

*Phakirmohan:
his life and
literature*

*Phakirmohan Sahitya Parisad
Balasore*

Phakirmohan : His Life & Literature

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Phakirmohan Sahitya Parisad

B A L A S O R E.

First Published : 1984

Published by Phakirmohan Sahitya Parisad,
Shantikanan, Balasore.

Printed at New Town Press, Balasore.

Price—

Rs. 45/- Only

PREFACE

In the nineteenth century when the language, literature and nationality of Oriya was in cross-roads at that critical juncture Phakirmohan Senapati came to the fore-front as a saviour. Not only he has saved the language and literature, but a new dimension and direction he has added. The background he has created for modern Oriya Prose, there stands an enormous and gigantic 'Konark' of fiction. The way he has depicted the contemporary social order and problems through different characters in colloquial language, so neatly and so artistically that it was nowhere found in the then Indian literature. At present the national integration is nothing but a slogan-oriented fashion. In spite of propagation by individual, Government and its machineries there is no reflection of that maxim in the ordinary business of the common men. But many years before Phakirmohan had deeply felt over the issue for a flourished Indian nation. His dear 'Shanti Kanan' (Garden house) where he constructed 'All-Religion-Integration monument' still conveys the equal prestige and status to each religion. But the man who with his towering influence moulded the last two decades of 19th and first two decades of 20th century has not been duly introduced to the world as he should have been made introduced. Most of his immortal classic novels and stories have not yet been translated into other Indian or non-Indian languages, where as some of the non-Oriya readers, writers, critics and philologists are eager enough to know in details of him. To satisfy that instinct of non-Oriya readers we present this book "Phakirmohan : His life and literature" as a slender toil

Right from 1948 up till now the "Phakirmohan Sahitya Parishad" as a pioneer literary organisation of

the state has been striving hard for about 35 years to enhance the standard of oriya literature in general and bringing out to light the unpublished writings of the poet in particular. Quite a good number of creative writers have been associated to this organisation at different times but in the face of furious set-backs not much has been achieved. Of course due to the monetary assistance of the State Cultural Department the replica of the old residence of Phakirmohan has been constructed and the attention has been paid for maintenance of his beautiful garden 'Shantikanan' by the authority of Balasore Municipality. Inspite of that many things are yet to be done, like popular edition of his entire work, propagation of his literature outside Orissa through translation, publication of a glossary and literary encyclopaedia on the life and literature of the poet and creation of chairs in different universities in his name to facilitate research work on Oriya language and literature.

In this auspicious moment of publication of this book I do recall the names of their kindself without whose sincere help and co-operation this publication would have been a remote possibility. They are Sri Pratap Chandra Chandra, ex-union Minister of Education, Sri Surendra Mohanty, President, Orissa Sahitya Akademi, Sri Jugal Kishore Pattanayak, Minister of State for Cultural affairs and Tourism, Orissa and Sir Samarendra Kundu, ex-union Minister of State, external affairs. I am also grateful to those who have contributed their valuable criticism and translation to adorn this anthology. At the same time I am grateful to Sri Uday Narayan Jena, artist for his cover design.

Brajanath Rath

President, Phakirmohan Sahitya Parishad, Balasore.

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FOREWORD

Phakirmohan Senapati (1843-1918) is one of the paterfamilias of Indian Novel. He blazed the trail of "Social Realism" in Oriya novels, nay of Indian Novels; which till then were essentially romantic in character. Phakirmohan in his novel *Chamana Athaguntha* (Six Acres and eight gunthas) published in 1898 for the first time articulated the urges and aspirations of the common masses for redemption from the tentacles of feudal landlords and usurious money-lenders. Historically, Premchand after about two decades reflected these trends in his works. In Bengali Literature, not before the "Kallola Yuga", in the Twenties, Social Realism, was familiar in the Bengali novels. Romanticism was still the most noticeable characteristic. In Telugu literature, the "Navela" or the Novel, which made its beginning towards the close of the seventh decade of the 19th Century, was also by and large romantic. Similar is the case with the Assamese and other Indian languages. But the stark reality of social condition, delineated with authenticity in the pages of "Chamana Athaguntha", leaves the reader astounded with pathos and horror. Ruthless exploitation by witty landlords and usurious moneylenders, the corruption of the police and the petty officialdom, sheer helplessness of the exploited and the injured to save themselves from the tyranny of the rich and the powerful, were the subject matter of his novels, though he had paid no small attention to the lower middle class and their trials and tribulations. His works awakened the conscience of the reading

public to the stark realities of the situation. The impact of "*Chamana Athagutha*" can be assessed from the fact that, while it was being serialised in the pages of "Utkala Sahitya", a literary journal of repute, people in large numbers flocked to the court, to satisfy their curiosity to know at first hand, the punishment that would be meted out to Ramachandra Mangaraj— the usurious moneylender a—fictitious character of Phakirmohan.

The Victorian Novelists in English literature wrote to please that great middle class which, between 1750 and 1850, gradually became the predominant force in England. Phakirmohan though almost a contemporary, employed the medium of novel, to lay bare the stark realities of human existence. He wanted not as much to regale the readers as to make them aware of the social situation. He was passionately committed to social justice; though not in the Marxist sense. His sympathy for the exploited and the downtrodden was inspired by his humanism and deep concern for the exploited.

Phakirmohan was a great master of type characters. He not only sketches personality with unparalleled vividness, but also understands the organic principles that underline that personality.

The structural technique of "*Chamana Athaguntha*", though unconsciously evolved, is unique. The denouement of its plot has taken place on two levels; which merge into each other unobtrusively to create unity of impression. The structure of the novel has

two levels— apparent and inherent. On the apparent level, it is the cruel story of the heartless expropriation by a ruthless greedy moneylender, of the lands of an innocent couple of weavers. But on the inherent level, it is the pathetic story of a mother's yearning for a child. Saria, the weaver's wife was beguiled by Champa, a typical mischievous maidservant, the mistress of Ramachandra Mangaraj; to believe that if she could construct a temple and consecrate it to goddess Mangala, she would be blessed with a child. Construction of the temple would be no problem, since the "compassionate" moneylender Ramachandra Mangaraj, would advance a loan for construction of the temple, if they agreed to place their land measuring six acres eight gunths as mortgage. Bhagia, the weaver, under persuasion of his wife pining for a child placed his landed property under mortgage for construction of the temple. But what Bhagia and Saria got in return, was a pile of stones. The land was auctioned away for non-payment of loan, the money-lender even did not spare the cow, which in her mute responses, satisfied the craving of Saria for a child. Saria died of shock and grief, Bhagia turned mad. Ramachandra Mangaraj was charged with murder of Saria and sentenced to six months imprisonment. After release from the prison, he died a pitiable death. Though Ramachandra Mangaraj in his death bed was constantly tormented by the vision of Saria and Bhagia threatening to kill him, Bhagia did not actually kill him. He only bit off his nose in a fit of madness. Class conflict and retribution in the hands of the exploited was not within the range of thinking of the writers and thinkers of Orissa, nay of India in the 19th

Century. Nonetheless Phakirmohan has meted out natural justice to Ramachandra Mangaraj, in his pitiable death, in the hands of a quack.

"*Mamu*" (The maternal uncle) is his third novel (1913) which presents a galaxy of well-drawn characters, both urban and rural. In this novel, Phakirmohan has dealt with the corruption of the petty officialdom, which was then emerging as an influential class in Orissan society. H. E. Beales, who was at one time the Collector of Balasore, seems to have been deeply influenced by "*Mamu*" in writing his novel "The Indian Ink." Nazar Natabar Das also meets the same fate as Ramachandra Mangaraj. Though "*Mamu*" is considered by critics as an important work, its structure is loose and in effect does not make as much impact as "*Chamana Athaguntha*". Phakirmohan also wrote two other novels, "*Lachhama*" and "*Prayaschita*". While the latter was didactic and belonged to the decadent phase of Phakirmohan's creative genius, the second novel, "*Lachhama*" was historical.

Phakirmohan was the father of modern Oriya short story. According to his autobiography Phakirmohan wrote a short-story "*Lachamani*" in the late sixties of the 19th Century, which was published in the columns of "*Bodhadayini*", a journal, which was being edited and published by Phakirmohan from Balasore, his native town. But that short-story—perhaps the earliest short-story in Indian literature—still remains untraced. Historians of literature have therefore relied upon *Revati* (1898) written by Phakirmohan, as the first short story in Oriya. *Revati* symbolises the

conflict between the dying old and the emerging new, in which process, Revati, an innocent girl, falls a pitiable victim. The tragedy and pathos of *Revati* leave the readers deeply moved with pity. No anthology of Oriya short stories is complete without *Revati*. "*Randipua Ananta*" (Ananta, the widow's son) is also another short-story, which deserves mention in this context. Phakirmohan also wrote *belles lettres*, essays and poems, but his undying fame solely rests on his novels and a few short-stories.

The masterpieces of contemporary fiction, one may note, have little humour; there are few jokes in them. But in Phakirmohan's novels they are abundant. Phakirmohan, though a serious writer, was the last great humourist in Oriya literature and in that he shared a common characteristic with Victorian Novelists of English literature. The secret of the survival and freshness of Phakirmohan's lies in his scintillating humour.

Though at places in his novels Phakirmohan used the heavy Sanskritic style, he employed the colloquial Oriya in his writing and gave them a new flavour. He demonstrated for the first time the beauty and expressiveness of the very language of the people. Though his two other distinguished contemporaries, Radhanath Ray and Madhusudhan Rao employed the Sanskritic style, the colloquial style of Phakirmohan came to stay and influenced generations of prose writers. In that sense, Phakirmohan's contribution to the growth of Oriya language is outstanding.

Phakirmohan's times were a period of deep unrest and churning when the Oriya language was faced with extinction by manipulators in the administra-

tive level. Orissa, then, was a part of the Bengal Presidency and not only the administration of Orissa, but also its social, cultural and economic life lay strangled in their hands. Phakirmohan was one of the early *patriarchs* of Oriya nationalism, who by his pen waged a relentless struggle, for the survival of Oriya, which was one of the ancient languages, with a developed literature, spread over seven centuries. Phakirmohan's colloquialism was inspired in this political context

The Indian literature to-day is a Babel of tongues; writers in one language not knowing, what is being done in the other language. The Sahitya Akademi has signally failed in evolving an Indian Literature through translations, of outstanding works in other languages. Its paltry efforts in that direction has not borne much fruit. It is no wonder therefore, Phakirmohan has not as yet found his rightful place in the history of Indian Novels.

In that context, the Phakirmohan Sahitya Parishad of Balasore has rendered a valuable contribution to the study of Phakirmohan, by bringing out the present volume, enriched by contributions from distinguished writers and scholars. One hopes this volume will project Phakirmohan in his true splendour and distinctiveness to readers not conversant with Oriya language and literature.

Shivani,
Cuttack-8
25th July, 1983

Surendra Mahanty,
President
Orissa Sahitya Akademi

AN INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY OF PHAKIRAMOHAN

A visitor to Balasore or Chandipore-on-sea, if he belongs to the literary brotherhood, seldom loses the opportunity of paying a visit to a quiet and sheltered spot close to the imposing Phakiramohan College buildings. About fifty years ago this was Santi Kanan, a garden of peace and bliss, which was a favourite resort of Phakiramohan Senapati (1843-1918), the father of modern Oriya literature. Though the place shows signs of neglect and decay now, it was, not very long ago, a beauty spot where flowers bloomed all the year round, trees yielded rich and luscious fruits and made an aviary for songster birds. It is here that an old man, three score and upward, drove his quill dipping it into an inkpot that was gratefully presented to him by a ruler of a small princely state and produced masterpieces in literature. He drew inspiration from the memories of his angelic wife, Krushnakumari, whose mortal remains lay close by and from the figures and mottoes of religious teachers Buddha, Jesus, Nanak, Srikrushna, Mohammed and Ram Mohan—carved on a monolithic structure by the side of a tank. As he sat either nursing his gouty feet or weaving rich experiences of life into patterns of his own, children from neighbouring cottages came to share the old man's gaiety or good humour and to receive slices of mango and guava or lichis plucked freshly from the orchard according to season's share and bounty.

Phakiramohan was born to suffer. He lost both the parents before he was three. It was only a doting grandmother's affectionate care that saved the sickly, pale and jaundiced child from imminent death. To fulfil her vow, the boy begged, dressed as a *Phakir*, with a bowl in hand and thus earned for himself the name 'Phakiramohan' dropping his original title 'Brajamohan'. His childhood closely resembled that of David Copperfield. His uncle and aunt, a veritable Mr. & Mrs. Murdstone were unkind to the orphan and put him either to repair sails and rigging or to watch the same work entrusted by them to contractors. Later he was switched on to the salt godowns. It was probably this hard and unfortunate childhood that made him a humanitarian and lover of children throughout his life.

His conjugal life was none too happy. His first wife, whom he married at the age of 13, was according to his own candid confession "quarrelsome, cruel and hard-hearted." "My married life was more painful to me than the agonies of childhood", says he. To add to this misery, the grandmother, whose protecting wings had saved him so long, died in 1867. But after the death of his wife, when he married again, he saw for sometime the silver lining in the sable cloud, for Krushnakumari turned out to be an ideal consort. Misery and bereavements however still dogged him. Their first child died young. When Krushnakumari died in 1894, he was left disconsolate and all alone.

The work of Phakiramohan mirror his time so faithfully that a historian can with ease reconstruct

it. Orissa stood then between two ages, one dead and the other unborn. She had forfeited her ancient dower of both inward and outward happiness. Gone were her days of empire-building and maritime trade. She had lapsed into the 'Dark Ages' and had become a 'dark continent'.

Balasore, the birth place of Phakiramohan, which had been for long a busy port frequented by European traders and handled and exported about nine lakh maunds of salt suddenly ceased to be the centre of Orissa's maritime activities due to Government's abandonment of manufacture of salt. "The river-mouth is sandchoked and its banks are deserted," says Phakiramohan lamentingly. With a touch of irony he adds, "Dame Fortune left Orissa for Liverpool and other places" and "Ravenous kites, crows and kingfishers from England are swooping down upon the fish and fries of Orissa, a poodle that she is."

The field of Education too was almost bare and barren. Wandering *Abadhanas* from the southern parts opened *Pathasalas* in richmen's varandah to teach the three R's to pupils for a few months and would depart when agricultural season set in. There was neither any printing press nor textbooks nor were there writers and readers. Even the existence of Oriya as a language was being doubted and questioned by people at the helm of educational affairs.

* Sent belatedly to school at the age of nine, Phakiramohan had practically little formal education. The progress of his studies was judged by the cane stripes on the back. His school days

ended when his guardians failed to pay fees amounting to four annas, even though their ward had been promoted to the next higher class with top honours. He was, however, soon appointed a teacher in the same school on a pay of Rs 2-8 annas which was subsequently raised to Rs. 4/-(certainly a decent pay when rice sold at sixty seers a rupee and fish at 2 seers a pice.)

Then began a period of self-education for Phakiramohan. With the help of grammars and dictionaries he began to study assiduously Sanskrit and English and in no time acquired proficiency in no less than five languages and drew the attention of Reverend Hallam and John Beams, a linguist, and passed for a Pundit. He wrote a few poems even in Bengali and for some time was a Bengali teacher to a Collector and Joint Magistrate of Balasore. Such acquaintance or friendship with the highest English officials of the time stood Phakiramohan in good stead.

Two years later, in 1868 Phakiramohan established, on a joint stock basis, the first press known as P. M. Senapati & Co.—Utkal Press. And rich and poor men from far and near came in carts and palanquins to see its working in the same manner as people had come in England to see Stephenson's "first Railway." "The way you have set up the press" said Radhanath Roy "will be recorded in letters of gold in the history of Orissa."

"I wrote to please my wife and after her, I write to allay my miseries," he once said. Though the desire for self-expression and to please others is

at the root of all literary activity, Phakiramohan's "one aim, one purpose, and one desire" was the upliftment and promotion of Oriya literature. The establishment of a press, the publication of a fortnightly newspaper and a literary supplement to it, the formation of a literary society at Balasore and writing of text-books on grammar, history and arithmetic in Oriya for use in schools were all directed to fulfil the same purpose.

Hardly had he worked for a couple of years to save the language from annihilation when came his appointment as Dewan of Keonjhar at the recommendation of John Beams. Thus commenced 25 years of wandering in strange lands and people of several feudatory states. As an administrator of these backward tracts he showed remarkable skill, shrewdness and sagacity. He introduced fiscal reforms, brought order to confusion, turned bankruptcy to solvency, quelled revolts and rebellions and cured rulers of eccentricities, often at the peril of his life.

Though apparently detrimental to the cause of literature, for he gave up writing for 8 years—this period provided him with materials for his monumental works. Phakiramohan had eyes to see and ears to hear and by the extra-ordinary power of observation he studied men and manners. He has recorded quite a number of fascinating anecdotes and strange stories in his works.

• "Why should we mourn the loss of our child? This book, like our son, will perpetuate us," observed Krushnakumari while listening to her husband's translated cantos of the Ramayan. Though

Sarala Das's Mahabharat and Balaram Das's Ramayan are the grandest Oriya epics—probably the oldest works of their kind in Indian vernaculars—they deviate and digress from the original and are often unintelligible to rural folk on account of their archaic language. Phakiramohan's translation of the two epics on the other hand is faithful and the simplicity of language appeals even to the unlettered. No wonder he was called Vyasakavi of Orissa by the contemporaries.

Phakiramohan's poetry has unfortunately been to a large extent overshadowed by his magnificent prose. Yet his 'Gifts' and 'Garlands', two clusters of poems occasioned by the death of his wife, contain rare lyrics of the language. "Shall I see her face again", She went away smiling leaving me disconsolate" and such verses addressed to Krushnakumari or poems like. "The lone leaf", "Whom shall I call Oh mother, my mother!" have captions suggestive enough. "In times of sorrow, I am able to write better," said Phakiramohan. At once, soft and tender, these small pieces express his poignant sorrow or helpless state in a language which is natural and spontaneous. The lyrics of 'Abasara Basare' prove that no subject is too trivial for treatment in poetry, provided the emotion is genuine.

At the age of 53 Phakiramohan settled down to begin his career as the builder of Orissa's modern literary edifice. This period lasted almost two decades, one each at Cuttack and Balasore. The literary output and value is also equally divided between these two places. Probably no other writer started serious writing at such a late stage of life

and succeeded in producing so many masterpieces. It is probably due to maturity of mind and art that there is no tracing of the development of his genius. It was fully matured at the start and knew no decline till the end.

Though Phakiramohan's work cover a wide range of subjects, from arithmetic to the *Upainshads*, he reveals more in the world of stories and novels than in any other branch of literature. "I find a story at every turn or corner of the street", he used to say.

His first long short story, "*Chhaman Athaguntha*", touches at once the high water mark of fiction. This book which is being translated into all the Indian languages by the Sahitya Akademi, gave such an illusion of reality at the time of its serial publication in a monthly magazine that people from rural areas came to Cuttack to see the trial described in the book.

His *Mamu*, *Luchhama* and *Prayaschitta* also bring to us the whole world of men and women of contemporary Orissa.

His short stories, likewise, touch all aspects of contemporary social life and show his observation which is abundant, piercing and swift.

Phakiramohan's autobiography, his crowning literary achievement is stranger than fiction. This unique book, which satisfies all the canons of autobiographical writing is as delightful as his stories and novels. Living characters have been so faithfully sketched that at once cease to be personnel of history and resemble some figures of a romance, who pass and re-pass the stage to enact a centry of Orissa's life. The author neither exaggerates nor

extenuates anything to make him look like a poser or a showboy. He takes readers into confidence, gossips, makes confessions and even caricatures himself in a manner no enemy would have done. "He who touches the book touches a man." Full of anecdotes and incidents enlivened with witticisms, the autobiography presents Phakiramohan's all-pervasive sunny nature and unflinching faith in divine dispensation. The harrowing picture of the famine, the romantic episode of that coy maiden with heaving bosoms, dark hairs and ever-smiling lips, the unlettered Raja Saheb of Daspalla signing away by way of remark the whole of the visitor's book of the Ravenshaw College, the Adibasi maidens using cauliflowers for decorating their braids—all these bring home to us his keen sense of perception and humour.

Though excellent at sketches, Phakiramohan is rather weak in composing plots which sprawl and ramble and ill-knit and loose like those in Dickens. His characters have often no development and have no inner life. They are at times grotesque and strange and there is no analysis of character. Yet both plots and characters are enveloped in a unique atmosphere which is the author's own. His sympathy for them is never withheld; they are always recognisable and strongly individualistic. The comic spirit, if not the tragic, makes them alive.

Phakiramohan devoted himself to the novel of social conditions with a reforming zeal. The weapons he chose were wit and humour, irony and satire and kind of prose which is "really used by men." More original in manner than in matter, he constantly expressed himself unhindered by classical education or fastidiousness. Whatever he produced, he set such a personal stamp that he became a rebel and an innovator.

B. K. Satpathy.



Phakirmohana Senapati and his times.

Dr. J. V. Boulton

(a) Time and Oriya literature

The main difference between the Modern and the Medieval literatures of India lies in their means of dissemination : the Medieval being disseminated in manuscript and oral tradition and the modern largely in printed books. The intellectual clash between Oriyas and Bengalis which took place in the pages of contemporary journals in the last century was probably precipitated by the expensiveness of printing. For there was virtually no dispute between them when Oriya and Bengali literature circulated in manuscript. Who would have cared, a thousand years or so ago, for example, when the so-called *Bauddha Gan o Doha* were being composed, to ask which verses were by Oriya poets and which by Bengali ? That question assumed importance only in the Modern Age, when each of these nations had become aware of its own individual interests and intent on preserving its own individuality and self-respect.

An attempt to evaluate the literatures of Medieval Bengal and Orissa will reveal that qualitatively and quantitatively there is nothing much to choose between them, though the advantage, if there be one, would lie with Orissa. For throughout the larger part of the Medieval period Orissa retained its independence by armed force and was thus able to secure for its pilgrimage centre, Puri, an all-India ascendancy which remains unchallenged even today. The Vaisnavite literature of Orissa composed during this period in both Oriya and Sanskrit and centering on the Puri Jagannatha cult stands unrivalled by that of Bengal. Bengalis may have lain claim to Jayadeva and his *Gitagovinda*, but their claim is invalid, as the *Mahabharata* of Sarala Das proves(1). By Sarala Dasa's time two forms of Vaisnavism

1. Jayadeva's *Gitagovinda* is thematically interrelated not only with the Sanskrit and Classical literature of Orissa, but also with the character of Krsna and the satirical treatment of the Radha-krsna theme in Sarala Dasa's *Mahabharata*. This *Mahabharata* is so popular a work and the character of Krsna is so closely interwoven in its texture, that its relationship with Jayadeva cannot be the result of interpolation. The earliest work on the Radha-Krsna theme in Bengali is Badu Chandi Dass *Sri-Krsna Kirtan* of which but one copy of doubtful authenticity was discovered in Bankura in 1906. Sarala Dasa and Chandi Das were contemporaries. Bankura was at that time probably part of the Kalinga empire. Even granted that the *Sri-Krsna-Kirtan* were authentic, could Oriya influence on it be discounted ?

See also Mayadhar Mansinha, *History of Oriya Literature* Published by Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi, 1962 pp 83-84; and Surendra Mahanti, *Odia Sahitya Adi Parva*, Published by Cuttack Students Stores, Cuttack 1972, pp. 151-52.

centring on Jagannatha were current in Orissa : one in the royal court and the other amongst ordinary Oriyas. Jayadeva's amorous Krsna seems to have been greatly admired in court circle. This Krsna had come to Orissa from South India under the influence of the Southern Gangas (2). So, when Kapilendra Deva rebelliously wrested the throne from the last, 'drunken' (3) Ganga king, Sarala Dasa in his *Mahabharata* even more rebelliously depicted this alien South Indian Krsna as a lecher and in his *Musali Parva* pointed out the true antecedents of Jagannatha, who, Sarala Dasa claimed was born on Dhauli hill (4) as Savari-Narayana and was thus a son of Orissa's soil, in duty bound to deport himself like any other respectable Oriya. This then was the message of Sarala Dasa, and after him the stream of abuse directed against the wayward Jagannatha was maintained by Balarama Dasa, one of the so-called Pancha Sakha.

Judged from the standpoint of Medieval literature, Bengal has nothing to justify her crowing over Orissa. Sheer chance made Calcutta the most important political and commercial centre of British India, (5) thus enabling Bengalis to acquire first that

2. Bansi Dhara Mahanti, Editorial, Konark, 6th year, 3rd Number, 1971 (this issue is hereinafter called R), p. vii

3. 'Matta' or 'Madyapa', see Dr K.C. Panigrahi, Pancha Sakha Yuga o Odishara Itihasa, R p. 2

4. Dr. Beni Madhava Padhi, Pancha Sakha Sahityare Sri Jagannath, R p. 87

5. Balasore could quite easily have assumed the same position, had it not been for the silting up of the river.

English education, from which their vaunted westernisation derives. But can an inflated sense of superiority be warranted by good fortune alone ?

In the Medieval period, however Bengalis were not so insufferably arrogant. Indeed, some like Chaitanya in the reign of Prataparudra Deva were sufficiently humble to learn Oriya, assimilate Oriya culture and mix with Oriya society. With the exception of Nama Samkirtana, Chaitanya probably brought nothing with him from Bengal. The Radha-Krsna-based Vaisnavism he propagated was already cultivated in royal circles in Orissa, (6). For it was from this Vaisnavism that the inspiration of such poets as Jayadeva and Raya Ramananda had come. Sanskrit dramas on the Radha-Krsna theme were then popular in court circles, and were occasionally performed even within the precincts of the Puri Jagannatha temple, (7). Classical Oriya poets like Dina Krsna Dasa and Upendra Bhanja continued to exploit the same and similar material in composing their immortal lines, the only difference being that they composed them not in Sanskrit but Oriya. So, to be blunt, Chaitanya came to Orissa not to teach, but to be taught (8). For in his days there was much for Bengalis to be taught in Orissa. Those with humility like Chaitanya

6. Bansi Dhara Mohanti, Editorial, Rpp. ix-x

7. Kedara Natha Mahapatra, Pancha Sakha Yuga Kalin Odisara Sanskrita Sahitya, R p. 13

8. "Sab sikhaila more Raya Ramananda", Sri-Chaitanya Charitamrta, Antya Lila, quoted by Bansidhara Mahanti, R px.

benefitted from a prolonged stay in Orissa, whereas those without, like his so-called Gauriya Vaisnavite disciples, went off to Vrindavan; i. e., forsaking the patronage of a powerful king like Prataparudra Deva, the comfort and facilities of an independent Hindu realm like Orissa, and the prestige of a Pilgrimage centre of all India importance like Puri, they went off to live in the jungles of Vrindavan in a fit of pique, simply because Chaitanya conferred upon a distinguished scholar-poet like Jagannatha Dasa the title of 'very great' ('Atibadi')

(b) The tolerance of Jagannatha and the literary climate of Orissa.

That there was much to be learnt from Orissa is proved by Gaurisankar Ray, Radhanatha Ray, Madhusudana Rao, Madhusudana Dasa and Phakirmohana Senapati, who, though fluent in Bengali, all remained loyal to Orissa. For Orissa possessed something rare to Bengal, namely tolerance. The nationalism, which surged up in Bengal in the last century, flowed mainly from ultra-Hindu pride expressed in blatant intolerance and communalism. (9) As an inevitable consequence of such arrogance Bengal like my own Britain was rent as under within constantly shrinking frontiers. Orissa, however, was untainted by such arrogance and communalism. There regardless of race or creed, Bengalis, Marathis and Oriyas ; Hindus, Muslims and Christians ; all

9. See Chapters on Hindu-Muslim Relations and on Literature in Dr Mustafa Nurul Islam's *Bengali Muslim Public Opinion as reflected in the Bengali Press 1901-1930*, Dacca 191

played their part in a united, national movement ; for to the peoples of Orissa the important thing was that all should acknowledge Oriya as their mother tongue and Orissa as their motherland. That is, participation in the national movement was a matter of personal choice alone, not of race or creed. Tolerance is the hall mark of such an attitude, the type of tolerance derived in Orissa from Jagannatha, whose cult harmoniously blends almost all the religions of Orissa, tribal, Buddhist, Sakta, Saivite, Vaisnavite and so forth, and whose presence negates all caste distinctions. Thus, though during the British period Orissa was initially dismembered for administrative purposes, gradually by her own efforts she regained unity within her own frontiers. Orissa therefore seems to me possessed of some power to win over foreign hearts. All those whose ancestors settled in Orissa ; as, for example, the ancestors of Gaurisankar Ray, (10) who, coming like many other Bengali Kayastha families to assist Todar Malla with the Moghal administration of Orissa, learned the Oriya language, accepted Orissa as their homeland and became to all intents and purposes Oriya.

(c) The feeling of affection for the soil of the motherland

In Gaurisankar's youth the educational systems of Bengal and Orissa were interrelated. Tutition for

10. 'Ray' was the title conferred on the family for Government service. Their family-name was Basu. They were Kayasthas from Southern Radh. See Mrtyunjaya Ratha, *Karmayogi Gaurisankara*, p.2.

only the Junior Scholarship was available in Orissa. To prepare for the Senior Scholarship one had to study at some such institution as Hughli College in Bengal, as Gaurisankar did in the 1850s.

At that period Modern Bengali literature was about to burst from its bud. Nevertheless, Bengali intellectuals like Isvar Chandra Gupta had already started gazing towards the past, collecting the older literature and bringing it out in new printed editions. The lives of old poets had also begun to appear in contemporary journals. Materials were being assembled to launch the academic study of Medieval Bengali literature.

All this inspired Gaurisankar to attempt to do the same for the language and literature of Orissa. Aided by friends like Jagamohana Lala he founded a press called the Cuttack Printing Company and launched a journal called the *Utkal Dipika*. Thereafter he took up the task of collecting and editing the old literature and plunged into a determined effort to establish himself as a publisher.

The publication of *Utkal Dipika's* first issue was hastened by the outbreak of the Great Orissa Famine, which in hindsight was to mark the commencement of a new era in Orissa. Upto the Famine the British authorities had, it is fair to say, paid scant heed to Orissa. That year Ravenshaw had newly arrived as Commissioner. Misinformed about the likelihood of famine, he had through inexperience failed to take adequate steps to prevent it. He, therefore, had virtually no option but to

stand and watch despairingly, when the people of Orissa began like flies to die of starvation. Overwhelmed with remorse for his blunder, Ravenshaw determined to do all in his power to compensate the Oriyas. Thus following the Famine additional canals were cut to improve crop production and additional facilities in education were created for Oriyas. These included an announcement of prizes for new text books in Oriya.

Upto this time the so-called Moghal Bandi had for all practical purposes been the Bengali Bandi. The announcement of new educational facilities for Oriyas sounded to Bengalis like the first trumpet notes of a challenge to their supremacy in Orissa. They therefore reacted strongly. Rajendralal Mitra being the first to take up the gauntlet in the Cuttack Debating Society with his slur that the continued existence of the Oriya language would be a constant impediment to the progress of Orissa.

Rajendralal was probably speaking of the difficulties facing the publishing industry, when he made this slur. The dissemination of a printed literature is expensive. Only two types of books sold well at his period : text books and old literature. The printing of modern poetry and fiction was risky and could succeed only if heavily subsidised. Modern literature in Bengali had been launched partly from Government sponored institutions like Fort William College (1808)) and the School Book Society (1817). Thereafter it had subsisted in serialised forms in journals subsidised by the rich. Thus Rajendralal

Mitra would seem to have been questioning, whether the reading public in Orissa was large enough to maintain a modern printed literature. His raising of the question was to some extent justified, though his answer to it was decidedly biased.

In refuting Rajendralal's arguments, however, in the pages of *Utkala Dipika* Gaurisankar Ray touched upon a theme that was to become central to the Oriya nationalist movement : the unification of the Oriya-speaking tracts. Taken together, Ganjam, the Garhajats, Sambalpur and the Moghal Bandi could, Gaurisankar argued, support a printed modern literature. History was to prove Gaurisankar right.

