

**UNGRAFTING THE COLONIAL ODISHA, A TRAVEL IN THE CULTURAL SPACE:
FAKIR MOHAN SENAPATI'S *UTKALA BHRAMANAM* AS A TRAVELOGUE**

Kaushik Nagadev Bhuyan

Ph.D. Scholar

Department of English

Central University of Rajasthan

Ajmer (Rajasthan)

Abstract

The paper is an attempt to reconstruct the Odia identity in the sub-nationalistic sphere in colonial Odisha through the voice of Fakir Mohan Senapati, the pioneer of Odia literature. Fakir Mohan's *UtkalaBhramanam* (1892) is the first travelogue of odia literature and its some major portion have been translated into English by the Odia writer SubhenduMund in few of his research. Further, the paper will be explored broadly to locate the certain nuances of language, culture and people in the colonial Odisha in the context of the reconstruction of Odia identity inclined to the original and the translated version of the travelogue. This paper is a humble attempt to introduce the travelogue to the contemporary readers as a multi-layered text, and does anticipate the postcolonial reading to bring out its contextual significance from various angles.

Key Words: travelogue, nationalism, ethnicity, colonial, quasi-political

Translation crosses boundaries. It touches culture, language, people and their life. It is a linguistic bridge of connecting one language to another. Translating the source language to another language, in a way establishes many forms of ethnic identity and cultural proximity of certain modes of representing the one and the other. The representation restores a sense of self-affinity to that of allocating the original ideas and views of the source person. The process of translation according to Dr. Johnson invokes the process of 'change into another language, retaining the sense', which is indeed the basic objective.

In this regard, certain questions come to my mind:

- Translating into another language, how the translator will keep the same essence that of the original?
- If it is believed that translation, cannot be faithful to the original, then where is the need to be faithful?
- Can the translator not make the translation more lively and appealing, bringing his/her own creativity?

These all questions lead me to one point of partial answer that, the translator creates instances of creativity of the trans-created work more appealing and lively, only if he has the thorough knowledge of both the source and target language, and seminally with their cultures.

However, to translate one regional Indian language into either English or other regional languages, also demands the absolute essence of knowledge regarding both the culture of the

language. Unless the translator has the knowledge of both the languages and cultures, he/she will not be able to translate one language into another effectively. And this helps in the process of constructing the identity formation both of private and public sphere as a sub-nationalistic and nationalistic approach of representing the work.

On this aspect, I would like to bring the attempts of my study here. This paper tends to discuss about the reconstruction of the Odia identity on the map of national boundaries and geographical borders which was hidden and lost during the British rule in Odisha, through the voice of the father of Odia literature, Fakir Mohan Senapati. I will be here discussing about the traits of Fakir Mohan's *UtkalaBhramanam*(1892) as one of the earliest travelogue of Indian literature and the first in Odia language and its implication and perspectives of building the odia identity as a sub-nationalistic movement on the Indian nationalistic identity during the British rule. Some major portions of the work have been translated into English by the renowned Odia writer and translator Subhendumund.

Fakir Mohan Senapati (1843-1918), a versatile literary genius of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries is considered the Father of Odia prose fiction. He is the pioneer of many western art forms in Odia literature. He is the first major Oriya novelist, the writer of the first Odia short story (*Rebati*, 1898) and the first autobiography (*Atmajeevanacharita/Atmacharita*, 1915, 1927) in Odia. Besides poetry and fiction, he has also written textbooks; translated the Ramayana, the Mahabharata and a few Upanishads from Sanskrit, as well as stray works of Bangla literature. His short stories are compiled in two volumes of *Galpasalpa*. He wrote four novels: *Lachhama* (1901), *ChhaManaAthaGuntha*(1902), *Mamu*(1913), and *Prayaschitta* (1915). Besides being hailed as an iconic figure in Odia literature, he is looked upon by the Odia people as a grand patriarch of the linguistic and cultural movement for Odia identity in late 1860s to 1936. This movement owes greatly to the inspiration and leadership of Senapati, who, besides being the most popular writer of his times, was also the initiator of new ideas and technology to Odisha.

