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**Literature and the tapashya of transformation:
A glimpse into the creative worlds of Chittaranjan Das**

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Abstract

The present essay discusses the works of Chittaranjan Das, a creative interlocutor of our times, who believes in literature as a *tapashya* of transformation. It begins with a brief sketch of his life and works and then presents Chittaranjan's *weltanschauung* on literature and criticism. Chittaranjan believes in *tapashya* as a mode of being in a world where we are patiently laboring to take the existent reality to a new evolutionary height as well as make the descent of a higher level of consciousness and a more dignified and qualitative relationships into existent self, culture and society. As a *tapashya* of social transformation, literature has to take part in people's social, cultural and moral struggles. It has to give expression to people's creativity and aspirations including people's deconstruction of the existing dehumanizing systems. Chittaranjan argues that for this, the poets and writers must involve themselves with the pangs and joys of common people and write in their language without unnecessary ornamentations.

Literature and the Tapashya of Transformation: A Glimpse into the Creative Worlds of Chittaranjan Das

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The new critics are critically aware. xxx They are beginning to adapt themselves to the new fact that literature is not a special pursuit and this cannot be cultivated away from life, that it is very much a part of life and society. And what is more, it has not only to interpret life and society as they are, it has to probe deeper to find out why they are what they are and upon that context, to suggest new directions and impetuses. This new criticism will not simply destroy; it will also fulfill and provide us with the next insights!

Chittaranjan Das (1982a), *A Glimpse into Oriya Literature*.

Writing is a question of becoming, always incomplete, always in the midst of being formed..It is not the first two persons that function as the condition of literary enunciation; literature begins only when a third person is born in us that strips us of the power to say "I." xxx *To write is also to become something other than a writer.*

Gilles Deleuze (1997), "Literature and Life," pp. 225, 230 (emphases added).

The genuinely committed writer is never on the side of the Establishment. His voice is always a powerful protest against arbitrary power. He is always on the side of man, of the future and of truth inspite of the pretensions that seem to rule all around. xx A writer is always on the side of affirmation, on the side of love.

Chittaranjan Das (1982a), *A Glimpse into Oriya Literature*.

Invitation and Introduction:

Reflections on literature, culture and society in contemporary India and various initiatives in literary and cultural criticism as they have been carried out in the academic portals of our land have deliberately chosen not to make a dialogue with movements of criticisms and creativity emanating from the soils and spaces of India, especially the non-metropolitan ones. Our theorists of literature and culture and our academic interpreters of life who have always claimed a larger than life role for themselves have almost always looked up to the West for direction and inspiration. Whatever emerges there-- whether it is modernism or postmodernism, structuralism or poststructuralism--immediately arrests our attention. We rarely make an effort to rethink these theories and methods nor are we interested to carry on a dialogue with the reflections on the human condition emanating from different non-incorporated and non-metropolitan spaces of India. While discussing contemporary interlocutors such as Jacques Derrida and Michael Foucault and old masters such as Jean-Paul Sartre, we do not feel an urge to bring some of the creative and critical interlocutors from contemporary India to have a dialogue with these thinkers and thoughts and thus widen our universe of discourse. Even the so-called moves of post-colonial criticism

as they have come to pass in the institutional corridors of India and the West are part of a metropolitan reflection on the human condition and embody very little urge and desire to talk to people in their vernacular and have a dialogue with creative litterateurs and critics who choose to write in the local languages (despite the temptations and the imperial gaze of the global). In this context of the hegemony of the global and the decimation of the local, the present article presents the works and worlds of a non-metropolitan and non-systemic thinker who has been a seeker of literature as a *tapashya* of transformation and who speaks altogether a different language. This interlocutor is Chittaranjan Das. Born in 1923 in the Bagalpur village in the district of Cuttack in Orissa, Chittaranjan has been and continues to be a part of many experiments, explorations and *tapashyas*—*tapashyas* aimed at the multi-dimensional transformation of self, culture and society. Before we discuss Chittaranjan's perspective on literature and the calling of criticism, let us begin with a brief overview of his life, works and his many-splendoured worlds.

A Brief Sketch of Life and Works

Chittaranjan Das started writing at a young age but from the beginning his concerns were critical and embodied a deep seeking. One of his earliest writings is an essay on Socrates that Chittaranjan wrote in Oriya when he was a student at the Ravenshaw Collegiate school, Cuttack in the late 30s. He started writing his diary at the age of 19 in 1942 and continues to write this unto the present. His diaries are intimate doors into his life and works. What is probably unique in the whole world of self-reflection is that his diaries have been published as they are without any changes, whatsoever. Now they have been published in 19 volumes under the title *Rohitara Diary*, the diary of Rohita. Rohita is the name of the Upanishadic seeker who is continuously drawn by the ideal "*Chareibati, Chareibati*": "Move On! Move On." What strikes us in these diaries is that how day after day in these pages the unbound soul of Chittaranjan has thought about the self and the world without any complaint and depression, whatsoever. Chittaranjan in the meanwhile has also gifted us with three volumes of his autobiography entitled *Mitrashya Chakhusha*—Through the Eyes of a Friend. For Chittaranjan, to be a writer and a critic means primarily to hold the hands of people on whose lives we write and be their friends. In another context, critic and philosopher Fred Dallmayr (1993) has challenged us to be a "house friend" of the world, standing at people's backyard and telling them a life of beyond, a life that could be instead of being resigned to a life as it is and Chittaranjan's life and works have embodied this commitment of a "house friend" with a creativity and commitment which is genuinely inspiring.

As a young student at Ravenshaw College, Cuttack Chittaranjan participated in the Quit India Movement of 1942 and was put behind the bars for three years in different jails. After his release from the jail in 1945 he realized that the freedom of the country was in the offing and went on to continue his learning at Shantiniketan, the abode of Gurudev Tagore's *sadhana* and dreams. After studies, he plunged into research on the history, culture, religion and literature of Orissa. He produced three monographs in the early 50s at Shantiniketan—*Studies in Medieval Religion and Society of Orissa*, *Odisara Mahima Dharma* ("The Mahima Dharma of Orissa") and *Achyutananda*

O Panchasaka Dharma (Achyutananda and the Religion of the Panchasakhas) (Das 1951, 1952). These explorations helped Chittaranjan discover himself anew and at the same time to reinforce his convictions. His perspectives on literature, culture and criticism are very much deepened by his dialogues with the two main protagonists of these studies--the tribal poet Bhima Bhoi and the saint poet Achyutananda Das. Bhima Bhoi has challenged all of us with his following lines: "*Praninka Jeevana Dukha Apramita Dekhu Dekhu Keba Sahu / Mo Jeevana Pache Narke Padithau Jagata Uddhara Heu*" (The life of beings is full of so much miseries and who can tolerate this on seeing / Let my own life be in hell and let the world live in happiness and escape from this misery). Similar has been the aspiration of Chittaranjan with one addition: he believes that transforming the world is possible while making one's life a heaven of freedom and joy; and while striving to transform the world, one is not condemned to a hell. Secondly, Achyutananda Das had argued in 15th century that one's primary identity is to be a *Shudra*, a servant, rather than to be a *Brahmana*. Achyutananda Das's ideal of servanthood as our primary identity before God and society has been another deep influence with Chittaranjan (Das 1992a).