The future status of the Oriya language affected not only the feasibility of a modern printed literature, however. Gaurisankar stuck to this point because he was a publisher staking his all on the feasibility of such a literature, but the status of the Oriya language also affected employment, as Phakirmohana was quick to point out in Balasore, when mobilising public opinion against Kanti Chandra Bhattacharya's book, 'Udiya Svatantra Bhasa Nahe' ('Oriya is not a separate language'). The introduction of Bengali as the medium of instruction in the schools of Orissa would mean the introduction of Bengali clerks in all the Government offices there. Further more, the status of the Oriya language affected the status of the Oriya speaking people. Were they to become a race of gardeners and coolies? Were they to lose their mother-tongue and with it their culture, their traditions and

their very existence and identity as a separate people ? To learn Bengali instead of Oriya at school would mean becoming Bengalis like the Oriyas of Medinipur, accepted as Bengalis for census purposes only. The loss would have been greater than any potential gain.

This is the kind of thinking one finds behind Phakirmohana's scattered remarks in his autobiography about the language dispute in 1869/70. It must also have lain behind his speeches and editorials in *Sambad bahika* ; for Phakirmohana was by this time becoming a nationalist, and indeed the Oriya nationalist movement dates from the activities of Gaurisankar Ray and Phakirmohana Senapati at this period. It was a movement open to all who chose to regard Oriya as their mother tongue and Orissa as their motherland. And its diffusion before 1903, when it entered its political phase under the leadership of Madhusudana Dasa, can be measured by the gradual diffusion of printing presses throughout Orissa, popularising Oriya literature. For in its initial phase the Oriya nationalist movement was language - and - literature - based. Its success, therefore, depended upon the popularity of that language and literature, which is why its leaders were at first literary men like Gaurisankar Ray and Phakirmohana Senapati.

One of the curious results of the language dispute was its effect on the style of Phakirmohana. Kanti Chandra Bhattacharya had quoted a remark from the preface to Phakirmohana's translation of

Vidyasagar's *Jivana-Charita*, where Phakirmohana had remarked that the difference between Oriya and Bengali was slight, and in fact the change of one or two endings and suffixes was sufficient to turn Bengali into Oriya. This remark applied only to Sadhu Bhasa. Phakirmohana obviously regretted making it and it is clear that in *Cha Mana Atha Guntha* at least he tried to break away from Sadhu Bhasa and use homely Oriya instead. That concluded part of my thesis.

(d) A brief summary of Part II of my thesis

The second part of my thesis attempted to analyse Phakirmohana's prose fiction. The first chapter gave an English summary of his four novels. There-after followed a discussion of the inter-relations between Phakirmohana's literature and his life. The next three chapters analysed and discussed the three main themes of Phakirmohana's prose-fiction, namely the theme of History, the theme of Education and the theme of Justice, one chapter being devoted to each of these topics. The main thesis of the chapter on the theme of History was that a reading of part of Phakirmohana's prose-fiction would tend to indicate that initially Oriyas welcomed the coming of British rule because of the anarchy and chaos they had experienced under the Marathas. They thought that once law and order were established, peace would prevail. But afterwards they discovered that the price of peace was the loss of indigenous industries like shipping and salt, and of the wealth and prestige associated with them. And this

ultimately engendered dissatisfaction with the British. Then came a discussion of the ill effects of Western education on family life. The main thesis of the following chapter on Justice was that law and religion were intimately interrelated. Unless a law was supported by the traditional sense of morality inculcated by religion, it was unlikely to be observed by the people ; i. e., for the Rule of Law to prevail law-breaking had in the eyes of the people to be as heinous as sin. The legal system introduced into India by the British had not been tailored to the indigenous sense of morality, and this had had various unfortunate consequences. When analysed from this point of view, Phakirmohana's *Cha Mana Atha Guntha* would be seen as a satire of British Justice. Thereafter I discussed Phakirmohana's Attitudes and Values, attempting to demonstrate that essentially Phakirmohana had but one life-long aim : the translation of the value system of ancient India into Oriya from Sanskrit, either literally as in his *Mahabharata*, *Ramayana* and *Upanisadas*, or metaphorically as in his prose-fiction.

A discussion of all this would be too time-consuming for present purposes. Therefore for detailed discussion one topic only has been selected : the interrelations of Phakirmohana's literature with his life.

(e) The interrelations of Phakirmohana's literature with his life :

Despite incidental difference of class, occupation and back-ground, Phakirmohana's early (II) (i. e. pre-June 1913) prose-fiction exhibits only two sets of central character, good and bad. These sets are distinguished only by sex. His good male characters such as Syamabandhu Mahanti in *Rebati* (Oct. 1898) are generally fond of Pauranika literature, religious, honest and reliable; his good female characters such as the Saantani in *Cha Mana Atha Guntha* (Oct, 1897) are dedicated to their husbands; modest in deportment; patient and tolerant, and generous to the poor, the sick and the needy. His bad male characters such as Mangaraja in *Cha Mana Atha Guntha* are generally hypocritical; cunning and deceitful; mean, avaricious and bad tempered; unfaithful to their wives; disloyal to their employers; and disobedient to their parents. And his bad female characters such as Champa in *Cha Mana Atha Guntha* are generally a lazy; vain, greedy, disrespectful, immodest and sometimes promiscuous. In short, the central characters in Phakirmohana's early fiction are stereotypes of good and bad people in earlier, and contemporary, Orissan society.

This use of stereotyped central characters does not pre-suppose, on Phakirmohana's part, a lack of interest in or understanding of, human psychology. Being primarily a moralist, however, Phakirmohana

11. These dates in brackets refer to the earliest known dates of publication as set out in the appendix of Natabara Samanta Raya's *Vyasá Kavi Phakirmohana*.

concentrated his attention on the problem of good and evil in Orissan society. It was this concentration upon a single problem, which drove Phakirmohana to endow his central characters with the limited range of good or bad characteristics possessed by either the virtuous or the vicious in his society; in order that he might demonstrate how, in his opinion, a man's personality is formed; and the role played by social class and cultural, economic and political circumstances in furthering either the development or suppression of good and bad traits. Thus, in effect, when one views Phakirmohana's fiction as a whole, one sees only one character, man, and only one plot, the formation of his character for good or ill.

As early as 1897 Phakirmohana wrote,

"...though all men are basically the same, not two men in ten million are physically identical; and just as men's bodies differ, their minds differ also. Some men have strong propensities, others weak, whilst the propensities of still others may lie dormant. At some particular time a turn of events may awaken these dormant propensities. Who would have thought that those drunken reprobates, Jagai and Madhai could have become devout Vaisnavas? Or that that tyrannical enemy of Christ, Saul, would now be worthy of a saint amongst the most venerable of seers...? On the otherhand, the asceticism of that royal seer, Visvamisra, son of Gadhi, that had endured for thousands upon thousands of eons, and his even greater steadfastness in Brahma, tottered at a single glance from the

beauteous Menaka... the cause of all these changes was a particular circumstance or meeting" (12)

The basic plot of almost all Phakirmohana's prose-fiction is inherent in that quotation. The plot is : there was once a person whose way of life was wrong/right; one day he was caused to suffer for this; and, provided he survived, his way of life changed.

Some of Phakirmohana's stories are so rudimentary that the plot is not fully exploited; for example, *Maunamauni* (June 1907), *Baleswari Rahajani* (July 1907), and *Kamala Prasada Gorapa* (May 1913) end with the suffering of the central characters, who are arrested and imprisoned by the police. In other stories the central character does not survive : Mangaraja has his nose bitten off by Bhagia, whose land he has stolen, and dies of internal bleeding after a savage attack by the Doms he had betrayed; Champa is murdered by her barber-lover, whom she treated as an inferior and with whom she refused to share her spoils ; Dhulia Baba (Feb. 1913) burns to death in his own sacrificial fire ; Bhaskara Pandit, the treacherous villain in *Lachama* (June 1901), is stabbed to death by Badal Simha and Lachama, the young couple whose family he had plundered ; and Madha Mahanti, the avaricious father in *Madha Mahantinka Kanya Suna* (Oct. 1915) dies as a result of his own greed. But many other central characters do survive and their lives are transmuted; Chandra Mani Pattanayaka, the drug addict and drunkard in

Patent Medicine (Sept. 1913) is transformed into a model husband under the battering blows of his wife's broomstick; Nima, the arrogant and indolent br. dge in *Suna-bohu* June (1913), is humiliated into becoming an ideal housewife by her sister-in-law, Champa; Natabara Dasa in *Mamu* (1913) is brought to repentance by imprisonment and for a while enjoys renewed faith in God, before the enormity of his sins drives him beyond remorse and into insanity; and Gobinda in *Prayaschitta* (Sept. 1915) is transformed by a savage beating and the suicide of his wife from being a head-strong romantic who tramples on his parents' wishes to becoming a dedicated servant of society.

In all the cases so far mentioned the way of life of the central character was initially wrong; i. e. he had been, not a hero, but an anti-hero ; and finally his way-wardness had brought him suffering, which transformed him into a hero. This is the most frequent direction of the personality change recorded in Phakirmohana's fiction, but the possibility of change in the opposite direction was not excluded from the formula of Phakirmohana's basic plot. Gopala Simha in *Daka Munsii* (Sept. 1912) is an instance of change in the opposite direction. At the outset of the story he was presumably a dutiful son, but as a result of his education he acquired a higher station in life than that of his father. In consequence he began mixing with a more sophisticated westernised class of people. In the company of these new friends, he was occasioned acute embarrassment by his father's old-fashioned dress and

ignorance of European etiquette. His sufferings on this account grew so intense, that he finally drove his father from the house. Similarly, Bhagia, a quiet, inoffensive weaver, is driven vicious and insane by Mangaraja's trickery and finally assaults him violently.

Thus in its final developed form, Phakirmohana's plot is the literary equivalent of the psychological process known as conditioning, whereby behaviour patterns may be imposed or remoulded. The beating of the drug addict in *Patent Medicine*, for example, is a violent and crude form of aversion therapy, whereby the addiction becomes associated with unpleasant experiences and is consequently relinquished. Not all Phakirmohana's plots conform to this basic pattern, but even when they deviate, the conditioning process remains inherent in them. *Birei Bisala* (Oct 1913) and *Sabhya Jamidara* (March 1914), for example, each contain two stories and plots. The second story and plot of *Birei Bisala* demonstrates how Birei was conditioned into becoming a good farmer by being set to work early and his cousin into becoming a wastrel by parental indulgence. *Sabhya Jamidara* points out the same lesson in two separate stories : the first shows how an orphan become a businessman by imitating his master ; and the second how the businessman's son become a wastrel by being born rich and given a western education.

I now wish to say something about the mind of Phakirmohana. Whether I succeed or not is for others to judge.

The human mind, as we all know, has at least two levels : the conscious and the subconscious. We generally assume that in problem-solving our conscious mind views the problem from all angles, analyses and finally solves it ; though in fact the solution often comes of its own accord. We will be lying in bed, tossing and turning trying to sleep, with the problem revolving in our minds, when suddenly we awake and cry, 'That's It : I've got it !' The solution has come from our subconscious mind. Understanding the subconscious mind is not easy, that is why in ages past people thought that the words of God were heard in dreams. Thus Sarala Dasa imagined that his venerable Mother Sarala dictated the *Mahabharata* to him night after night and he merely recorded it on palm leaf in the mornings. Similarly, when being plagued by Balarama Dasa, Prataparudra Deva imagined that in dreams his ears rang with the orders of Jagannatha. That is, our conscious minds spend our waking hours grappling with life's most pressing problems, but their solutions often come of their own accord from the subconscious.

Education, like problem-solving, takes place at both levels of the mind. Subconscious education is to some extent instinctive like that of animals. All that we see, hear, touch, taste and smell from birth or is analysed by our subconscious minds, which frames within us what one American psychiatrist has termed our 'assumptive world', (13). It is during this period that our mother-

13. 'Assumptive World' is a term used in American psychiatry to denote the totality of a person's assumptions and

tongue is largely assimilated; the foundations of our sense of values ethics and aesthetics laid ; and the broad outlines of our personalities formed. It is therefore a most important period in our lives. For the assumptions formed then are rarely questioned in later life. Unfortunately, however most of this occurs at a period, for which very little conscious memory survives in most of us.

Now let us return to Phakirmohana and the problem of creative writing. When an author sits down to write, all his own personal experiences, those related to him by others, his moral, ethical and aesthetic sense and all the knowledge he has acquired at school and university ; in short, all his consciously and subconsciously acquired knowledge and experience is drawn on as material for his fiction. And as he goes on writing and writing, it all comes into play ; so that creative writing and the process referred to by psychiatrists as 'free association' are largely the same.

So when we come to analyse Phakirmohana's fiction, we see first of all two levels, the conscious and subconscious. The first of these reveals his conscious opinions about the circumstances in which he found himself : i. e., opinions based on

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- expectations about the behaviour of people both towards each other and towards himself ; and about the scientific and supernatural laws governing both the behaviour of people and objects.

See Jerome D. Franks, M. D. *Persuasion and Healing*, Baltimore 1961, pp. 20-30.

conscious experience of the history, society, politics, education, culture and civilisation of his native land. The second level reveals to us, however, the evolution of man's ethical nature : that conceptual hub, around which all Phakirmohana's thought revolved. For here lay epitomised his basic plot. And it was from here, in Phakirmohana's view, that a start had to be made, if reforms were to be achieved in any sphere, whether political, economic, educational or whatsoever.

It was here, in my opinion, that the most pressing, unresolved problem of Phakirmohana's life lay ; his relationship with his son, Mohinimohana. Unfortunately, however, Phakirmohana's subconscious possessed no instinctive knowledge about the father-son relationship, or virtually any other family relationship for that matter. During his infancy, in the time long before he could consciously remember, his elder brother, father and mother had all died, leaving deeply imprinted on his mind a vague sense of melancholy, that is still perceptible in his portrait in old age. Subconsciously he had assumed that conjugal love, though the source of the greatest bliss, was exceedingly short-lived. Whenever he came to sketch such bliss prior to June 1913, death cast its shadow across his page. How blissfully happy were Bhagia and Saria, Manadhata and Mahadevi, Pratapa Udit Malla and Chandamani, Swapna and Chami, but, alas ! for how long ?

The roles of father and mother in Phakirmohana's life were played by his grandmother, Kuchila Dei,

and his uncle, Purusottama Senapati. Their relationship was not good. Phakirmohana's portrayal of Purusottama in his autobiography seems to suggest that Purusottama may well have borne his mother, Kuchila Dei, a grudge. For he will almost certainly have regarded her as the source of all his troubles: her folly had cost them their property, and it was probably her desire for pilgrimage that had resulted in his brother, Lakshmana Charana's death. Had they retained their landed property, Purusottama and his brother Lakshmana Charana, would not have had such a desperate struggle to establish themselves in the shipchandling business. And had Lakshmana Charana survived; the whole burden of the family would not have fallen upon Purusottama's young shoulders. Given such circumstances, what else could Purusottama have become but the violent, semi-educated, uncouth man that he was. Phakirmohana viewed all the events of his childhood from the standpoint of his Grandmother, from which his Uncle appeared as some kind of villain. The relationship between Mangaraj and the Saantani in *Chha Mana Atha Guntha* is merely a conjugal edition of the relationship between Purusottama and Kuchila Dei, with Purusottama always obsessed with thoughts of the aggrandisement of his property and the Saantani (Kuchila Dei) concerned only for the welfare of others. Yet there was much good in Purusottama for despite all he was a man worthy of respect. Even had the whole world collapsed about his ears, that hard, unbroken man would have survived. It was this harsh, terrifying figure who stood as a father

to Phakirmohana. Purusottama's approach to fatherhood was blunt and violent : the least sign of disobedience earned a beating. Thus the first assumption formed in Phakirmohana's mind was that conduct could be changed only by caning. His basic plot, therefore, demonstrates that people's characters change only after suffering. Phakirmohana's subconscious seems constantly to have been urging that the only way to bring Mohinimohana to heel was to beat him. Only then would the moral instruction given him in childhood bear fruit. Thus an analysis of Phakirmohan's works at a deeper, subconscious level reveals him constantly seeking a solution to this unresolved problem.

Yet the problem remained unresolved, because of the conflict in Phakirmohana's mind over what was meant by goodness. This conflict is merely a reflection of that between Kuchila Dei and Purusottama. Whenever prior to June 1913 Phakirmohana set out to depict an ideal heroine, there emerged from his pen merely a portrait of Kuchila Dei. And the only woman he ever really loved, his second wife, Krushna Kumari, was also largely of Kuchila Dei's type. Thus at this time he generally modelled his villains largely on Purusottama. But, ruminating on the outcome of education and the economic welfare of the country, Phakirmohana gradually came to appreciate the value of the education he had received from Purusottam, especially in contrast to that of the Western Arts type (as enjoyed by his son, Mohinimohana). Thus it was that stories like *Birei Bisala* (Oct, 1913) and

Sabhaya Jamidara (March 1914) presented themselves to his mind.

Yet in June 1913 there occurred an event, whose imprint on Phakirmohan's prose-fiction is clear. Up till then his heroines had always been like Kuchila Dei, good-intentioned, yet ineffectual. Gradually, however, Phakirmohana was compelled to conclude that in the interests of sheer survival one had on occasion to behave like Purusottama. Indeed, a little firmness and cunning were indispensable.

One's first impression upon reading *Suna Bohu* (June 1913) is that by June 1913 Phakirmohana had realised that his first marriage need not have failed. For Nima in *Suna Bohu* was like Phakirmohana's first wife, Lilavati Dei, naturally bad-tempered. In the story, however, Nima's character is reformed as a result of the humiliation she received at the hands of Champa, her sister-in law. In real life Lilavati-Dei's character could also have been reformed, if only Kuchila Dei had been bold and strict.

Though this change in the nature of Phakirmohana's heroines might lead one to suppose that his heart had gradually turned against Kuchila Dei and inclined towards Purusottama, nevertheless a glance at his autobiography clearly shows that this impression was nothing but the play of Phakirmohana's subconscious mind : right up to his death he continued to regard Purusottama with loathing and Kuchila Dei with affection. Even so, this much is clear : by June 1913 Phakirmohana had begun to criticise Kuchila Dei, as is proved by the change in his heroines.

The coming change is first heralded by Ani Aai in *Suna Bohu* :

“Ani Aai had been really quarrelsome in her time, but she had always been quick to make friends and do people a service. When quick wits were called for, she could devise underhand schemes with the best of them. It is small wonder that villagers sought her advice when they were in trouble, even though she was only a poor little widow”. (14)

After Ani Aai the change is rapid. Simhani in *Randi pua Ananta* (July 1913) is more alarming than Champa in *Chha Mana Atha Guntha*; Sulochana in *Patent Medicine* (Sept. 1913) abuses and, if necessary, beats her husband; and Kamali in *Birei Bisala* (Oct. 1913) steals from her father. Kuchila Dei had been the embodiment of Orissa's traditional virtues. But Phakirmohana's heroines after June 1913 are the exact opposite. Indeed, upon first reading, *Pathoi Bohu* (June 1915) appears to be a satire of Kuchila Dei. For the sufferings that ultimately befall the heroine are a direct outcome of her traditional virtues.

One may perhaps say in conclusion that the behaviour of Phakirmohana's daughter-in-law in June 1913 led Phakirmohana to hope that his unresolved problem had passed into someone else's hands.

(The speech ended with an expression of gratitude to the Orissa Sahitya Akademi for the invitation to speak.)

Phakir Mohan Senapati

Ka Naa Subramanyam

Usually styled the "Father of Modern Oriya Literature," Phakir Mohan Senapati distinguished himself early in his life, as an educationist of revolutionary ideas, as a linguist, as a lexicographer and as a scholar in spite of the fact that he had only a sketchy schooling. .

For the greater part of his early life, Phakir Mohan Senapati was very friendly with English scholars of Oriya with whom he worked to give Oriya language and culture basic importance in the region of the Oriya-speaking people who were dominated by Bengali influences. He wrote his most important fiction late in life, in fact after he retired from a career in administration.

Sir Galahad's strength was the strength of ten we are told in the poem because his heart was pure. Phakir Mohan Senapati crowded into his one life from 1843 to 1918 the lifework of ten lives; he was pioneer in pure style, grammar, lexicography, journalism, printing and publishing. As a writer

he spearheaded a patriotic group. Revitalizing an old language and culture is always a strenuous task and Phakir Mohan Senapati and his group, which included Radhanath Roy and Madhusudan Rao whose labours were mainly in the field of poetry, ably accomplished this task. Phakir Mohan equaled other members of the group in their love for the Oriya people and culture, but in overall achievements he outstripped all of them.

Bengali Dominance

The years in which Phakir Mohan Senapati grew up were the years of Bengali dominance over the neighbouring Oriya-speaking people. A greater part of Oriya region was itself part of the administrative province of Bengal under the British and an aggressive Bengali chauvinism would not allow Oriya language and cultural achievement equal recognition.

The adequacy of Oriya for purposes of education and communication had to be demonstrated not only to the Bengalis and the English rulers of the country but also to the Oriya-speaking people themselves. In this task Phakir Mohan was ably helped by English scholars who believed in the land and the people. He cultivated them with a vigor, independence and an earnestness that impressed them sufficiently to support him in his endeavours to make the Oriya language adequate and self-sufficient. They helped him in his educational programmes, in his printing and publishing efforts and recommended him for administrative jobs for which he was

eminently qualified and which he performed with great honour and integrity which was not so common even in his days.

Contact with Masses

His contact with the lower classes of the people of the region was to stand him in good stead when he began writing his novels and short stories. He did not go back to the historic past or to the ruling class of Nawabs and aristocrats for his characters; he drew them from his first-hand knowledge of the people, the poor and the downtrodden, the peasant and the town labourer, the tinker and the tailor, soldier and washerman. The problems he dealt with were current problems which he faced in his administrative career in various zamindaris, petty states and districts.

Obsessed with reality, wielding a sort of realism with well-grounded ideals for the future in the emancipation of the people, he brought to the writing of fiction an integrity such as he found helpful in his administrative work. His characters are real persons such as we can meet every day in the villages and towns of Orissa. Withal he was not devoid of the traditional values and their impact, having equipped modern Oriya with translations of the Ramayana and The Mahabharata in particular. Here was rich ground for a novelist-to-be.

It was said of Alessandro Manzoni, the great Italian novelist who wrote a historical novel /

Promessi Sposi-The Betrothed-that he was influenced by Sir Walter Scott, the English historical novelist. When this was brought to his notice, he is said to have remarked ; "Yes I was greatly influenced by Sir Walter Scott. I learned from him how not to write historical novels." In a similar manner, Phakir Mohan Senapati might have learned how not to write novels from his study of Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, the great pioneer of Bengali and Indian novel writing. Bankim was greatly interested in presenting a glorious Hindu past and working for a Hindu regeneration. Phakir Mohan on the other-hand was interested mainly in depicting the present and working for a national regeneration.

Phakir Mohan had the advantage of being not very well-educated in English, at least in what was available of English literature to the contemporaries of his time. This was greatly to his advantage as far as, techniques and methods were concerned. He did not look up to English or other European models. He rather looked into his heart and wrote after studying the life around him at first hand.

This is a phenomenon which we can note regarding the early pioneering novelists of most of the languages of India. Though Bankim himself was called Sir Walter Scott of Bengal, his novels had something other and more than Walter Scott had in his novels and they have to be critically estimated for that otherness. The first novelist of Malayalam, Chandu Menon had the Vicar of Wakefield as an ideal but when he wrote his novel

Indulekha he strove for something real, there and then in his context and time. Vedanayakam Pillai, writing his first novel in Tamil Prathapa Mudaliar Charitram, did not look up to any particular model (unless it were Don Quixote) but he put into his novel all that he could observe of life and tried to draw moral conclusions from his observations. These were well educated men who had to unlearn something they had learned before they could set about producing their masterpieces.

Novelists of later generations have not been able to achieve wholly the unlearning process. The world started shrinking, so far as ideas are concerned, after the two World Wars and our fictionists have made no great effort to get out of suburban attitudes and a servitude to ideology that did not arise from the Indian context. After Independence, the servitude and the suburbanism seem to be on the increase because of many sociological reasons.

Phakir Mohan's fiction, both long and short, is an expression fully of the Oriyan, and thus of the Indian experience. Works like those of Phakir Mohan Senapati, Chandu Menon, Vedanayakam Pillai, Rajam Iyer, Gurnazda Appa Rao, Goverdhan Ram, Meghani, Prem Chand, Bankim, Rabindranath Tagore and Bibhuti Bhushan Bandyopadhyaya will have to be studied anew and re-evaluated from the point of view of their Indianness of content, theme and technique in order that an Indian form of fiction should take its legitimate place in world literature. We have sufficient work here of importance from which we can

draw our own literary tenets and vocabulary, so that we can have a form of purely native literary criticism as well.

In this task of re-evaluation, if it is to be done effectively, the Indian critic will find that Phakir Mohan Senapati occupies a central place. For he had little to unlearn; and future practitioners of the novel in India have to learn much from him — things of a purely literary, salutary kind.

By common consent the best novel of Phakir Mohan Senapati is his "Chhamana Athaguntha"—Six Acres and Eight Decimals, which portrays in detail the victimisation of a simple childless weaver couple by the rapacious village money-lender. The author might have drawn largely from his own experiences as administrator not only in the scenes of sympathetic portrayal but also in the detailing of the rapaciousness of the money-lender. The climax is a murder which leads to a trial and extremely realistic trial scenes.

The success of the novel with its Oriya readers was almost immediate. After he had retired from administrative service, the author was pressed by a friendly editor to write for him a story. Phakir Mohan had written a story some two decades back and with extreme reluctance he began to write. But soon it developed into a fullfledged serial. It won the admiration of its readers by its being true to life, by its alternately comic and tragic situations, by its depiction of the tragedy of the undergo in

Indian society, by its sympathy with the illiterate peasant and by its noble sentiments. It will not serve any purpose to summarize the plot of the novel for it is too full of life in the raw as lived in the villages even today. The author does not shy away from glancing at everything that comes under his purview without losing sight of the end.

Shrewd Observations

The novel is full of shrewd observations, irony, biting satire and moral lessons not too obviously pleaded. The language was conversational verging on everyday speech, difficult to achieve in writing at a time that was more than ordinarily given to pedantic literary flourishes. The novel achieves epic dimensions in its variety of scenes and characters though it is obviously an epic of the ordinary people and humdrum of everyday life. The conception of the novel as an epic comes naturally to the Indian fictionist ; and like all the effective pioneers of the novel in India, Phakir Mohan had achieved an epic in prose.

Apart from this novel Phakir Mohan wrote quite a few other novels of which mention can be made of "Mammu" (Maternal Uncle) and "Prayaschita" (Expiation). In them he set himself to describe the disintegration of a traditional culture and society by contact with the west. The Darwinian idea of evolution finds a place especially in the later novel in an easily digested Indian form. The other novel of his is a historical one entitled 'Lachchamma'

describing the depredations of Maratha raiders in Bengal and Orissa.

Evergreen Fiction

The impact of Phakir Mohan Senapati on the further progress of Oriya fiction especially and the language in general can not be gainsaid. The Oriyans respect him as the father of modern Oriya letters. But the danger lies in this very respect and easy acceptance. One has only to read his masterpiece I have read its Tamil translation provided by the Sahitya Academi - to find that it has not dated in any way even though the novelist was dealing with contemporary life of his time. This is surely a test of all great fiction that it is modern for all time. His work should go into the lives of the people of the other regions of India to give them an idea of the heights Oriya in its first stage has achieved and to supply elements that might be wanting in other regions.

New Language

Quotations from a poet might be impressive even in inadequate translation but to quote from a novelist significant passages of any effectiveness might be wholly difficult. However the temptation to quote from Phakir Mohan at least to demonstrate his modernity in language and the soundness of his observations are great. I quote a passage from 'Chha-mana Athaguntha' provided by Dr. Mayadhar Manasinha in his Monograph on Phakir Mohan Senapati in the Sahitya Akademi series of Monographs on Makers of Indian Literature.

“About a score or more of white herons could be seen scouring the mud-belts close to the banks of the tank, right from dawn up to nightfall in desperate efforts at getting their meagre daily fill of small fry. But behold now, a couple of cormorants flew down from nowhere and after having bellyfuls of large fish with only a few dives into the tank, flew away, over-satisfied. A cormorant could even be seen now on the high bank, spreading its wings in the sun in excellent contentment as Memsahibs do in their evening gowns, on the eve of a party. Oh Ye humble herons of India, see how the English cormorants fly across distant seas to our land and return gleefully, with their erst-while empty pockets filled with excellent fish, while you fools, who live on boughs of trees standing close to this tank, fail to get more than a few of the small fry after hard day long struggles. A bitter war of existence is on now. You may expect more and more cormorants flying thither very soon. They might eat all the fish in the tank. If you are keen on your own survival, you had better behave like those cormorants. You have to learn how to swim the seas. I do not know how else in future you could even keep body and soul together.”

It is to the credit of the novelist that he does not labour the political or economic moral too much, beyond what it can bear. Within restraints imposed, by telling the story he is able to draw a lesson from a simple everyday observation.

If I have not talked at length at any place in this essay on his poems, his translations or his numerous

short stories it is not because they are not important for the Oriya language and people but because he should mean more as a novelist to the whole of India. In his poems he was forging a new language and a new attitude that others would carry further. In his short stories he was not aware of the form as we understand it today and was more interested in telling a tale and drawing a moral for living - sometimes implicitly, sometimes explicitly. In his translations he was trying to make the language adequate for modern purposes. As a journalist he was aware of the social good and the domains and demands of progress ; he was not unaware of the problems of life for the simple village folk and for the dwellers in towns that were springing up all over the land. He was more than a man of letters in the totality of his life. Until Phakir Mohan Senapati is absorbed into the mainstream of Indian writing in a critical manner, a tradition of modern Indian literature might not come alive at all. He deserves a place of honour as a full figure of great influence in the Indian context as he wrote for 13 million people out of 400 million.



Phakir Mohan Senapati

Dr. Mayadhar Mansinha

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

As a matter of fact, three men of genius ushered in the modern period in Oriya literature, working together round about 1866. This brilliant trio, with harmonious intellectual and spiritual affinities and on excellent social terms with one another, is Phakirmohan Senapati, Radhanath Ray and Madhusudana Rao. Of the three, Phakirmohan was the oldest and Madhusudana the youngest. Phakirmohan was the real inspirer of the group. He had absolutely no ambition to blossom out as a poet or a writer. He dared not entertain such aspirations vis-a-vis the other two who were well

versed in English and bore the hall-mark of higher education. Senapati had no more than a Primary School Education. But he was a born patriot and humanitarian and was determined from his early days to do whatever lay in his power to raise the prestige of his fallen compatriots and lift them from the morass of sloth, despair and exploitation. He adopted literature as an experimental means to that great end. His extraordinary creative powers were revealed only as he went on writing miscellaneously. The actual creative contributions on which stands his immortality belong really to the 20th century and were written long after Radhanatha and Madhusudana had exhausted themselves. His long life of over eighty years was a blessing to the nation. Radhanatha and Madhusudana, born after him, died earlier. It was in his peaceful garden-house (Santikanan) at Balasore, in the golden twilight of his mature years, that all unexpectedly, Senapati gave to the nation great works year after year almost till his death, putting into them the quintessence of experience and observation of a brilliant mind during a long life.

Down to the sixties of the last Century, Balasore was an important port of call and entrepot on the east coast of India for the sailing ships of the East India Company. Round about the middle of the century a semiliterate, sickly lad of twelve years or so, with a quillpen tucked behind his right ear, might often have been seen walking up and down the quayside of this port, his hometown.

Orphaned at the age of a year and a half, this lad, the impecunious scion of a once-noble family whose landed fortunes had changed hands with the departure of the Marathas and the advent of the British in Orissa, was being looked after by his doting old grandmother. He had been withdrawn from the village Primary School on account of extreme poverty and made to earn his living by watching the repair of sails and rigging on behalf of his uncle who was one of the many contractors for such jobs on the quayside.