Fakir Mohan's *UtkalaBhramanam* (1892), the first specimen of travel writing in Odia, remains unique in its concept as well as context. As a travelogue *UtkalaBhramanam* covers a distance, goes beyond the boundaries, maps the roots, brings the other and unites the person to the mass. Written during the colonial period of Odisha, the travelogue certifies certain aspects of local identity as a bridge to overcome the issues of nationalistic representation of one's self-proclamation of mother land as a British colonial state. Though the original writings of the travelogue does serve an inclination towards the identity crisis and certain other factors of statehood on the nationalistic sphere, but it is the trans-created work which oriented new dimensions of hope, pride, morals and ethnic values.

In the nineteenth century, when the country, along with the western world was waking up to the idea of the nation, some parts of the country like Orissa saw the rise of subnationalism as a complementary ideology. No wonder, narrations of *Bharatavarshaas* well as sub-national identities (such as Odia, Bengali, Marathi, Tamil, Telugu, etc.) have been co-existing in the Sanskrit as well as the bhasha traditions. It is in this context that the emergence of nationalism and subnationalism in India as well as its many components may be seen. Subnationalism takes many forms but at the most general level all forms of subnationalism can be seen as manifestations of a search for community or identity different from the community or identity offered by shared citizenship of an existing state. The rise of Odiasubnationalism was, in fact, an expression of the quest of the Odia people for their identity. And a variety of issues related to language, culture, literature, religion as well as social reform, politics and economics were

subsumed in this quest. During the active period of the movement, roughly between 1860 and 1936, there were conscious attempts by journalists, poets, playwrights, historians and novelists, with the active help of zamindars, feudal lords and kings, to re-construct the Odia identity by re-creating a ‘national’ history. For instance, KuntalaKumariSabat, the first Odia female poet called upon the Odia poets to re-construct the identity of Utkal through their pens. She wrote: “*UtkalaUtkalabolikechinichakahin/ Kabiralekhanitabadeu ta chinhai.*”

The Odia Movement was characterised by its efforts to culturally unite the Odias for the unification of the different Odia-speaking tracts into one province under one administration. This phenomenon is quite close to Michael Hechter’s definition of “unification nationalism”, which involves “the merger of a politically divided but culturally homogeneous territory into one state” (17). This category of nationalism manifests itself in “the effort to render cultural and governance boundaries congruent requires the establishment of a new state encompassing the members of the nation. Whereas state-building nationalism tends to be culturally inclusive, unification nationalism is often culturally exclusive” (*Containing Nationalism* 15-17). Benedict Anderson also acknowledges “the cultural roots of nationalism” (*Imagined Communities* 7). In fact, Odia Movement, at its very inception, derived strength from a book called *A Practical Handbook of Orissa Language* (1873) written by T. J. Maltby, which argued to unite the ninety lakh Odias under one administration.

Owing to the peculiar administrative structure of Orissa under the colonial masters, non-Odias, especially Bengalis, were in most of the government jobs and eventually a section of Bengalis tried and almost succeeded in convincing the colonial rulers that Odia was not a separate language but a ‘corruption’ of Bengali language. As a result, Odia was withdrawn from educational institutions and in its place Bengali was introduced. There was sharp reaction among the Odia cultural leaders of the time to this absurd decision of the authorities and it soon resulted in the so-called ‘Language Movement’ in the late 1860s. This is when Senapati came into the scene and occupied the centre stage. He earned the sobriquet of “*sala* ringleader” because of his leadership in the Odia language movement which in due course not only restored its dignity, but also led the Odias towards a quasipoliticalsubnationalist movement which eventually ended with the formation of Orissa as a separate province/state on the basis of language on 1 April 1936.