After his research at Shantiniketan, Chittaranjan went to Denmark for further studies and upon return started a school in the interior tribal area of Orissa, at Champattimunda in the district of Anugul. He was there for five years and whatever he wrote there for students have been published as *Jeevana Vidyalaya* (The School of Life) and *Jangala Chithi* (Letters from the Forest) (Das 1971). He joined the faculty of Rural Institute at Bichpuri, Agra in the late 50s and was there for 15 years. During this period, some of his works are--a collection of essays called *Taranga O Tadi* ("Waves and Lightning"), *Samaja: Parivarthan O Vikasha* ("Society: Change and Development") and *Sheelatirtha*. A perpetual wanderer that he is, Chittaranjan left Agra in the mid-70s and came back to Orissa to devote full time to the emergent movement of integral education in Orissa, inspired by the vision of Sri Aurobindo. This last 20 years has been a period of intense creativity for Chittaranjan where he continues to give us his best. Some of his most important works of creative criticism in this period are--*Jatire Mu Jabana* (I am an Outsider by Caste), *Pashyati Dishhi Dishhi*, *Odia Sahitya Sanskruika Vikashadhara* (The Cultural Development of Oriya Literature), *A Glimpse into Oriya Literature*; *Santha Sahitya* (The Literature of the Saints), *Sahitya O* ("Literature and.."), *Ebam* ("And..") and others.

Literature as a *Tapashya*: Chittaranjan's Weltanschauung

Chittaranjan believes in *tapashya* as a mode of being in a world where we are patiently laboring to take the existent reality to a new evolutionary height as well as make the descent of a higher level of consciousness and a more dignified and qualitative relationship into existent self, culture and society. One of his inspiring interlocutors in Oriya literature is the poet Gangadhara Meher, a weaver like Kabir, and the writer of a heart-touching poem on Sita of Ramayana called *Tapaswinee*. In one of his critical works Chittaranjan calls Gangadhara a *tapaswee* (1983). One can also look at the strivings of Chittaranjan through the same vantage point.

Literature as *tapashya* makes possible many new beginnings. First of all, it enables us to blossom, to grow, capable of more sharing, giving and love. To begin with, the *tapashya* of literature is a *tapashya* of self-transformation. In literature, we are familiar with experimentation with styles and techniques, but for Chittaranjan the most important experiment in literature is to experiment with one's life, to carry out manifold "experiments with truth" in one's life, as Gandhi, another creative interlocutor of our times with whom Chittaranjan has carried out a life-long dialogue, urges us to realize. But self-transformation and world- transformation go together. Literature must contribute to the transformation of the world--from its ugliness and many indignities, literature must help the world be a more dignified place to be and become. The institutional moorings of the world--its politics, economy and education--must be changed in order that the dignity of the human person is at the center of our scheme of things. Literature must contribute to the building of such a world and the transformed consciousness that makes this possible.

As a *tapashya* of social transformation, literature has to take part in people's social, cultural and moral struggles. It has to give expression to people's creativity and aspirations including people's deconstruction of the existing dehumanizing systems. For this, the poets and the writers must write in the language of people without unnecessary ornamentation. The dominance of ornamental language as it happened in the era of *Ritikavya* of medieval literature and as it happens in certain fields of modern poetry are signs of decadence for Chittaranjan. One of the animating chapters in Chittaranjan's magnum opus *Odia Sahitya Sanskrutika Bikashadhara* ("The Cultural Development of Oriya Literature") is a chapter called "The conflict between Reeti and Preeti." Chittaranjan is for life-affirmative love in literature, a love which gets expressed in the clarity of one's language. Writing in alienating language whether it is Sanskrit in the medieval world or English in the contemporary India is an expression of our alienation from the vibrant links with people around.

But to write in the language of people requires courage. The hero of such courage for Chittaranjan is Sarala Das, the maker of Oriya *Mahabharat*. Centuries ago, in 14th century, when poets were writing in Sanskrit, Sarala Das chose to write in Oriya. This was a protest as well as a creative affirmation. Similar courage is shown by Achyutananda and the *Panchasakhas*--the famous five friends of 15th century Orissa, Balarama Das, Ananta Das, Yashovanta Das, Jagannatha Das and Achyutananda Das--who refused to write in Sanskrit and translated many epics and *puranas* into Oriya. Chittaranjan helps us to understand that the *Panchasakhas* were people's leaders and chose this wider calling for themselves other than the more secured one of being a court pundit. For Chittaranjan, as writers we must have the courage to be on the side of the people rather than sing ballads for the kings and queens and loiter in the corridors of power.

Speaking of language, Chittaranjan believes that the written language in literature derives nourishment from the spoken language (Das 1982a). The debate on the written and the oral has a contentious history and recently Derrida has argued that while the written fixes and binds our thought, the oral gives unrestricted freedom to it. But Chittaranjan is not obsessed with the issue about the

comparative significance of the written and the oral. His main point is that the users of the written must have the humility to realize that the written is nourished by the oral and have the readiness to learn from the oral. But after a while, Chittaranjan's meditation on language and literature goes beyond the conventions of the written and the oral. For Chittaranjan, literature must be a *mantra* in life. Taking inspiration from Sri Aurobindo, another seeker who has been a constant companion of Chittaranjan in his life's pilgrimage in the last quarter century, Chittaranjan believes that the language of literature should be a language of *mantra*. It must have the illocutionary power to transform. Chittaranjan also suggests that alternative literature must have an alternative language because the existing language is inadequate to describe and express the horizon of emergence. Therefore when Chittaranjan argues that we must write in people's language, it is not an exercise in populism alone. In the evolutionary unfoldment of a writer, there has to be moments when the writer presents a new language to the people in order to describe the emergent world he/she has envisioned, strives to create or has created.

