way, it shall remain a standing national shame to

the Oriyas that they did not show to the great maker of the modern State of Orissa a fraction of the gratitude which our noble Andhra brethren have extended so universally to humble Potti Sriramulu, on whose martyrdom rose the present State of Andhra Pradesh in 1953. But nobody can prevent History from speaking the truth and History will forever declare in unambiguous terms that, in the formation of the modern State of Orissa and unification of the Oriyas, only two names shall deserve universal salutation,— that of Madhusudana Das at the vanguard of the struggle and that of the last of the Gajapatis, Maharaja K. C. Narayana Deva of Parlakemidi, at the rear, bringing to fruition the seeds that the former had sown far back in the last decade of the last century.

APPENDICES

- i) To Chapters V and VI—World estimation of Orissa's Art and Architecture.*
- ii) To Chapter VII—Orissa's contribution to Sanskrit Literature.*
- iii) To Chapter X on Jagannatha.*
 - a) Mahaprasad by M. Krishnan*
 - b) A parallel Jagannath Temple in Western India rising out of a Buddhist Stupa.*

APPENDIX—I.
TO CHAPTER V AND VI
WORLD ESTIMATION OF ORISSA'S ART AND
ARCHITECTURE

The master builders

(i) "The number and magnificence of the remains at Bhubaneswar and elsewhere are evidence of a wealthy and highly civilised kingdom. The art of architecture and sculpture must have been well developed to enable such huge structures to be designed and constructed and the skill and the resources of builders and masons are clearly shown by the fact that they were able to move and lay in place, without mortar, such gigantic stone blocks and to produce the vigorous and often exquisitely carved figures, foliage and arabesque patterns which add a charm to the carvings adorning these shrines."

—*L. S. S. O'Malley, Puri District Gazetteer.*

(ii) "In its design this Orissa Temple (Konarka) is a class by itself for several reasons.....In its conception, the building is unique on account of its supreme imaginative character."

—*Percy Brown, Indian Architecture.*

(iii) "There is no monument of Hinduism, I think, that is at once so stupendous and so perfectly proportioned as the Black Pagoda, and none which leaves so deep an impression on the memory."

—*Sir John marshall*

(iv) "I scarcely know one so singularly appropriate and elegant (as the Konarka Temple) and the play of light and shade from its bold and varied projections and intervening shadows give it such a brilliant and sparkling effect, that I confess I have almost never seen it equalled."

—James Fergusson, *Ancient Architecture in Hindustan.*

(v) "The lower ones (i. e., the panels on the walls of Konarka) are carved with infinite beauty and variety on all their twelve faces and the antifixae at the angles and breaks are used with an elegance and judgement, a true *yavana* (Greek) could hardly have surpassed."

—James Fergusson, *History of Indian and Eastern Architecture.*

(vi) "There is, so far as I know, no roof in India where the same play of light and shade is obtained with an equal amount of richness and constructive propriety as in this instance (i. e., Konarka temple), none that sits so gracefully on the base that supports it."

—James Fergusson, *History of Indian and Eastern Architecture.*

(vii) "In studying the statutory on this building (Konarka) one is struck at once by the expert manner in which each figure or group of figures has been so modelled that not only are they architecturally conceived, but they also merge themselves into the building, so as to form part of the structure itself.....Several hundred years ago the Orissan master-mason intuitively devised his sculpture so that it is embodied in his building scheme and so forms an integral part of his architectural ideal."

—Percy Brown, *Indian Architecture.*

(viii) "In its (i. e., the temple of Mukteswar in Bhubaneswar) surface decoration there is such beauty

of form that all its surfaces resolve themselves into one harmonious effect.....The *torana* (archway) in front of the entrance is one of the most original conceptions throughout the entire style, and evidently the production of an artist having superior vision and skill, with a mind above his fellows."

—*Percy Brown, Indian Architecture.*

(ix) "It would be hard to find anywhere in the world a more perfect example of the adaptation of sculpture to architecture, than is afforded by the temple of the Sun at Konarka. It is remarkable how alike are the facades of the Orissan Cathedrals, their statues inseparable from the frame-work of the building itself, to the contemporary churches of Western Europe, without, of course, any possible direct connection."

—*Ananda Coomaraswamy, Arts and Crafts of India and Ceylon.*

(x) "The figure of a musician nearly 7 feet in height, is one of the series of similar figures placed high up on the roof-galleries of the pavilion. The rhythmic pose serves as a foil to the horizontal lines running across from cornice to cornice, showing how at Konarka, as elsewhere in Orissan architecture, the sculpture serves an integral function in the whole design."