The penniless, orphaned, unpromising, semi-literate and sickly boy was Phakirmohan Senapati. He was born in 1843 and is now accepted as the Father of modern Oriya literature. As poet, novelist, administrator, scholar, social reformer, printer, journalist, businessman and patriot he had a romantic career that appears stranger even than the grand fiction with which he has so abundantly enriched his language. This genius had only about two years' formal education to his credit, but became later an erudite scholar in at least four or five Indian languages, including Sanskrit. He acquired also an excellent working knowledge of English, all by his own efforts. Through sheer mental brilliance, efficiency and other outstanding abilities, this semi-educated man made intimate friendships with Britishers of the highest rank and became the Dewan of several of the ex-native states of Orissa. Born and brought up in a medieval environment, he was remarkably receptive to modern ideas. Unassociated with the

Government in any way, Phakirmohan, all by himself, was the pioneer in propaganda for the Co-operative movement which was just reaching this country from the West. He was the first among the Oriyas to set up a printing press and publish a journal as a private enterprise and that too on modern joint stock basis, taking the then British Commissioner of Orissa Division as one of the shareholders. He says in his autobiography that on the day his printing press began to operate at Balasore, the entire bazar closed down and half the Government officials took casual leave to see the miracle. For many days, rich folk from the countryside came in palanquins to see Senapati's printing press in action—the first in the whole of Orissa outside Cuttack.

Wherever he was, Senapati made a mark as an administrator also, cleverly tackling many a knotty problem of revenue administration, inter-state disputes, personal problems of the chiefs, even quelling revolts and rebellions. When he was Assistant Manager of Keonjhar State (now Keonjhar district, celebrated for its extremely rich minerals) the Bhuyans, an ancient tribe peculiar to the state, rose in rebellion. The Raja fled to Cuttack, leaving his family in the state capital to shift for themselves. But Phakirmohan, always lion-hearted though physically weak, stayed on in the interest of the Rani and other ladies in the palace. To forestall attacks on the palace by the tribals that were expected every day, Senapati, true to his family surname which means 'general', collected a ragged battalion of the State militia

that had long forgotten warfare, and marched with them on an elephant to meet the rebels in their jungle hold-out. But betrayed by the scout he had relied on, he was entrapped in a mountain pass by the rebels, numerically far superior and with superior dispositions on both sides of the mountain. He was taken and imprisoned in the jungle headquarters of the rebels and might easily have lost his head but for his mother wit. He told the silly-headed rebel chief that he was sure to win and that he, Phakirmohan, would assist him in the administration when he got the gaddi of Keonjhar. After winning the rebels' complete confidence he obtained the chief's permission to send a message to his personal servant asking for a supply of pan and areca nut, which was not easily available in that deep jungle and to which both Senapati and the rebel chief were addicts. The letter was ingeniously worded like this :

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

This letter, coming from the missing Assistant Manager, soon reached the hands of the authorities. Phakirmohan had closed the letter with three bits of wire. That was interpreted as a suggestion to send wires to Government. The ditch from the north was understood correctly as a request to

Government forces from the district of Singhbhum in the north. The betel leaves were understood to be soldiers and the betel nuts to be bullets or guns. Action was accordingly taken and the rebellion was quelled in a few days.

Senapati's Autobiography

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

"In those days, the salary of Government officers in the Collectorate ranged from three to ten rupees only. But with that the people lived happily. Goods in daily use were cheap indeed. Here are some instances : Rice, $1\frac{1}{2}$ maunds per rupee; Moong dal 10 as. per maund; oil 7 seers per rupee; ghee 3 seers per rupee; fish 1 to 2 seers for just one paysa. Only the rich and the upper class officers were the fine cloth that was being manufactured at Balasore. People in the mofussil used rough home-spun, spinning their own yarn.

Only those who had no ladies at home to spin purchased clothes from the market. In the countryside everybody had a small cotton plantation in their backyard and everybody in the family possessed a charkha. The yarn was handed over to local weavers who made the required cloth at the rate of a pice per cubit."

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

His Works

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

His fame now solidly rests on his novels. But for thirty years before his first novel, his writings in this period were confined to a few text-books. To meet the lack of text-books in Oriya when the first few schools were started, young Senapati, bruised himself to save the prestige of his mother-tongue and produced biographies, a highly entertaining History of India in two volumes, even a book on

arithmetic, getting sumptuous rewards from Government for all. Barring these, however, his literary output during the three decades, from 1866 when his first text-book appeared up to 1902 when his first full-length novel was published in book form, was an enormous amount of poetry. Not to speak of numerous other pieces, Senapati translated single-handed the whole of the Ramayana and Mahabharata from the original Sanskrit into Oriya verse just to beguile the melancholy hours of his second wife after the loss of their first child. This is indeed an amazing feat of both physical and mental labour for one man to perform labour that is generally the life-work of an entire team. The Senapati Ramayan and four of the 18 Parvas of the Mahabharata were published and were very popular with the educated people of Orissa of those days. Efforts are now afoot to reprint these translations.

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

His first original poem Utkala Bhramanam (Tours of Orissa) appeared in 1892. It is not a travel-book really but an unusually unorthodox and humorous survey of the contemporary personalities in Orissa's public life, with praise, admiration,

satire and condemnation distributed duly to each. It was written at a stretch while the poet was travelling on elephant back on an official journey and when published soon after, took Orissa by storm. The authorship was kept anonymous at the beginning but discerning readers easily discovered who the author was. Fifty years after it still remains as entertaining as it was to contemporary readers.

His other original poems published in different anthologies are 'Pushpa-mala' (The garland), 'Upahar' (Gifts), 'Abasarbasare' (Days of idleness), 'Pujaphula' (Flowers of worship), 'Prarthana' (Prayer) and 'Dhuli' (Dust grains). Numerous as they are, these poems seldom reach great heights, but their naive simplicity, flowing felicity of versification and their depth of sincerity cannot fail to touch the hearts of readers. Their variety and range, considering the poet's lack of formal education, is indeed amazing. They include excellent story poems for children, satires on dead customs, poems on natural objects, hymns and prayers, poems on the eternal questions of life as also on famous personalities and incidents of international history. The excellent short and long poems in these collections, those on Josephine, Jesus Christ, the Rape of Lucretia, Cleopatra, Tukaram and on the Russo-Japanese war of 1905 clearly display an unusually liberal mind. His friends, Radhanatha and Madhusudana, in spite of their western education which Phakirmohan lacked,

have not dared to go beyond Orissa or India for subjects for their literary creations. They stuck to 'poetic' topics only. But Senapati lifted all manner of subjects under the Sun into the charmed sphere of poetry. If he is the greatest novelist of the common man in Orissa he is also the greatest poet of the common thing.

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

Beautiful Krishnakumari, the queen of
my cottage,
Eternal sweetheart, dear as life and my
constant companion !
You, the apple of my eye, have departed
from me,
Leaving your virtues intermingled in the blood
of my heart.
Never have I come across a more virtuous Lady
than your good self
Never a wife more faithful to her lord.
The full moon have I often watched
in the blue heavens,
The pearls of dew on roses and lotuses
in full bloom.

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

All the other stories of Senapati, like these two, have a unique character of their own, each revealing

an unsuspected dark corner of society. The stories, on the whole, are not personal so much as social, coloured with humour and dignified with a subtle moral.

Senapati's novels appear as the natural development of his story-writing. The strong individualistic style which made him unique among contemporary writers and popular with the general reader, was fruitfully developed in his stories through a long period. This style Senapati used spontaneously while dealing with the common folk. But his pen was also capable of writing in as grand a manner as any, if and when the occasion arose. The way he put the speech of the common folk to unexpected and effective use will forever remain a literary miracle. That Senapati did not have a good formal education was a great blessing to him as well as to his language. Nobody could have even imagined the folk speech of Orissa to be worthy of literary use if Senapati had not used it so successfully. Compared to the over-Sanskritised style of Bankimchandra, the Bengali novelist and almost a contemporary of Phakirmohana, his adoption of the scorned common speech as a literary vehicle was certainly a daring literary adventure.

Like his style, Senapati drew the characters for his stories and novels also out of the common depressed multitude. This undoubtedly entitles him to be called the first proletarian writer in modern India. He anticipates Premchand's *Godan*, for example, by more than half a century, in his

*Chhamana Athaguntha*¹ (Six acres and eight decimals). This novel is a masterpiece of realistic fiction, depicting the sad victimisation of an innocent couple of weavers by the village money-lender. The story in outline is this :

Ramachandra Mangaraja was a poor orphaned boy of the village Sarsandha in the district of Cuttack. Entering into petty business in his childhood he determined, as a sort of revenge for his misfortunes, to be rich at any cost. His village belonged to an estate whose Moslem landlord was living a dissipated life in distant Bengal, never visiting his rural estate but demanding regular payments to maintain his luxury. The wily Mangaraja succeeded through subterfuges in becoming the sole rent-collector of the estate, a very important office in a rural area. And in a few years, he completely outwitted his master, and got the estate for himself by paying the arrear rent at an auction. Not content with that, Mangaraja in his mad craze for aggrandizement started acquiring land and other properties from all sorts of people by fair means or foul. He became the biggest money-lender in the area and the hardest-hearted at that. In a village close to Mangaraja's, there was an old settlement of weavers. They had as hereditary headman one Bhagia, a simple soul, who had some six acres and eight decimals of land for his honorarium. Simpler still was his wife Saria. They had no children and the object of Saria's intense love

1 Selected by the Sahitya Akademi for translation into all other Indian languages.

and devotion was Neta, a lovely black cow. Mangaraja's evil eyes fell on Bhagia's six acres and eight decimals of land, the most fertile and consolidated piece of paddy fields in the area, now adjacent to his own ever-increasing fields. Champa, a devil of a woman, was Mangaraja's maidservant and conscience-keeper. Engaged by Mangaraja to bring simple Bhagia and Saria under his control so as to get their fertile land, this woman made overtures to childless Saria, raising hopes in the simple woman of having a child if she persuaded her husband to build a small temple to the village goddess (who was lying beneath a banyan tree). Champa easily caught the simple weaver couple in her net. They mortgaged their six acres and eight decimals of land to Mangaraja to obtain the funds needed for the temple. But soon came demands for repayment of the loan. Saria's dear little cow was snatched away to pay interest alone. Saria, in despair, went to Mangaraja's house and lay down on his back verandah, refusing to take food. This did not move the stony heart of the money-lender and Saria died of starvation. And Bhagia turned mad in these tragic circumstances. The police came to investigate Saria's death and arrested Mangaraja. After a trial he was sentenced to hard labour. But one day mad Bhagia somehow got out of the asylum which, in those days, was inside the jail and, catching sight of Mangaraja, tried to bite off his nose and limbs. Mangaraja was seriously hurt and developed high fever. He was released from the jail to die ultimately in the courtyard of his own empty and deserted house, repeating over and over

again these last half-articulate words : 'Six acres, eight decimals'.

During the absence of Mangaraja in jail, Champa, the wicked maidservant, having cleverly secured the keys from her master as he was being led away by the police, collected all the money and jewels she could carry and, taking Govinda, a barber servant of the house as her escort and the sharer of his loot, left for an unknown destination. At a lonely wayside inn, they stopped for a night and started quarrelling about which of them most deserved the loot. Govinda was no match for Champa in a battle of words. He sat sullen outside refusing food. At midnight he took out his razor and murdered sleeping Champa and taking the bundle of money and jewellery ran to the river ghat to escape in a ferry boat. While the boat was in midstream, dawn came and the boatman's eye fell upon the blood stains on Govinda's clothing and he began to question him closely. In the meantime the postal runner was seen on the opposite bank. Apprehending certain arrest Govinda jumped into the river, with all the ill-gotten money and valuables of Ramachandra Mangaraja, never to rise again.

His *Prayaschitta* (Expiation) is a picture of the tragedy that came upon a new-fangled English-educated youth through his nonchalant defiance of the old order of things in India. His *Mamu* (uncle) is another picture gallery illustrating the battle of good and evil and the ultimate redemption of a fallen soul through repentance. His *Lachhama* is a

historical novel bringing to life the horrors of Maratha depredations in Bengal and Orissa in the 18th century. In and through the political and military manoeuvres of the opposing war-lords in this book, Senapati has cleverly woven the romantic career of lovely Lachhama, an up-country girl, who lost her entire family at the hands of the Bargi highwaymen, while on pilgrimage to Puri. Her trials and tribulations fill the reader's mind with deep compassion and when at last, at a strategic moment which she had contrived, she kills the notorious Bargi leader Bhaskar Pandit, the reader's mind fills with admiration for her.

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

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

Thomas Hardy of Orissa

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

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



The Many Longings of Phakiramohan

Chittaranjan Das

Phakiramohan had to start with scanty little in life as his capital. There was fear all around him in the milieu of which he was a part. Horizons were very narrow and very few. An orphan from his very childhood, he was forced to move and have his being in a world carved out by his grandmother who had nothing much to give to the child except a bowlful of love and concern which could hardly go beyond the mere domestic bounds. Nevertheless, Phakiramohan had something in him that could cut a definite way for him, could hold on in spite of the very inclement circumstances. Though born into a very closed and small world he could make a breakthrough for himself and prove that life could be lived abundantly and bounteously.

He had very little formal schooling and was already in the midst of rude and real life while he was still very young. But an inner urge pulled him on and the avaricious learner in him always enabled him to go beyond the seemingly determined limits. He started earning before long as a school teacher, but his cravings for more and more learning kept him always on the way to more and more. He was a victim to the many dis-

advantages that falls usually in the lot of the less fortunate in a joint family. He was married very early and was married to a child for that matter. His relationships with her was anything but cheering but happy. But all this was as it were compensated by an invincible inner urge in him to learn; learn as much as possible, and the will to become goaded him unmistakably on. He learnt English, Parsee, Sanskrit and Bengali during his leisure hours outside the school. And what is more, he did in no time find himself trying his hand in writing. In the way of making a debut, he wrote letters to the editor of a Bengali literary magazine being brought out then from Calcutta. Perhaps to Phakiramohan's great surprise, these letters were published and this brought in great confidence to the shy primary school low-earning teacher. This was a time when Phakiramohan read whatever he could find at hand from Bengali literature, and perhaps was lead to assume that all his pasture of creative inspiration really lay there. His maiden attempt at writing was a translation of a book written by Shri Iswarachandra Vidyasagara, a sort of biography written in Bengali to introduce lives like Copernicus, Galileo and Newton to native readers in Bengal. In the foreword to this translation of his, Phakiramohan had written that there was virtually very little difference between Oriya and Bengali as languages. With a few twists in the case-endings and the like, he had said, one could convert Bengali into Oriya. This remark of his was cited in support of a booklet written by a Bengali teacher in Balasore to prove that Oriya was not a separate language. The latter had come

from Calcutta to teach to Oriya boys in the Oriya medium. It has been said that the unfortunate person could not communicate himself in Oriya and hence wanted to get rid of his incapacity by pleading for a change in the medium and thereby joining with quite a few of his contemporaries in Bengal who believed one could do without the Oriya language by providing Bengali as a substitute. The incident must have taught a real lesson to Phakiramohan and made him penitent over what he had written.

The incident must have also been largely responsible in providing an incentive to Phakiramohan to play the role by which we have come to know him in the long run. He was instrumental to bring the first printing press to Balasore and bring out two papers in Oriya. With the blessings and the support of a few British officers then posted in Balasore and Cuttack, Phakiramohan came out in full size with his compatriots who were determined to give the Oriya language a sound and recognizable mooring. The service of the mother tongue was the call of the hour and Phakiramohan was always in the foremost ranks in this service. And in this mission of his also, he used to be inspired as it were by Vidyasagara, his first love. With the latter he believed that the simultaneous encouragement of Oriya, Sanskrit and English was the right way to education and enlightenment. He wanted the windows to be open so that stagnation could be successfully fought with. Even the very style of literary

writing, chaste, limpid, unassuming and yet satirical whenever the occasion permits, seems to have derived greatly from the prose that Vidyasagara also wrote. Following almost the same logic, Phakiramohan took it as a part of his total scheme to make the Ramayana, the Mahabharata, the Geeta and the Principal Upanisads available in Oriya translations. His pioneering zeal also lead him to write text books in Oriya, which were very much in want at that time.

As in the case of Vidyasagara, it was also not very easy for Phakiramohan to prevail upon the then very few privileged who did have access to education to take Oriya language seriously and accept it as their own. As he mentions himself in his autobiography, these people, who were then versed in English and Persian, thought themselves to be a class for themselves. They deemed it below their dignity to even touch the gradually appearing Oriya books and to speak in undiluted Oriya. These privileged few had got the 'new' education either in Calcutta or in Cuttack, and like elsewhere in India, a process of disorganization had already set in society because of them. Those who were the very first to receive English education and to be entitled to the loaves and fishes of the then Government offices had ofcourse a tendency to migrate away from the villages and seek a separate status there imitating the yet higher-ups. A new aristocracy was beginning to form up and the recruits to it were more often than not also from the old aristocracy. Phakiramohan has dealt with this new unhealthy trend in

one of his novels. If this is what civilization has in it as a promise, it is better to live a primitive but simple life with few wants and cares, Phakiramohan has expressed himself thus also in one of his poems. But it is interesting to note that he thought these problems would cease to be and a new era would dawn upon the horizons with the coming of the British rule to Orissa. Let us note again that he was not alone in harbouring such an expectation and that was perhaps the prevalent spirit of the time. To give an example, the then Rajah of Khadial in Western Orissa in a drama written as late as 1904 depicting the misery and suffering of Orissa (the book is called *Utkala Durdasha*, probably after the Hindi writer Bharatendu's *Bharata Durdasha*), brings the events to a climax when the Oriya Language goes to stab herself to death in a flight of despair when, suddenly and in the fitness of things, an Englishman appears on the stage as the rescuer and redeemer uttering the very consoling words that now that the Government had made up its mind and taken a decision, there was definitely going to be an end to Orissa's sorrows and woes.

Phakiramohan had come in close contact with Radhanatha Roy, a senior contemporary of his in Oriya literature, already when he was just beginning to hitch his literary wagon and just striving to attain a take off. They met very frequently to discuss, besides literature, the flood of the new thinking that was so much upon them in the very air they breathed. Balasore was then an active centre for the Christian missionaries and needless to say, the

inhumanities and irrelevances of institutional Hindu religion was enough to attract Phakiramohan towards a conversion to Christianity. He narrates in his autobiography how one day he and Radhanatha Roy together resolved to change over to the new faith. But the latter had also second thoughts and changed his mind soon after. And Phakiramohan admits that he was not courageous enough to go it alone. But his primary hatred towards what he saw around him in Hindu Society stayed on with him. As late as 1909, in the preface to his treatise in poem about the life and the gospel of the Buddha he ascribes all the many ills of India to Hinduism only, at any rate to the Hindu sacerdotalism. But Phakiramohan was not to stop at that much. It seems the quest took him through the various religious scriptures and he wanted to get at the essential aspects of each of them. This led him to the conclusion that we can not be saved by merely adhering to this or that religious denomination only and that the right way was perhaps along an open minded receptivity arriving at its own synthesis. Phakiramohan mocked at all outwardliness in the realm of religion, all religiosity that craved for satiety by a show only. He goes to state in one of his poems that a Muslim who condemns the non-Muslims as nonbelievers, a Vaishnava who has made his entire investment on the outer garb, and the Christian who worships only Christ, these will not at any time enter the kingdom of heaven. Those who will really get a right will be persons who have at once acquired in their lives the faith as upheld in Islam, the love as spoken of and lived by Jesus, the asceticism as practised by Goutama

the Buddha and the Bhakti, the unflinching reverence and surrender as propounded by Shri Chaitanya. Faith, detachment, love and reverence have been described by Phakiramohan as the four fundamental articles of spiritual aspiration and attainment, and he says that we have to get the right clues to them through Islam, Buddhism, Shri Chaitanya's Vaishnavism and Christianity respectively. In one place he has described Krishna and Christ as the two flowers on the same branch. In the firmament of his spiritual alignments, Phakiramohan has Gautama, Christ, Muhammed, Nanak, Sankaracharya, Rammohan Roy and Shri Chaitanya as forming his galaxy of the Seven Stars. Following him in his process of evolution, we have a poem by Phakiramohan where he feels his essential kinship with the very atoms that constitute the world. He wonders if there exists an inner bond because of which the life in him longs for a union with the life in every atom. One can perhaps thus watch a movement, in Phakiramohan, from rejection through aspiration to a supreme affirmation and identification. This will be our discovery if we follow him through his poems.

But Phakiramohan did not write only poetry; he wrote also prose, 'that other verbal harmony called prose'. In fact, to many of his readers and admirers in Orissa, he is what he is in Oriya literature because of his prose, his novels and his short stories. Looking around as a parallel, one can with a good deal of affinity with Phakiramohan think of Alexis Kivi of Finland who is said to have been the creator of Finnish prose, Finnish novel and the

falsifier of the then prevailing myth literature could never be possible in the Finnish language. Fairly much has been done in assessing Phakiramohan's contribution to the birth and development of Oriya novel upon the context of the social challenges that obtained in Orissa at the time, but little has been yet done to weigh him as a poet, to weigh the person, the writer, through his poems. As we have seen, the growth of Phakiramohan was a growth almost from scratch, and what is more, that growth never submitted to any satiety. Phakiramohan was the first writer worth the name in Orissa to open the windows of the Oriyas both ways, inward as well as outward. Whereever he was, he had eyes that could see, he could extend the range of his consciousness many times more than what could be customary with the millieu of his time. We can get an idea of this range from even the themes he chose for his poems; Tukaram, Jesus on the Cross, Cleopetra, Napoleon's Josephine, the Russo-Japanese War of 1904, to cite but a few. The innate humanist in Phakiramohan could associate the loud croaking of a pack of frogs with the arrogance of the few in society who have it very happy while the many are left to starve and to stagnate in all sorts of privations. The rich, he says, give themselves to feasting merrily and have only a deaf ear to the woes of a neighbour who is in distress, and the rich man's palace seems to mock at the dilapidated huts of the poor. With a heartfelt protest, Phakiramohan depicts how the cruel and the well-to-do society shows only indifference to the poor tiller of the soil, the cultivator-farmer whose Job it is to feed every one. Yes, he produces the

food that we all eat. yet he has also to live a life of fear and uncertainty about his own lot. He adds : "Some talk of industrialization of the country while some others talk of Swadeshi; some again show their prime concern for the improvement of the mother tongue. But few give a thought for the farmer. They get their file alright and thus have no reason to bother. And the truth is, the farmer himself having earned no proficiency in delivering lectures no body has any need to think about him !" As a humanist again, he was even ready to go without modern knowledge and modern civilization if they conspired to make man more selfish and indifferent to other men's sufferings.

It has been observed by a critic that the novels of Phakiramohan are full of the anguishes of the society that was around him while his poems are full of the anguishes of the individual that was within him. Speaking upon a frame of sequence, Phakiramohan was mainly a poet during the first phase of his life as a writer and wrote mainly prose in the second phase. One could also say that his prose helped him to grow, to look about with a longer eye while his poetry, or at least a lot of it, tended to cramp him within his small personal life with its personal losses and sorrows. His prose is so full of the love that aspires to widen and expand itself, to grow into and to accept; and his poetry, at least a lot of it, smacks so much of an infatuation as it were, that kept him enclosed, almost visibly bruised and complaining. Phakiramohan's second wife had really meant so much to him and in the realm of his inspirational props, he really owed so

much to her. He took to translating the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* with a view to console her after she had lost her first child. She passed away in 1894, ushering in a phase of dark night in his life and Phakiramohan could never outgrow this dismal phase, except perhaps when he wrote prose. His poetry sought to tie him to the past, to what all he had and kept him down and miserable. The phase of infatuation had probably started already when she was living, as Phakiramohan, the very homesick and lone husband seems to have indicated it: "It is true that one's motherland is greater than heaven itself, but yet greater are one's children and one's wife whom one loves foremost. I have spent my entire life away from them; they are far away at home while I am condemned to wander from place to place." And it seems to have gone beyond him after she passed away. Even the stars in the sky appear to have no lustre and worth for him because his own star, the one he possessed, has faded away. Several of his poems dwell upon nothing beyond a personal woe, beyond this egocentric predicament of a poet who has lost his real moorings in the torrid languishments of his own woe. At one place he is out to curse God because He has snatched away from him the valuable jewel. He had once blessed him with. And at the next stage of this violent withdrawal and obsession, he declares that this world is but a place where unhappiness is the only lot, it is the burial ground of all happiness; you can perhaps compare it with the rainbow in the sky which entices you for only a few moments. One may guess, the heat of his own sorrow that he was unable to bear drove

him at times to serious moments of depression when he thought even of putting an end to his own life, of committing suicide and thought death to be the [supreme solace-giver and redeemer. Only a second thought that the body was an abode of God also and thus he was not entitled to put an end to it enabled him to remain dissuaded from it. One may say, only as far as he wrote his novels and stories, as far as he occupied himself with his creations in prose, was Phakiramohan able to keep himself immune from his own small preoccupations, and then we got the full benefit of his awareness as one that looked out to a future with conviction, with humour and with hope.

But, as we can see if we follow Phakiramohan step to step, he was soon becoming a fatalist, a believer in Karma and its retributions. When he had hardly started with life and was just beginning to look around and feeling himself into his environment, he was once censured as a 'ring leader' by those in the other camp who were afraid of him. During that phase, Phakiramohan was really a representative wave in the resurgence that was then making itself felt in Orissa. After that Phakiramohan travelled out to many places in Orissa, was more exposed to the world outside and had a better experience of the human dust he encountered everywhere. Without his being aware of it, he was soon becoming involved with life, real life, from stray poems, poems that more often than not represented various moods and vagrancies of an utterly pain-conscious mind, Phakiramohan switched on to prose to prove that he was able to rise to the

occasion, that he had not fallen behind. But his moods and the morose hours as it were got the better of him and he was withdrawing gradually to the obsessions of his personal losses. For him, the world was soon becoming mightier than his soul. Even in his novels, he could not help but end with fatalistic consolations, and one wonders, as one encounters at the end of his novels, if Phakiramohan was really in touch with the new winds that were before long to take the whole age with them,

Thus, to conclude, in Phakiramohan, modernism and the modern temper had but a first simmer. But there was so much of tradition-directedness, so much of the old fixations that kept him faltering within him like the many other like him in contemporary Orissa who did not perhaps sense completely what was around them in the world. In Europe it was the day of Marx, of nationalism that gave birth to a new conscience which stirred entire people and made way for a discovery of man as man. The First World War came when Phakiramohan was still functioning vigorously as a writer. In fact the Russian Revolution was an event of his life-time. The Indian national consciousness had already experienced Tilak and Sri Aurobindo by that time. But these were closed books then as far as Orissa and its representative personalities were concerned. The real thaw was yet to be. And even to-day, one can perhaps say with malice to none, we in Orissa are still in the process of that thaw. And what is more, there still continue to be occasional regressions, infantile recessions with a sort of idle and romantic pseudo-nationalism, from which many of us, including those in the field of literature, have not been able to wean ourselves.



Sociology of Phakirmohan's Fictions

Dr. Khageswar Mohapatra

"I don't think any of the contemporary Oriya writers was as genuine an Oriya as Phakirmohan Senapati".

—Pandit Nilakantha Das

Phakirmohan Senapati (1843-1918) is singularly identified as an Oriya intellectual who lived consciously and experienced actively the life in the 19th Century Orissa and wrote about it with honesty and goodwill. The 19th century is a very significant time because thence before political changes had never affected so much the socio-cultural climate of the land. British occupied Orissa in 1803 and wiped out the land from the political map of India by amalgamating it in parts with the adjoining provinces. The result was twofold: the people of those other regions dominated, exploited and influenced the Oriyas; and the cultural identity of Oriya people was shattered. Even sinister attempts were made to supplant the Oriya language. In the midst of economic oppression and cultural humiliation the march of the history of Orissa during the life time of Phakirmohan Senapati was peculiarly wobbly. However, he stood up to the occasion, valient as he was befitting to his title of 'Senapati', in the struggle for self-assertion and emancipation in the political and cultural fields. Along with his contemporary literatures he served the cause of the Oriya language,

but more than others he made his literature serve the cause of the Oriya society. The Oriya society was determinant of his fictional world and his creative faculty was mainly concerned with the location of historical man in the flux and flow of society.

The sociology of Phakirmohan's fiction owes its credibility to the facts that as a poor and helpless orphan of a decadent aristocratic family, a pupil of the half-educated teachers of the 'chatawali' and 'madrassa', an employee of the decaying maritime trades, a leader of the agitation against the linguistic chauvinism of some Bengalis, and as a teacher, an editor, a text book writer, and above all, an administrator in the rank of Dewan, Phakirmohan Senapati directly acquired facts of life in different forms and spheres for fifty years and then portrayed it in his fictions. His materials were men and women seen around, events and incidents occurring daily, pleasures and plights experienced universally. There might not be the technical artistry of remodelling Oriyas in Orissa in imitation of life in Greece, Rome, England or America, or of exploring an image of the Oriyas through the vision of the European intellect. But there occurs in his works an authentic probe of the autochthonous lifestyle of the Oriya people. His four novels depict the social, cultural and political scenes in an extensive backdrop of two hundred years. The short stories numbering twenty focus on specific realities of life and society. Similarly, his autobiography and the travelogue in verse present the living history of his time, and the poems reflect the feeling of an Oriya's

mind. Thus, he emerges as a genuine Oriya personality of the Rennaissant Orissa in every nook and corner of his literary world.

Phakirmohan's attitude and ideology are the outcomes of his participation in the social and political issues of his time. His social philosophy is deep rooted in three hundred years of history. Orissa lost its independence to alien rules in 1568. Its sufferings beginning since then through economic degradation and cultural degeneration culminated in the form of the Great Orissa Famine in 1867. Those who survived the deluge emerged with a new determination to redeem the land and the people from the domination of outsiders. The '*Utkal Deepika*' (1867) as the torchbearer led the way on their movement towards reorganisation of their mutilated land, revitalisation of their language, literature and culture, and reassertion of their right in local administration. Since the beginning of the movement in 1868 till his death in 1918 for full fifty years Phakirmohan Senapati stood at its centre. He, whose learning at the school was measured by the number of lashes he had in a day, whose education had the only objective of writing petitions in the court, whose hands did not touch printed books for fear of losing caste, whose schooling was discontinued for inability to pay fees of four annas, whose first means of earning a livelihood was to supervise mast-making on the sea-shore, whose career began as a teacher with a monthly salary of two and half rupees and who was treated by the missionaries as a wicked and unreliable person, by the Bengalees as the ring-leader and by the Oriyas as an iconoclast

of the social systems, that man, Phakirmohan Senapati, by the turn of time became an ideal teacher, writer of text books, founder of printing press, editor of journal, friend of the English Collector, Vanguard of the Oriya language and literature and a high ranking administrative officer. The development of the national life in Orissa runs almost parallel to the successes in the personal life of Phakirmohan Senapati.

Phakirmohan's social philosophy is based on both agreement and disagreement with the system. In spite of his avowed Oriyaness he was just not a patent personality in the general pattern of the folks. He has no unquestionable support for the social traditions and conventions like an average man. He was rather an authentic individual. He was neither extremely reformistic nor conformistic in his approach and neither traditional nor modern in attitude. His observations of the social phenomena are non-dogmatic and objective. He was very critical of certain aspects of the society in general and personalities in particular. He used to ridicule such things in words sharper like polished razor. The rhetorics of laughter in his style reflect how critical he was of the incongruities prevalent in the social order and individual behaviour.

Nextly, the sociology of Phakirmohan's fictions is to be interpreted in terms of his portrayal of social situations and social beings. The temporal and spatial dimensions of his novels and stories are confined to the end of the eighteenth century to the beginning of the twentieth century, and to the districts of northern and coastal Orissa and

some feudatory states. *Luchhama* depicts the Maratha period of Orissa history (1751-1803), other works deal with the author's contemporary period. The time and space are not just referential elements, but vital to the theme and structure of plots. The social significance of his works is greatly heightened because of total integration of plot and characters with the social and cultural settings—the milieu. For instance, the plot of *Mamu* is based on the same old 'Kamsa-Krishna' type relationship between a treacherous uncle and a virtuous nephew. But here 'Kamsa's appearance in the form of Nazar Natabar Das, a member of the historically evolved new ruling class, and his activities in the changed socio-political situations are the striking features of the plot. Similarly, *Champa* and *Lady Macbeth* may be made of the same stuff, but the former has a natural place in the Orissan context. A character like *Champa* was a predictable outcome of the 19th century feudal society. She not only represents her own class but also a social trait implicating the other classes.