For Chittaranjan, literature must have commitment but this is not necessarily expressed through commitment to political parties and ideologies. Sometime ago, the noted sociologist Andre Beteille (1982) had argued that commitment does not mean commitment to an ideological orthodoxy alone; it also refers to the moral commitments of the actors. Chittaranjan's concerns are similar and at the same time much more as he urges us to realize the ontological depth of moral and social commitments. For Chittaranjan, one cannot be committed to society if one is not committed to oneself. But self-commitment here does not mean commitment to one's ego-aggrandizement but to the calling of the universal self within us. Chittaranjan makes a distinction between ideology and devotion to an ideal life (Das 1992b). Ideal life is not just a romantic utopia for Chittaranjan but is a design of an ideal relationship of dignity which one continuously seeks to realize in the life of self, other, culture and society.

But what has happened to the devotion to an ideal life in post-independent India? Chittaranjan is pained by the death of the ideals in this period and looks at it as an era of *Prabanchita Biplaba*, an era of "Betrayed Revolution." Indian freedom movement wanted to realize both political freedom and social revolution. But after the realization of political freedom, the agenda of social revolution was hijacked by the powers that be. Chittaranjan condemns the writers of the country for so easily and willingly becoming a party to this political conspiracy. For Chittaranjan, poets and the litterateurs quickly forgot the dreams of freedom movement and soon sang eulogies for the holders of power, even surpassing the court pundits of the medieval world. They forgot the language of *tapashya*, *sraddha*, social struggle and social transformation. Thus the so-called modern era in a field like Oriya literature for Chittaranjan is a field of decadence where the writers became clinically preoccupied with styles and techniques. As Chittaranjan writes: "... the-so called modern movement in literature soon came to mean the movement for new styles and techniques, often harping in a bizarre sort of way, on new lethargies and therefore also new eccentricities" (Das 1982a: 242). While "literature could have given a leadership and provided an alternative," it compromised and declared its "insolvency" (ibid: 245). Furthermore, "when there was this fundamental incapacity to face the

real issues and the real privations, the writers ran away and took refuge in gimmicks and skills. One can say without exaggeration that in Oriya poetry at least there was a regression to the *reeti* phase of its history in the 17th-18th centuries where the poets of the courts overdid the structure of poetry to conceal the fact as it were that they had nothing more important to say. Thus, as far as range is concerned, the poets remained very closed and cornered inspite of the avowed modernity of their styles" (ibid: 243).

For Chittaranjan, literature in post-independent India should have been a literature of protest and seeking of new affirmations. The burgeoning body of post-colonial criticism has not really embodied this sensibility deep enough. Literature must have confronted the brutality of the post-colonial state and its dehumanizing configuration of power with love, courage and *sraddha*. These days, critiques of modernity under the rubric of varieties of postmodernism are still confined to the safe institutional corridors of modernity but Chittaranjan's critique of modern literature is inspired by an identification with the pangs and hopes of ordinary people who have been victimized by the processes of modernisation. In a poverty-stricken society such as India, modernisation has been the other name of elite domination. In another context, liberation theologian and critic Felix Wilfred (1997) has argued that critique of modernity should be attempted taking into account what processes of modernization and the condition of modernity have done to many of its victims. Chittaranjan's critique of modern phase of Oriya literature is guided by similar concerns. Modern literature has forgotten that it is a dialogue with people and is a partner in their pangs, aspirations and many strivings for a more dignified future.

On Poetry, Literature and Criticism

Now we can come directly to a discussion of Chittaranjan's perspectives on poetry, literature, culture and criticism. For this, I shall confine myself to a few of his texts, namely an essay of him on the new horizons of poetry called "*Ethara Udiba Neta*" ("Now the flag shall fly") and his collection of essays called *Sahitya O.. "Literature and.."* (Das 1989a; Das 1989b). It must be mentioned that his theoretical statements on literature are also presented in his other collection of essays such as *Ma Nishada*, *Jatire Mu Jabana* and *Pashyati Dishu Dishu*.

"*Ethara Udiba Neta*" is a unique and inspiring meditation on poetry and poets. It is a long essay on poetry written along with another inspiring poet of contemporary Oriya literature, Srinivasa Udgata. In this Chittaranjan begins by stating: Poetry is not primarily a *kruti*; a work: this is a *drusti*, a vision, a perspective, a way of looking at oneself and the world (Das 1989b: 2). *Drusti* gives rise to creation, *srusti*. This creation is fundamentally meant to take us from what we are to what we ought to be. But poetry is not meant to take us away from reality. Poetry makes bridges, establishes many threads. In the evocative words of Chittaranjan which is difficult to translate into English: "Poetry makes bridges, it conquers hopelessness by making bridges; by itself becoming a bridge, it establishes victory over all *asammata* (hesitation for consent) and *anamaniyata* (stubbornness). After

this everything looks beautiful here...Once the ladder is there, loneliness departs and the unreachable reaches us as our very own" (ibid: 7).

Poetry establishes a bridge between time and timelessness, history and eternity and reality and possibility. It is also a creative and transformative link between *bhumi* and *bhuma*. A poet stands on the ground but is continuously after a *Bhuma*, a beyond. For Chittaranjan, *Bhuma* is such a constant attraction and appeal that while standing on the present and the past it continuously draws us to a future. For Chittaranjan, to live with poetic sensibility is to live in continuous touch with what psychologists call the peak experience of one's life. Peak experience is a spiritual experience, an integral experience which makes the poet a traveller. In Chittaranjan's words: "The real poet never situates himself at the center. He does not hide himself for a catch like the spider of a web and does not wish to sell his *tapashya* and get the fortunes of an *Indra* (The King of Heaven). He traverses his path with all his sufferings, sympathy and determination, the path which connects the ground with the peak" (ibid: 10). For Chittaranjan, to touch the peak while standing on the ground is called *utkranti* in the Indian shastras and poetry is an embodiment of this *utkaranti*.