—*John Irwin, Indian Art.*

(xi) "The whole of the sculptures on these figures (in Konarka), comprising men and animals, foliage and arabesque patterns, is executed with a degree of taste, propriety and freedom which would stand a comparison with some of our best specimens of Gothic architectural ornaments. The workmanship remains too as perfect as if it had just come from the chisel of the sculptor."

—*A. Stirling, An Account, Statistical and Historical, of Orissa Proper.*

(xii) "Had the early European visitore reached Konark about the time they saw the TAJ, observes Percy Brown. a noted authority on Indian Art and Architecture, they would have placed Konarka and *not* the Taj as one of the seven wonders of the world."

—*West Bengal and Orissa, pp 19;*
 (issued on behalf of the deptt.
 of Tourism. Govt. of India .

(xiii) Indeed the Sun-Temple of Konarka represents the fulfilment of medieval Indian architecture and sculpture. Even to-day, its beauty and grandeur attract visitors from all parts of the world,"

Ibid. pp 69

II

INFLUENCE AND IMPORTANCE OF ORISSAN ART

(i) "To a student of architecture, it (Orissa) is important by resson of its being the seat of Indo-Aryan style in its purest form. Here we do not notice the least vestige of foreign influence. It has maintained its native purity marvellously, being nurtured and reared on the very soil where it grew, without any extraneous aid. This is really a marvel in the history of architecture, the like of which we very rarely come across."

—*Manmohan Ganguly, Orissa and Her Remains*

(ii) "The influence of Orissan art made itself felt in the temple ornamentation of both Java and Cambodia."

—*Hermann Goetz, Five Thousand Years of Indian Art.*

(iii) "A characteristic which seems to be distinctive of the (art of Orissa) in the Bhauma period is the manner in which the relief-carving extends over several blocks of masonry,—a device which helped to ensure that the sculptures would not be removed. I do

not think there is any need for me to stress how similar they are in this respect, as well as, in general style and manner of execution, to those of the world-famous Buddhist temple at Borobudur in Java. The resemblance is not of course coincidental, but it is due to the direct implantation in Indonesia of the whole Mahayana Buddhist, Saivite, and Vaisnavite culture of Orissa, or that part of it called Kalinga, by the Sailendra emperors who ruled Java from the 8th to the 14th centuries. They are convincingly indentified as a descendant branch of the Sailodbhave kings who preceeded the Bhaumas in Kalinga. The fact that both Sisireswar and Borabudur can be dated to 8th century, makes their stylistic connexion even more certain."

— *Willam Willetts in The Illustrated Weekly of India, July 14,1959.*

(iv) "The temples of Orissa provide the most logical beginning for a study of the Indo-Aryan style."

— *Percy Brown, Indian Architecture*

(v) "The Orissan style had a northerly development which penetrated into a region comprising the Burdwan district of Bengal and the Manbhum district of Bihar."

— *Percy Brown, Indian Architecture*

III

CLEVEREST METALIURGISTS

(i) "Each laterite lintel (in Konarka) was reinforced by a number of wrought iron beams, while many others like girders, were disposed about the ceiling, the whole forming an iron grid or framework, of great strength. Some of the metal beams are as much as thirty-five feet in length and over seven inches thick, one fragment measuring eleven inches in section. In no other part of India was such a process employed,

but it appears to have been the usual method in Orissa."

—*Percy Brown, Indian Architecture*

(ii) "No one can certainly behold the massive beams of iron and prodigious blocks of stone used in the construction of this edifice (Konarka) without being struck with amazement.

—*A. Stirling, An Account, Statistical and Historical, of Orissa Paoper.*

IV

HEROIC GRANDEUR

(i) "Some of these groups (of sculptures of Konarka) are superb works of art. Such are the monumental statues of war-horses, their impetuosity restrained by armed attendants, which for spirit and power, recall the Chinese productions of the Han period, but combined with the indigenous Indian rock-sculpture tradition. That the entire conception was worked out so that every element, large and small, was not only perfect in itself, but in proportion and intention, in complete agreement with every other element, is abundantly clear. Each part proclaims its correct architectural application and the whole is assembled in such a masterly manner that the result is an ordained and convincing uniformity."

Percy Brown, Indian Architecture.