Phakirmohan Senapati is often blamed for introducing too many minor characters and portraying them with full details. But he was probably doing that deliberately as it is evinced from the self-explanation given by him in the context of introducing *Gelhei* in *Mamu*. His justification was that delineation of a complete picture of the society necessitated inclusion of as many men and women as possible in the scope of the plot. *Nakaphodia Ma*, *Sadhu Sahu* etc., are such characters whose absence would not have affected the

main story but would have certainly kept out some typical members of the Oriya society. Phakirmohan Senapati developed a characterology which was never before in the Oriya literary tradition, and formed character typologies on the basis of empirical data gathered from folk-anthropology. In naming, locating, describing physiological features or psychological dispositions, giving historical informations on ancestry or recent status he made his characters typical Oriya beings. Besides a few ideal types like 'Chhaman Athagunth's' *Saantani*, most of them are real types of character. Phakirmohan's social idealism was an offshoot of social realism. As a realist he was both descriptive and critical in approach and ideal in objective.

The Oriya society is basically village oriented. Phakirmohan Senapati has largely projected that society in his fictions. Nevertheless, glimpses of urban life are flashed in some works. Cuttack was then the only town worth naming and was growing as a centre of urban culture. Phakirmohan Senapati lived in Cuttack during 1896-1905 and experienced the emerging new pattern of life and values. He observed two new classes of people surfacing that society—the nouveau riches and the officialdom. In *Mamu*, *Prayashita* and some stories an impression of those people and their activities is imprinted. Phakirmohan Senapati himself was a member of that society, but unlike others he did not lose his identity in the glare of Westernization. He was not opposed to modernization, but he cautioned us by way of exposing its bad effects how best we can profit from it without corrupting and upsetting our tradition and value-system.

‘Novel is a form of social enquiry’ (V.S. Naipaul) is aptly applicable to the works of Phakirmohan Senapati. He lived as a social being and wrote for his fellow social beings. A sociological approach to the study of his fictions leads us towards knowing better the writer, the social contents of his works and the influence of the society on the literature. He was a great artist and also a convincing interpreter of life. His literatures are great for the sake of art and has attracted many for its appreciation. Similarly his works are full of sociological interests. Applying the method of content analysis the literary critics and the sociologists can greatly benefit themselves for objective, systematic and quantitative description of the manifest contents of his works. The sociology of literature is a relevant discipline for assessing Phakirmohan’s genius as a man and a writer.

Phakirmohan Senapati : A Critical Review

Samar Ballav Mohapatra

Phakirmohan was born on the 14th of January, 1843 at Balasore. His ancestors who had fought for the Marathas were granted a few Jagirs. But Phakirmohan lost his parents before he was two years old and was brought up by his widowed grandmother. In his autobiography he vividly describes the struggles of his life. After getting some coaching from a village teacher he joined the Barabati school. Though he always stood first in his class he had to give up studies, because, as he himself puts it, he could not pay four annas per month as tuition fee. After doing some odd jobs in Salt depots and Shipping Company offices he joined the same school as a teacher and got a salary of four rupees per month. As a teacher Phakirmohan soon distinguished himself. In 1864 he became the headmaster of the Mission School. Soon he became interested in journalism and installed the first printing machine in Balasore with great difficulty. Apart from bringing out a periodical he also published a few text-books in Oriya mostly written by him. During this period he devoted all his attention and energy for the development of Oriya language which was in the danger of becoming extinct because of a conspiracy by some Bengali officials of the Education Department.

A turning point in his life was his meeting with John Beames, the then Collector of Balasore. Beames, a great linguist, was writing a comparative grammar of Indian languages. He needed the assistance of someone who had a good knowledge of Bengali, Oriya and Sanskrit. Someone recommended Phakirmohan for this. Beames was so impressed with him that for years he acted as his guardian angel. On Beames's suggestion he gave up his job and joined as Assistant Manager in Nilgiri, a small State in Balasore district. Thus began the next phase of his life as an administrator. From 1871 to 1896 Phakirmohan worked in Nilgiri, Dampara, Dhenkanal, Daspalla, Pallahara and Keonjhar in various capacities.

Those years are important in his life not because he recovered from the chilling poverty of his early life and lived in considerable affluence, but because of the fact that the first seeds of creativity were sown during this period. After an unhappy first marriage Phakirmohan married again when his first wife died. The second marriage was very successful. But soon he lost his first son. In order to console his wife and divert her attention he started translating the Mahabharata and other religious works. In his early youth he was influenced by the Brahma Samaj. But during these years he regained his faith in Orthodox Hinduism—at least in the basic tenets of Hinduism embodied in the Gita. He began composing small lyrics and ballads on diverse topics. A collection of these occasional poems, *Puspa Mala* (A Garland of Flowers) was

published in 1897. Most of his interesting experiences as an administrator are narrated by him with a deep insight into human nature. By the time he retired from active life, he had known life in all its facets. He had known the suffering of the common people, the struggle of the half-educated youths of the lower middle-class for a living, and the lazy life of luxury led by the Rajas and Zamindars. This close acquaintance with life of different classes enriched his experience and matured his out-look.

Thus, when Phakirmohan published his first novel in his fiftieth year he had years of active and varied life behind, which served as period of preparation for this creative period of his career. It is not surprising that *Chha Man Atha Gunth* (The six and one third Acre of Land) the earliest novel (1898), is also best of his works. It begins with an elaborate description of Ramchandra Mangaraj, an oppressive landlord, whose greed knows no bounds. Beginning his life as a village money-lender and pawn-broker he gradually annexed the land of others by crooked design and eventually bought a small estate. *Champa*, his mistress, a woman of easy virtue, always gave him all advice and helped him in the execution of his evil designs. Phakirmohan describes Champa with long similes and elaborate parodies of old poems. While in the beginning she is presented as a grotesque caricature she ends up as a consummate villain. One day posing herself as an auntie she visits the family of another Zamindar in the neighbourhood with whom Ramchandra Mangaraj had some quarrels, and sets fire to their house.

In the same village there lived an innocent weaver Bhagia with his wife Saria. All their property consisted of six and one third acres of land and a beautiful cow. Being issueless they were always worshipping the gods for a child. Ramchandra Mangaraj and Champa hatched out a conspiracy to swindle them. One day Champa persuaded them to build a temple for the village-goddess in order to propitiate her and win her favour. To convince them Mangaraj sent two other accomplices who hid themselves in a trench behind the deity and proclaimed that if Bhagia and Saria build the temple, the goddess would not only give them three sons, but also much wealth. They took a loan of hundred and fifty rupees from Ramchandra Mangaraj to build the temple. With this paltry amount no temple could be built. Nor could they repay the loan. So Mangaraj obtained a decree and in satisfaction took away all their land and the cow. Saria was deeply attached to the cow. Both of them went mad. The Zamindar's wife who was a pious lady persuaded her husband to return them their land and cow. But he paid no heed to her advice. Unable to tolerate the misdeeds of her husband she breathed her last.

After a few days Saria died. Nemesis followed Ramchandra Mangaraj close on his heels. He was charged with murder of Saria and was put under arrest. While he was being taken to Cuttack, he handed over his bunch of keys to Champa. Champa plundered all the valuables and ran away with Govinda, a barber. But fate was not kind

to Champa. She fell out with her companion and was murdered by him. Gobinda, the barber, tried to escape with the valuables. While crossing the river in a stormy night he was questioned by the boatman about the blood stains on his body. Getting scared he jumped into the river and was swallowed by a crocodile.

Ramchandra Mangraj was found guilty of cheating Bhagia and Saria of their land and was sentenced to six months imprisonment with a fine of five hundred rupees. Previously he had instituted false cases against a few persons and got them imprisoned. They welcomed him into their midst with vulgar abuses. One day he was severely beaten up by them. Bhagia who was roaming as a lunatic was also lodged in the same jail. When he saw Ram Chandra Mangaraj he came running towards him and tried to bite off his nose. On the recommendation of Jail doctors Ramchandra Mangaraj was released. But none of his sons came to take him. Eventually he was taken home by one of his servants. Lying on his death-bed he was tormented by the vision of Bhagia and Saria coming to threaten and kill him. Thus the novel is a story of crime and retribution.

In 1901 Phakirmohan published *Lachhama*, a historical novel. Like the earlier novel it also dealt with the theme of crime and revenge. The story opens with an account of robbery on a group of north-Indian pilgrims going to Puri. Those were

the days when the Maratha Chieftain Bhaskar Pandit and his troops were engaged in plundering the northern Orissa and parts of Bengal. One youngman Badal Singh and his wife Lachhama survived, but were separated from each other. Each of them took a view to wreak vengeance on Bhaskar Pandit. Lachhama sought refuge in the fort of Rai Bania held by Oriya Chieftain, an ally of the Nawab of Bengal. The Marathas besieged it, and after holding it for a few days he died fighting valiantly. Lachhama escaped with a few others. By then she had recovered sufficiently from the earlier shocks. She took the garb of man and became a Panwalla i.e., pan seller in the Maratha camp. Her husband Badal Singh, in the mean time joined the Nawab's party and won his favour for his gallantry in a few encounters with the Marathas. After a series of set-backs in the battle of Katwa, the Nawab managed to defeat the Maratha troops in one surprise action. The Marathas retreated and agreed to sign a treaty with the Nawab. While he was going to the Nawab's tent to sign the treaty Bhaskar Pandit was stabbed by both Badal Singh and Lachhama. The novel ended with a happy reunion of Badal Singh and Lachhama with their parents in Gaya. *Lachhama's* plot is too full of coincidences and some times does not ring quite true. Most of the characters are puppets. Despite the imaginary figures of the hero and heroine Phakirmohan's description of the political history is largely true. Still the novel makes delightful reading mainly because of Phakirmohan's inimitable style.

In *Mamu* published in 1913 Phakirmohan shifts his attention to a different kind of social tyranny. If the villain of *Chha Man Aitha Gunth* was a rustic landlord, the villain here is a petty bureaucrat, Natabar Das, the nazar. The locale here consists of both Cuttack and the estate of Natabar Das's brother-in-law in the countryside. Natabar's sister Chandamoni married to a young educated and generous landlord, loses her husband. According to the provisions of law the estate should go to the Court of Wards. But Natabar forges his sister's signature and gets himself appointed as the guardian to his nephews in charge of managing the estate. He exploits the poor peasants and misappropriates the property of his innocent sister. When his nephew wins a scholarship and comes to Cuttack for further studies he does not look after him properly.

Natabar Das's brother-in-law Ragho and his mother-in-law came to live with him at Cuttack. Phakirmohan makes much fun of those uncouth rural folk and their bewildered attempts to get in tune with the town life. The Nazir is constantly embarrassed by their boorish manners. Ragho is Phakirmohan's Caliban—an ugly rustic knave to whom alphabets look like cats or dogs. Ragho's ego is swelled by a few other mischievous persons, like Bhagat and Chitrakala, the Nazir's mistress. They introduced him to the luxuries of town life and persuaded him to steal government cash put in Nazir's custody. The theft was discovered and

Nazar Natabar Das was arrested for misappropriating the government's money. Ragho was discovered in a drunken state from an old dilapidated bungalow. He was unable to give even coherent reply to the questions put to him in the trial. Phakirmohan says he drew everyone's sympathy because he 'wept and brayed like an ass' in the trial. He and Chitrakala were punished. Nazar Natabar Das was released. While he was in judicial custody Natabar repented for his misdeeds and confessed that he misappropriated the property of his widowed sister. Ultimately he goes mad. *Mamu* is full of diverse characters and situations many of which do not have direct bearing with the story. Consequently the plot is not as compact as it is in *Chhaman Atha Gunth*. But *Mamu* is more than story-novel. It is a complicated human statement as well as a comprehensive social document, and it has all the essential motifs of Phakirmohan's novels.

Phakirmohan used to write short stories occasionally which also present the same themes on a smaller canvas. *Rebati* his earliest story, describes the bold attempt by a girl to study in the school and the series of misfortunes which befall her. Ultimately she dies, and her whole family is exterminated. *Dak Munshi* describes the misery of Hari Singh, a postal peon who takes great pains to educate his son. Due to the efforts of his father the son becomes a postal clerk and misbehaves with his father. Some of the short stories like the *Patent Medicine* or *Dhulia Baba* are purely farcical and humorous. In the former a husband is beaten

up by his wife and as a result gives up his bad habits like drinking.

The dilemma lurking in Phakir Mohan's mind while he wrote '*Rebati*' comes to the surface when he writes *Prayaschitta* the most controversial of his novels. Here the story centres round Kumar Gobinda Chandra, the only son of a Zamindar. Sadananda his friend and the villain in the story is an orphan brought up by Gobinda Chandra's parents, is some what like Edmund. Taking full advantage of Gobinda Chandra's zeal for modernity and social reform, he persuades him to marry Indumati, the daughter of another Zamindar with whom his father had some old quarrels. Sadananda gets a lot of money as bribe from Indumati's father to bring about this marriage. This gives a terrible shock to Govinda Chandra's parents. One evening Govinda Chandra in order to spring a surprise on his newly married wife tried to enter stealthily into his father-in-law's house. The people there could not recognise him at night. They suspected him to be a thief and beat him up. Govinda Chandra was taken to the hospital at Cuttack by Saita his faithful servant. All his friends including the ungrateful Sadananda deserted him. Indumati committed suicide by jumping into the river. Logically, the story should have ended here. Phakir Mohan's son who censored some editions of his works published after his death scissored out the latter part of the book. But in the original version Phakir Mohan prolongs the story. Indumati's dead body is discovered in the river beside Govinda Chandra's village, where his father accepts her as his daughter-in-law

after her death and arranges for her cremation. Then the story is dragged into a forced ending and happy reunion. Both Govinda Chandra's father as well as father-in-law become Sadhus and go to the holy city of Brindavan. Govinda Chandra repents for his past actions and when learns about Indumati's death he also goes to Brindavan. In that holy city all of them are united.

Such forced ending is extremely artificial, to say the least. But what really disappoints one is not so much the structural defects as the spirit, the 'metaphysique' behind the structure. There is no doubt that the novel is directed against the twin evils of western education and uncritical devotion to modernity. We have earlier referred to Phakir Mohan's dilemma in *Rebati*. *Rebati* is a kind of martyr against the forces of orthodoxy and superstitions which combine with a cruel fate. But why should Phakir Mohan describe the triumph of such superstitions? Is it because of a certain degree of equivocation in his own mind about it? Yet *Rebati* is successful because this sense of equivocation which itself is a product of psychological conflict between forces of modernity and forces of superstition, is expressed with moving sincerity. By the time he wrote *Prayaschitta* Phakir Mohan had become more conservative. His social criticism in this book lacks conviction and it sounds hollow. For a man who had pioneered the cause of modern education it was not possible to make a convincing caricature out of it. Phakir Mohan is convincing only when he describes the villainy of Sadananda and faithful service of Saita.

Phakir Mohan's Autobiography deserves more than a passing mention. This is his 'David Copper Field'. Though it gives a true account of his life it is so full of interesting details that it reads like fiction. The story of his early childhood is described with a lot of pathos and humour. There are many comic tit-bits like the description of modes of punishment inflicted on erring students in the village schools. His caricatures of the over zealous missionaries and their attempts to speak Oriya are memorable pieces of comic writing. In one of the chapters he describes the tragic suffering of people during the famine of 1866. As an administrator he had to face many difficult situations like the rebellion of the 'Bhuyans' at Keonjhar. He sent a famous code message for troops and suppressed the revolt. The later part of the book describes such experiences. Apart from its literary qualities the book is a great document of social history. It gives us a good glimpse of the social conditions during Phakir Mohan's life time.

In any critical evaluation of Phakir Mohan's work it is impossible to avoid a sociological approach, because he focussed his attention primarily on man in his social environment. He lived in a transitional phase of Orissa's (and India's) history. During his time the old stagnant society was exposed for the first time to the impact of English education and English administration. The British took over the administration of Orissa in 1803 and during the next fifty years tried to consolidate their position and organize their administration. The attempts to spread English education

could not make much headway owing to the suspicious attitude of the local inhabitants.

During the later half of the nineteenth century we find the slow emergence of an English educated middle class in Orissa which championed the cause of progress and social reform. They constituted his reading public and with them like Dickens he shared a common outlook. Indeed, there is a remarkable degree of similarity between Dickens and Phakir Mohan both in their lives as well as in their act. Just as one is aware of a pronounced influence of Scott on Bankim Chandra one always finds Dickensian flavour in Phakir Mohan's writings.

His novels are primarily pictures of his contemporary society, analysed with the skill of an anatomist. They bring out the inherent conflicts like the tyranny of the Zamindars or oppression of the petty officials. But the social conflict in Phakir Mohan is always visualized in terms of a larger moral conflict. Ram Chandra Mangaraj or Nazar Natabar Das are villains not because they represent the class of idle Zamindars or petty bureaucrats but because they are basically bad men. In the shaping of their personality and outlook their social situation contributed little. Phakir Mohan does not subscribe to the mechanistic or Marxist thesis that man is a product of his social environment. This is evident when we compare Phakir Mohan with Prem Chand, the great Hindi novelist. Both of them have dealt with similar themes and have written in the same Dickensian style. Premchand's 'Godan' also depicts the plight of

ordinary peasants and tyranny of money-lenders, and exploitation by the landlords. But Premchand was attacking the institutions or classes which he held responsible for perpetuating social exploitation. In Phakir Mohan's works, however, social injustice is presented in broad humanitarian and moral terms.

The structural principle behind his novels is simple but dramatic. He follows the technique of presenting the story through the interaction of contrasting characters representing different moral principles. Vamps like 'Champa' and 'Chitrakala' are pitted against pious and graceful ladies like *Saantani* (Ramchandra Mangaraj's wife) and Chandamoni. Most of the characters are two-dimensional representing a particular humour. What really sustains them is the poetic quality in presenting them. Here his inimitable prose style stands him in good stead.

Before him Oriya prose was used merely for the purpose of journalism. For the first time it is Phakir Mohan who used it for imaginative and creative purpose. Two factors deeply influenced the making of his prose style. One was to purge it of the influence of Bengali and the distortions introduced by the missionaries. Phakir Mohan explored the roots of the language and exploited the inherent flavour of the colloquial speech to the maximum. The strength of his language is in the tension coming out of a queer mixture of rustic idioms and turns of speech with Sanskritized words. But essentially it is language spoken by men.

Replete with vivid imagery and similes drawn from all sources it has a kind of raciness, warmth and vitality rarely seen in the style of others. When one compares any of his short stories with his contemporary Radhanath's 'Italiya Yuva', (The Italian Youth) one is struck by the difference. Radhanath's prose is cold, literary and pedantic. After Sarola Das, the great epic poet, Phakir Mohan is the greatest master of Oriya prose style, if the ability to exploit the spoken language is the criterion.

Phakir Mohan died in 1918. During the last fifty years Oriya fiction has made considerable headway. But few have presented the picture of the Oriya Society with such realism or authenticity. Nor has any one created such a gallery of memorable characters. Phakir Mohan has set the norm by which all other Oriya novelists are ultimately to be judged.



Phakir Mohan Senapati : The Poet of Pathos and Realism.

Dr. Janakiballav Mahanty

Phakir Mohan is regarded as one of the founders of modern Oriya literature. He was engaged in literary activities during the last phase of the nineteenth century and the early decades of the present century. Through his incessant effort he has enriched modern Oriya literature through numerous stories, poems, novels and translations. His autobiography, novels, short stories and a few poems are regarded as the immortal treasure of Oriya literature. Needless to say that he is the father of modern mass literature. His literature is rich with the portraits of unimportant and neglected characters drawn from the masses. He has satirised the old customs and superstitions of the past and has frowned upon the extrovert and unhappy civilised society of the present as well.

In the last decade of the nineteenth century, specially after the great famine of 1866 a few non-Oriya Officers tried their best to uproot Oriya

language from the curriculum of schools. At that time Oriya text books were practically non-existent. The rich and ancient literature of Orissa did not find publication till then. Young Phakir Mohan could visualize that the richness of ancient Oriya literature can best be realised through their publications. To materialise his dream he, with much difficulty, set up a printing press at Balasore in 1868 and brought out two Journals named the "*Bodhadayini*" and the "*Baleswara Sambad Bahika*".

His first composed short story "*Lachhamania*" was published in one of this Journals. Considering the time of composition this story may be claimed to be the first short story written in modern Indian literature. To meet the shortage of text books for primary and middle English schools of Orissa, Phakir Mohan wrote and published books on history, grammar and translated the biography written by Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar from Bengali. The first phase of his literary activities was thus spent in translations and adoptions. In his translations of seven cantos of the Ramayana, four cantos of the 'Mahabharata', 'Sreemad Bhagabat Geeta' and the 'Harivansa', he has shown his mettle as a translator in his usual simple, easy-flowing idiomatic Oriya.

'Utkal Bhramana' may be considered as the first creative work to have borne the stamp of his originality. The soul of Utkal, its hopes and aspirations are very humourously projected in this long poem. It was written and published in 1892. The next thirty years of his life

since then are packed with immaculate creative activity. His best literary achievements were worked out during this period. But apart from his poems it is mainly through his fictions that Phakir Mohan achieves undiminished glory. Stories and novels were his field of real creativity. "*Chhaman Athaguntha*" (six and a half acres of land), "*Lachhama*", *Mamu* (The maternal uncle), *Prayaschitta* (Atonement) are the four novels written by him. '*Chhaman Athaguntha*' said to be finest and the greatest of his Novels was published in 1898 and the other great work "*Prayaschitta*" was published in 1915.

All his fictions except '*Lachhamu*' are society-oriented. It can safely be said that in these novels, there is a unique combination of idealism, real representation of society with its living characters in simple and colloquial language, deeper psychological study of mind, lucid descriptions, humour and satire. He was the contemporary of the great Bengali novelist Bankim Chandra. Though not guided by political considerations his novels reflect a kind of originality and foresightedness that can be claimed as progressive and modern in any literature. Ignoring the romantic and imaginative traditions of the age of Radhanath, which made princes and princesses as the characters of his works, Phakir Mohan made a departure by introducing the ordinary characters of society such as Saita, the servant, Haribolia the barber, Champa and Chitra-kala, Marua the concubines and maid servants, Ragho, the uneducated rustic etc. Hence it can be

presumed that the literary ideal and creative vision of Phakir Mohan was revolutionary and progressive. Since he had intimate acquaintance with the day to day life of the people of different strata of the society, the varieties of characterisation, natural language according to different characters and clarity of description were possible in his writing. Therefore Phakir Mohan, the real pioneer of mass-literature in Orissa, may rightly lay claims as the 'Vyasa Kabi' for raising the ordinary characters to the epic stature.

The history of Oriya short stories begins with Phakir Mohan. Before him no one ever attempted to write modern short stories. No one after him has written short stories in the manner he wrote. In his twenty and odd short stories he has given new directions to short story as such. In a life stuffed with much experience he began writing short stories at the age of forty five. Therefore the stories bear the evidence of intimate knowledge of human psychology and vivid expression. From the point of view of plot construction, characterisation and technique each story has an individuality of its own. Apart from aesthetic consideration the stories are intended to be reformative in terms of education and culture. The stories on the social, political and cultural life of Orissa reflect the transformation of Oriya society from the old to the new during the century that precedes his times. Phakir Mohan has no peer in the deliniation of characters. Most of the stories like his novels are character-oriented. He depicts successfully the

misery, sacrifice, simplicity, hopes, frustrations, fraud of the simpletons living in the hamlets of the country side.

In stories like *Rebati*, *Randipua Ananta*, *Putant medicine*, *Suna bohu*, *Dhuliababa*, *Daka muni*, *Berei Bisal*, *Bagala Baguli* he strikes a balance between the character and its presentation making it a flawless work of art. These highly integrated creations are pieces of gems in Oriya literature. Besides he has also written a few essays in Oriya.

Let us not forget that Phakir Mohan had also substantial contribution to lyrics in modern Oriya literature. Tossed between ups and downs of life he could never be a poet of futile dreams and imagination. His lyrics are the outcome of deep sorrow and uncountable sufferings. The early demise of his wife and the eldest child made him disconsolate at an old age. This misery and suffering finds expression in collection of his poems like '*Puspamala*', '*Pujafula*' and '*Upahara*'.

He is the first poet of Orissa who composed lyrics on the life of Adivasis, '*Patua Pataie*' is a bright testimony of this category of poems. He is also the first poet to have created extremely readable poems out of the ordinary. Some of the poems can be very useful for juvenile literature. His ballads are another great contribution to modern Oriya poems. As he was an adept in story telling his ballads bear the stamp of beauty and excellence. Even though he was influenced by the modernism of Radhanath and Madhusudan he had great

respect for traditional poetry. He makes ample use of traditional metre and popular sayings of Orissa.

Thus within a period extending from the last decade of the nineteenth century to over twenty years of the twentieth century he has made substantial contribution to translation, satire, juvenile literature, sonnets and lyric poetry in Oriya literature. The Oriya lyrics are based on a solid foundation. The new direction he gave to Oriya literature has an impact on the creative artists after him. Needless to say, Oriya literature is enriched and colourful because of his creation.



The Oriole's Song
and the
Dark Shadows of a Famine :
(A note on Fakir Mohan's Autobiography)
Sitakant Mahapatra

"The paddy stalks were all burnt out by the sun. Some stalks which had emerged either partially or fully looked like white and pale dwarf sugarcane flowers swaying in the wind..... Half a mile from my house towards the south the township of Balasore comes to an end. From there, right up to the horizon it is an endless expanse of paddy fields. In between there are isolated villages like islands in a sea. Those days, around 9 O' clock every morning, I used to go to the fields all alone after a bath and with a small carpet tucked in my arm-pit. There, sitting on the carpet in the midst of the dying crops, I used to pray to God to save the lives of the people Towards the end of *Kartik*, they started leaving their houses — men and women, fathers and sons, nobody waited for the other..... Wherever the tamarind trees had sprouted new leaves, one could sight ten to twenty persons on top of the trees like monkeys devouring the green leaves. And

wherever you looked you could see people reduced to bone and skin, skeletons with sunken eyes. Young daughter-in-laws of ones-affluent houses roamed the streets with barely a torn cloth round their waist and with two pieces of wrinkled dangling skin on their breasts — the symbol of vanished motherhood. Some of them had children in their arms and they were only bone and skin with their mouths sucking at the leathery breasts. It was difficult to know whether the children were alive or dead. Towards the month of *Chaitra*, the figures of death rapidly increased. There were dead bodies on the streets, by the road side, at the banks of ponds, almost everywhere."

(*Atma-Jibana Charita*, Pages 37-38)

"It was in this house that many of the poems of the last days of my life were composed. Some day I saw a row of *Rajanigandha* in blossom. Some other day a bunch of rose flowers. I started writing poetry about them. For almost months on end I saw that daily, punctually at 9 O' clock in the morning, two orioles would come into my flower garden and engage themselves in fun and frolic. I wrote a poem on them. I wrote another poem on how two doves flew away in the sky side by side. I wrote yet another poem on the thoughts that came to my mind as I was sitting alone one evening on the stone embankments of river Kathjori."

(*Atma-Jibana Charita*, Page 169)

The above two quotes give two distinct pictures of the novelist Phakir Mohan's personality as

revealed in his autobiography. The first one relates to the celebrated famine of 1866 when the green rice-bowl of Orissa, Balasore, was in the grip of an unprecedented and severe famine. The paddy fields were all burnt out under the relentless sun and there was death, disease and desolation everywhere. Later, at the age of 57 in his house at Bakhrabad in Cuttack city there is a calm evening, poetry, the roses and the orioles. The young Phakir Mohan of 23 had seen death, devastation and a desperate famine. A mature and a grown up person, he saw the birds in the evening sky returning home, the playful orioles, sitting all alone. In between there were the long years of marriage and responsibilities, of unhappiness, and pleasures, of travels from one ex-State to another, Dampada, Nilagiri, Dhenkanal, Daspalla, Pallahara, Keonjhar. Everywhere the same probing eyes, the same desire to look deep which is perhaps one of greatest qualities of a fiction writer. And in different situations and with reference to varieties of people and events the same unusual and unique view-point which combines sympathy with satire with rare brilliance. Then again all those small little details concerning the prices of rice and fish, the frightening journeys from Bhadrak to Calcutta in a rickety bullock cart, the note on the work of the missionaries, the songs and orations in English tunes, the documentation of Dewani work in different ex-State and many other similar episodes. The picture that emerges is one of a living, soft-spoken, friendly ordinary man fully immersed in the joys and sorrows of living. It is perhaps for this reason that Phakir Mohan's Autobiography is so immensely

readable and significant as literature. It opens up windows on his other creative works in fiction. His themes and approach are generally deeply related to reality and deal with day-to-day situations and the myriad little truths of being. The play of imagination is rather limited. On the contrary, there is a sharp eye on the relatively small events and the apparently meaningless situations. The style shuns cheap emotionalism and melo-drama. A simple, authentic and austere style makes him the unique fiction writer that he is. His attitude towards theme, style and taste, the back-ground of his poems and stories can be seen vividly by a reader in his Autobiography. Related to the genealogical tree and the horoscope prepared by the local astrologer, a golden ear-ring on his left ear, this great novelist of Mallikaspur in Balasore district emerges as basically a man of flesh and blood, sometimes angry, sometimes affectionate, sometimes unhappy and miserable but always a simple out-spoken and ordinary man. No wonder, he became the pioneer of realism in Oriya fiction, the unassuming father of literature deeply committed to the life of men in society. The frolicking orioles in his garden, the absentmindedness on the banks of the river Kathjori are realities to him but equally great or even greater are the realities of the dying crops and his prayer to the Lord to save the unfortunate men in society. Love and compassion was integral to his personality and he was never far from the rhythm of community life. It is possible that if he had kept himself at a little more distance from the actions and reactions of social order he could perhaps have had glimpses

of that other Reality which philosophers speak of. But whatever he had seen, he had seen with a pair of keen, observant eyes and with great compassion. An intimate affection for man and his world emerges from it. Harsh, austere and unadorned in his style. As if he wanted to say: "I have only attempted to describe what I have felt in my blood and bones; I have not inflated anything, I have not exaggerated anything; I have not added the myriad hypnotic colours of imagination nor burdened it with verbosity. I have not tried to speak of man as God, man who has no darkness inside him, who is not involved in his little details or pleasures and pains. No, I have not tried to insult reality and truth with such irrelevance. My autobiography is what I am, what I have been totally austere, completely real and ineluctably outgoing and not withdrawn unto itself."

Not that there are no withdrawn moments. In fact when such moments come they also partake of the same controlled idiom and the same refusal to over-speak or over-describe. Yes, he too knew emptiness and loneliness, the fate that each writer faces at one time or another. The death of Thakurma that simple mother-figure, who had only three little bamboo baskets as her sole worldly possession and yet who possessed an entire world of love, responsibility and endless concern and activity for others. "Thakurma kept an eye on me as a cow keeps its eyes on the calf frolicking nearby. Her death was one of the most tragic events of my life."

Later, another event in 1876. I was in need of the journey expenses for going to Cuttack. My wife took out all the money she had with her, Rs. 14/— and a few other coins, and a Jaypuri medal which she had long in her loving possession. It was midnight. The whole world was plunged in darkness. Every one was asleep at home, only she was awake. Earlier when I was an officer placed in different elevated positions, there were so many to see me off. But where were they today ? Going out of the house I looked back. My wife stood there like a little girl clutching at the door frame almost like a statue and totally broken in pain.”