Chittaranjan again urges us to understand the distinction between the language of power and the aspirations of a poet. With Nietzsche and Foucault, it is the human will to power which has dominated the way we think about poetry, literature, criticism and society. But Chittaranjan provides us with an alternative language and an alternative world. While the man of power runs "to bring the entire world inside his closed fist," the urge of poetry ("*Kabira basana*," as he calls it) brings our consciousness to an intimacy when we feel at home with the entire world. At that time all our fears vanish. There is also no hatred. The Upanishadic aspiration of life, "*Tato Na Bijugupsate*", then becomes a way of life. In the poetic words of Chittaranjan: "[At that time), the bird inside comes out silently with all the achieved aspirations and urges of one's life. Once she starts coming out the door which had remained closed for centuries spontaneously gets opened" (ibid: 7).

But for Chittaranjan, the man of power does not want to open his doors. He is afraid of expansion, he is afraid that he would be lost in the process of expansion. In the words of Chittaranjan: "The man of power is not able to give himself. He is not able to open his many knots. The knots open and hesitations go away only when we discover the poet within us; we are then able to realize that our greatest way and *dharma* is to expand ourselves. When we look at the world through the eyes of a poet, we realize that our threads are connected with all this, (with everybody in the world)" (ibid: 10).

Thus for Chittaranjan, poetry is continuous with expansion of consciousness which while establishing a bridge between the outer nature and inner nature takes both to a new height. Taking inspiration from Biswanath Kaviraj, the great theoretician of poetry, Chittaranjan calls this *chaitanya tanmayata*, expansion of consciousness. The creative imagination which is the mother of this expanding urge knows no bounds, accepts and acknowledges no limitation. For Chittaranjan, this is the stage of "self-creation" in one's life where one strives to continuously create and recreate oneself.

In his earlier reflection on poetry and prose shared with us in his *Jatire Mu Jabana* Chittaranjan (1979) had looked at poetry in a narrower way. For him, modern prose is much more close to reality than poetry thus declaring the present age as an age of prose. But in the present treatise Chittaranjan has no such parochialism.¹ Rather he challenges us to realize the blurring of genres between prose and poetry in our creative works. In this essay, Chittaranjan also urges us to transcend the distinction between the poets and critics. In the integral unfoldment of one's life while a poet goes up step by step and is worthy of critical observation and presents the picture of a possible world as a critic of the existent world, a critic in the same trajectory of integral unfoldment is capable of touching deeper and deeper and is able to look at the world through the eyes of a poet (ibid: 43).

Thus central to the overcoming of the distinction between prose and poetry and poetry and criticism is the creative travel, creative immersion and creative evolution of the maker of literature. In fact, Chittaranjan establishes an intimate connection and transformative link between criticism and creativity, deconstruction and reconstruction. He demonstrates this link in both his life and letters. In fact, we can use this issue of creativity to move to a discussion of another of Chittaranjan's treatise on literature, *Sahitya O* which is a collection of his sixteen essays on literature. All these essays have the connecting term 'O' ['and'] existing in the middle such as "literature and commitment," "literature and creativity" which is probably meant to bring home his conviction that to think of literature is only to think of it in conjunction with life. For Chittaranjan, literature alone is not enough; it is a means to leading a more dignified and qualitatively different life.

In his essay, "*Sahitya O Srujanasilata*" ("Literature and Creativity") Chittaranjan argues that behind creative literature stands a creative person. While contemporary interlocutors such as Foucault (1977: 107) announce the "death of the author" and argue, "If we wish to know the writer in our day, it will be through the singularity of his absence and in his link to death, which has transformed him into a victim of his own writings," Chittaranjan brings to the fore the creative subjectivity of the writer. Of course, even for Chittaranjan, all that we write in the name of literature is not creative literature but one cannot be creative in literature if one is also not creative in one's life. For Chittaranjan, "a divided life is a diseased life and a diseased life can never be creative" (Das 1989a: 157).

Chittaranjan believes that in literature one cannot be confined either to Truth or Beauty. Chittaranjan has a relational approach to aesthetics where aesthetics is part of the quality of life that constitutes the total context (also see Giri 1998). Chittaranjan believes that adoration of beauty must have within itself a fight against ugliness and a *satyagrahic* quest for truth. If one starts with either truth or beauty, then in the characteristic unfoldment of one's life one inevitability meets the other. The literature which adores truth is a literature of courage but those who adore beauty in literature may not necessarily be the bearers of courage and the determination to struggle. As Chittaranjan argues: "Those who are only aestheticians in literature are afraid of struggle, and are afraid to come down from their *palankas* [luxurious beds]; they are afraid that if they come down then they would fall down to an abyss of mud..." (ibid: 148). Chittaranjan wonders how such fearful aestheticians

can ever create a literature of beauty! For him, beauty cannot establish itself by denying truth and ignoring the courage and struggle that is required to protect, preserve and nurture both truth and beauty. Literature can then transcend the many distances between the few who consume literature only as beauty and the many who are condemned to remain at the margins of the world of aesthetics. Recently many critics have drawn our attention to the dangers of an aestheticization of life (see, Harvey 1989, for example) and Chittaranjan contributes to this critical perspective of the times. But Chittaranjan does not belittle the significance of beauty in purifying our desire and making our life artistic. What he wants is an integration of truth and beauty. In the words of Chittaranjan: "The person who realizes that he is also nearer to truth while having made one's life beautiful and more beautiful, he alone enters inside the real creative and artistic domain of one's life. The person who in the love of being nearer to Truth also feels nearer to beauty and washes the many dusts which have gathered around his eyes, makes his life truly artistic. He elevates and expands himself to such a level that he sees both truth and beauty inside one gestalt plane" (ibid: 133).

In literature there is a commitment to truth, beauty and the wider relationships where these are manifested. For Chittaranjan it is this commitment which would fight against alienation in life and society. But this commitment is not an imposed one, nor is it a fixed one. Along with the journey of the maker of literature, this commitment also attains new heights and discovers new depths. Chittaranjan warn us that in the name of commitment we should not be stuck somewhere on the path of our life. For Chittaranjan, literature is a *sadhana*. "*Sadhana* refers to a process of transcendence. In the process of transcending from one step to the next in the inner path of our life literature can become at once a means as well as a companion" (ibid: 183).