Although the poet highlights the leaders and activists of DeshamishranAndolan and BhashaSurakshaAndolan (Movements for amalgamation of the Odia speaking regions to form an integrated Odisha), he does not neglect people active in other walks of Odia life. In that *UtkalaBhramanam* may be read as a document of contemporary socio-political history of Odisha. In an attempt to glorify the imagined Odisha, Senapati not only celebrates the contribution of cultural leaders but also lionises apparently ordinary individuals. More importantly, while he criticises the machinations of the non-Odia classes for marginalising Odia language and the Odia people, he eulogises some of the individuals belonging to the non-Odia category who worked for the cause of Odia language and nationhood. For example, he is all praise for Raja Boikunthanath De, Radhanath Ray, Gouri Shankar Ray, Rama Shankar Ray, Pyari Mohan Sen, Narendra Kumar Sarkar and Jogesh Chandra Roy (all of Bengali origin), Madhusudan Rao and Jagannath Rao (of Marathi origin); and a number of British administrators.

Like any other representative text written in the colonial period, *UtkalaBhramanam* also criticises the tendency of imitation of the western habits at the cost of Odia/ Indian culture and tradition. Senapati’s criticism of the new generation of English-educated Odias is quite bitter but humorous. All through his career he has been sarcastic towards the imitators of the West, the most artistic representations being his short stories like *Rebati* and *DakMunsi*. In

UtkalaBhramanam, he mercilessly ridicules the blind imitators of western habits. Bankimchandra Chatterjee, Krupabai Satthianadhan and many other contemporaries of Senapati have criticised such imitators in their works. It may not be out of place to present here a free translation of a passage from the poem to demonstrate this aspect:

When I see these learned baboos, I think
 Darwin must have come once to this land;
 Having seen these guys he must have concluded
 That human beings are born of the species of monkeys!
 Day and night you keep mouthing English
 [You] don't wash yourselves after defecating on the fields
 You put on black coats in terrible sun
 Throw away cheese cakes to eat biscuits,
 You put on waistcoat and speak in English
 And eat half-cooked meat and stinking *paneer*
 You urinate standing, and don't brush your teeth!
 Howsoever you try, you can't become English
 You will remain Odia to the core!

The poet does not discourage English education, but urges upon Odias not to neglect their mother tongue Odia. He asks Odias to emulate Bengal in this: the Bengalis have acquired English but they have not neglected Bangla. He seems to drive the point home that no race which undermines one's own language or culture can ever be called civilised.

On this aspect, Fakir Mohan's 'UtkalaBhramanam' can here be looked upon as a manifesto-cum-travelogue to bring the hidden voices of many Odia people of cast, creed and culture as a sub-nationalist revolt of reconstruction of Odia identity. Fakir Mohan's these writings in the travelogue motivated many Odia people to revolt against the British rule and it lead to the great 'Odia Movement'. The movement was akin to what is called 'unification of nationalism'. It remained culturally exclusive, but it ultimately succeeded in the configuration of the conceptual Odisha as a province with a congruent cultural and governance boundary in 1936. Besides, by the early twentieth century a twofold cultural identity -- nationalist and sub-nationalist – already emerged. Interestingly, these two identities were never in conflict. In reality, rather than being oppositional, they were complementary to each other. And the movement went on for long in each and every corner of the state till the declaration of Odisha province on 1st April, 1936. And later, the movement became an integral part of the nationalist approach of the great 'Indian Movement' against the British rule.

Here I go back to my initial queries of translation regarding the original work and the trans-created text. In this context, the original work of Fakir Mohan Senapati and the partial trans-created work of SubhenduMund, do share a sense of comparison of linguistic variation and cultural proximity of self. Both Fakir Mohan and SubhenduMund are Odias, share a common place banal of language, literature and culture. But one question props up here: the faithfulness of SubhenduMund as the partial translator to the creator of the travelogue, Fakir Mohan Senapati. Though after attempting a search for the Odia identity on a cultural space, re-reading the travelogue in the perspectives of both the creator and translator, it may not be appropriately authentic to name the better part, yet the partial trans-created work discovered certain facets and the hidden identity of Odia literature making translation as a creative process of linguistic bridge-building of private and public sphere.

I conclude my paper here keeping the travelogue as a multi-layered text of post-colonial translation and do anticipate the contemporary readers' interest in re-reading it from various perspectives.

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