He again reverts to his wife Krishnakumari's death. “At the time of my second marriage, I was 39 and Krishnakumari only 12. From that tender age she devoted all her energies and attention to my welfare. Today it is twentyfour years she has left me. And I feel the emptiness in my heart. There is nobody in the world to whom I can communicate my anguish. Whenever I am bowed down with sorrow I stand by her cemetary in the garden and derive some consolation. One other reason why I took to poetry was because of her. She was so fond of listening to my poems that in the beginning I used to write poems only to please her. Later, after her death, I wrote poems to assuage my injured feelings. Most of my poems have been written in moods of terrible anguish and restlessness”

(*Atma-Jibana Charita*, Page 115)

Like the empty fields of dying crops at the time of the famine, some times his mind was another lonely

field and it was there that poetry took its birth. Perhaps that is how all poetry begins; at the deepest recesses of terrible anguish. Phakir Mohan had made that journey from the social landscape of his fiction to the loneliness and intimacy of his poetry. No longer it was a peopled landscape, a landscape where things or situations continuously happened. Now it was the landscape of poetry where statements were no longer relevant, where man feels the dying crops vanish in a moment. Yes, even the orioles, the dark shadows of the evening and the river Kathjori— they too vanish and what remains is only a restless anguish, a deep intimate pain crying to be heard, to be understood. Perhaps poetry takes its birth there & Phakir Mohan arrived there towards the end of his life despite all the austerity and rarity of his prose style. Miguel de Unamuno the celebrated Spanish philosopher has said "Towards man's destiny of pain there remain two attitudes which can give at least some consolation—the religious and the poetic." Bringing together the orioles & the dark shadows of death, Phakir Mohan ultimately reached that charmed land of poetry where his powerful characters, Sarias, Bhagias and Ramachandra Mangarajas become only toys in some unknown hands. No longer you can laugh at them, ridicule them. No longer you can only offer them empty sympathies, dry consolations. For they are eternal victims of unknown anguishes inflicted by an unknown power. For they are only men, tragically human !!



Phakir Mohan Senapati - A Tribute

Samarendra Kundu

Phakir Mohan Senapati's contribution to Oriya literature has been outstanding. At a time when the Oriya language and literature were passing through a very critical phase and there was a danger of its extinction, it is Phakir Mohan Senapati who, together with Radhanath Ray and Madhusudan Rao, saved the language and literature from its possible extinction. Indeed, it is amazing to know that Phakir Mohan who started writing at a very late stage of his life and, who had not much of education, could comprehend the imminent danger to the literature and language of Orissa and work hard for its survival. His indefatigable energy and love to preserve and promote Oriya literature is proved when against heavy odds, he established the first printing press and brought out a newspaper named SAMBADA-BAHIKA.

What is, however, remarkable of Phakir Mohan's literary activity is the theme of social

awareness in his writings. It is indeed the outstanding contribution of Phakir Mohan Senapati to Oriya literature that he understood and portrayed this social awareness in a clear, vivid and unambiguous manner. His famous novel, "Chhamana Athaguntha" depicts the social system as it was prevailing then in the context of the Zamindari system and the exploitation of the poor peasants by the Zamindars.

Considering that Phakir Mohan Senapati wrote at a time when the social system centred around the predominant role of the landed aristocracy and that some of them were the pillars of support to the British, it is really fascinating to know that he understood the theme of social awareness more clearly than anybody else. The mischievous ways in which the poor peasant Bhagia and his wife Saria were deprived of their land and the system of justice which could not give them back their land, the satire and the sarcasm with which Phakir Mohan has treated this aspect of social degeneration, is not only remarkable but also an eye-opener for the social reformers of the time. If literature is meant not only to reflect the contemporary social system but also to bring about a social awareness in order to reform the society, then Phakir Mohan's contribution in this regard has

been unique and outstanding. His portrayal of the peasant life and the rural background in his novels is so intimate and vivid and the comparisons and similies which he has used in his writings are so down-to-earth and apt that one can feel and smell the pleasures and sufferings of the native soil as one goes through his immortal pages. As is well-known, his education was very little but his experience was surely too great. It is his matured experience and understanding which, in fact, has given a living portrayal of different characters in his novels.

Apart from ‘Chhamana Athaguntha’, Phakir Mohan’s other novels such as ‘Prayaschit’, ‘Mamu’ and ‘Lachhama’ are also master-pieces of Oriya literature for the vivid portrayal of the contemporary social scene. ‘Lachhama’, a historical novel, describes vividly the operation of the Maratha rule in the erstwhile Orissa.

Phakir Mohan is a versatile genius. He is regarded as the father of the modern Oriya novel, because of his contribution to the growth and development of it. So far as stories are concerned, Phakir Mohan is also the forerunner of modernity in Oriya story writing. One finds a judicious mixture of contemporary scene, social awareness, satire and sarcasm, coupled with a deep commit-

ment to reform the society, as important elements in his stories. I am reminded of a very popular story of Phakir Mohan called "Patent Medicine" in which he has depicted the influence of negative side of the English way of life in the form of drinking habits and how the wife of the Zamindar addicted to drinking is finally made to give up drinking by getting beating by his wife with a broomstick. The whole story is full of satire and the author in his remarkable sense of humour and ingenuity called the strikes from broomstick as "Patent Medicine" for her recalcitrant husband.

In his poems also, Phakir Mohan has demonstrated same masterly element of a poet. His "Utkal Bhramana" is a long poem in which he has described the contemporary situation in Oriya and has made reference to the leading lights of Orissa. There are also poems depicting sorrowful incidents about his own self, about his wife; which are full of pathos expressing the wealing of the great poet at the intransigencies of nature, circumstances and his deep love to his wife.

Next to novel, Phakir Mohan's greatest contribution to Oriya literature is his own autobiography. It is one of the very first attempts in Oriya in writing autobiography and Phakir Mohan has given a very faithful portrayal of himself in his

autobiography, including the deficiencies in his character. His role in the rebellion of Keonjhar against the Princedom where he was serving as Dewan is also remarkable for the skill with which he managed both sides, i.e., the Zamindars and the rebels.

It is time that this great poet and author should be read, understood and his messages in the cause of service of the weak and the down-trodden so vividly portrayed in his different writings be carried far and wide.



**Selections
From
Phakirmohan**

Autobiography

Phakir Mohan Senapati

Translated by Jayanta Mohapatra.

(PHAKIR MOHAN SENAPATI, who died in 1918, was the first important novelist and story teller of Orissa. He wrote about his contemporary social problems in an inimitable idiomatic Oriya style. The following extracts are from his "Autobiography" which is incidentally the first autobiographical writing in Oriya-Eds.)

1. Marriage (1856 and 1871)

When I was thirteen years old, I married Srimati Lilabati Debi, daughter of Narayan Parida of Manikakhamba, on the orders of my paternal uncle, Purushottam Senapati. My first wife was alive till my twentyninth year. She was extremely cruel, proud and sarcastic, and went against my wishes. It was always the intent of my aunt that there should be a squabble between us, husband and wife. This poisonous marital-life became, on my part, more agonizing than the pain I experienced in childhood from disease. The ancient saying used to come to my mind then ;

When one has no mother at home
And the wife bears a caustic tongue,
Better it is to remain in the forest
For the forest and home are the same.

At that time, the only peaceful influence was my grandmother. After her death, staying at home became a great torment for me. My first wife fell sick. A year after it was known that her illness was incurable and fatal. For effective treatment and nursing of the ailing woman, her parents carried her to their house. It was there, in her father's home, that her life came to an end. I was residing at Puri in those days. I have only a daughter at present from my first wife.

Apprehending that my father's name would be effaced and my father's people would be deprived of funeral offerings unless I took a wife again, my well-wishers and relations reasoned with me and began looking out for a bride. The bride was fixed up by the name of Krushna Kumari Dei. I was married to her in the summer of 1871. Krushna Kumari's father Siba Prasad Chowdhury was the head-clerk (Criminal Section) and her brother Prasanna Kumar Chowdhury the head-clerk (Customs.)

The kind Lord had sent Krushna Kumari to me as my wife in order that all the suffering and misfortune of the world be ended, and good fortune, happiness, riches would go on increasing. Truthful, devoted to her husband, and religious, she considered it her greatest duty to look after my

comforts and to obey me wholeheartedly. She was a mere eleven-year old when she married me. When she abandoned this earth in the year 1894, leaving behind a son and a daughter, the sympathy that I gained from the world came to an end. Now my life is filled with emptiness.

2. The Fearful Famine of Utkala *(1866)

With the sympathy I obtained from Mr. Hallam, I went about the work of the school with gladness and enthusiasm. Often we used to have discussions on literature after the school was over for the day. For although I was his subordinate, this great man treated me as his very own.

At this time, the number of converts to Christianity went on increasing every day. One of the main reasons was the terrible famine of Utkala. This awesome affair occurred in the ninth year of the reign** People have not been able to forget this fearful happening till today. Thirty lakhs of people lost their lives during the year. About four hundred and eighty families were wiped out. Many died and the rest scattered here and there. Then I was twentythree years of age; and was the head master of the Balasore Mission School. Fifty years have passed since. Still the events of those days are etched clearly in my heart.

It rained heavily for four days in the month of Bhadra,** and then cleared. After Bhadra, entered

* The old name for Orissa.

** ninth year of the reign of Dibya Singh Deb of Puri (1866)

*** corresponding to August-September.

Aswina. From the beginning, people grew restless and looked at the skies. No other words were heard from their lips, but "water, water." When the month of Karticka began, people lost all hope. For even water would be of no use. The paddy plants had begun dying. Paddy was the sole crop in the District of Balasore. Lives of people depended on it. The dry paddy stalks appeared as twigs of straw. Some of the paddy had half emerged from their sheaths, and some had come out fully, appearing as tiny white fans swaying in the breeze. People had allowed their cattle to stray in the fields. But the cows simply sniffed at the paddy plants and turned away, not touching the plants at all.

Half a mile to the south of my house, the town of Balasore came to an end. Unbroken paddy fields extended to the far limits of the horizon. In between, like Islands in the ocean, lay villages separated from each other. Every day at nine in the morning, I had my bath and then carried a rug under my arm alone to the fields. Spreading the rug on the ground, I sat and prayed God to save the lives of the people.

The day-labourers sold out the few pieces of brass utensils they possessed and managed as long as they could. Towards the end of Karticka, they left their homes and took whatever road seemed easy for them. Man or wife, father or son—none met the other. They moved from door to door, begging for alms. But did anyone have rice that he could give away ?

The farmers according to their position, first sold their brass utensils, cattle, gold and silver, and whatever they had in their houses; and with great determination they stayed on till the end of Magha and Phaguna. At that time, the price of a bullock varied from one to five measures of paddy and that of a cow was one or two measures. The balances were not used to weigh even gold and silver, for none could wait that long for a balance to be brought out. And who was to enquire about the rates? Give as many measures of paddy or rice you can. With money tucked about their bodies, many a middle-class person went from village to village searching for rice or paddy. There was no paddy, and whatever little people had, was hidden away.

By the end of Phaguna, most of the farmers and nearly all from the craftsman-class, started to eat whatever they could obtain. When the tender shoots of the tamarind came out, ten to twenty persons climbed up each tree, and picked and chewed the leaves like monkeys. When you looked at anyone, he was only skin and bone with deep, sunken eyes. Young women, married and unmarried, from many good families, roamed about in the roads with only a six-foot long knotted piece of cloth around their waists. The signs of motherhood hung in two folds of skin over their breasts. Some of them had in their arms a skinny child who hung on to the wasted breast of skin in its mouth. One could not know whether the child was dead or alive. The number of the dead began

increasing from the month of Chaitra.* The roads, the jungle paths and by the village pools, wherever one looked, were strewn with corpses.

At that time, the greatest friend and supporter of Utkal Mr. Ravenshaw, had been appointed as the new Commissioner. Sometime during September or October, a letter reached the Commissioner that there was great likelihood of a famine in Orissa due to draught. Was it necessary for the Government to take action to save the lives of the subjects? If necessary, what ways had to be adopted? The Commissioner called a meeting of all the ministerial staff of his office, and had discussions in order to send a reply to the Government's letter. Both the Official record keepers said, "If a famine arises in Orissa, well, let it, there is no cause for worry. Plenty of paddy is stocked with the Zamindars and merchants of the mofussil areas. With that, it is possible to manage for a year." Now that the record-keepers had spoken these words, the Commissioner's Peshkars had to exaggerate somewhat to please them. They added, "In the house of the Zamindar of Gopalpur are fifty thousand measures of paddy stocked in ten mareyis.** Apart from this, thousands of measures of paddy have been preserved underground. At least forty thousand measures of paddy will come out from the house of Shama Sahu of Bhimpur. Besides,

* Bhadra, Aswina, Kartic, Phaguna and Chaitra—the months of the Oriya calendar.

** Mareyi—Storage place for paddy, made of straw ropes wound in a cylindrical form.

the smaller merchants' houses are fully packed with paddy. Only if they open their mareyis, Orissa can pull through for two months.' The Peshkar from the Political Services Department overstating, gave accounts of lakhs of paddy measures present in people's houses starting from thousands. And from the accounts the lower ministerial staff submitted, it was understood that there was unlimited paddy in Orissa, which would last a year. The Commissioner accordingly wrote to the Government that there may be a famine in Orissa but enough paddy is in the land, and would hold out a year.

The Commissioner committed a grievous error. He should have enquired thoroughly into the matter and then informed the Government whether there was actually that much paddy stored in Orissa, and if paddy was present with certain people, whether they would be willing either to sell or distribute the paddy at the time of crisis. But the Creator had ruled that almost thirty lakhs of noble souls would be wiped away from Utkala. Under such circumstances, from where would the Commissioner get his good sense ?

People started dying from the beginning of Phaguna. The number of dead increased from day to day. Roads, ghats, fields, and forest-wherever you went, you would see corpses lying about. By and by, it appeared as if the land was covered with bodies of the dead.

The rice-rate became ten seers a rupee. For only three days it was three seers a rupee, and that too, was not available in the town. After three or four days, when stocks of rice arrived from Rangoon, it fell back to its usual rate of ten seers a rupee. In the year preceding the famine, paddy was sold at the rate of 150 seers a rupee (according to the Balasore weight-measure) and the rice-rate was one and a half maund* a rupee. The same rice which started selling at the rate of ten seers a rupee during the year of the famine caused this misfortune. Rice, whatever little, was only found in the town, but was completely unobtainable in the mofussils. Those persons who had rice and paddy in their houses in the mofussil, hid them away, most of them dug holes within their houses and buried them.

Towards March or April, the Commissioner prayed to the Government to despatch enough quantities of rice and paddy, stating the actual position that existed in Orissa. We presume that the Government, recollecting the previous letter of the Commissioner, wired back, "You have telegraphed to despatch rice but it is not possible to send rice by telegram."

The excellent trunk road extending from Calcutta to Puri that you see at present was but a trace of a track then, that too, was full of forests, and infested with thieves and robbers. Therefore

* maund, a measure of weight equal to forty seers.

there was no way of bringing in rice or paddy by road. With the abolition of the salt-estate, the generation of sea-going ships of Balasore came to an end. The inhabitants of Balasore had only heard the name of steam-ships, never seen them with their eyes. Still, the Government hired large luxury vessels from Calcutta and began sending rice from Rangoon and Bengal. Free-kitchens were opened at many places by the Government.

When news of free-kitchens spread in the interior, the starved beggars rushed to the town. They had not seen the sight of food for fifteen to twenty days remaining alive with the tender leaves and unwholesome fruits they had eaten. With the hope of obtaining food they hurried to the town. But how could they come so far? About eight hundred to a thousand persons died on the way. And of those who did manage to reach the free-kitchens and had only one meal of rice, some died of cholera and others of dysentery. Their stomachs had dried up. Seeing the rice, each one gobbled up as much as he could. With the digestive-power destroyed, could the stomach bear that much of rice?

Doctors were at hand to treat the beggars with dried-up stomachs. The Government sent for bags of sago-grains from Calcutta and stored them in the godowns of the free-kitchens. For the first few days, arrangements were made to feed the beggars with sago. Still, none of these had any result. Almost everyone died.

The sweepers picked up the bodies of the dead which lay all around the kitchens and at other places of the town, loaded them in their carts and

flung them into the river. The writer has witnessed with his own eyes every day, three to four carts filled with corpses, led towards the river by the sweepers for one or one and a half months.

Out of the rice, the Government had obtained from abroad, plans had also been made to sell rice to the public at the rate of ten seers a rupee, after distribution at these free-kitchens. But arrangements were not made to sell to whosoever desired the rice, nor to sell him as much as he wished. The appointed members of the Relief Committee could only issue tickets for the sell of rice varying from one seer to a rupee worth of rice to persons they approved of and showing these tickets, the people procured the rice from the godowns.

Nothing is permanent in this world. The famine, after all was over. The year after the famine, a number of boys and girls and other persons wandered about on the roads. Calling them the free-kitchen-eaters, the Hindu community drove them away. But the Christian Missionaries embraced them with love, brought them up as their sons, and taught them to be learned and worthy. Is n't the Hindu religion to be blamed for this unjust desertion? For it is clearly mentioned in the Hindu Scriptures that (to save one's own life under adverse conditions) it is not blameworthy to take food which has been touched by untouchables. It has been stated in the Mahabharata, that the King of sages, Biswamitra, in order to save his own life, and had once partaken of dog's meat cooked by a low-caste, and had again regained his exalted position among the great sages. An inconsiderate community is solely responsible for this desertion. ☪☪

The story of a Printing Press

When I was a teacher in the (Balasore) Mission School I tried heart and soul for the spread and development of Oriya Literature. I began with a prose piece called *Rajputrar Itihas* (The story of a Prince). At that time there was only one press in Orissa which was the Cuttack Mission Press. I contacted the press only to discover that they would charge nothing less than four hundred rupees to print my book. I had not the required amount with me at that moment and therefore, desisted from my plans of publishing the book. Later, I got printed a translated version of Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar's Bengali "Jiban Charit" (Lives) in the Baptist Mission Press, Calcutta. This was selected as a text book for the Scholarship Examination. Thereafter I wrote two books, one on Grammar and another on Arithmetic. Both of them were also prescribed as text books in the schools.

We constituted a committee for the improvement and propagation of literature which consisted of six members with Damodar Prasad Das as Secretary and Treasurer. The other members of the committee were Jaykrushna Choudhuri, Bholanath Samantaray, Govind Prasad Das, Phakir Mohan Senapati and Radhanath Roy.

It was resolved in a meeting to print all old Oriya *Kavyas*, *Rasakallol* being given the first preference. Out of the sale proceeds of the printed book other books would be published one by one. A Company would be floated to collect subscriptions for meeting the printing charges of *Rasakallol* and each share was fixed at Rs 20/-. Three or four months of hard enterprise fetched only two hundred and fifty rupees as the capital. Thereafter we started the work of preparing commentaries of the book. Every evening we sat working from seven to nine. The work was hardly finished when we realised that unless the Company had a press of its own the printing of other books would be held-up until all the printed copies were sold. On the other hand, if the Company would own a press, the printing of many books can be undertaken at a time. Some times before a Printing Company had been set up at Cuttack. We decided that a Company in the lines of that one be established at Balasore. The work of preparation of commentaries of *Rasakallol* was abandoned. The amount that had been collected for its printing has not yet been refunded by the Treasurer.

It was also decided to set up the Printing Press at Balasore in 1868 and name it as "P. M. Senapati and Co. — Utkal Press". The share money was for each Rs. 5/-. Four of the members of the Company set out to collect share - capital. Many agreed to purchase shares; some understood the utility and importance of a press and purchased shares; some went in for them with a profit motive.

Some others were coaxed and cajoled by us to do so. Ceaseless labour lasting for four to five months fetched a total amount of Rs.1200/- which we deposited with the treasurer.

No body at Balasore at that time, had the faintest idea of a Printing Press, let alone the question of any knowledge of its working. Neither had we sufficient funds to get a trained worker from Calcutta who would run the press. I, therefore, sent a cousin of mine to learn the work of printing at Calcutta. His name was Jagannath. For one full year I remitted on my own account, Rs. 15/- to him for his maintenance there. He was asked to enquire and find out the requirements of the press and send a list of articles quoting the prices thereof.

Materials and accessories for the press began to arrive by instalments by means of Balasore bound vessels. It took some eight to twenty days for them to reach Balasore from Calcutta depending upon the behaviour of the wind. At long last Jagannath Babu arrived with the types. The total expenditure for all these had so far been Rs. 800/-; the balance of Rs. 400/- remaining in hand. All that we needed now was a machine for printing. On enquiry, it was found out that a machine would not be available for any amount less than rupees seven to eight hundred. Where from would this money come? Should all our labour, all our efforts and organisation end in smoke? We came to know that the Missioneries had a machine at Midnapore. I wrote to them to ascertain if a machine would be available cheaply. To our great surprise, within

four or five days, even before the reply to our letter had reached our hands, the machine arrived in a bullock cart. The price of it, to my mind, would not have been more than Rs. 150/-.

We had a house of our own in the central Motiganj area of Balasore Town. On request, my father's elder brother agreed to let the house to us. We decided to set up the press there. Jagannath Babu, the printer immediately set himself to the task of arranging the house for the purpose. Six men were employed to run the press. The printer was to teach them their work.

With very great joy and enthusiasm we announced the date of inauguration of the press. Half the shops in Motiganj Bazar were closed on that particular day. The elites of the town turned out in large numbers to see the working of the press. The road in front of the house was jam-packed. There was no passage even for the passers-by. The work of composition was over and the format was imposed on the machine. Ink was smeared on it by means of a wooden roller. Finally paper was placed on it. Hundreds of people stopped there breath and anxiously waited to see the outcome of it all. But lo ! when the paper came out there was not a single letter typed on it. The whole page was smudged and smeared with ink. The printer himself stood flabbergasted and looked like a wooden statue. The world was dark for us. Not a word was spoken for grief and shame. Our plight could easily be imagined. To add to our miserie

hundreds of enquiries and questions were showered on us. "Where is the printed matter ? Everybody asked. With a heart tortured in the agony I replied with the tongue in my cheek "Only ink has been applied today which in course of time, will turn into letters."

Later, we discovered that the Midnapore press had cast that machine away as they considered it useless. So we concluded that no printing work was possible with the condemned machine and a new one should be procured from Calcutta. Otherwise all the work, labour and money invested in the course of one full year would go in vain. But a new machine would cost Rs. 800/-. Wherfrom could we get such a huge sum ?

One misfortune brings another in its train. It was the month of Jaistha (May-June). The terrible summer heat, running about day and night, irregular food & sleep told severely on my health and I suffered from blood dysentery. One day, it so happened that I had to stand for a long hours by the machine to set it in order. So absorbed in my work I was that I did not know that all my clothes had become wet with perspiration and that the ground had been soaked with blood that dripped and percolating through my cloth. Coming home I fell down unconscious. Those days I worked from morning till 9 O'clock in the night and, no wonder, I became senseless due to fatigue whenever I reached home. But I never let anybody know my miseries. On the other hand, I always talked about

the press with confidence to people. I continued to hold my steering with strength. In this misfortune or predicament, I determined either to set up the press successfully or to give up life in the attempt.

It is an old saying that God always comes to the rescue of those who devote themselves to honest and selfless endeavour. In this critical juncture, Kishore Mohan Das, brother of Madan Mohan Das stood by me as a true friend and benefactor. He came forward to advance Rs. 800/- to me without any document the moment I approached him for help. Immediately I secured one Super Royal Albion Press from Calcutta.

The rains had now set in. So no transport by the Balasore bound vessels was possible. The machine had, therefore, to be brought from Calcutta by bullock cart. The Jagannath Road is at present macadamised. But those days, it was a kutcha earthen road which for all practical purposes was unpassable for most part of the year. The bullock carts got stuck up in the knee-deep mud and pot holes. These had to be raised with the aid of labourers from neighbouring villages. The cart loaded with our press machine sank into mud right in the centre of the road passing through Dantan Bazar. It took some eight days for fifteen to twenty labourers to make a passage for the cart to cross only the bazar portion of the Road. In twenty two days time the machine reached Balasore.

All troubles and difficulties were over with the arrival of the new machine. The apprentices had already learnt their trade. Good printing both in

English and Oriya was a reality. One day, Mr. Bignold, the Collector of Balasore sent for me and offered his hearty congratulations to me and ordered many official forms to be printed in our Press. We made good bargain by printing those forms in our first endeavour.

Like people streaming to a place of pilgrimage to see the car festival, crowds of curious men and women thronged to our press continuously for two or three months to see the working of the press. Even rural zamindars came down to Balasore in palanquins to see the wonder. The press continued to be a draw for people of the locality for many months. Today when there are so many printing presses this may appear strange to many. But is it not an historical fact that their Majesties the King and Queen of England paid visits to the first Printing Press of their country to see its working ?

Six month, after the starting of the Press, Mr. Bignold, the Collector, John Beams, his successor and Mr. T. Ravenshaw, the great patron and benefactor of Orissa jointly paid a visit to our Press one morning. They saw everything, heard a brief history of the Press and were pleased to give us a reward of Rs. 10/-. In stead of appropriating the amount we diposited it in the company account in the shape of two shares to the creadit of the Saheb. When the company was liquidated we were able to return Rs. 30/- to him.

On the occasion of the Durga Puja, many distinguished persons used to come to Balasore as guests of Madan Mohan Das, an eminent bussinessman. Babu Radhanath Ray and myself happened to be present at their function. In an open meeting, Babu Radhanath Ray looked at me and said, "The way you have set up the press should for ever be recorded in letters of gold in the annals of our country."

The press continued to work smoothly & efficiently. It yeilded much profit too. The Cuttack Printing Company used to publish some time before, a weekly literary magazine called "Utkal Dipika." The Board of Directors of our Company decided in favour of bringing out a similarly journal on fortnightly basis. This would be called "Bodhadayini abom Balasore Sambad Bahika" the first part of which would be devoted to literature and the second part to news items. The paper saw the light of the day but there was noticed a dearth of contributors. I used to be thoroughly rattled after my work in the school and the press and so, I was hardly able to do anything at nights. The paper became irregular in its publication. There were, in all, forty, to fifty subscribers and of them only eight to ten paid their dues.

The Raja Saheb of Daspalla and his Dewan.

At long last we reached (after a perilous boat journey upstream lasting for eight days through the gorges and caverns of the Mahanadi) Belpara. The town of Daspalla was about fourteen miles away from this place. An official was already there with a palanquin to receive me and take me to the Garh.

The next morning at about eight, I arrived at the place allotted to me for my stay. The ration supplied from the Palace stores was enough to occupy one full room. It was the custom with the Rulers to send such quantities of things for their guests. The ration for one day was sufficient to last a month. Moreover, the experienced Palace Store-keeper arranged things in such a way that the guest never felt the want of any thing at any time. From toothpick to the toothbrush—everything was there.

At about nine or ten, the same morning I proceeded to interview His Highness. The Raja-Saheb sat on a cushion leaning against a huge pillow. All his officials such as the Steward, the

Storekeeper the Granary manager the Accountant were present. They sat in the front some ten feet away from the Ruler. They squathed on the bare ground. Behind the Raja, stood eight to ten attendants. Many of the village headmen had also come to have a darsan of their new Dewan. There was a seat about six feet to the Raja Saheb's right front. This was meant for the Dewan.

As soon as I was seated, the Raja Saheb began to scrutinise my physical features from tip to toe again and again. While his eyes were glued to my body, his fisted right hand was busy behind his back turnnig the thumb right and eft. Furtively he cast significant glances at the admiring attendants and Padhans. The Raja Saheb had a fantastic notion that all thin people were dull witted and therefore, concluded that I was an idiot as I was lean & thin. So he advised me to take a good quantity of ghee to make myself intelligent. His argument was that ghee would increase my fat; and fatness, in its turn, would swell my wits. For a long time therefore, two seers of ghee were regularly supplied to me every day.

Hard labour and practice lasting since his childhood had enabled the Raja Saheb to initial his name. Once Mr Ravenshaw the Superintendent, Fuedatory States had paid a visit to Daspalla. When several complaints were lodged betore him against the Ruler's unjust and whimsical decisions, the Superintendent said to him "Look here, Raja Saheb !

you are illiterate and cannot, therefore, run the administration of your state. We shall soon be sending you a Dewan". It was too much for Raja Saheb to stand the remark. Turning to the Saheb he said "What ! ourselves illiterate you say ! Bring us a piece of paper and see if we cannot write down not only our name but also Killa Daspalla and Joramo." It is a matter of regret that the Saheb did not think it necessary to test the great knowledge and learning of the Raja Saheb.

Once the Raja Saheb had been pleased to pay an august visit to Cuttack. He came to know some how the existence of a College called the Revenshaw College. His Highness immediately pleased to say, "We understand that there is a college at Cuttack where students read and write. We would like to see what sort of thing it is". When the Raja Saheb arrived at the college, the Professors came out to receive him cordially and showed him round the classes and the buildings. Thereafter they seated him in the Library Room and placed before the distinguished guest the Visitors' Book, inkpot and the quill-pen. The Raja Sheb saw the book and said "What's all this ?" The reply made was "Your Highness ! This is the Visitors' Book where, your Highness, if you so please, may record your impressions". Pat came the reply "most certainly, we would like to pass orders on our behalf. Tell us where we shall write". A Professor opened the Book and showed the pages. The Raja Saheb forthwith proceeded to record "Sri Chaitanya Bhanj Deo, Raja, Killa Daspalla

Joramo". He went on scribbling page after page non-stop until three or four pages had been covered. He then laid down the pen and ordered for departure. Those days all Professors of Ravenshaw college were Bengalees. They had noticed the speed and fluent movement of His Highness' hand and thought that he had recorded many things. They sent for the local Pandit to decipher the writings in Oriya. No wonder all of them burst out into peals of laughter when they came to know the contents.

One chief defective trait in the Raja Saheb's character was that he would do exactly opposite to the advice given to him by any body. The Royal Physician had many a time told me that none but he could treat the Royal master. When I asked him the reason he told me that the Raja Saheb would do just opposite the advice rendered by the physicians. That is why he always prescribed and recommended heavy diet like rice and sour milk when he actually wanted him to fast. The Raja-Saheb would immediately protest saying, "What ! Are we not the Raja Saheb ! Should I do what physicians ask me to do We would go without any food today". And he fasted for the day. All the activities of the Ruler were then very ridiculous.

The Raja Saheb's limited knowledge can be known from the following dialogue. During the first year of my Dewanship, Mr. Metcalf, the Superintendent, paid a visit to Daspalla. The following conversation took place between him and the Raja Saheb.

Metcalf— Govt. have sanctioned construction of a Railway line from Kharagpur to Bilaspur.

Raja Saheb— Railways, you say ! well Saheb, can waggons like that move on the rice fields ?

M— No, No, there will be rail tracks for them.

R— In that case, there would be huge expenditure, say five thousand rupees.

M— No ! No ! Raja Saheb, much more.

R— Ten thousand ?

M— Much more, very much more.

Within two or three months of my taking over charge as Dewan, a Padhan of Joramo area of the state came to see me. In course of our conversation he mentioned to me a case that had been filed against him by the Government. One could get a glimpse of Raja Saheb's system and procedure of judicial administration from the facts of the case which are as follows:—

A mischievous tell-tale had given the information to the Raja Saheb that the Padhan of Joramo had painted two lotuses in the front walls of his house. This was provocation enough for the Raja-Saheb to take action against the Padhan. For, lotuses could be painted only on the walls of his palace. How could a base born Padhan have the guts to paint lotuses on his walls ! Surely this was a clear proof of his insolence and pride. At the royal command two of his personal attendants went out, caught hold of the offender and produced him before their master. But, by that time the

Raja Saheb had conveniently forgotten the lotus story, When he cast a glance at the Padhan he charged him with "You Padhan ! How is it that you have become so fat ? How much ghee do you eat everyday ?" Greatly frightened the poor Padhan pleaded innocence with folded palms saying, "Where from shall I get so much money as to eat ghee ?" The Raja Saheb said, "We the Royal Highness are pleased to observe that the man has told a lie forgetting all our behests in this regard. Our belief is that he takes ghee in great quantities, otherwise how could he be so fat ? Hallo, my men you tell us now if this man does so or not". With his unique sense of judgement the Raja Saheb gave the verdict that the Padhan had looted other peoples wealth and property and had become fat by eating ghee. So he commanded that his own men should proceed and siege and forfeit all his hoarded wealth.

Luckily for the Padhan, there was an old accountant serving there since the time of the predecessor of the Raja Saheb. He was fully conversant with the mood and nature of the present Raja Saheb and was the Padhan's kith & kin. He came forward and stood before the Raja Saheb with folded palms and said, "My Lord ! We would certainly obtain all his wealth but before we do that let us refer to records and documents and ascertain exactly our dues. Thereafter, we may bring as much as we like and the Commissioner Saheb will not be able to find fault with us. The Raja Saheb said "That exactly is our command".