Whatever Chittaranjan has written about poetry and literature applies to his views on criticism as well. Criticism should help us be a more genuine friend of life, hold the hands of authors and people and take them to a new height. In a remarkable essay of his, "*Sarjantmaka Sahitya Sameekhya: Abhimukhya O Angeekara*," ("Creative Literacy Criticism: Objectives and Commitment") shared with us nearly two decades ago, Chittaranjan had clearly stated this position of his. As we have already noted, Chittaranjan presented us two important monographs of criticisms quite early in his life--namely, *Odisara Mahima Dharma and Achyutananda O Panchasacha Dharma*. In his work on Mahima Dharma while discussing the spiritual aspirations of prophets and seekers such as Mahima Gosai and Bhima Bhoi Chittaranjan has discussed their work in a global context. He has provided examples from other religious and philosophical traditions of the world while discussing the message of Mahima Dharma. In this book, Chittaranjan (1952) had written nearly half a century ago, "*Bhakti* is a global urge which has manifested itself in many religions. This urge has also strongly manifested itself in Mahima Dharma. So the critic would fulfill his duty if he can show the link between Mahima Dharma and other Dharmas." Chittaranjan has carried this wide-ranging exploration in all his critical works thus breaking the walls of parochialism that afflict us.

Chittaranjan is an explorer of life where any movement, experiment, social struggle and *tapashya* adoring and enhancing human dignity is dear to his heart. His critical engagements are

always enriched by such a global conversation, a personal immersion and intimacy with global cosmography, a *Brahmanda Bhugola*, as Balaram Das would have it. Chittaranjan's critical exercises are inspired not by any one particular theory and model of literature, culture and society. He never looks at a critical work and its author through any deterministic model. He believes that a genuine author and text want to tell us something and as critics our primary task is to understand this voice rather than only be obsessed with how this voice has been constituted and determined by culture, history and society. Chittaranjan's critical works on authors, texts and phases of literature do not discount the significance of the constitutive or the formative context of history and society but at the same time he is uncompromising in his faith that our primary task as critics is to understand the meaning of the text and the voice of the author and the experimental subjectivity which is the bearer of all this. To all those who hail the coming of historicism in contemporary social and cultural theory, Chittaranjan says that a critic's role is not only to go back to sources. Contra-Foucault, Chittaranjan believes that obsession with genealogy and archaeology can be a disease and make us unable to understand the emergent world and consciousness which breaks the chains of the past and present. As back as 1968, in the year of the worldwide student movement, Chittaranjan had written an essay entitled, "*Utsa Nirupanara Roga*"—"The disease of determining sources," in which he had urged us to overcome our obsession with the sources. But at the same time, Chittaranjan, had made clear, "I am not condemning history, I am only pointing to the limits of history in the discussion of literature" (p.121, *Manishada*). For example, he argues if in a discussion of a maker of literature such as the great Sarala Das we are concerned only with whether "he belonged to this caste or not" and whether he was one or many [like Shakespeare] and "whether he was born in this village or not," then we forget the creative Sarala Das. Understanding the creative subjectivity of Sarala Das as expressed in his work is as important as understanding his many historical determinants. Criticism of literature has to be as creative as literature itself and for Chittaranjan an uncritical bondage to the power of history in literary criticism often makes one forget this.

Spinoza has been an early influence with Chittaranjan whose emphasis on understanding has deeply influenced him. Chittaranjan believes in the Spinozian dictum that the role of a critic is not to condemn or judge but to understand. This Spinozian emphasis has reached illuminating heights in Chittaranjan with his dialogue with Martin Buber. Indeed, Chittaranjan's critical encounters with texts and authors are engagements in understanding and dialogue. Chittaranjan starts with the statement and world view of the texts and authors concerned, describe their points of view. Then slowly and step by step he raises probing and transforming questions. In his conversation with authors he would say: "O Friend! you have thought about this problem this way but your own work suggests a transforming departure. Can we take it as a starting point and carry on a subsequent exploration?" Thus Chittaranjan's criticisms are connected; they are not thrown as bombshells from an unfamiliar sky. In Chittaranjan's engagements there is a move from description to critical dialogue. What is striking is the dialogical nature of this move itself and the intimate connectedness and friendship it embodies. Chittaranjan believes that the role of a critic is not just to act as a simplifier of the author's world-view and be a middleman between the author and the reader but to widen and deepen the universe of discourse and take us to new heights and depths. But at the same

time, a critic should not impose his or own views and theoretical models on the text. Chittaranjan's *Grantha Manthana*, a collection of his review essays, is an embodiment of such an approach to criticism (Das 1996).

Chittaranjan's critical works as engagements in understanding have been enriched by his dialogues with psychotherapy. Carl Gustav Jung and Victor Frankl have been his two companions in this pilgrimage of understanding. With Victor Frankl Chittaranjan believes that literature should provide us therapy to the many distances and alienations of life ² In fact, Chittaranjan's criticism works as a therapy and closes the distance between the author and the critic, establishing a soul's friendship between them. In his dialogue with psychotherapy, Chittaranjan always emphasizes the significance of creative subjectivity. For instance, in one of his critical essays in *Pashyati Dishī Dishī* Chittaranjan argues that the archetype in the collective unconscious of a culture is not out there as a given; it has to be selected by the poet and this act of selection is not a mere external act, one of choosing the right technique. It requires a journey on the part of the poet, a journey to welcome the right archetype to one's home.

Chittaranjan's *A Glimpse into Oriya Literature and Odiya Sahitya Sanskrutika Bikashadhara* suggest us some other methodological and perspectival insights as well. Chittaranjan writes: "Periods in literature do not come in terms of one exclusively following the other. We study a literature in terms of a few periods solely for reasons of convenience. These periods do not really give into another which succeeds them. They just evolve into another and thus depict a process of development that is always there. The history of any literature, therefore, should be looked at and conceived as a continuum and unending chain of challenges and responses" (Das 1982: 35). The above again illustrates Chittaranjan's dissatisfactions with a mere historical approach. When a critic is looking at the history of culture and literature his probing also carries the questions of the present. In the words of Chittaranjan: "The contemporary society determines to a very great extent the nature in which the challenges are served and emphases given" (ibid).

Another insight we gain from Chittaranjan is to look at literature as a bearer of the cultural imagination of a group, a society. Culture for Chittaranjan is the eye of a society, an eye which looks at existent social reality creatively and critically. Culture is a perennial seeking of value and a striving for dignified human relationships. Culture is a source of inspiration and Chittaranjan calls it *prerana*. Chittaranjan discusses literature keeping this reality and aspiration of *prerana* in mind. He discusses literary work from this point of view of *prerana* both at the level of an individual author as well as the creative literary expression of a group. His *Odiya Sahitya Sanskrutika Vikashadhara* shows us the dynamics of this *prerana* of culture throughout its history and how literature has sometimes enhanced its flow and at other times obstructed it.