(ii) "Here (in the war-horses of Konarka) Indian sculptors have shown that they can express with fire and passion, as the greatest European art, the pride of victory and the glory of triumphant warfare, and not even the Homeric grandeur of the Elgin marbles surpasses the magnificent movement and modelling of this Indian Achilles, the superbly monumental horse in its massive strength and vigour being not unworthy

of comparision with Verrochio's famous masterpiece at Venice."

E. B. Havell, Indian Sculpture and Paintings.

V

THE DRAMA OF LIFE AND LOVE

(i) "The language of Man here (i. e. the temples of Bhubaneswar) stands defeated by the language of stone."

—Rabindranath Tagore

(ii) "The images of Konarka belong to eternity in the world of art."

—Stella Kramrisch, *The Art of India*

(iii) "The whole building (Konarka) is covered with a profusion of remarkable and beautiful carvings symbolising the fertilising and creative power of the Sun. It is a hymn to life, a frank and exquisite glorification of creative forces in the universe. The four main entrances of the temple are guarded by pairs of rampant animals. Those on the south side are horses trampling down armed men. One of these great horses, with a warrior striding beside it, has a majestic and monumental grandeur which makes it rank amongst the finest heroic sculptures in the world."

Anando Coomaraswamy, "Four Days in Orissa,"
The Modern Review, 1911.

(iv) "In some respects these panels (in the grills of the Parasurameswar temple) might be reproduction in stone, of Della Robbia's glazed terracotta relief, excelling even the work of that famous Florentine in their vigour and rythm and evidently the creation of one who has left this brilliant work of art as the sole record of his inimitable genius."

—Percy Brown, *Indian Architecture.*

(v) "The best Konarka figures are characterised by an exquisite smoothness and vitality. The sculptures of women are frankly the works of lovers. But it is perhaps the animals that are most impressive, the led horse is of unsurpassed grandeur; some of the smaller horses drawing the temple on its huge wheels express a mood of sadness almost as profound as that of the Javanese Mahishamardini. There is an important group of a Guru and Disciples in the Indian Museum at South Kensington, formerly miscalled Nepalese, but almost certainly from Konarka."

—*Ananda Coomaraswamy, Arts and Crafts of India and Ceylon.*

(vi) "This (Konarka) is a merry mart of eternal youth ! The ever old and the ever new dance-sport of the whole universe is going on here during nights as well as the days, under the sportive Kadamba tree of Love, sacred to the gods, to the accompaniment of burning lamps of divergent colours, placed round the bejewelled throne of the bodyless God of Love. Here, nothing is silent, nothing is motionless, nothing is barren or sterile. Stones are ringing with the deep resonance of the *mridanga*-drum and stones are running like frisky spirited horses pulling the car at top speed. Stones have blossomed out like the ever-blooming plants of the bowers, embracing all quarters with their thousand arms of shining green."

—*Abanindranath Tagore, "Pathé Vipathe", Viswabharati, 1918.*

(vii) "Near Jagannath is a temple dedicated to the Sun. Even those whose judgement is critical and who are difficult to please, stand astonished at its sight."

—*Abul Fazl.*

(viii) "It is unfortunate, that for obvious reasons, none of these *maithunas* (of Konarka) can be reproduced in detail. Each is a separate masterpiece of relief composition in which the feeling of movement,

as well as the marvellous suggestion of the participants melting with love, transcends the character of the action."

—*Benjamin Rowland, Art and Architecture of India.*

(ix) "All the Ellora or Elephanta sculptures appeal to the European eye by a relatively greater observance of the laws of co-ordination, and by an evidence of dramatic force which indicates that Indian art did not always convey its meaning in a strange tongue. The same is true in an even greater degree of the superb, colossal figure of a war-horse led by a striding soldier from Konarka, Orissa. This is indeed, in the highest degree, the qualities of great monumental design and one may sympathise fully with Mr. Havell when he says of it that it not only shows the versatility of Indian sculptors in the past, but points to one of the many potential opportunities which might be opened to their descendants in the present day."

—*Roger Fry in Oriental Art, 1910.*

(x) "On the terraces of the roof (in Konarka), as interruptions to the lines of cornices, are monumental statues of female musicians. They have a massive heroic beauty quite in keeping with their function of serving as architectural ornaments, meant to be seen from a great distance. These figures are *yakshis* of Sanchi translated into the artistic language of late Hindu art."

—*Benjamin Rowland, Art and Architecture of India.*

(xi) "The huge monolithic elephant at Konarka carved out of a single block is worth mentioning. It may have been said to have been copied out of nature and in consequence of this, it has extracted the unstinted admiration of the most captious critic of Art."