The Padhan went away, collected huge quantity of palm leaves and began preparation of Account Books. He sat at a place in full view of the Raja Saheb and went on with his work of scribbling throughout the day. He took a full months time to get the accounts ready.

One fine morning the Accountant found an opportune moment, called the Padhan to Raja Saheb's presence and demanded the production of account books from him. The Padhan placed before the Ruler five to six loads of palm leaves. At Raja Saheb's command the Accountant began to explain turning over page after page of the Account Books in every page of which was written only this sentence "O God! Save me." The Accountant laughed in his sleeves and placed them again before the Raja Saheb's feet.

His Highness asked ? "What are you finding ?"

"As much so much", was the reply.

"What's What ?" the Raja asked.

"Your Highness. The Padhan has deposited so much as much he had collected. So there is nothing left for us to appropriate."

The Raja Saheb was then pleased to order "Looking into the Padhan's Account Books ourselves we order that so much is as much and that the Padhan had not misappropriated anything."

The Padhan was discharged. Lots of people of Daspalla were thus the victims of whims and caprices and were for no fault ill-treated and

totured. So they had approached the Superintendent who, in his turn, appointed the Dewan to give the ruler proper advice and deal justice to people and maintain law and order.

I noticed that there were very few cases and disputes and those too were not at all complicated ones. People, for the most part, were Khonds and Khariars. In a dispute, all the parties, plaintiff, defendent and the witnesses told the truth and there was no discrepancies in their statement.

Most of the tenants who belonged to the Khond tribe called themselves Zamindars and did not pay anything to the ruler by way of rent or tax. Once the then Commissioner, Mr, Ravenshaw summoned all the Khond Padhans to his presence and said. "It is not good on your part not to pay anything to the Raja in whose estate you reside. Pay him something, say, a Kataki seer of paddy per pair of bullocks. A tenant should pay as many Kataki seers of paddy as the pairs of bullocks owned by him." All the Padhans put their heads together and said "The Saheb wants us to pay, we shall pay; but we can't pay in Kataki measure." They knew not the exact shape and size of the Kataki measure. They replied to the Saheb and said, "We are ready to pay at the rate of one 'tambi' of paddy per pair of bullocks but can't pay in Kataki seer measure." I do not exactly remember if a 'tambi' measure was thrice or four times the Kataki measure. The Saheb worked it out in no time and readily accepted their proposal.

I went to conduct an enquiry into a boundary dispute between Ghumusar and Daspalla. At that time I had an opportunity of seeing Khond villages, their places of worship. Turmeric was their principal crop. To increase the colour of turmeric they offered human sacrifices to their Gods. In 1863, the Government prohibited such inhuman practices and Government forces rescued many children reserved for such sacrifices in Khond areas. I have seen with my own eyes some such children as were being educated under the benign care of Missioneries.

Once I had come home on leave. Radhanath Ray, who had concluded his maffusil tours was about to return to his head-quarters at Cuttack. My period of leave was due to expire and I was also to return to duty. Accidentally we met each other at the Balasore-River-Steamer Ghat. At about ten in the morning, both of us boarded the steamer for Cuttack.

At about eight o'clock in the evening, when our steamer had just crossed the Matai river and entered the Dhamara mouth, there arose a terrible storm. The small Canal steamer we were in began to toss violently in the huge waves of Ghadiamal. The passengers became panicky as the steamer was on the verge of sinking. Ghadiamal was not a separate or independent river. The confluence of the Brahmanj, Baitarani, Salandi and Matai in their sea-mouth was known by that name. Even the boatmen were mortally afraid of this spot for it was the abode of all the crocodiles and alligators on earth. Radhanath Babu & myself were the

only two occupants of the second class cabin. He gave up all hope of life and as he became cold he unfurled the creased front portion of his dhoti and wound it round his frail body and hurriedly tied some opium to the cloth end. He had been attacked by tuberculosis when he was only seventeen or eighteen and since then he was taking opium regularly under physician's advice. Whenever some sound would come from any side he would look startlingleat that direction apprehending some disaster. He was still to write his epic. "The Mahajatra" (the last journey) and, therefore, his own last journey was delayed. It appeared to me I wasalso saved on account of his virtues.

Not this time alone, I have, on many occasions, been saved from innumerable perils. I have had hair-breadth escapes thrice from snake bites, twice from boat disasters and once each from the clutches of a bear, a wild and mad elephant, a bison. There had been narrow escapes too from poisoning, daggers and arrow from a murderer's bow.

Joramo which was a separate unit of Daspalla estate was on the northern banks of the Mahanadi. There was special revenue settlement for this area. But there was no cash payment to be made to the Government. The estate had to supply year after year logs and timber to Puri Lord Jagannath for the constructions of Chariots. This arrangement had been existing ever since the time of independent Rulers of Orissa.

Anugul District was situated to the north of Daspalla. The Forest Department Officials of the Government had allowed the reserved jungles to straggle right into the homestead lands of the Joramo Villagers with the result that domestic cattle strayed into the forests as soon as they were let loose from their sheds and were impounded. Moreover, the lower officials like the Paiks drove away herds of cattle on the pretext of non-payment of Government dues. The poor Khond tenants were thus greatly harassed in having to pay the penalty for no offence of their own. They had times without number applied to the Durbar for redress but to no effect.

I brought this to the notice of the Superintendent of Estates through the Raja Saheb. Orders were passed by the Government to the effect that the Tahsildar and Forest Officer of Anugul and the Dewan of Daspalla would make a spot enquiry and report. On the date fixed for the meeting I arrived at Joramo where the Tahsildar and the Forest Officer were present. The Tahsildar, however, put me in sole charge of the demarcating operations and went back to Anugul. I demarcated twenty to twenty five miles of boundary with reference to an old survey map and along an old boundary line. Later on there arose some dispute which lasted for some time. But two years after, when I had left the Estate, the question was finally disposed of by the Superintendent and his decision upheld my demarcation line as the correct one.

After attending a meeting at Anugul I returned to Joramo. There were several mango

groves along the Mahanadi River Bank. I spent a fortnight in one of these. Not far from the grove where I encamped was a breach in the embankment of the river through which flood water rushed in and submerged cultivated land. I sent for the people and with their help and assistance the breach was closed by a stone embankment. Rocks and boulders were fetched from the neighbouring hill.

People still remember with gratitude the little good work I did for them. They have named one hillock after me. They call it Fakir Mohan Hill and the stone embankment as Fakir Mohan Bandh.

The inmates of the Daspalla Jail were mostly 'Pan' by caste. These 'Pans' were of two classes, the weaver class and the oriya class. The former did not steal, weaving was their chief occupation. The latter class were thieves by profession. The Jail administration in those days was usually very loose and chaotic. Prisoners were allowed to go home on leave to celebrate marriages of their children or to participate in social functions. They returned of their own accord after the ceremonies. The Jailors had some chosen and earmarked Jail-birds who were usually let loose after nightfall. Next morning all of them would be found sleeping in their respective places. The stolen property would be equally divided between the thieving prisoners and Jail-keepers.

I had started construction of a road which would have linked Madhuban, the headquarter of Daspalla with Bargada Village. This work was being done with the help of prisoners. About half a mile

of the Road had been done when the Raja Saheb was blessed with a son. On this happy occasion, the ruler freed all the prisoners who merrily went to their homes and the road construction work ended then and there.

The people of Daspalla had never heard of cabbages, cauliflowers, peas, lettuce, beet or reddish. I was the first to introduce all these crops into the estate. Try as much as I like, I failed in all my attempts to persuade the Raja Saheb and the people to eat these vegetables. One day a Padhan of a particular village approached me and said, "Please do not sent cabbages for us. We tried various preparations but sorry to say we could not relish it. Only yesterday I got them cooked with broken rice and dried mango chips, but failed to remove the foul smell." I grew cabbages extensively but allowed cattle to graze them away. I was once surprised to see Khond girls wearing bits of cauliflowers to decorate their dark braids of hairs.

Difference between the Raja Saheb and myself began to grow. Once a batch of Sadhus appeared at a village where lived a rich milkman. When he did not pay enough money for their entertainment two of the Sadhus entered into the rich man's house and began to break and pull down doors and pillars. The milk-man caught hold of them both and dealt severe blows where upon they approached the Raja Saheb and lodged a complaint before him. When the personal attendants whispered into the Raja Saheb's ears that the milkman had herds of cattle and hoarded

much money the Raja Saheb exclaimed with surprise and excitement 'What! a mere cowherd has the guts to manhandle holy saints!' Looking at the Police Sub-Inspector he ordered, "proceed immediately and seize all his money and cattle and bring them here." The helpless man came running to me for protection. I went to the court and stopped all proceedings for the seizure of his property. But the Police Sub-Inspector pleaded for the Sadhus in my presence before the Raja Saheb "Your Highness! Piety and religion in the state would disappear if no redress is given to them for Sadhus would never come into our Daspalla." I silenced the policeman with threats. The two complainants who had recieved the thrashings stood there. I told them straightaway "Unless you leave the estate just now and proceed elsewhere I would put you to prison." Sheepishly they left the place. Differences began to increase from such petty trifles.

Mr. Metcalf, the Superintendent had paid a visit to Daspalla. The Raja Saheb told him, "Saheb, we can not pull on with this Dewan. Give us another." The Saheb told me "Well! I find no fault with you but since the Raja does not like you I don't think you can work smoothly here." He appointed me to the Bamanghati Sub-division of the Mayurbhanj State and appointed a clerk of the commissioner's office as the Dewan of Daspalla. In January 1866, I handed over the charge to the new Dewan and came away to Cuttack.

I was glad that I was appointed to a place close to my native place. But on my arrival at Cuttack, I heard that the Govt. had already appointed the youngest brother of late Maharaja Krushna Chandra to the Post at Bamanghati. I had therefore to sit idle at Cuttack. ●

(From "Autobiography")

The Dusty Fakir

Hanumanji of Degaon was a proved deity, a living God. Unlike other gods of today, who belong to the Age of Sin and lies, he had been existing there since the Age of Piety and Truth.

The name of the Mahant of the temple was Hanuman Das. He too was as much powerful as the deity. Being an oracle or a prophet all his words and biddings instantly came true. So his name and fame spread far and wide.

The Marhatta Chief of Nagpur heard of his prowess and came to have his *darsan* and pay homage. It was morning when he arrived. The Mahant Maharaj was sitting at that time on a mattress and was preparing for a smoke of Ganja. Looking ahead, he saw a richly caparisoned tusker elephant. On it was held aloft the golden umbrella, beneath which sat the great Marhatta Chief. The Mahant had a good look of him and simply uttered the words "Move on, my mattress, move on!" The poor mattress had no option. It could not but obey His Holiness' Commands and in no time it moved towards the Imposter. The

mattress was proceeding from one direction and the elephant from the other. They met half way. Hardly had the Marhatta Chief seen this miracle when he jumped down the elephant and bowed his head down to the ground craving the Mahant's blessings. The Mahant was pleased to bless him and said "Long live, my child, long live !" and asked him to get up. The Chief rose to his feet and straightway signed a copper plate grant of four hundred acres of rent-free land. This Mahant sat on the *gadi* for twelve hundred years and twelve months and twelve days. He was a selfwilled person. Being tired of living in this sinful world, he sent a message to Ajodhya wherefrom came forthwith his successor-disciple. He conferred the *gadi* on him and straight ascended the high heavens.

His disciple was called Markat Das Mahant Maharaj. By viture of the powers and influence of the great *gadi* which he occupied, he too, became as powerful as his master. It was during his regime that the British Rule came to being. The *Saheb* of Cuttack remarked irreverently in broken Hindi "How is it that a Hindu Fakir enjoys so much of rent-free land? Summon him at once to our presence. We shall set him aright." The Mahant received the summons in due course and moved in a procession riding on horse back. Flags and banners fluttered before him in the breeze and shouts of "Glory be to the Lord" filled the air.

It was the month of *Bhadra* (July-August). The Mahanadi, which was in full spate, was about to overflow the bank. Heavy rain and storm had also taken possession of the scene. The Boatman said "for all the world, I shall never let loose my boat." So how could the Mahant cross the great river? Cool and unperturbed he said "No fears." Slowly he brought out the tiger-skin which he had carried under his arms and spread it on the current. He seated himself on it and asked all his personal attendants to embark. One of them held the silken umbrella over his head and two others rowed the skin-boat across.

The *Saheb* who had encamped on the other side of the great river espied the party in the midstream through his binoculars and asked in surprise "What's that?" Bystanders replied, "That's the Hindu Fakir coming in a procession." The *Saheb* immediately toppled over the chair and came down to the bank to receive him. He took off his hat, saluted the great Mahant thrice and submissively said, "Hallo Fakir Saheb! You retain all your lands." This Mahant sat on the gadi for one thousand and five hundred years.

After him ascended the gadi yet another powerful disciple called Jambuban Mahant Maharaja. Yonder forked tree that grows behind the temple had its root in the little twig with which the Mahant scrapped his tongue. It sprang into a huge living tree as soon as the Mahant had poured a drop of water on the split twig.

The present Mahant is Bandar Das Mahant Maharaj. Nowhere on earth will anybody come across such a massive figure and gigantic personality. He is five hands tall, his cheeks and chin touch his chest. The neck is scarcely visible. His arms are as big as other people's thighs. The belly is like a huge pot capable of boiling five nouties (20 Kilos) of paddy. A stranger, at first sight, would think him to be nude. No ! this is not a fact. He has undoubtedly put on a dark loin cloth, three feet long and six inches wide. But as his thighs touch each other and the belly protrudes downward the loin cloth is scarcely noticed.

Immeasurable and strange are the magical powers of this Mahant too. There are so many richly furnished beds in the temple chambers but the Mahant prefers rolling in the dust to sleeping on one of these. So he is always dusty all over. He neither bathes nor washes himself. So he is called the Dusty Fakir. Though the math is rich in wealth and delicious food he touches nothing of either. Only ten seers of pure milk is boiled to reduce it to five till a thick reddish layer of cream settles on the top. This is offered to the Deity at noon and the Mahant lives on this little thing. All that he needs for the day is nothing more than a tola of opium and a quarter seer of ganja for his smoke. The smoking pipe or *chillum*, which is a hand long, never leaves his hand. His eyes are two small chink of red vermillion, which always blink. Some ten or fifteen disciples always

sit surrounding him. They know no respite in their work of crushing ganja for the pipe. These devoted disciples are always at the back and call of the Mahant. In return, they freely enjoy the *bhog* or *prasad* of the temple.

The exploits of the predecessors, which are known all over the country, have been recorded on parchment in Devnagri script written in red sandalwood and kept underneath the pedestal of the Deity. The Dusty Fakir recounts these only to his trusted disciples in secret confidence. But some faithless heretics reveal these to the public.

The Dusty Fakir also narrates before the disciples every evening the story of his own life. "On the occasion of the consecration ceremony of the Puri temple" he would say, "there came one thousand and eight Fakirs from Ayodhya to partake of the feastings. I was one of them but I had to stay back as I could not put aside the persistent implorations of my devoted disciples. But, frankly speaking, I do not like this lying country. I may some day go back to the great seat of Ayodhya Hanuman." But the followers would roll before him in supplication and prayer. The Dusty Fakir had to continue and prolong his stay in this wretched country. The story had been repeated a thousand and one times.

Nobody can ever estimate the wealth and resources of the Mahant. Herds of cattle apart, there was no measuring of paddy and money. The

sources of income were also numerous. One such was from law suits. Both the parties involved in a case were to come to the temple and give a solemn pledge as to the amount each would pay to the Deity in case of victory. The Record Keeper made a note of this promise and as soon as the case was over, a Sadhu was immediately sent to realise the promised amount from the winning party.

Ram Sahu and Shyam Sahu were two brothers, who had a partition suit pending in the Law court at Cuttack. Ram Sahu came and pledged before the Deity the amount he would give in case he wins the case. The record keeper, as usual, made a note of it.

Shyam Sahu did not come. Some one must therefore, go and find out why he did not come. A disciple went forthwith and on return said "I am afraid of opening my lips, Oh my Lord ! This Shyama had the guts to denounce Your Holiness openly before the rabble saying that in the Age of *Kali* the Mahant had no power and so he never cared to come and offer anything to the Deity." The Mahant was smoking his pipe of ganja at that time. He took a deep puff or two so that the fire in the pipe glowed and sparkled. The Mahant let off smoke in small measures and in a deep undertone said "All right, my boys ! You will see how, at our commands, the fire in the pipe shall speak."

The joy of disciples knew no bounds. Their firm belief was that the Mahant's words were infallible. That very day, news spread everywhere that the Dusty Fakir had been in a vision bestowed with such supernatural powers as would enable his pipe of ganja to speak. Some disciples corrected this rumour saying "No, No! it is not the pipe but the fire in the pipe that would speak." News spread that ten persons had already been blessed with boons from the Fire God in the smoking pipe of the Mahant and that some had heard the messages with their own ears.

Next day, people streamed to the temple in hundreds from morning till evening. One was suffering from diseases, another had lost a bullock, a third had a case in the law court and so on. Many barren women had also sent their offerings to be placed before the sacred feet of the Mahant with the hope of being blessed with children. Many people in the great assemblage made unstinted offerings of rupee, half-rupee and quarter-rupee coins and lay prostrate before the Mahant Maharaj waiting for His Holiness' commands,

Mahant Maharaj bade them get up and said "We won't speak anything ourselves. A sacrificial fire shall be lit with the fire from our smoking pipe and the Fire God shall appear in person, listen to your prayers and confer blessings on you all on your merits. On the coming *Aghira* (Fire) *Purnima*, He shall come down from Heaven and

walk on this earth. He has already revealed himself to us in a vision and ordered us to arrange for his consecration. All who offer ablutions shall get their heart's desires fulfilled." He then detailed the ceremonies and observances which included the offering of one hundred and eight wooden spoonfuls of ghee for which a piece of new cloth, five quarter seers of ghee, five kinds of sweets and flowers of five colours would be necessary. Gift and offering of money will be according to the devotees' mite and capacity but, in no case, the amount could be less than five-quarter coins,

Rituals and ceremonies commenced just after midnight of the *Aghira Purnima*. As soon as the Mahant Maharaj poured ghee on the sacrificial alter, the fire God appeared and began to blaze forth brilliantly. The devotees stood with their palms folded and laid bare their sins and grievances. The Fire-God from the pit spoke in a sombre voice such words as "Aye" "Nay" "All right" "and the like". Who could disbelieve his own eyes and ears? Those who had the luck to hear the voice were astounded and rolled in the dust in pious delight. The Math or the temple overflowed with the shouts of "Hail to the, of Lord."

Shyam Sahu heard all about it and began to beat his head frantically against the ground. He thought to himself, "Other people have received boons as a reward for their gifts and prayer.

Brother Ram is sure to get his ambitious designs fulfilled in the same way. Cursed that I am, I shall be utterly ruined; for the undivided property is worth nothing less than a lakh. He will get away with everything. To add to my misery, the Mahant in a pious rage had uttered, "we shall certainly bring to look that oil crushing chap." Shyam was greatly perturbed and mortified. He was at his wits end. But as good luck would have it, he suddenly lighted upon a plan. He approached the votaries who lived chiefly on the crusts and crumbs of the Mahant and won them over by bribing each with five to ten rupees. They in their turn, advised him to surrender to the Mahant by prostrating himself before his holy feet.

It was about ten in the morning. The disciples as usual, sat surrounding the Mahant, who was smoking hard. The entire area was filled with the smoke of ganja and opium. Shyam's heart was beating hard against the ribs being full of apprehensions and he meekly threw himself at the adored feet of the Mahant. With the jingle of coins he offered his prayers and said "Oh Lord ! I am as ignorant as a child, as cursed as a sinner. Forgive me my sins, O Lord !" The Mahant continued to smoke with his eyes shut, oblivious of surroundings. No holy words dropped from his prophetic lips. It was now the turn of the disciples to prostrate themselves at his feet. With one voice they said "O Lord of Lords ! We are all ignorant, we are all great sinners and offenders. But who on this sinful earth, protect us unless thou dost pardon this poor Shyam ?" The all-merciful

Mahant Maharaj instantly commanded, "Go, my son, go; bring your gifts and offerings unto us."

Shyam Sahu's joy knew no bounds. He ran home to arrange all the prescribed things and articles, which he thought, must be in keeping with his rank and status. So in place of five-quarter seers of ghee he arranged for full five. All other articles were collected in like proportion. Where every body offered a common piece of *Sari*, Shyam Sahu procured a silken one embroidered and silver lined, from Berhampure.

The two brothers had the reputation of being the biggest merchants of the locality. When people heard that a *Puja* of a great magnitude and dimensions was being arranged at the Math on behalf of Shyam, people from neighbouring villages began to muster strong in the temple to observe the ceremonies, particularly to hear the Oracle's announcement and the conferring of boons on him by the Fire God himself. Nearly five hundred people had already assembled and not even an inch of space was available any where in the sacred precincts.

There was a row of rooms adjoining the compound wall of the Math. One of these was set apart for preparing cakes and sweets on festive occasions. The room contiguous to this was the Stores Room. The Fire-God had been installed in the former. At 10 O'clock in the night the Mahant emerged from one of the Temples.

It had been a momentous day for him, a day of rich income. The Mahant was overwhelmed

with joy. Over and above his daily quota of one tola of opium he had smoked one tola more along with a considerable quantity of ganja. No wonder he tottered in his walk. So, four of his devoted disciples assisted him in reaching the holy spot. At the sight of the Mahant, all the people in the vast congregation shouted with one voice the name of the Lord and laid themselves down on the bare ground.

Then commenced the religious rites. Huge logs were laid and piled on the sacrificial altar and five seers of ghee (butter oil) were poured on it. Instantaneously the flames darted forth and rose about four hands high. The Mahant sat all by himself in this room. Who else could sit so close to the great blaze of fire? Poor Shyam stood penitent at the threshold with a scarf wound about his neck. The Mahanta began his prayers loudly "Oh God fire! Confer on Shyam, your devotee, boons, blessings and benedictions so as to enable him to win his law suit! But to every body's dismay and amazement, there was no response.

The Mahant in a rage, stood up and to show his might and prowess to the devotees struck the ground very hard with the heavy and huge forceps weighing about ten seers, that he held in his hand. There was a loud thudding noise. Shyam Sahu startled and was almost petrified to behold before him a yawning chasm of about five feet deep right in the centre of the room. Half of it was full of fire and embers and in the midst two persons were engaged in a fierce scuffle. Shyam could not understand anything. A moment later, he realised,

through his pious devotion, that the fire-God had been incarnated and was caressing the mighty Mahant. He considered himself very fortunate because he would soon be favoured with the blessings which would bring victory for him. In a trite, he could understand so much by his piety and in religious ecstasy shouted at his loudest "Glory be to Hari !" and announced to the crowd "The God of fire has revealed himself." The jubilant assembly echoed back. Glory be to Hari and announced to the crowd "The God of fire has revealed himself." The assembly echoed back "Glory be to Hari." The bells, trumpets, cymbals and sirens, pipes and timbrels sounded forthwith from the temple and the noise was as vociferous as the breakers of the sea. Immediately, there was a stampede for the *darsan* of the fire-God. The fire-room which had only one door was by that time full of smoke. Due to the great rush at the threshold many people had already been trampled upon and injured.

About an hour passed in great commotion. People became tired of shouting and dancing. But what was that ? A foul stinking smell of burning bodies had filled the air. Every one covered his nostrils with the cloth ends. Some very important persons went close to the door and looked in cautiously and said "Alas" ! the Mahant is probably burnt alive." Lesser people, however, thought that God of fire had appeared in person and had begun eating the Mahanta. "Let us all run away for our dear lives," they said. Now every body began to fly falling one upon the other in

the process. Even the high-priest and the attendants of the temple left their post. In no time, the temple was as lonely, deserted and silent as a grave. Only the sound and smell of burning bodies were heard and felt.

The Gopalpur police station was full five miles from Deogan. Information reached there early in the morning. The Sub-inspector along with five or six constables and eight or ten chowkidars rushed to the place of occurrence. On arrival, the Police officer saw that there was not a soul to be found in the entire village, not to speak of any one in the temple. All the doors of houses were shut. When the chowkidars shouted and knocked repeatedly the female folk responded from within with the same reply, "No manfolk within." The excuses and pretexts put forth by them usually were "He has gone out to search the lost cow." "He has gone to his house." "They have gone to law courts at Cuttack." After a prolonged search, the temple-priest and attendants were however found out.

The police officer then proceeded to conduct a spot enquiry. He discovered that an underground passage had been dug out to connect the fire room with the adjoining store room. It was wide enough for a man to creep to the point just beneath the fire in the other room. The pit for the fire God was two and half hands in length, breadth and depth. A six-inch layer of earth covered the pit and the fire was lit over the platform. A man used to come through the passage and suitably respond to the commands of the Mahant.

On the night of occurrence, a disciple intoxicated with ganja sat in the pit just beneath the fire. His name was Hunda Das. The Mahant, too, had lost all his wits by smoking a good quantity of both ganja and opium. When this huge man struck the ground with the massive forceps with a terrible force, the thin layer of earth easily gave way with the huge fire over it. Two persons were thus burnt to death in the pit their piteous wails and cries could not be heard due to the deafening noise outside.

The Sub-Inspector of police drew up his report and sent the two bodies for post-mortem.



REBATI

Patpur is a tiny village in the Haripur Pergana of the Cuttack District. At one end of the village was situated a house which had a row of four rooms, a shed for the *dhenki* and a well in the court-yard. The front room was used as guest room as well as rest room for tenants who came to pay rent or other dues.

Shyambandhu Mohanty was an agent of the Zamindar. He received rupees two as his commission and earned another couple of rupees by other means. With this four rupees he managed his household smoothly. The family had no wants. Vegetables were raised in the garden. There were two cows which gave birth to calves year after year and so there was no dearth of milk and curd. Cowdung mixed with husks was made into cakes and baked in the sun for fuel. The Zamindar had allowed him three *manas* of his land to cultivate. There was therefore neither deficit nor surplus of paddy and rice.

Shyambandhu was a very simple and honest man, greatly loved and regarded by the tenants. He himself moved from door to door collecting the

Zamindar dues. Never did he use a harsh word nor did he ever realise a fine illegally. He was trusted so much that no tenant ever asked for receipts for payment. The peon of the Zamindar was, however, very hard hearted and exacting. So, Shyambandhu himself bribed him off when he came to fleece them.

There were only four members in the family; Shyambandhu and his wife, the old mother and their only daughter aged ten. Her name was Rebati. In the evening, Shyambandhu used to sit in the verandah and some times sung *Chhandas* and *Bhajans*. Some times he used to read the *Bhagavat* placing the oil lamp on the wooden stand. Rebati sat by his side and listened to these recitals attentively. Very soon she learnt a few of them and began reciting herself. These were heard very well in the lips of a small girl and village folk were often attracted by her sweet voice. Shyambandhu was fond of a particular *bhajan* which he would often like his daughter to sing.

Some two years before the Deputy Inspector of schools in course of tour chanced to halt at Patpur at night. At the request of the public he recommended to the Inspector the establishment of a U. P. School in the village. The teacher's pay of Rs. 4/- was to be paid by the Government. Every student had, however, to contribute an anna each to the teacher.

The New teacher was Vasudeb, who was trained at Cuttack. He was truly worthy of his name. Aged about twenty, he was very handsome

and accomplished. Yet he was unassuming in his walk as well as manners. In his childhood he suffered from epileptic fits and as a remedy the mother applied a hot bottle to his forehead. The burnt mark was still there but far from being a stain it was a decoration to his face.

Orphaned in childhood, Vasudeb was reared up in his maternal uncle's family. As Shyambandhu and Vasudeb belonged to the same cast some sort of attachment began to grow between them. So on festive and ceremonial occasions, Shymbandhu used to go to school to invite Vasudeb saying, "Your aunt wants you in the evening; please come to our house." Such frequent invitations and visits led to some sort of intimacy between the two.

At the sight of Vasudeb, Rebati, out of sympathy, would say "Poor orphan! who would look after his comforts?" Whenever she saw Vasudeb she would jump out of joy and announce his arrival to the house. Vasu would come in the evening and hear the *bhajans* sung by Rebati. The old songs were for ever new to him.

One day Shyamabandhu came to know that there was a Girls High School at Cuttack, where girls were taught stitching, sewing and other crafts besides regular studies. He was determined from that day to send Rebati there and sought Vasu's advice. Vasu who regarded Shymbandhu as his father said, "I was just going to suggest the same thing to you, father." So both agreed in the matter of sending Rebati to Cuttack for higher studies when time would come. Rebati who was listening

to these talks jumped with delight and rushed to inform the mother and grandma of that piece of good news. The mother was very happy at this but grandma said "What has a girl to do with books and studies? Let her learn cooking rice, churning milk, and decorating walls."

At night Shyambandhu was sitting on a piece of mango plant waiting for his meals. Rebati too joined him in eating. The grandma sat in front of them and asked her daughter-in-law to serve rice, dal, salt and the like to them. Casually she asked "Shyam! I hear that Rebi would go to Cuttack to read. What will a girl do with her education?" Shyambandhu said by way of reply "Let her read. The daughters of Jhankad Patnaik are now able to read the *Bhagabat* and the *Vaidehishvilas*." Greatly annoyed Rebati abused her grandma saying, "Thou old ignorant fool! She entreated her father to send her up for studies. Shyambandhu assured her daughter that, he would. The matter ended then and there.

Next day when a copy of Sitanath Babu's Primer was handed over to Rebati, she eagerly turned leaf after leaf, from the first page till the last. Her joy knew no bounds when she found picture of elephants, horses and cows in the pages of the book. Kings and Princes are proud of possessing them, others enjoy riding on them but Rebati was delighted to see them in pictures. She ran to her mother and showed her the book. She expressed her joy. But when the book was shown to grandma she was irritated and dismissed

her forthwith Rebati too in her turn, scolded her roundly and came away.

Next day was *Sripanchami*, an auspicious day for beginning lessons. Rebati got up in the morning, finished her bath, put on a new piece of cloth and waited breathlessly for Vasudeb who would impart her the first lessons. Unfortunately, no elaborate preparations could be made for the ceremony for fear of grandma who was up against girls' education. At about ten in the morning, Vasudeb arrived and wrote down for her the first two alphabets of the language. Since that day regular studies of Rebati began. Vasu came every evening to coach her. In two years time, Rebati made rapid and good progress and could read and write fluently the poem from Madhu Babu's *Chhandamala*.

One night at meal time Shyambandhu and his mother started a conversation on a subject over which they had some discussion before.

"What do you think of the match Mother?"

"Suitable, but what about caste?"

"Do you think I never enquired about it.

Though poor, he belongs to a good *Karan* family."

"Who cares for wealth son? Caste is all important in such matters. But do you think he will stay with us here?"

"Where else will he go? However good they might be, they are after all his maternal uncle and aunts."

Rebati, who happened to be present, heard it all. What she understood from the talks we cannot say, but this we knew that since that day a change came over her manners and attitudes. She blushed when Vasu taught her in the presence of her father. For no reason, she began to smile and when she became conscious of it she cast her head down and suppressed the smile by pressing her lips hard. She, thereafter, said just 'yes' or 'no' to all questions put to her by Vasu at the lessons. Some times she read without opening her lips and after studies ran into the house, her face rippling with chubby smiles. Every day in the evening she would stand at the threshold leaning against the door as if waiting for somebody and when Vasu came she ran indoors and declined to come to him even after repeated calls. The grandma, on her part, began to abuse her whenever she came out to the verandah.

Thus passed two years since that *Sri Panchami*. It is not always fair weather with anybody in God's creation. The month of Falgun (February March) set in. One morning rumour spread that Shyambandhu had been attacked with cholera. In rural areas, people become panicky in such occasion and never stir out of their houses. They have a firm belief that old witch is afoot with her basket and going round the village to pick up lives here and there.