Chittaranjan contrasts the *prerana* of culture with the notion of *sampatti*, property. Culture is an inspiration, a *prerana*; not a property, a *sampatti*. The *prerana* of culture and literature is to help us to be and become, rather than just to have and possess. Chittaranjan shows us in his history

of Oriya literature what happens to a society when the *prerana* of culture and literature is treated as a property by both the poets as well as the holders of power. It speaks of the death of the human person and creates obstructions in the flow of culture as well which looks for the coming of a *Bhagiratha*, a *Bhagiratha* who makes the river Ganges flow from the mountains by the dint of his *tapashya*. For Chittaranjan, the *tapashya* of the Bhagirathas is facilitated and strengthened by different social, political and cultural movements as well.

Chittaranjan's emphasis on culture can immediately make us jump to the conclusion that Chittaranjan is also a postmodernist and post structuralist as these movements also reiterate the significance of culture. But while the post modernist notion of culture is still very anthropological and anthropocentric treating culture as a way of life and a mode of practice without understanding the transformative potential inherent in it and the *sadhana* which makes it possible, Chittaranjan brings the dimension of continued seeking and self-transformation to the core of culture. Second, while discussing the work of culture Chittaranjan does not remain at an ideational level alone despite suggestion of idealism. Chittaranjan looks at the base of culture in land ownership and the educational capability of a society. He tells us that when excellent ornamental poetry was being written in the royal courts of medieval India a majority of people did not have ownership of land and were working as tenants. These vantage points of poverty and social death are as much helpful to look at medieval literature as to the creative literature and theoretical texts emerging from advanced industrial societies, the home of the postmodern and post-structural enunciations on the human condition today (Harvey 1989).

Chittaranjan:

The Beginnings of a Critical Appreciation

One of the essays in Chittaranjan's *Sahitya O* is an essay called "*Sahitya O Bahubhatrukatta*" ("Literature and Polyandry") in which Chittaranjan tells us how writers and poets now have many husbands; they prostitute their creativity and poetry for the laurels of money and power. But this is a masculine imagery and Chittaranjan has consistently used such masculine imageries to speak about lack of commitment as well as courage in literature. In his *Shukara O Socrates* (The Pig and Socrates) where Socrates is the model of an ideal critic for him Chittaranjan writes that Socrates was not an effeminate person (1992b). This language is again masculine and Chittaranjan's consistent recourse to such a masculine language in his critical conversations is symptomatic of a wider problem (also see Giri 1996). There is probably a reluctance and incapacity on his part to deal with the feminine other in his work. It is no wonder then that his meditations on life and letters are full of *tapaswees* and there are not many *tapaswinees*. It is probably for this reason that Madhavi Das, the woman compatriot of Chaitanya Dev, great religious leader of medieval India, does not find a significant mention in his history of Oriya literature. If Madhavi Das does not find a special mention in his history so is the case of Salabega, a Muslim poet who was devoted to Lord Jagannatha. Does this reflect any incapacity on Chittaranjan's part to deal with the Islamic other as well?

Chittaranjan's work provides immense challenges to us in terms of classification and characterization. Is his work mainly Orissan and Indian? Does it affirm the value of Indian tradition? Where do we fit him--the voice of the *Desha*, *Marga*, or *Videsha*?³ Chittaranjan's works of criticism and creativity defy all such classifications. It is an embodiment of a "conversation of the humankind" where there is a deep urge to make life better and in the process of realizing this dream there is a dialogue and personal participation with many movements of criticism and creativity in different periods of the history and in different parts of the contemporary world. Chittaranjan's work not only embodies a dialogue with Biswanatha Kaviraj but also with Robert Browning. He writes: "Poet Browning says somewhere that out of three sounds, the poet makes not a fourth thing but a star" (Das 1982: 291). Chittaranjan had also brought Boris Pasternak into Oriya literature having translated the great novelist's *Doctor Zhivago* as soon as it was published and written a critical essay on him. Chittaranjan's work not only embodies a dialogue with Balaram Das (cf. Das 1982b), another great poet of Oriya literature but also with Martin Luther and Erasmus. Chittaranjan believes that all the experiments of human history and the world contribute to the making of what he calls a *viswa viveka*, a world conscience (Das 1992b). It is a *viswa viveka* which also gets manifested in Chittaranjan's creative and critical works which embody a conversation with the global heritage of mankind and the future of humanity. In Indian society, as we are striving to discover our roots and create a healthy base for our leap into the future, it is important not to forget this task of global and planetary conversation. In this context what fellow traveller Jitendra Nath Mohanty, the distinguished philosopher of our times, writes is so helpful to understand Chittaranjan and the challenge of self-understanding that awaits a creative response from all of us critics interested in building an authentic tradition of Indian literary and cultural criticism:

My tradition is constituted not by *sruti* alone but by all those texts with which I think: Plato, Kant, Hegel, to name a few. My tradition as an Indian philosopher needs then to be represented as a series of concentric circles opening out to many other traditions, to the large conversation of mankind at the outermost fringes. This picture rehabilitates my self-understanding as being both an Indian philosopher and an universal thinker (Mohanty 1992).

[This is the revised version of a presented at the National Seminar on "Recent Trends in Literary and Cultural Criticism in India" at the Indian Institute of Advanced Studies, Shimla, Nov. 4-7, 1997. I am grateful to Professors Mrinal Miri and Makarand Paranjape for their kind invitation and to the participants of the seminar for helpful comments, criticism and questions. I am also indebted to Professor Chittaranjan Das for helping me with some of his books. Professors C.T. Kurien and C.T. Indira have also read the manuscript and offered many valuable suggestions for which I am grateful to them. However, I alone am responsible for any gap in this paper]

Endnotes:

1. Though it must be noted here that when Chittaranjan exclusively writes on prose--its nature and possibilities--, such parochialism continues to haunt him as it is evidenced in a recent series of essays he writes on prose in the famous Oriya literary journal *Jhankara*.
2. Please note here a similar perspective offered by Gilles Deleuze (1997: 228): "One does not write with one's neuroses. Neuroses or psychoses are not passages of life but states into which we fall when the process is interrupted, blocked, or plugged up...the writer as such is not a patient but rather a physician, the physician of himself and the world."
3. Makarand Paranjape (1997), the organizer of the conference at the Indian Institute of Advanced Studies where this paper was first presented, offers us these categories of classification in his agenda of an authentic tradition of Indian criticism.