—*Manmohan Ganguly, Orissa and her Remains.*

(xii) "Sculptures in high relief, exquisitely cut, cover the exterior walls (of Konarka) and

bear witness to an age when Hindu artists worked from Nature. The nymphs are beautifully shaped women, in luscious attitudes ; the elephants move along at the true elephant's trot, and kneel down in the stone exactly as they did in life."

—W. W. Hunter, Orissa.

(xiii) "The elephants (of Konarka) have the flabby undeiliips of nature and exhibit a uniformity in all the essential points of their anatomy, with a variety in posture and detail which Hindu art has long forgotten."

—W. W. Hunter, Orissa.

(xiv) "... I have seen nothing more impressive through all my subsequent travels, with the sole exception of the ruins of Konarka in Orissa.

Now, my visit to Konarka came many, many years later, and I have revisited that wonder of the world six times, but it has never ceased being a wonder for me.

You may have seen the temple yourself, and so must know that it is one of the world's greatest works of art; gigantic in size, carved with thousands of figures, it is surely one of the wonders of the world. As an English student of Indian architecture once remarked, had Konarka been discovered first and the Taj Mahal at Agra later, there is no doubt that the Taj would have taken second place in the mind of the world.

—Dr. Charles Fabri in *The Hitavada*, August 5, 1962.

APPENDIX-II

to

Chapter VII

ORISSA'S CONTRIBUTION TO SANSKRIT LITERATURE

Though the beginnings of modern Oriya language are clearly discernible in the Buddhist psalms and songs in popular Apabhramsa, supposed to have been written in 7th-8th centuries, it is interesting to know that long before and long after Oriya had attained respectable stature, the holy fire of Sanskrit culture had been kept steadily burning in Orissa. The planned manner in which the ancient Hindu *rajas* of Orissa established compact colonies of Brahmin intellectuals called *sasanas*, keeping the scholar-settlers above all day-to-day material worries so that they might devote themselves entirely to the pursuit of different branches of knowledge, may perhaps be unique in the whole of India. The late Professor J. B. S. Haldane, the world-famous biologist, is said to have remarked, after visiting a few of these *sasanas* round about Puri, that they reminded him of Oxford and Cambridge. Oriya Brahmin friends and co-workers of mine tell me that even as late as two decades back their *sasana*-villages were resounding every morning with the seven-thousand-year-old Vedic chants from every home. Has all that most precious national heritage and tradition vanished altogether in so short a period ? We have got political freedom and might delude ourselves with the thought that we are making progress, because of the huge dams and extensive railroads we are building, but we have perhaps already lost our very souls by belittling or ignoring the precious Sanskrit culture and the most civilising tradition of treating the intellectuals of the land with respect. Among the fast accumulating heaps of ashes there might still be some embers, which, if

respectfully attended to, might burst into flames again, provided those who rule this ancient land at present, approach this vital problem in a manner worthy of the land of Saraswati, that once Orissa was.

That not the Oriyas alone but the whole of India should remain eternally grateful to those medieval, *rajas* of Orissa for the splendid manner in which they looked after the scholars of the land and left them in peace for their intellectual pursuits, will be clear from the following brief account of Orissa's contribution to India's Sanskrit heritage. May it be said here also that in those spacious times of liberal Hindu rule in Orissa, the intellectuals of the land, though maintained as a class by the *rajas*, had the courage to speak out against their patronising sovereigns. This is well exemplified by Godabara Mishra, author of the *Harihara Chaturangam* and of about a score of other important works. He is said to have resigned his post as King Prataprudra's Prime Minister and left Orissa after his strong protests against the King's unworthy craze for the blessings of a mere Sannyasi named Chaitanya, neglecting more vital kingly duties, proved unavailing.

The fact that fragments of precious Vedic literature, supposed to have been lost forever, such as, the *Pippalada Sakha* of the *Atharva Veda* and the latter half of the *Sayana Bhasya* of the *Kanwa Sakha*, have been discovered in Orissa in Oriya palm-leaf manuscripts, and that their contents are still recited by Oriya Brahmins in accordance with accurate Vedic phonetics, indicate the depth and extent of Sanskrit culture in this ancient land. The mounds of palm-leaf manuscripts, lying scattered in thousands of villages of Orissa, slowly disintegrating under barbaric national indifference as well as the impact of a tropical climate, have been sending mute appeals for their rescue to insensitive philistine ears like ours. Even

those rescued from moulding heaps in interior villages are in no better condition after their dignified transfer to museums and universities. Those who know and feel deeply about it, have been telling with sighs of regret and sorrow that most precious books with only single extant copies, are rapidly crumbling away at places supposed to be the citadels of scholarship and research. This state of affairs is all the more pitiable and regrettable for the unusual preciousness of the few that have been allowed to see light of the day.