So none came to Shyambandhu's house. What would the two unfortunate women do? Rebati was constantly weeping and howling about. Vasudeb heard it all and rushed to the house from the school. Unafraid, regardless of consequences,

he sat by the side of Shyambandhu and began nursing him. He rubbed his feet and put drops of water in to his perching tongue. But all in vain. At about 3 O'clock, Shyambandhu turned his face and looking intently at the face of Vasudeb mumbled a few broken words just to say "Rebati for you". Vasudeb burst out into weeping. The whole house wailed, Rebati rolled on the dust. "All is over" the villagers thought. By night-fall the end came.

What should they do now? Vasudeb was young and inexperienced in these affairs. The other two were women. Bana Sethi, the washerman of the village had some knowledge in these matters having in his life time disposed of fifty to sixty dead bodies. The lure of a few pieces of clothes urged him to help them. With a towel tucked to his waist and an axe on his shoulder, he arrived. As their's was the only *Karan* family in the village. Vasu with the assistance of the two women managed to do the last rites. The morning star was already in the sky when they returned from the cremation ground. Hardly had Rebati's mother entered the threshold when she too was attacked with that fatal disease and by noon that day she too passed away.

Time and tide wait for none. The rich become richer and the poor poorer. Days come and days go, so passed three months since the death of Shyambandhu. There were two cows in the house. The Zaminidar's men appeared one day and took them away for default in the payment of

land rent money. But we know Shyambandhu regarded the Zamindar's money as forbidden fruit and had no rest till the last pie was accounted for and deposited. But the Zamindar knew that the cows he had were of high-yielding variety and it was immaterial if he had paid the money. Next to go, was the three *manas* of lands which the Zamindar had given Shyamabandhu to cultivate. What was the need for the ploughmen or the labourer if there were no land ? So the man who was in charge of the lands departed on the full moon day. The two bullocks had been sold already for rupees seventeen and half and that amount was spent after the double funeral. A month passed some how or other. Yet another month passed by selling or mortgaging this pot or that brass utensils.

Vasu came both morning and evening, stayed till night and returned when both the grandma and grand daughter had gone to bed. When he paid any money neither the old woman nor Rebati would accept it. If he pressed them to accept the money it lay on the shelf. Vasu came to know this, and desisted from offering any more. All that he did was to take a copper or two from the old woman and purchase for them daily necessities which lasted them for eight to ten days. Meanwhile the roof of the house was gone and a new thatch has to be put on it. Vasu purchased two rupee worth of straw and dumped them on the backyard. Thatching operation were delayed for want of an auspicious day.

With the passage of time the old woman had ceased crying which she did day and night. She

wept only in the evening and when she was tired she fell asleep on the spot and spent the night there. Her vision was gradually impaired and she became almost mad. Though she moaned less she increased her scolding for Rebati. For, she had concluded that Rebati was at the root of all evils. It was she to her studies that her son and daughter-in-law passed away, the bullocks were sold, the ploughmen deserted them, the Zamindar's men took away their cows and to crown all, she lost her vision. She was undoubtedly an ill-starred wench.

Rebati could not stand by her grandma for fear of being scolded. She stood like a log or stone either in the back door or in the door corners with tears streaming down her eyes. Vasu, too, in the eyes of the old women, was guilty for it was he who educated her. But she could not say anything to him because in his absence every thing in the house would come to a standstill. Moreover, the Zaminidars accounts had not been finally settled and cleared. His men were coming every now and then and pressing them with this and that. Who would find out and produce account books before them if Vasu were not there ?

Rebati was no longer that sprightly girl moving about the house like a living doll. None had even heard her voice since the day of her father's death, none had seen her in the verandha. True she did not weep aloud but her eyes were like two blue water lilies tossing in the

water. The tiny hopes of her tiny life were dashed for ever. Day and night were the same to her. For her, there was no light in the sun, no darkness in the night. The world was all void and emptiness. Her mind was filled with thoughts of her parents. "Here sat she, there went he and thus they talked" and such thoughts and pictures came crowding to her mind. She could not believe that they were gone for ever. She knew no hunger, she had no sleep in her eyes, so absorbed she was in thoughts of her parents. It was only for fear of her Grandma that she sat up to eat; otherwise she rarely got up. She was reduced to a skeleton. She voluntarily stood up only when Vasu arrived and stared at him with wide eyes. When Vasu looked at her she cast her head down with a sigh. So long as Vasu was there she continued to gaze at him, her eyes and all her senses were at that time full of Vasudeb, nay, her entire being was saturated with the thought of Vasudeb.

It was now about five months since the death of Shyambandhu. One hot noon of *Jyestha* (May-June) Vasudeb came and knocked at the door. This was rather unusual hour for him to call. When the old woman crawled to the door and opened it, Vasudeb said "Grandma ! (he always addressed her so) the Deputy Inspector will examine my boys in his camp at Hariharpur Police station. I am to take all my students there tomorrow morning. It will be five days before I return."

Rebati, who was listening to him in a door corner, sat down with a plop. She would have fallen flat had not she caught hold of the door. Vasu purchased their ration for five days, placed there in the courtyard, bowed down to the Grandma and bade goodbye to her on Saturday evening. The old woman said, "my son ! do not walk in the sun, look to your health and take care to eat in time." And she heaved a long deep sigh.

Rebati continued to gaze at Vasu's face intently. This look was different from the previous one. Vasu too looked as her straight in a manner never before seen on former occasions. Vasu desired to see Rebati closely but her eyelids drooped. At this moment their looks were transfixed to each others and neither was able to withdraw them. Rebati could not know when Vasu left her. The day too had departed and darkness had cast a pall over every thing. Yet Rebati looked on. She came back to senses only when the old woman called her and the gloom had taken possession of the house.

Rebati began to count days one by one. It was the sixth day of Vasu's departure. After the death of her parents she had never approached the threshold but today since morning she had already come there twice to see if Vasu was coming. At about ten in the morning the school children returned from Hariharpur and soon after, news spread in the village that the teacher had breathed his last under a banyan tree on his way back home. He died of cholera at

a midnight. The villagers mourned for him and men, women and children wept aloud. Some said "How very handsome youngman !" Some others said "What virtues !" and yet some others said "How innocent ! never wished any harm to the meanest of creatures,

Rebati heard the tidings, so too the old woman. Her voice was choked with weeping. When she was unable to weep any longer she got up and said, "You brought your own end, my child, by coming to this alien place," meaning thereby that Vasu's death was due to his foolish attempts to educate Rebati. He would have certainly lived had he not done that.

Rebati, on the other hand, lay quiet on the floor. One day passed. The next day when the old woman did not find Rebati near her she began to call aloud, 'Oh Rebati ! Oh Rebi ! Oh Rubbish ! Oh trash !' She had become almost mad, she ceased weeping but began to abuse Rebati in a rage day and night. Whenever the neighbours passed by that house they heard the same cry, "Oh Rebati ! Oh Rebi ! Oh Rubbish ! Oh trash !"

Not being able to find her, she groped for her in darkness and found her at last and called. But when no voice replied she felt her body and knew at once that she was having high fever and the skin emitted fire as it were and she was unconscious. She sat for a long while and deliberated as to what she would do. She searched for some body in her mind but could not find one in their wide world. Unable to decide

anything, she felt greatly enraged and said to herself "Who would find a remedy for self-inflicted diseases & troubles?" meaning thereby that Rebati was the cause of her own undoing for the fever was her own seeking as she wanted to read and write.

Day followed day. On the fifth day, Rebati lay almost flush with the floor. She did not open her eyes nor did she respond when called. But on the sixth day, Rebati appeared to be better because she had shouted twice or thrice. Hearing her voice the old woman went to her feeling from her hands and legs knew that they were cold. She also responded feebly to her call. She looked staringly and muttered words of her own accord. Any physician in this case would have cited a *sloka* to prove that she was in a state of delirium and had all the symptoms of a fatal fever. But the old woman was delighted thinking that her grandchild was on the way to recovery. The temperature was gone, she had begun to speak and to open her eyes and even begged water to drink. For six days, she did not take even a drop of water. If she could give her some diet, the girl would get up and walk about.

"Will you sleep a while, Darling? I shall cook something for you to take." With these words the old woman came out. But what was then to prepare her diet with? She searched for something in the nook and corner of the house but could not find even a handful of rice. She heaved a sigh and sat for some time. Vasu has purchased ration

to last only for five days. Had she eyes, she could have known how that lasted for ten days.

A way can always be found if one sits and thinks. But there were no utensils in the house. Her hand accidentally fall upon a leaking brass pot. With that in hand she straight made for Hari Shah's shop which was situated in the middle of the village. It was not a regular shop but rice, dal, salt and oil were stored by him for the benefit of strangers and even villagers. The old woman arrived at the door of the shop. The shrewd businessman could guess the old woman's purpose as soon as he saw her with the pot. When she narrated the purpose of her visit Hari Shah examined the utensil by turning it in all directions and said "No, No, there is no rice; who would give you rice in exchange of this useless pot ?" It was not a fact that he had no rice, nor did he intent to refuse her but that he wanted to reduce the value of the pot in the bargain. The old woman was thunderstruck to hear that there was not a grain of rice. "What shall I do ? What am I to give her ? She has just recovered and should be given something." She muttered these words and sat a while.

The sun was about to set. She had already looked pitiously at the face of Hari Shah. "Let me go back then and see what my child is doing." With these words in her lips she arose with the pot in her hand when Hari Shah called her back and said "give me the pot, let me see if I can find any thing for it." Very soon he handed over to the old woman four *mans* of rice, half a *man* of *dal* and

some salt in exchange of the pot. The old woman got back home resting at five or six places. She had not even washed her face since morning. One can imagine the condition of her body as well as mind. On arrival she called Rebati. She believed that Rebati had fully recovered, she would get up and draw water from the well to enable her to cook. When she got no response from her she was greatly enraged and approaching her shouted "O Rebati ! Oh Rebi ! Oh Rubdish ! Oh trash !" Even then there was no response.

Meanwhile, Rebati's condition had deteriorated further. There was great pain all over the body which was fast collapsing; the tongue had parched up, there was unquenchable thirst. Seeking a cool place she rolled across the floor and came outside. Even then, there was no relief. She went to the verandah in the back yard.

The day was declining. There was a strong breeze. She sat leaning against the hedge. Her eyes wandered all over the backyard. There grew the plantain tree which her father had planted the year before and was about to bear fruit. Close by, there blossomed the guava tree which her mother had planted two years before and which she had watered all along. She remembered her mother. Her wits were unsettled, her mind was wandering; so she could not remember things in a connected manner. But she could not efface from her mind the mother's pleasant figure.

Evening drew on. A thick pall of darkness covered the face of mother earth. Rebati looked at the sky. The evening star twinkled. Rebati

gazed at it without a wink in her eyes. Gradually the star increased in shape till it assumed the size of a wheel. Yet it continued to grow, yet there was more effulgence. What was that within the star ? It was the peaceful, loving and joyous figure of her mother, beckoning her to her lap. The mother sent two rays which came down and entered into her heart through the eyes. There was no other sound in the darkness, except her breathing. That sound increased in volume and length till at last two very feeble words '*ma, ma,*' escaped her lips. All was over. There was total darkness, total silence.

The Grandma, in the meantime, had crawled to the place where she had been lying and found that she was not there. She searched for her in the rooms, in the backyard and even in the *dhenki* shed but found her not. She imagined that Rebati might have completely recovered and was strolling in the garden. She, therefore shouted for her in the usual manner "Oh Rebati ! Oh Rebi ! Oh Rubbish ! Oh Trash !" She went to the threshold of the back door and gropingly clambered up the verandah which was two hands high and one hand wide.

"So you are here !" She exclaimed but was startled when she put her hand on her body. She gave out a sharp shrill cry. Closely following which there was heard another sound of a body falling down the step.

Since that night, nobody had even seen a living creature in the house of Shyamabandhu Mohanty. The neighbours heard the last voice at about eight O'clock which was "Oh Rebati ! Oh Rebi ! Oh Rubbish ! Oh Trash."

Sheikh Dildar Mian

Sheikh Karamat Ali belonged originally to the Arrah District, but later on he had settled in the Midnapur District. The Sheikh was called by the popular name of Ali Mian, and we shall also call him by that name in our narration. Ali Mian was at first a dealer in horses. It was his business to purchase horses at the Harihar Chhatar fair at Sonepur in Bihar, and to sell them in Orissa and Bengal.

Ali Mian once sold a horse to the Chief European Officer in the district of Midnapur. That horse turned out to be a good one and the officer was highly pleased. Condescendingly he enquired how Ali Mian fared in his trade. On being told that the Sheikh was not making much profit in his business, the Saheb enquired whether Ali Mian knew how to read and write ; perhaps he could be given a government job. Ali Mian said he knew how to sign his name in Persian ; he proceeded to get pen and paper and wrote out his name in the Saheb's presence.

In those days, Persian was the favoured language and it was also the court language. Through the patronage of the European officer, Ali Mian got

an appointment as a Police Daroga. During his tenure of service, he worked fairly well; he had, at times, to face many difficulties but he acquired a sizeable property in the 30 years of his service. Besides his residential house, garden and furniture, he acquired four Zamindari estates.

Those were the days when the Zamindari estates of Orissa were being put to auction at Calcutta. Ali Mian had gone to Calcutta to escort some persons accused in a murder case. There he purchased the estate of Fatepur Sarsandha in an auction sale.

Do you doubt the veracity of our statement ? A Thana Daroga was as good as a Police Inspector in those days. So you may take it for granted that our statement is absolutely true.

People know the words in which a Brahmin named Govinda Panda once blessed a Deputy Magistrate who had decreed a case in his favour. "Deputy Babu, may you become a Police Daroga", he had said. These words have a significance of their own; a hint is enough for the wise.

Moti Sil was a well-known rich man of Calcutta. He had started by selling empty bottles. An envious liquor-vendor once said, "Moti Sil has become a millionaire by selling only empty bottles while I am so poor even though I sell bottles full of stuff." We are afraid the story of Ali Mian may lead some of our B. A.s and M. A.s to deplore their lot like the liquor-vendor and say,

“Alas; Ali Mian who could barely sign his name in Persian managed to become a Zamindar, whereas we, who can write long essays, cannot even earn a living.” Fate must have its way. One’s education and one’s efforts are of no avail against the decree of fate.

This Ali Mian had only a son, Sheikh Dildar Mian alias Chhote Mian. The father spared no pains to educate his son for a career. He engaged a tutor. (Akhunji) for a long time to teach his son Persian. By the time Chhote Mian was fifteen, he had learnt all the letters of the Persian alphabet.

By the time Chhote Mian had completed his 22nd year, he fell to thinking, ‘What will people say if I sit cross-legged before my teacher and swing to and fro while I read my books like a school boy?’ Moreover, he could not tolerate that his friends should unnecessarily be kept waiting for his company. He also hated his teacher’s occasional warnings. ‘A man becomes a beast if he takes to intoxicants.’ It was too much for Chhote Mian to bear.

Once afternoon, the teacher was lying asleep on his back after taking his meal, his bushy grey beard covering his neck and chest like a bundle of jute fibre spread out by a fisherman for making rope. Somehow a glowing cinder landed on his beard and set it burning with crackling sound. The teacher woke up suddenly and, crying ‘Toba-Toba’ (Alas,-Alas), stroked his beard desperately. The violent shaking of the beard caused the glowing cinder to disintegrate and sparks of fire scattered

all over his clothes while he ran about the room exclaiming "Woe on me, Woe on me" and trying to put out the fire.

The great sage, Valmiki, famous author of the Ramayana, has given no graphic description of what Hanuman looked like in the conflagration of Lanka. So we do not think it reasonable to mention anything by way of analogy. The scriptures say that wise men settle for half when the whole is in danger of being lost. Following this maxim, the teacher shut himself up in the room that night with half of his beard saved. The next morning he was not to be seen in the district of Midnapur.

When this news reached the ears of Ali Mian, he said, "My son has already gained enough knowledge I know only how to sign my name and I have earned so much wealth. But my Dilu has learnt much more. The other day, he was put to test in my presence. He was able to write his own name and also many other words like 'Calcutta', 'Midnapur', 'elephant', 'horse' and 'garden'. If the Bara Saheb (Superintendent of Police) comes to know this, he will at once offer him the post of a Daroga. But I have kept all this a secret. I won't allow Dilu to take up a job. He is a mere boy. He cannot stand so much strain."

He called his son and gave him a lot of advice about managing his own affairs properly. He warned him to be particularly careful about the management of his Orissa estates, and said, look here, the Kayasthas (scribes) of Orissa are very dishonest. They cannot deceive me because I am

very good at accounts. I will give you an instance of their fraud. People all over the world count one, two, three, four in that order. But do you know the Kayastha's method of counting? They say, one one makes one, two ones makes two, and two twos make four. You see, there is no mention of the three is the middle. Why? It means a clear theft of three rupees.'

We had to write all these things at such length to give the reader an idea of the Zamindar's family. But all these are events long past. Sheikh Karamat Ali had been dead five years and Chhote Mian alias Sheikh Dildar was himself the proprietor when, in the early hours of one night, we find Zamindar Sheikh Dildar Mian sitting in his Kut-chery hall. It was a spacious brick-built structure. The floor was covered with a big carpet which seemed to be very old. It was oil-stained and had holes at several places; the borders were frayed. In the middle of the carpet, adjoining the wall, as a velvet bed-spread. A big velvet pillow was placed against the wall. Flanking it were two smaller pillows of the same material but round in shape.

It was on this bed that Sheikh Dildar Mian was sitting. His dress consisted of a loose pyjama of embroidered silk, a chapkan of satin and a silk cap on the head. Stuck in his ears were otto-soaked swabs. A silver otto-stand and a rose-water sprayer stood before him. Close by was a *hookah* with a long pipe and a tobacco-holder of the size of a small earthen pot, with a cover from which four silver chains were dangling. Like a sick man

prostrating himself before the Lord Siva for a favour, the smoking pipe lay at the feet of the Mian, not gracing his lips for the moment.

In corners of the hall, and at odd places, lay worn-out broom-sticks, a spouted water-pot, three or four opium-smoking hookahs, the ashes of burnt tobacco, opium and hemp, flakes of onion, goat dung and many other things useful and useless. Spittle of betel-leaf juice covered most of the floor and walls. One could see that the hall was rarely dusted; otherwise how could there be such heaps of dirt in the corners ?

The ceiling of the hall was in a dilapidated condition. In the corners, spiders waited in their webs for flies and gnats as pleaders wait for clients, reclining on their pillows, with their law books arranged in glass almirahs. Sparrows kept up a merry straw or a twig or a feather came floating down; but in the assemblage below there was silence today.

The Mian Saheb sat speechless, his cheeks cupped in his hands. Even Napoleon could not have sat in such a pensive mood after his defeat in the battle of Waterloo. In front of the Mian Saheb sat seven of his comrades, either dozing or in a very thoughtful mood.

The music master, Bakaula Khan, sat with his beard resting on his legs bent at the knees joined together. His instrument, the *tanpura*, lay forsaken like a divorced woman. In one corner of the hall, two *tablas* lay keeled over on the floor like earthen pots thrown away in a field.

Fatua the waiter kept rolling something on the palm of his left hand with his right thumb, stopping now and then to add drops of water with his middle finger.

Munshi Zaher Baksh, holding a piece of paper with the debt account written on it, stood there like an accused before a magistrate. The Mian Saheb, his eyes still closed, heaved a deep sigh and moaned, "What then is the way out?"

"May it please my master : I have been moving about the whole day, but no money could be obtained anywhere," the Munshi replied, "Rama Das, the money-lender, says he has already lent twenty thousand rupees against registered deeds and another four thousand against notes of hand. He refused to lend any more. Four thousand rupees are due to the grocers in the bazar; they refuse to supply anything more on credit."

"You are a fool, a good-for-nothing fellow," the Mian replied angrily. "Rama Sirkar was our manager for 20 years from my father's time. I dismissed him and gave you the appointment because I took you to be a friend and a competent man; but you fail me in my urgent need."

Munshi Zaher Baksh protested, "How is it, master, that you call me incompetent ? Rama Sirkar could not procure any loan while I have secured a debt of 25 thousand rupees for you in five years."

To which the Mian replied impatiently, "Let us not talk about that, the point now is how to keep up my prestige. I don't mind the loss of property, but prestige once gone is gone for ever."

The Mian's dozing comrades suddenly woke to life on hearing this and supported him loudly with one voice. "Quite so, quite so, you are perfectly right."

"Go and meet the expenses of today's entertainment," the Mian directed the Munshi, "however you like. Mortgage any property, movable or immovable. Look. Hurry up. The night is advancing. I don't require much money. One hundred rupees for the remuneration of the dancing girl and another hundred for the entertainment of her companions and my friends will be enough."

"That is quite sufficient", the Mian's associates chimed in. "What need of more money?"

"This dancing girl, Khatum Unnisha, who is here today", said the Mian's crony, Hanu Mian, "is an expert in singing and dancing. They say she is the best of the dancing girls from Kashmere. She has reached the peak in the art of vocal music and dancing. What does she care for this part of the country? She is here on tour only for a few days. She refused invitations even from the Nawab of Murshidabad, the Nawab of Lucknow and the Chiefs of other States. You have now become famous far and wide. That is why she has come here of her own accord to give a performance."

All the friends present took up this theme in a chorus. "Who is there in this place who does not know you? Once anyone has tasted the delicacy of your viands, he will never forget it in his life."

At this juncture, Faju the waiter came in and reported with a *Salaam*, "Sir, a money-lender has come from your Orissa estate for an interview."

As the new-comer was ushered in, he placed five silver rupees before the Mian as a present and bowed three times, touching the ground with his hand. Then he bowed once to every other member of the gathering, not excepting even the waiter.

The Mian nodded appreciating at the manners of the new-comer. "The man is very polite and courteous," he said, and everyone else echoed the remark, like singers chanting the burden of a song in a chorus party.

The Mian turned to the man and asked, "What is your name?"

"Ramchandra Mangaraj" came the reply.

"What? Ramachandra Mamlabaj (tout)?", joked the Mian.

"No, Sir, it is Mangaraj."

"All right, Ramchandra Mangaraj," the Mian condescended.

"I have brought only a very few things," Mangaraj submitted, "to offer as a present to your honour as a mark of my respect. Have I your permission to lay these before you?"

“Very well, bring them here,” said the Mian.

The list of presents written on a palm-leaf read as follows :

(1) Eleven maunds of fine rice packed in five straw-bundles;

(2) Seven maunds of pulses in two straw-bundles;

(3) Fifty pounds of ghee in earthen jar,

(4) Five bunches of green plantain;

(5) Two bunches of ripe plantain and

(6) 32 pounds of potatoes.

Here ends the list.

“The rice is very fine,” the Mian remarked, “and suitable for the preparation of *palau*. The ghee is also very nice.”

Encouraged, Mangaraj said, “Sir, you are the lord of our estate. We have been under your protection for the last fifteen generations. These are but trifling things. If you permit, I shall continue the supply of fine rice, ghee and dal.”

The joy of the music master knew no bounds at this turn of events. His left hand moved at once to tune his *tanpura*. The *tablas* also joined in. The Mian ordered dinner to be prepared quickly. The Christian tell of the dead being called back to life at the sound of the archangel's trumpet on the day of resurrection. In a somewhat similar manner, the Mian's Majlis which had been deadly silent came suddenly alive at the jingling sound of Mangaraj's purse.

The Mian put the smoking pipe to his lips and smoked. The cloud of smoke covered the beard on his face like a fog enveloping a dark hill. The smoke inside the *hookah* was distributed through the pipe to the lips of all the others, like the waters of the Mahanadi distributed by canals to different Praganas by the British Sarkar.

A bleating goat was brought for the dinner and its price settled in the Majlis at two rupees and a half. This seemed to surprise Mangaraj. "What, he exclaimed, "is this poor animal worth two rupees and a half, my lord?"

"What would it cost in your village?" the Mian asked.

After thoroughly inspecting the goat, back and front and flanks, like a doctor examining his patient Mangaraj said, "It should cost not more than 4 or 6 annas. If you please, I can sent 40 or 50 such for your dinner. I must say, Sir, you have not appointed the right person to manage your estate. This is why so much money is squandered. A goat for two rupees and a half, my lord."

This gave rise to a great tumult of joy. The Board of Directors of the East India Company in England were not so overwhelmed with joy at news of Lord Clive's victory in the battle of Plassey, for they had not yet been able to shake off their fear of the Emperor on his throne at Delhi.

All of them were in raptures, their faces beaming with smiles. Only Mangaraj sat there with folded hands and a grave appearance. The fowler watches in silent delight when the birds peck

at the corn spread in his net to catch them. We who know the mind of Mangaraj can well imagine that he was telling himself, "Well, my dear bird, approach the bait now."

A servant came running to give the welcome news of the coming of the dancing girl. Everyone had forgotten about her remuneration, but the music master, who was a man of experience, remind them that a fee of Rs. 100 had to be paid to her. This reminder became the cause of fresh worries and an excited discussion ensued, the like of which is not probably experienced when the British Parliament discusses the budget for the Indian Empire.

No decision could be arrived at and there was no time to temporise. Finding the moment opportune, Mangaraj spoke with folded hands, "Sir, why do you worry so much when your humble servant is here?"

Words of thanks and praise were again showered upon Mangaraj. "Mangaraj : You will get a befitting reward for your services", the Mian said, "besides interest at the rate of four annas per rupee for the money advanced."

"Sir, I do not practice usury," Mangaraj replied. "What ? You don't charge interest?", exclaimed the music master. "The man is very upright. Charging interest is one of the 25 things forbidden in the Quran."

A historian says that Clive Saheb obtained the Subedari of Bengal from the Emperor of Delhi in less time than it takes to bargain for the sale or purchase of a donkey. Then why need it have taken Mangaraj longer to acquire the right to collect rent and other rights in the estate of Fatepur Sarsandha ?



Ananta, The Widow's Son

Fakir Mohan Senapati

(Translated from Oriya by Jayanta Mohapatra)

Subal Mahakur, alias Subal Singh, had been handed down a buffalo-herd from his father. Mahakur spent his days tending the herd in the jungles of Harispur. He rarely came home. Winter, rain and summer were the same to him. Yet the rains were the most enjoyable. With plenty of grass around, the buffaloes could be milked profusely. Palm-frond hat over his head, carrying a chest-high bamboo staff on his shoulder, he ran behind the buffaloes whole day long. He derived great pleasure wading through knee-deep or waist-deep water, his body smeared in mud. Mahakur never felt home-sick. A small leaf-hut was all he needed for cooking during the rains. The hut was simply made by inserting a few branches in the ground and covering them with long grass. It was so low that he had to crawl inside. He cooked rice squatting on the ground. One could not stand within. There was no fence around the hut. He was thus able to keep a look-out as he lay asleep within the hut at night, and observe if a hyena chanced to attack his buffalo-calves. During the night he placed his tall wooden clogs under his head, covering his face with the hat.

He only needed to protect his face from the rain. With the calves tied around, the dung and urine were swept with the rain-water, flooding the inside of the hut. Nonchalantly, Mahakur wallowed eel-like in the filth. The buffaloes slept out, their heads towards the forest. Towards the last quarter of the night, they moved off to graze in the forest. Mahakur lay awake since then, his staff by his side, for that was the hour when the hyena usually carried away a calf. A single snort from the buffaloes warned him that a tiger was close by. He then gave vent to one of his piercing calls, and even the largest tiger made its escape. The tigers seemed to recognise Mahakur's voice. As the jungle fowl started cackling at dawn, the buffaloes returned to the hut. Mahakur next milked the cows, tying their hind-legs together. About noon, his wife Debaki was there with a large cake made from a *seer*¹ of rice, five seers of unfinished coarse rice and a bundle of tobacco leaves - Mahakur's sole food for the day. He finished the rice-cake in the morning and topped it with a seer of pure buffalo milk. In the early hours of the afternoon, he put to boil two and a half seers of rice. If he managed to find some berries or green stalks from the forest, he boiled them along with the rice. Never a worry for any tasty curry had Mahakur ! Two and a half seers of rice with two seers of pure milk, sufficed him for half a day.

Giving the cake and rice, Mahakur's wife related her worries before her husband. She also brought news of their relatives and of the village. Then placing the milk pitcher over her head, she

1. A seer is equivalent to about two and half pounds.

hurried home. Mahakur faced some inconvenience during the summer months. The buffaloes loved to wade in the mud-water all afternoon like water-animals, and there was no water to be found in the forest. So they used to come out of the forest to the marsh, where grass and water were in abundance. Mahakur then dug in a palm-leaf umbrella by the water's edge, and did his cooking within the shade. At night, he curled himself up like a worm with his clogs under his head. Nearby two or three dry dung-heaps burned through the night. Still, the numerous long-legged black giant mosquitoes by the marsh constantly bothered him. At last in exasperation, Mahakur would get an earthen pot-full of muck from the marsh, plaster it all over his legs and toes, and cursing, go off to sleep. When his arms and body would itch and burn, he slapped himself so violently that two or three fistfuls of mosquitoes would be crushed. Shouts of 'Oh you Malati; Oh you Sukri; You Kali,' at times in his sleep would bring the buffaloes closer to the hut if they strayed away. The wayward ones had wooden stakes and bells tied to their necks, and Mahakur could easily retrieve them when they strayed into some trap-laid field.

Then suddenly one year, pox attacked the herd. Within eight days the fifty-buffalo herd had vanished; Mahakur's body sunk to the ground. With his chin on his hands, he sat and started. His wife could stand it no longer. "*Arre*² Mahakur," she wailed, "What are you starting at? Are you out of your mind? Whatever had to happen has

2. *Arre* — an intimate way of address.

occured. And just for this ? With the money from milk, we can start a trade from Brunda Barik's and my brother's herds; And see in two years time whether you cannot count out, one by one, the total number that belonged to your herd."

Mahakur, however, sold out the remaining three or four calves and took over charge as *Setha*³ of the Zamindar's four herds. With such a big job, Mahakur's wife was highly flattered. She fought with anybody in the village who did not address her as the wife of the Setha - running to strike any woman, young or old.

Winter set in. The Sahib of Police came over to visit the police station of Makrampur. His tent was erected nearby. A mile away was the marsh. It was full of crane, duck, teal and different water-fowl. The Sahib, taken aback at the sight of so much game placed his hot-gun on his shoulder and went off to hunt. Behind, trailed four police constables and eight to ten chowkidars, their heads adorned in red, black and yellow torn *pugrees*⁴. Each carried a chest-high bamboo staff as he jogged along. As soon as the Sahib reached the edge of the marsh, he fired his gun with a loud bang. Thousands of birds rose and circled round uttering shrill cries. Perhaps the birds thought, "Well, what's this today ? It appears to be a white man, could it be so ?" Anyway, whatever the birds discussed among themselves was only screaming and twittering to those below.

3. Setha — Chief cow-herd; a sort of manager of the herd.

4. Pugree— a turban.

Two of the water-fowl were shot somewhere in their wings and legs. But they could still fly and landed in the middle of the marsh. Nobody ventured to retrieve them. Helplessly the Sahib looked from one to the other. The marsh was quite deep in the middle, and people talked of two man-eating crocodiles.

The constables seemed afraid of wetting their uniforms. The chowkidars being village touts had never learnt to swim. The truth was, each was lacking in courage. Well, the Sahib would impose a fine, or in the worst, dismiss one from service, but who would take the risk of facing a crocodile? At that moment our Setha, who was checking up the herd, had strolled over to watch. Without a word he strode into the water. In no time he was back with the fowl which he placed before the Sahib. Immensely pleased, the Sahib looked him over thrice from head to foot - five arm-lengths of a man arms round and thick difficult to span with both hands, broad chest, square jaw, wide nose and thighs solidly built as *sal*⁵ trunks. He asked happily "who are you?" "Your honour," was the reply, "I am Setha Subal of the Zamindar's herds." "Will you work as a constable?" Our Setha stood silent for a few moments, than said "I cannot answer unless I enquire at home." The Sahib could not understand. He looked enquiringly at the Jemadar. The Chowkidars were aware that the Jemadar knew English. But it was known to all that he had only covered the First Book and could sign his name in English. He explained the gist of Mahakur's

5. Sal — a tree, having very hard wood.

statement to the Sahib. "Sir" he said, "this *guala*⁶ Mahakur says he ask his wife, if she says, he will constable." It took a couple of minutes for the Sahib to follow the Jemadar's broken English. Smiling to himself, he took out his note-book from his pocket and wrote "Subal Singh is fit to be constable. He seems to be a clever man and knows how to show respect to the fair sex." He barked an order "Present yourself at my tent tomorrow morning."