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Appendix

In the Beginning¹

By Chitta Ranjan Das

In the beginning are the people. The people have a corporate life. This corporate life in history has always preceded what is now known and celebrated as individual life. People have thus lived in society before they have really lived as individuals. Every society has always had a culture of its own, built upon a functional structure. Culture has always inspired the creator in man while it has also striven to provide the necessary succor for the very material existence of man. Relationships in a particular society have been healthy or unhealthy according as these two functions of culture have been able to exist in harmony with each other, as far as a society has developed appropriately to mean all individuals and as far as some individuals in it have not thought themselves to be more equal than others and have on the other hand normally bound themselves in a sense of commitment with the whole which sustains them. Thus, the fully functioning person in any human society has been in the long run identified as *Homo concors*, or man capable of feeling in harmony with himself and with others. Whatever may have been the explanations, mere *Homo sapiens* and *Homo faber* have not proved to be enough.

In the beginning were the people. They lived their lives, always in relationships with one another. They thought, they worked, they manufactured and they also created. They shared their creations and ideas. They grew as they shared. This process of sharing gave them a language which evolved into a definite shape as the people themselves evolved. A language was spoken pretty long before it came to be written down and recorded. All peoples had a literature before the languages could be written down. Thus everywhere, an oral tradition preceded the so-called literary tradition. There was a language before *Pundits* could weave out a grammar and a syntactic separate idiom and identity around it. Likewise, there was also a literature, quite a rich heritage of it, before some people adroitly came to call it their own. History of literature will reveal that it was only very lately that people became sentimental about what they called their own language and literature, feigned as if they possessed them, loved to hold them up against other people's languages and literatures. That gave them a sense of glaze and in the long run, the vogue was to identify the whole gamut of literary creation in terms of what they came to look upon as a national literature.

Oriya Literature

The story of Oriya literature is primarily a story of literature, a story of producing and sharing in a field of activity which is literary and which is creative. Oriya literature is definitely

¹. This is the first chapter of Chitta Ranjan's *A Glimpse into Oriya Literature*, which is presented here with a view to provide the reader's a direct access to the writing, thought and *weltanschauung* of the author.

a part of the great tradition that Indian literature is, and with that qualification, can only be treated as a little tradition. As any other regional literary tradition in India, of course, Oriya literature does have its special nuances and props, its special curves of excellence and lag in view of the peculiar inducements of a situation that obtained here from time to time. Oriya literature is that mass of literature which has grown up and come to be in Orissa, because of the peculiar nature of the interplay of forces, literary and otherwise in a particular slice of territory called Orissa. And to start with straight, Orissa has not been a stable concept even territorially considered. What is to-day known and governed as Orissa is of a very recent origin. Orissa became a separate province only as late as 1936, when the major identifiable Oriya-speaking tracts were put together to form one administrative unit, then called a province. The very term Orissa was one given to a part of this region by the Moguls, to the coastal sarkars, on which they had established a hegemony beginning with the reign of Akbar, while the other tracts were lying apart and being ruled by other powers. The very name Orissa or Odis'a as it is called in the land itself has been inferred to have been derived from what was known as Udrades'a right during the pre-Aryan times. Some Tibetan texts of the Tantric-Buddhistic lore have used the term *Ottivisa* to mean what is now territorially modern Orissa and in all probability the latter is a derivation from the former. *Udra*, denoting the name of a people and a language, is found in several ancient texts of India, including the *Mahabharata* and Bharatamuni's *Natyas'astra*. A peasant community inhabiting mainly the central regions of Orissa is still called the *Oda* community, that claims itself to be the oldest on the soil in this region. Nevertheless, it has to be submitted that what went under the name of Udradesa was never the whole of Orissa as the latter is known to-day. Denoting the other regions were Kosala, Utkala and Kalinga. These were separate entities and more often than not ones that fought with one another. The boundaries and the bulk used to change according to conquests and empires being made and unmade all the time, compelling people frequently to change their identities and allegiances. It was surely an age when people did not matter at all. It could not be otherwise.

Kosala in this context was known as Dakshin Kosala most probably a southern extension of the comparatively more familiarly known Kosala of the Ganges basin in the north. Most probably in course of time the tail became separate from the main whole because of a territorial feud and became an entity for itself. This unit of a kingdom was in constant hostility with the sister kingdoms of Utkala and Kalinga adjoining it, had made more than one intrusions by conquest till it was finally absorbed into the Ganga empire by the Cholas in the 11th century AD. Even to-day, when Orissa has been governed now for quite more than a generation as one entity, there are several people in the Kosala counterpart of the State who take a special pride and pleasure to be reckoned as inhabitants of Kosala though simultaneously being called inhabitants of Orissa. Interestingly enough, such people mainly constitute those who are educated and hence ought to know.

The southern part of Orissa was known in history as Kalinga. It seems that in earlier times there were several tribes called the Kalinga and subsequently they were brought under a common sway by one who therefore proudly proclaimed himself as *Sakalakalingadhipati*. The Cholas who had surged northwards from Karnataka towards the close of the first millennium had already a

kingdom established as Kalinga with its headquarters at Mukhalingam and then annexed the north-lying Utkal to it. They also later took Kosala by conquest. That was perhaps for the first time in history that our tract under review got the semblance of a single whole. The northern region was Otkala, which should be a derivation of Utkaliga meaning upper Kalinga. It may be noted that when king Ashoka had his Orissa expedition in the 3rd century B.C. it was in all likelihood Utkalinga that he was dealing with.

In between these three major names that denote a broad regional division which should describe Orissa of the bygone times, there were many others, pointing out to dynasties and areas which they ruled. A few of these are the Matharas, the Mundas, Sailodbhabas, the Bhaumakaras the Somavanmisis or the Somakulis, so on and so forth. Each of these had existed, moved and they had their being at a particular time forming a regional kingdom which gave in to others rather so frequently that it is very difficult for a historian to pin them into a whole, linking them together in a coherent sequence. More evidences have yet to be available and till then at least, one has to be content with the available regional descriptions.