Below is a small list of such works in Sanskrit by Oriya authors as have already been published and are read and admired by scholars wherever Sanskrit is studied.

NAME OF BOOK	NAME OF AUTHOR	CHRONOLOGY (Century)
<i>Poems</i>		
<i>Gita Govinda</i>	Jayadeva	13th
<i>Arya Sa ptasati</i>	Govardhana Acharya	12th
<i>Sahrudayananda</i> (epic)	Krushnananda Mahapatra	14th
<i>Dasagribabhadham</i> (epic)	Kabindra Markandeya	16th
<i>Abhinaba Gitagovinda</i> (lyrical play)	Gajapati Purusottam Deva (Dibakara Mishra)	15th
<i>Mukunda Vilasa</i> (lyrical play)	Yatindra Raghunatha Puri	17th
<i>Bhakti Bhagabata</i> (epic)	Jeevadeva Acharya	16th
<i>Gundicha Champu</i>	Chakrapani Pattanaik	18th
<i>Sivalilamruta</i> (epic)	Kavi Nityananda	17th
<i>Narayana Satakam</i>	Vidyakara Purohita	16th

NAME OF BOOK	NAME OF AUTHOR	CHRONOLOGY (Century)
Drama		
<i>Anargha Raghava</i>	Murari Mishra	9th
<i>Bhakti Baibhaba</i>	Jeevadeva Acharya	16th
<i>Chandrakala</i>	Viswanath Mahapatra	15th
<i>Bhanja Mahodaya</i>	Kavi Nilakantha	18th
<i>Jagannatha Vallabha</i>	Rai Ramananda	16th
<i>Veni Sanhara</i>	Bhatta Narayana	16th
<i>Piyus.: Lahari</i>	Jayadeva (ii)	16th
Literary criticism		
<i>Sahitya Darpana</i>	Viswanatha Mahapatra	15th
<i>Ekavali</i>	Vidyadhara	13th
<i>Rasakalpadruma</i>	Jagannatha Mishra	18th
Grammar		
<i>Jumara Darpana</i>	Netrananda Sahitya Panchanana	
<i>Prakruta Sarvaswam</i>	Kavindra Markandeya	16th
<i>Vardhana Karika</i>	Vardhana Mahapatra	16th
Music		
<i>Sangita Prakasa</i>	Krnshnadas Badajena Mahapatra	16th
<i>Sangita Kalpalata</i>	Haladhar Mishra	17th
<i>Sangita Narayana</i>	Purusottama Mishra	18th
<i>Sangita Sarani</i>	Narayana Mishra	18th
<i>Sangita Muktabali</i>	Harichandana	16th
<i>Sangita Chintamani</i>	Kavichandra Kamalalochana Khadagaray	18th
Dance		
<i>Natya Manorama</i>	Raghunatha Ratha	17th
<i>Abhinaya Darpana</i>	Raja Yadunatha Singha Mahapatra	18th

NAME OF BOOK	NAME OF AUTHOR	CHRONOLOGY (Century)
<i>Astronomy</i>		
<i>Pancha Siddhanta Vaswati</i>	Satananda Acharya	11th
<i>Siddhanta Darpana</i>	Samanta Chandrasekhara Singha	19th
<i>Military Science</i>		
<i>Harihara Chaturanga</i>	Godabara Mishra	16th
<i>Veera Sarbaswa</i>	Govinda Samantaroy	18th
<i>Tantra</i>		
<i>Jnana Siddhi</i>	Indrabhuti	8th
<i>Politics</i>		
<i>Saraswati Vilasa</i>	Raja Prataparudra Deva	16th
<i>Religious rites</i>		
<i>Durgoschhaba Chandrika</i>	Vardhana Mahapatra	16th
<i>Niladri Mahodaya</i>	Raja Purusottama Deva	16th
<i>Swarnadri Mahodaya</i>		16th
<i>Ekamra Purana</i>		16th
<i>History</i>		
<i>Gangavansanucharitam</i>	Vasudeva Rath Somayaji	18th
<i>Kosalananda Mahakavam</i>	Gangadhar Mishra	16th
<i>Social Codes</i>		
<i>Suri Sarvaswam</i>	Govinda Samantaray	18th
<i>Nityachara Paddhati</i>	Narasingha Vajapeyi	16th
<i>Gadadhara Paddhati</i>	Gadadhara Rajaguru	18th
<i>Kalyapada Dharma</i>	Sadasiva Kavyakantha	19th
<i>Sarvaswam</i>		

APPENDIX III
to
Chapter X
on Jagannath
(A)

MAHAPRASAD.