Subal Singh became the Sahib's orderly. The Sahib was very fond of *shikar*, and entrusted all shooting matters to Singh's care. For unless Subal Singh was present, the Sahib never went hunting. Knowing that Singh was quite a favorite of the Sahib, prominent people began to pursue him. Besides his monthly salary of nine rupees, he managed to make some extra money. Debaki however, kept account of all his income. At times when Singh spent an additional rupee. Debaki reprimanded him in anger "You eater of wood; you scum, if you like to squander your money this way, why do you serve as a slave in other's houses ? And besides Debaki's desire was to be addressed as Singh's wife, since her husband came to be known as Singh. Herself, she went about the village saying this. After two or three years of Singh's service, the Police and Magistrate Sahib went hunting into the jungles of Dompara. The Magistrate Sahib shot at a hyena wounding the animal in the groin. It entered a bush and started roaring. But nobody would dare approach a wounded hyena, even with the hundred

6. *Guala* — vernacular for cow-herd.

men and two elephants accompanying the Sahibs. What difference lay between death and a wounded tiger? The Police Sahib looked straight at the face of Subal Singh. Singh, without a word of protest, stepped into the forest. He still carried his buffalo-driving staff with him. Four times he struck the tiger hard on the head, then dragged the animal by its tail and dumped it before the Magistrate Sahib. Twenty rupees was paid to him as *buksheesh*⁷. He was also offered the post of Jemadar on a monthly salary of fifteen rupees. With all these benefits, fate seemed to be against Singh. When he came home on leave in the month of *Kartick*,⁸ he was overcome by a sudden bout of fever. It developed into pneumonia. Within three days he was gone.

On the other hand, Singh's wife never appeared to lack in strength or spirit. She could face indomitably the gravest crisis. She immersed herself in her work after completing her husband's funeral rites. Singh and his wife were one in looks and virtue. It was as if both had been carved out of a single piece. Yet she was taller than him by an inch. Her sari tied below her navel, her belly swelled out like a six-measure earthen paddy-boiling pot. She seemed to be quite fond of jewellery. She had removed all her ornaments on the first day of widowhood. The day after the funeral rites were over, she covered both her hands from wrist to elbow with ten-seer brass bangles. A one-tola heavy gold ring was attached to her large squat nose. A necklace made up of eighty rupee coins

7. *Buksheesh* — a sort of tip, present.

8. *Kartick* — October-November months.

reached down to her navel. She possessed great courage, living alone with her child at one solitary end of the village. People knew she had enough money. Having got scent of this, thieves dug their way into the house. Three men entered one dark night. When they tried to overpower the Singh woman who lay asleep, she thrashed her arms about so violently that the robbers were flung six feet afar. Two of them fled, the third got a sound whipping. She tied him with a cow-tether rope to the centre-post of the house. Early morning brought the villagers running; who could the robber be? A surprise surely, for it turned out to be the low-caste Chowkidar Jhapat Singh. Everyone advised to hand him over. The Singh woman agreed; then slapped him hard over both cheeks. His cheeks got puffed up as the two halves of the *uwau*⁹ fruit; the Chowkidar boy stayed in bed and could not stir out for fifteen long days.

At the time of Singh's death, his son Ananta was four years old. The son was born towards the decline of Singh's youth. The parents therefore thought no end of him. He was built like them, with the same colour of skin. The Singh woman took him in her lap after the day's work, singing softly as she caressed him for more than an hour.

“The elephant swings over and over
to take the *kia*¹⁰ pulp,
Ananta swings over and over
to drink his mother's milk.

9. Uwau — a round sour fruit.

10. Kia — a thorny plant whose tasteful yam is eaten.

The moon moves across the sky
with stars and stars around,
Ananta swings in his mother's lap
to drink the milk he's found.
Father is away with the buffalo-herd
and mother will do the milking,
Elephants down at the Raja's palace
for Ananta to go a-riding."

Thus she sang and fondled the child. Like a baby-elephant the boy snugly swung in his mother's lap. In the early hours of the morning, she applied a little oil and turmeric over his body. She brushed his hair with a wooden comb, tying his hair in a small knot. She would watch intently her son's face, then all of a sudden bite her tongue and exclaim "Me; the mother, behaving as a witch; And that too, my own son." She then brought a little earth from the *tulsi*¹¹ plant and smeared it on his forehead, also a little dung over the knot on his head. She next cast some spittle over her son. With the various types of women in the village, who could say which one among them was a witch? They would cast an evil spell on him. To keep him safe from evil eyes, she hung around his neck a chain having a piece of pig-snout, a copper talisman containing *bel*¹² leaves blessed at the Siva Temple, eight shells and four silver talismans. Over his head too, she put some dust from her feet. At night, she handed him a cake backed with a seer of rice, and sat to churn the milk. Afterward she set two or three pitchers

11. Tulsi—a plant considered sacred, worshipped in every village home.

12. Bel — a tree, whose leaves are offered to Lord Siva.

of curd in a basket over her head, and went selling in the village. People turned to stare at her as she walked swinging her arms down the main village path, the basket with pitchers of curd balanced over her head. Cries of '*Nandi Ghose Ratha*'¹³ would accost her; she was known by a number of names—the milkwoman Debaki, the Mahakur woman, the Demon Tadaka, and of course Nandi Ghose Ratha; these epithets had been given to her without her knowledge. However, she was really glad to be addressed as the Singh woman. Many a fun-seeking youngsters in the village would call out "Oh you, Singh woman; give us some curd, will you? And happy, she would dole out two to four cocoanut-kernel measures of extra curd on being called so.

Ananta was over four years old at the time of Subal Singh's death. The days rolled on Ananta soon reached the age of ten. Yet to all, he seemed a strapping youth of twenty. After selling the curd each day, the Singh woman put to boil five seers of unfinished coarse rice. Into the same fancy bowl Subal Singh had used, she would pour about three seers of boiled rice and water before her son. Ananta never needed any curry to take with the rice; still a mother's heart remained the same indulgent one. She kept a bowl of *dali*,¹⁴ or at times boiled spinach and vegetable by his side. The Singh woman also had a cow for her son, which gave four seers of milk. Ananta gulped down the raw milk after his meal of rice.

13. Nandi Ghosh Ratha—the heavy wooden chariot of Lord Jagannath of Puri which is drawn on Ratha Yatra day.

14. Dali — boiled pulses, usually taken along with rice.

The Singh woman was worried because of her son. People were jealous of Ananta. Some said "Ananta stole away cucumbers from my garden," others said "He removed all my corn-cobs," and yet others would complain "He ate up all mangoes and berries." Such allegations reached the ears of the Singh woman every day through the village folk. She felt irritated over these persons. Nevertheless, she did not admonish her son. Even now she continued to caress him in the evenings. Returning exasperated from the village one day, she observed the school master Baishnab Mohanty teaching the village children. He sat on a platform at the foot of the *boul*¹⁵ tree, cane in hand. She thought to herself "Well, if I admitted Ananta in this school, he would stop wandering around the village." The next day she left him with the school master saying "Teacher, do take care of Antu's studies." Obediently Antu attended school. For he was afraid only of his mother in the world and listened to none but her.

The master wrote the alphabet on the ground and Ananta was ordered to go over the letters with a chalk. While his hands moved over the letters below, his eyes kept searching for ripe fruit in the *boul* tree. Catching sight of fruit, he would climb up the tree nimbly as a monkey, stuff the fruit in his mouth and be in his place in a trice. He was quite agile at climbing trees. Noticing a monkey in his tamarind tree, he would go up after it by smashing it on the ground. Monkeys never got the better of him in the matter of climbing trees.

15. Boul — a tree with sweet-smelling flowers and fruit.

The master could bear it no longer. Only a few days had passed, and for fear of Ananta the master could not step out of school. Whenever he turned his back, a riot occurred. Ananta would push a boy, or strike someone, or pull somebody's leg - even thrash someone. He jumped for joy if children hit him, although he never hit them back; but who could ever dare to raise a hand on him ?

Primarily, the master was afraid of the Singh woman. Besides, she invariably poured four measures of curd into the master's bowl on her way back after selling curd. For this, the master would never say anything to Ananta. In fear and greed, people are prevented from many a deed. The master lost his self-control in the end. He used his cane on Ananta. Twice at first, then four strokes. Six hard lashings at last. Still it mattered little to him. He would look around the bowl fruit while being caned; at times ran his fingers lightly over the bruises on his body. The boys would snigger "Mahadev falls short of bel-leaves, but Ananta always has enough lashes." His mother never knew of the terrible beating he got at school. Ananta forgot soon. Gone were all thoughts of the lashing as he stepped out from school.

Four months, and then five, passed by in this way. Ananta was still learning the second letter of the alphabet. Many a cane had broken. The master found it impossible to manage him. But he could not drive him out, afraid that his share of curd would end. At last the master could bear it no more. Throwing away the cane, he got hold of

some branches of poison ivy and gave a thorough thrashing over his legs, arms and body. Ananta felt the pain that day. Yet he did not shed a tear. He boasted before his school fellows, "I'll see that brother of a wife - that Mohanti." The next day Ananta was writing quietly, not lifting his eyes from his work. The master had been observing him from the corner of his eyes a number of times. What a picture of saintliness! Very pleased, the master thought to himself "Such an easy way out? Alas! Why couldn't I do this before?"

Past noon, the master wanted to go out to the fields to relieve himself. He shouted "You boys; Bring me fire, my tobacco-leaves; Get a pot." Four to six school boys ran about to keep everything ready for him. The children did every little chore for the master from pressing his legs to washing his dirty clothes and utensils. However rich the man his son had to press the master's feet. For one studied well if he massaged the master. The master rolled a tobacco *pika*¹⁶ with care. Lighting it from a firebrand, he inhaled two mouthfuls of smoke. Then blowing out the smoke with a whoosh, he said "You fool Mukunda. This tobacco-smoke doesn't seem to have any pull."

Mukunda answered "Not my fault, teacher. My father got this from the weekly market yesterday."

Teacher - "You Bindiya; What about those Balasore tobacco leaves your father got from Cuttack? Why; You never brought them?"

16. Pika — a giant-sized hand made cigar, made with tobacco leaf.

Binod - "What could I do, teacher ? Mother has tied them in bundles and placed them over the rope-shelf high up. My hands did not reach it."

Teacher - "Listen. Do what I say. When your mother goes for her bath, turn a big basket upside down on the floor. Climb over, and remove the tobacco-leaves; take out only two to four pieces, and tie up the lot again. Careful ! Don't bring any more; And if you don't get the leaves tomorrow morning, just watch out for this cane - will you;"

The master observed Ananta once again. Silently, Antu was doing his work. The master felt pity for the boy. He said softly "My son Antu; Will you take this *lota*¹⁷ and bring me some water ? "Down went Antu to the pond as a dutiful boy - to fetch water. The master sat smoking, waiting for him. But Antu was not to be seen. The master could stand it no more. He had given two or three glances in the direction of the pond. At last he rose. He proceeded towards the pond, puffing at his *pika*. Hidden below the bank, Antu had seen observing the movements of the master. Antu meekly approached him. He handed the pot in such a manner that the master would not fail to notice the water within. Five fingers of his left hand gripping the *lota*'s rim, the *pika* in his right - he walked smoking to the distant end of the village to relieve himself. Half an hour had not passed, when the master came running with six-foot leaps in the air, frantically yelling at the top of his voice. The water-pot had dropped somewhere. His *dhoti*¹⁸ would also have fallen off;

17. *Lota* — a round water pot, of brass or aluminium.

18. *Dhoti* — long cloth, worn to cover the body from the waist down.

only he kept clutching it in his hand in a half-naked condition. He screamed "that destroyer Anta; That murderer He's killing me." When he reached the school, he picked up his cane - "Where is Antu?" But who could find Ananta? Ananta had vanished.

The master lay rolling on the ground from one end to the other, and cried out for water. A boy ran into the kitchen and brought him a bowl of water from the pitcher. As the master washed his hands and face and took a mouthful of water, he flung the vessel seven feet away. Crying "Oh father mine; Oh mother mine;" he rocked about. He could not shout any more. He simply lay groaning. His face had swollen up a lot, the eyelids had puffed up to cover his eyes - he could not see. The villagers crowded around. Saying "what happened?" about four of them tossed the master into the water. Towards evening, the master began to shiver in cold. They got him out of the water, and massaged a quarter seer of *tīl*¹⁹ oil over his body. With difficulty the master could get a few words out of his mouth. Still, his face was bloated like a round earthen pot. He could not speak clearly. He managed to mutter "Very hungry." Knowing he would not be able to eat anything else, the village folk brought him half a seer of hot milk. Mouthful by mouthful, he drank it all and sat up. His body cooled. *Til* oil takes out the poison from ivy; The master was feeling better. All the villagers were present. Five elders sat down to enquire into the matter. "Well, what could have happened?" they asked. "Why did the master behave in such a way?" Evidence

19. *Til* — sesame.

was taken from those around. After discussion of the previous action of the master, it became quite clear that it was the work of Ananta, the widow's son. For it was now definite that Ananta had harboured anger for the thrashing with the poison ivy he got from the master. When the master asked Ananta in the morning to fetch water, he went to the pond and half-filled the lota with sticky mud, people had seen the creepers of poison ivy growing in the bushes by the water's edge. Bringing two palmfuls of the poison fruit, he had scraped off the rough hair and skin with a broken piece of clay. Half of these scrapings he put inside the lota. The rest he made into a packet and tucked it in his waist. As the master went into the fields, Antu had mixed the contents in the pitcher of water that was in the master's kitchen and ran off. The master bore a grudge. He picked his cane and thundered "I will see that son of a widow, Ananta, today;" and started towards Ananta's house. A man in anger has no sense of time and place. The villagers tried to stop him. From a distance he shouted "Oh you milk-woman Debaki; You milkwoman Debaki; Where is that son of a widow Ananta? That vermin." By that time Singh woman had heard everything. Hiding her son inside the house, she sat on the outer verandah. When she heard the master's words, she brought out the buffalo-driving staff from the house; and yelled, "You slave of a Mohanti; You pig; You scum. My husband was Jemadar to the Sahib how dare you call me Milkwoman Debaki? I am the Singh woman; And you curse my son; Whatever is eating you?"

Wait till I get my hands on that Mohanti lout." Her head was bare. Strands of grey and black hair blew in the wind. The staff lay on her shoulder; hearing her savage screams, the master's intestines turned cold as ice; He was quite conscious of the woman's strength. It had happened one morning. The Singh woman was going down the river bank to the village to sell curd. At that instant the fierce bull of the Binode Behari temple came charging at her. Motionless she stood for some moments; then caught the bull's horns. Over her head was the basket containing three pitchers of curd, but she did not hold on to it. Clutching the horns, she edged the bull towards the steep bank. Then with a sudden shove, she let go the bull's horns. The bull went hurtling like a bundle down into the river. It had turned lame since that day. Gone was its fighting spirit. The master had seen this with his own eyes. In panic, he made his escape. As an antelope flees from an attacking tigress, the master ran for his dear life. Stumbling he ran, while the blood streamed from the wounds on his knees. The staff across her shoulder, she raced after the master, heavily as a she-bear. Her huge belly gave out a loud thump as she ran. The jingle of brass bangles on her arms could be heard quite a distance away. The village visibly shook with her piercing yells. The master merged somewhere in the darkness near the middle of the village. The Singh women kept on hurling insults at him "You wood-eating slave of a Mohanti; Wherever have you hidden my son? Fetch him - and remember; Tomorrow morning I'll crush your head with these brass bangles;"

And so it was, that the school-master was never seen in the village from the next day.

Five to six more years went by. Most of the villagers were harassed because of Ananta. His tyranny was limited. Although fruits like cucumbers, corn-cobs, berries, mangoes and bel never remained in people's orchards, Ananta did not cast a glance on any gold and silver lying around. Still he remained as good as he was mischievous. Heaven save the person who angered him. He would first break down the door and centre-post of his foe's house. Never did he lift a hand on anyone, as his mother had warned him not to. Yet if you gently pleaded with him, he would do anything - even clean your dirty shirt. If Ananta happened to be watching when someone's field was being furrowed, and the man said "My son Antu; How can anyone's work be done without your help?" He would grab the shovel straightaway, without a word. Within a quarter of a day he dug up a foot-deep plot of land that which four men could not finish in a day. When no labourers were available and the thatching of some person's house had to be done - he got hold of Antu. A little cajoling, and sure enough Antu would complete the thatching by himself even if it took a full day or two.

Rama Bina's father lay dead in the house. Nobody came to remove the corpse as he had died of cholera. Antu was passing by in the evening. Rama narrated his story to Antu. No more words passed between them. Antu rolled up the corpse in a mat and lifted it upon his shoulder alone. A

night black as pitch, with cholera rampant in the village. A mile away he threw the body on the burning-grounds, dipped himself in the river and came out. Ananta was fearless. Tiger, bear, spirit, snake or toad could not scare him. He would remove and eat the fruit from people's orchards; but if you offered him any food, he would break down your front-door in a rage.

Bindiya Chanda was a merchant, weaver by caste. He could count eight to ten thousand rupees before you in a moment. With a thriving cloth trade, he was busy erecting a building for his shop. The outer posts had already been fixed. The two middle ones were each twenty four feet long - extremely heavy sal trunks. Ten men with all their strength could not insert them in the ground. One of the workman laughed and said "Well, all of us are unable to do this - but the widow's son Ananta could fix the two posts by himself." And at that moment, who would be passing by but Ananta. The weaver Bindiya called out "Oh you Ananta; Fix these two posts and I'll pay you two rupees for sweets." Could Bindiya now escape from Ananta's wrath? Shouting "Yes, you weaver; You brother of my wife; Am I your slave? That I should work for you?" he hastened forward to strike him. The weaver fled in fear. In the next hour he had uprooted all the wooden posts that the ten workmen had taken twenty days to fix. Nevertheless, people who knew Ananta could get him to do most of their work. Each day he helped some person or other. The weaver Bindiya complained about Ananta before the village elders, but instead heard the worst from them.

On the northern side of the river Bhargabi was Binodraipur. The village lay slightly above the level of the river. To protect it from flood water, an embankment stretching from Gopalpur to Ramnagar - eighteen miles long, thirty feet wide and fifteen feet high had been built by the Government. A number of riverside villages and paddy fields were saved because of this. Binodraipur was a prosperous village. Below it lay innumerable sunny fields. About two hundred houses made up the village. Mostly they were people of means. No one vied with the other. Among them were Government servants, schoolmasters, money-lenders and workers from Calcutta.

It was the month of *Aswin*²⁰ - time for Durga Puja. Villagers who were away had all come home. Merrymaking swept the entire village. Food and drinks were in plenty. Music and dancing stretched far into the night. The season was marked by festivities every year. The sixth day of Puja arrived. In the morning a wisp of cloud was seen to the north. The sun came up; then hid behind the clouds. In a short while the sky was covered with dark masses. Gusts of wind began to blow. The old man Gobinda Panda cautioned 'My son; It is said -

"Day-break with a smiling sun,
One moment out, the next within;
Yet the father says - my son,
Sure as ever, there will be rain."

Take heed, it's going to rain today." Hardly had the words left the old man's mouth, when drops of rain

20. *Aswin* — September-October month.


fell. Once the rain started, it did not cease. It rained through the sixth, the seventh and the eighth day of Puja. The fury of the rain had not lessened till the evening of the ninth. People were stranded. The hundred-year olds said they had never seen the like before. The walls of a quarter of the houses in the village collapsed. Day and night, they were lashed by wind and rain. Came dawn of *Dasami*²¹, the village filled with cries of "Our village - it's lost; It's gone," People could not remain in their houses any longer. With baskets and shovels they ran to the river bank. Young and old worked together. Brahman and Harijan mixed freely. Everyone was on the embankment, basket and shovel in hand. The south of the river was one unending stretch of sea. Nothing else remained. The flood waters touched the top of the embankment. Seven-foot high waves leapt up from the river from time to time to splash across the embankment. A hundred loads of earth would pile up at the places where the water overflowed - without anybody's asking. The base of the embankment was already scooped into a small lagoon. Eight miles down at the other end, the flood waters had entered through the Rampur breach and began lapping the foot of the village. The low lying areas were seas of water. Even if the water did not flow over the embankment, the lower reaches of water would submerge the village. The flood waters were rising every moment - and would sweep through. At a time like this could meals be cooked in homes? The women folk came out of their homes and started blowing conch shells.

21. Dasami — The tenth and final day of Durga Puja.

Some started weeping with infants in their arms. The sounds of conch shells, calls of worship and wailing resounded through the village. The sun began to set. Water entered the village through the bathing ghat. Within minutes the flood-water was seven feet high. The width of the stream went on increasing. Water spurted into the village with great force. Cries of "*Hari Bol*²², Save us - we are lost," rang out. No other words were heard. The flood would smother them any moment. Hundreds of loads of earth were heaped up to prevent the flow through the breach, but not even a handful remained in the swirling current. While this went on Ananta did not care to see what was happening. Since morning he roamed the length of the village in the rain. Whatever plants with cucumbers or corn-cobs came floating in, he would stuff them in his waist. Hearing the cries at the bathing ghat, he ran laughing to see what the fun was about. There for himself he saw - a strong current of water was rushing into the village. He heard that the whole village would be swept away. He looked carefully at the village. The entrance door of the Binoda Behari temple was massive, seven feet high and six feet wide. Wrenching it free, he placed it over his head and ran. He remembered the heavy paddy-pounder belonging to Parbati's mother lying about in the open. He pulled it free. He pushed the door upright in the breach and rested the paddy-pounder as a stay against it. With all his strength he set his shoulders to the door. And called out "Earth; Now fling earth; Fling more earth." Amidst

22. *Hari Bol* — a form of address to the Gods.

all the din his shouts of "Earth; More earth;" continued. Load after load of earth began to fall on either side of the door. The fallen earth came up to his chest. Without a thought for himself, he continued shouting. As the earth reached his lips, he cried out twice "Oh God, Throw earth; Earth;" Ananta's calls could be heard no more. The earth on piling. The breach began to close. People had a little faith again. They stopped to breathe. And then they thought of Ananta. Where was Ananta? Ananta? Three feet of earth lay over his head. The village was rent with cries of "Praise to the widow's son Ananta. Young and old, men and women - the entire thousand of the village cried "Hari Bol" and chanted "Glory to the widow's son Ananta." As fate would have it, the rains stopped. The level of the river receded a foot. Ananta's mother was sitting out on the verandah. Hearing shouts of joy, she said to herself "Let me see what had happened. That son of mine has not returned yet - I'll call him back." She rested her husband's staff upon her shoulder. Then she closed the door and stepped out. Passing through the village, she heard each one say "Praise be to Ananta; Praise be to him." They touched her feet and exclaimed "Glory be to your son." The Singh woman forthwith walked towards the ghat. She heard everything. Yet she did not utter a word. She walked over the embankment. Gazing at the middle, she went round and round it. She stood and stared at the ghat, her back towards the river. She was not aware that fifteen feet of water lay below the bank. She turned to face the river. There came the sound of a loud splash. People shouted "What happened?" They held aloft some lighted flares in the direction of the river. Over a deep hollow in the water seven feet from the bank a lump of froth was spinning around; fifteen feet away a bamboo staff floated by.



The Postman

Phakir Mohan Senapati

Translated by Ashok Kumar Das

Since appointment to Government service, being posted to many post offices, big and small, Hari Sing has discharged his duties. Posted at Sadar Post Office, Cuttack, he had been working there since ten years at a stretch. Got preferment for efficiency. Now Head Peon, pay rupees nine per month. In Cuttack City all articles had to be bought. Even for a little fire, purchase of a match-box was a must.

In spite of living in extremity, expenditure was not less than five rupees a month. By hook or by crook, remittance of four rupees to home was obligatory. It being a rural place only with four rupees they could some-how make both ends meet. One pice less than that caused a dead-lock. Gopal was a student of Upper Primary School. Schooling fee was two annas per month. Besides school fee, occasionally a little extra expenditure had to be met for purchase of articles, such as, a book today, a slate tomorrow, or paper. Such additional expenditure made the going extremely difficult for that month. On some days the old man had to go without food. "Leave alone food, may my Gopal continue study." One day referring to the Service Book, the Postmaster said, "Hari Sing, you are fifty-five, have to retire, cannot serve anymore." It was, indeed, a bolt from the blue for Hari Sing. What to do, how to maintain the family? Leave his family alone, this surely would finish Gopal's study. Since Gopal's birth Sing cherished a high hope—Gopal

would be Sub-Post Master of a rural Post Office, at least a village Post-master. But without a smattering of English, to get that big job was difficult. No facilities in the rural areas, had to be brought to Cuttack for being taught English. Brooding over the matter, his health was shattered. Did not get a wink of sleep on some nights; fretting over, night would pass into dawn.

Postmaster Babu was very well-disposed towards Sing. Notwithstanding permanent servants at the lodgings, after office hours, Sing did some chores at the Babu's lodgings. During evening, lounging, while Babu would be reading his English Newspaper, Sing used to prepare and hand over a pipe of sweet-strong tobacco of a sort which nobody else knew. One evening Sing fetching a well-prepared pipe of tobacco, blew the air well into the pipe. Babu was puffing smoke like the fume of an engine, eye-lids closing. Sing sensed it was an opportune moment. Falling at Babu's feet, hands folded, with profound reverence, very humbly, very slowly, in very sweet words Sing briefly putforth his grievances. He did not also forget to mention his high hope about Gopal. Babu lying in the same posture of eyes shut—spoke in a dignified tone. "Very well, put up a petition." Babu had guts, for during the Postal Inspector's or Superintendent's visit, they put up at Postmaster Babu's lodgings. No efforts were spared in making neceseary arrangements for food and drink to please the high officials. On that night Postmaster Babu was heard shouting ten times "Hari Sing, Hari Sing." Hari Sing was a veteran, had served a good number of high

officials was aware of personal idiosyncracies, their gratification. On that day Sing was required to stay at Babu's lodgings till midnight. Because of Orissa's bad climate if any babu suddenly falling sick started vomitting, Hari Sing arranging lemon, etc., dealt with the babu. After the babus slept comfortably Sing going home at midnight used to cook for himself. Sing was known to his superior officers in this context.

Postmaster Babu forwarded Hari Sing's petition to Headquarters with a high recommendation. Extension order was received within a short time. Sing, no doubt, was much elated ; communicated this happy news to the village. People who consider the present as their be-all and end-all are overwhelmed by immediate happiness or sorrow. They do not care to see what step the future God is contemplating for him. Such a feeling of great exultaion burst Sing like a bubble. Letter from home was received; Gopal's mother had pneumonia, no hope of life. Sing showed the letter to Postmaster Babu. Babu was a very kind-hearted man, immediately granted leave. At a breath Sing ran home. Arriving home the light vanished from his eyes. The world was plunged into darkness, as it were. The old woman was almost speechless. She surveyed the husband with a feeble vision, raising both hands a little bowed, indicating to take the dust of her husband's feet. Was she only waiting for that little dust ? It was all over. Sing's real home broke down. Disposing of his few household articles he came down to Cuttack with the boy.

Gopal is a student of Middle Class. Sing was now in his extremity, pensioned off. He was in strained circumstances. Was living on the sale proceeds of a few items he was left with at home, such as, a waterpot, bell-metals, etc. While in service scraping up two to four annas per month deposited something in the Savings Bank, had exhausted all after Gopal's Middle English School Education. It was Sing's big hope—there will be an end to all his troubles after Gopal got through the examination. Gopal also said assuringly a number of times, "Father, continue my education with a loan, I shall repay after employment."

Friend of the poor, the Lord heard Hari Sing's pitiful prayer. Gopal got through the Middle English School Examination. Sing was happy beyond measure. That old Postmaster was there, Sing importuned him. Superior officers also were helpful to some extent. Gopal was directly appointed Sub-Post-master, Makrampur rural Post Office. Salary rupees twenty per month. At present training for four months at Sadar Post Office would take over the rural post.

Hari Sing's joy knew no bounds; always gazing at God, bowing down repeatedly, was expressing, "How merciful You are, heard the grievances of a distressed person." On the night news of appointment was received, old Sing cried hard in seclusion. Alas! if the old woman were alive today, how happy she would be! her Gopal got an officer's job; would be rolling in fun, frolick and mirth. Alas!; the unfortunate woman was destined not to see. Let well alone,

to be sure, Gopal got an officer's job. May God protect Gopal.

Gopal handed over his first month's salary to the old man. The old-fellow was jubilant; was capering about. His son was an officer, got so much money within a month. Counting the coins four five times, tying it up at the waist went to sleep. Next morning, rushed to the market in a confused state. Shoes, shirt, cloth, everything that was necessary were bought. Indeed, Gopal was an officer, should he wear a cloth of common stuff? In fact, remuneration ought to be according to one's worth. Suitable dress is necessary.

At one end, Gopal babu in office was writing in English along with his five colleagues. Very closely associated with the babus, all addressed him 'Postman babu', full name Gopal Chandra Sing. At the other, coming to the lodgings what he found out was that the old fellow wearing a piece of dirty cloth was busy with chores. How would Gopal relish his meals—Gopal gone for bath, his wet cloth not dried up—the boy dreadfully tired of working, these bothered him day and night. Sometime before old Sing took God's name occasionally, performed some religious rites, now he had forgotten everything on account of Gopal. I feel, all this must have incensed God. Threatening, said, "You fool, what is all this, well, you will realise."

Lately, there had been some change in Gopal babu's attitude. Now he vented his spleen upon his father. This fellow is an idiot, does not know English—wage-earner—wears dirty cloth,

should I call this fellow father, what would people say ! The other day a few respectable ladies putting on chemise, dress were standing nearby—the old fellow without a shirt, passed in front of them. What a shame ! Unless this fellow is thrown out of the lodgings my prestige will go.

Once, Postmaster babu told the father point blank, "See, you have not done any good to me, stay, if you like, in the lodgings or go away. Besides, see, when babus come to our residence don't come out of the house". Stung by Gopal's words, the old man sat down numb. Who should he tell this ? It concerned a son, a sore in private parts can neither be seen nor shown. One whom he could open his mind, was no more. Was put in mind of the old woman, cried hard, looked around—none to help. The old man remembered the old woman for better or worse. Wiped the face, did not cry any more, lest some harm comes to Gopal.

Gopal babu did not inform the old man about his departure to a rural post. Got up early morning, said in a disrestful tone, "You, father, I am off to my rural post. Carry this luggage, do not hire labour, it is your responsibility, I will not pay."

Dressing up, taking the umbrella under the armpit, gyrating the stick, babu walked off. What the hell was the old man to do ; making a bundle of everything carried it on his head. Unable to walk, no strength in the body, eyes watering at times, halting ten times enroute he reached Makrampur by evening. Babu reprimanded him for being late. Stupified the old man sat down to take rest.

Babu attended office morning and evening, the old man worked silently at the lodgings. None had ever seen father and son sitting together in a place having a tete-a-tete. The Postmaster was an officer of the rural area. People used to come to pay courtesy calls and left, did the old idiot think he would talk to him !

The rural climate did not agree with the old man. In fever he coughed with a characteristic sound, that cough aggravated as night advanced. Babu was very much disturbed in sleep. Babu ordered the peon, "Throw the old fellow out on the kia (a kind of thorny shrub) fence." The peon was an illiterate fellow, did not read English, had a native heart. He thought "How is that ? Should I lay this old patient on a kia-fence." Once, the old man ran high temperature, did not take food for three days ; it was mid-night, very dark, and due to exposure the old man's cough was beyond belief. Babu, no doubt, was highly annoyed, dealt two English blows on the old man's chest, threw his bedding out. Old man left for the village.

It was learnt from persons close to Gopal babu that he was very cheerful since that day. And, at the other end, the old man having come to the village, leased out his two acres of land on share basis, to get paddy at home. With pension money, the expenses towards apparel, salt, oil were met. Since he had contracted cough the old man took to opium in small doses. All expenditures were taken care of. At the moment, both father and son are in good cheer.