By M. Krishnan.

At Puri I wanted to see the Juggernaut, the great *ratha* beneath which Europeans supposed the Hindus immolated themselves, and learnt that the wooden temple-car was built afresh each time for the festival and was not there then, for it was not festival time. So I went, instead, to the shrine of Jagannath, the Lord of the Universe.

Familiar with the towering *gopurams* of Southern temples, I was still impressed by the tall, massive spire; the lack of intricate moulding on it emphasized its height and mass. At the gateway I halted, seeing a notice in English and Oriya which said that only the orthodox could enter. My host, who was guiding me, seemed a pious man, and I had no wish to cause him any embarrassment. I discovered myself to him as an unorthodox Hindu, and practically an atheist.

He told me that Mahatma Gandhi had refused to enter and offer worship because Harijans were not allowed inside, and with a courteous gesture invited me to follow him into the shrine. He said nothing, but his hand seemed to convey to the Lord of the Universe that the petty obduracy of a mere mortal who insisted on castelessness or denied personal gods, made no difference.

Once past the gateway, my host was instantly transformed into a devotee; but he never forgot that he

was also the guide of an unbeliever from a far country. There was a prescribed ritual for going round the temple and he instructed me in it ; there were various other idols which had to be worshipped before one presented oneself before Jagannath, and briefly he whispered their identities to me and took me, with meticulous care, along the prescribed path to the Lord.

The devotees thronging the shrine impressed me profoundly, a crowd, unaware of the basic kinship that draws a crowd together, each preoccupied with his or her own prayer and oblivious of all else. Years ago, at the shrine of Viswanath in Banaras, I had experienced the jam-packed confluence of the worshippers, the merger of the *jivatma* into the *paramatma*, by sheer physical crowding, but this total isolation of each devotee in personal prayer in a less tight crowd was more moving. I began to regret my atheism ; I lacked that which all else in this varied assembly around me had, and that which I had always known was so much greater and more sustaining than sterile intellect. I lacked faith.

Afterwards, squatting on the floor of the rest-house where we stayed, we had *mahaprasad* for dinner. Unpreoccupied with ritual and eloquent once more, my host told me how the various dishes on the menu had all been cooked hygienically in the earthen pots that held them, by steam. Even in my native South, a worshipper may turn to *prasad* from a temple for his meal, but nowhere had I known so many specialities, particularly vegetable side-dishes, being made available as *prasad*. There were four different dishes of vegetables, three kinds of cooked rice, and two rich milk-sweets, and I was assured that these were only representative of the fare available,—there were other similar dishes.

In fact, my host explained, it was true that the shrine of Jagannath at Puri was the largest restaurant in the world,—at major festivals it fed two lakhs and at

a price that no hotelier could afford to offer ; the cooks were highly skilled in their traditional art, and I would notice that no vegetables that had come to us from abroad, like potatoes or tomatoes or even chillies, were used in the temple kitchen.

Even from the sampling before me when there was no festival, I could appreciate the culinary skill of the cooks at the shrine. There was a dish of mature bananas and greens cunningly compounded together, not pungent but with the relish of mustard in it, and a semi-sweet chutney, piquant with the aromatic taste of citron, that added considerable zest to the meal. No longer bothered by nine scruples, I fell to and gorged myself.

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(B)

A parallel Temple of Jagannath rising from a Buddhist Stupa.

Strongly supporting Percy Brown's theory that the present temple of Jagannath, Puri, stands on an old Bauddha-Mahayanic structure, is the recent discovery in Maharastra, of another Temple of Jagannath on a Buddhist Stupa, as described below.

BOMBAY, June 30.—The recent discovery of the Stupa complex at Pauni in Bhandara district of Maharashtra, has thrown light on the early history of Buddhist religion and architecture, reports UNI. The excavations have revealed that Pauni, situated on the ancient main route from Central India to South India, was a great centre of Hinayana Buddhism between fourth century B. C. and second century A. D.

The excavations this year have confirmed the varied and extensive nature of the ancient settlement. *The mound which is now capped by the Jagannath temple was a Maurayan Stupa, which seems to have been in worship for about four centuries.*

THE STATESMAN, July 2, 1969.

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