Orissa was conquered by the Muslims in 1568. But this Orissa was only the coastal strip to the east, meaning only not more than three districts. A major portion of what constitutes political Orissa to-day was outside the pale and was ruled piecemeal by feudatory chiefs some of whom were the unillustrious tenants of the erstwhile Gajapati royal line who had been ruling the land after the Gangas, and some others of those again who had come from outside Orissa and taken possession of the respective units by mainforce after having killed the native chiefs. After the Muslims came the Marathas. The latter were already in their phase of wane when they came to Orissa. They were rather plunderers than real rulers and were more after the gains of a plunder after they had overrun a tract. The British followed the Marathas in 1803 and yet, for reasons prompted by the interests of empire-keeping, they had two kinds of government:- the districts which were directly under the British administration and the as many as twenty-six feudatory states ruled by the *Rajahs*, who ruled as vassals and yet had the impression that they were really *Rajahs*. Thus feudalism and imperialism continued side by side right up to 1947, thus very tacitly building up a regional imbalance that persists even after decades of political freedom. These *Rajahs* had to pay a certain sum to the crown mutually agreed upon, but could exact as much as they could from their subjects. As a result, a sort of darkness prevailed over about half of Orissa and the nineteenth as well as the twentieth century contact of the land with modern enlightenment and the awakening that came in its wake did not touch even the peripheries there. Both socially and politically, the chasm continues to a very great extent even to-day, and it has surely its repercussion in the field of literature also. The few people who had migrated from the directly governed coastal areas to these feudatory states, prevailed upon the *Rajahs* and got themselves settled there, were more on the side of the *Rajahs* than of the people and thus added to the exploitation and misery. The great divide thus created still exists and serves as a hurdle to all real assimilation.

The three coastal districts of British Orissa - Puri, Cuttack and Balasore - were part of Bengal when the British had won these from the Marathas. For some time they were also governed as a part of Bihar. The Sambalpur tract was with Madhya Pradesh as late as the first decade of this century. The two southern districts of Ganjam and Koraput were in the-then Madras Presidency, till the lot came to be formed into a separate province in 1936. The feudatory states were a world remote and apart till their merger into the State of Orissa after 1947. This will indicate that Orissa has not been the territorial whole as is often supposed and this has always had its effect on the cultural evolution of the region. Social and economic factors always tend to affect the literature of a particular people and in Orissa the distances have always remained powerful enough to be a factor.

Oriya Language-The Uniting Force

Thus territory is not the really important variable which gives Oriya Literature its *raison d'être*. Though territorially Orissa has meant different things at different times, the real uniting force has been the Oriya language. This language, inspite of the local variations in forms of dialects from time to time, has remained the main inspiring factor behind the development of a literature. Oriya language has a much better claim to be that variable. Though under different rules and rulers, changing lot with the change of masters, the bulk of the Oriya-speaking people have remained a contiguous whole and that whole has given rise to a literature through the centuries, which has a continuity and a homogeneity. It is not of course claimed that Oriya language has always been the same right from the very beginning. In fact there is no abrupt and total beginning, there has been only an evolutionary process. Orissa, because of its special geographical position has been specially open to that process and to the many combinations and assimilations which that process always connotes. Orissa is situated right between on the passage from the north to the south, also vice versa and thus has been exposed to all the advantages and hazards of being a passage and to some extent a bridge. Even a look at the Oriya script will tell a lay observer that it bears the mark of both Dravidian and Indo-Aryan scripts.

Racially, Orissa has been the meeting ground of four main strands of races, the Negrito, the Austric, the Dravidian and the Aryan. The Negritoes were the very first inhabitants and then came the Austrics or the *Nisadas* as they have been called in the Indian texts. The very fact that about a quarter of the entire population of Orissa to-day belongs to these two stains is enough testimony to the premise that much of what happens in the total life-sphere in Orissa has very much of the impress of these two races. In Orissa as all over India so much of the pre-historic Austric life, world-view and culture have been appropriated into the so-called Aryan culture. Most of our deities worshipped, the folk deities as well as the later sankritized ones have been originally Austric innovations. Most of our observances are vestiges, sophisticated vestiges though, of those ages. The Sabaras have been acknowledged to be one of the very oldest tribes that inhabited India and a very large portion of the Adivasi population in Orissa to-day happens to be Sabara. Some scholars think that even the words Kalinga, Utkala and the like have been originally Austric words. Thus we may assume, the

Austrics were the first inhabitants of this land after the very first primeval Negritoes. After them the Dravidas came to Orissa from the south and south-west. This migration seems to have taken place by about the close of the pre-Christian era. After these, have come the Aryans, in two hordes, one through the Radhadesa in the north-east and the other through Mahakosala in the north-west.

It must have been anything but easy for the Aryans to enter the Orissan tract and settle down there. It seems, there has been quite a bit of resistance on the part of the native inhabitants against such an intrusion. This may be one of the reasons why Kalinga, along with Anga and Banga has been denounced as an inferior sort of country defiled by the impure quality of the breed of people who lived there. Even as late as the 6th century B.C., Aryans were advised not to go in for settling down in Kalinga and those who were the original inhabitants there were condemned as fallen and degenerate. The great law-giver Manu of the 2nd century B.C. goes to mention that a journey to Kalinga was permissible only for purposes of a pilgrimage and any violation of the rule required an act of repurification and expiation after one had come back from there.

The same is the story of the Oriya language in the early days. We have terms as *Udrabhasa*, *Odrabhasa* and *Audri* to indicate that a language having some identity of its own prevailed in this part of the country. In the *Matsya Purana*, *Udradesa* has been described as a land of the *Mlechhas*. Accordingly the language then ought to have been in the category of the *Mlechha* languages. The *Mlechhabhasa*, in the case of Orissa of those times should mean the language of the *Sabaras* and in terms of the genre, of the Austrics. This was the base upon which the subsequent combinations and evolutions have taken place. The Dravidian speech has surely influenced it from the South. The local speech of South Orissa shows how it has taken into itself very much of the elements of the Dravidian language style and thus has formed into a distinct dialect, called *Dakshini Odia*. The Aryan tongues then being spoken in Magadha and Mahakosala have come along with the Aryans who came to Orissa and thus caused an Aryanization. To be more precise, these have been the *Magadhi* and *Mahakosali Apabhramsas*, dialects of the scriptural Sanskrit. Bharatamuni of the first century after Christ has attributed to this amalgam the status of a *bibhasa*. The name he has given to it is *Oudri* or *Udrabhasa*. For the Sanskrit scholars, *Oudri* has remained a *bibhasa* till as late as the 16th century. It will mean that the pundits of Orissa, the celebrators of Sanskrit as the only *bhasa* have taken about fifteen hundred years to recognize the real language of the people and the land as a language. It will be evident however through the later chapters that by that time this language, Oriya, had already come much of age and had become a worthy vehicle of a high level of literature. But the Sanskrit scholars did not give it an appropriate status. Things had to wait till the 16th century when Markandeya Kabindra who flourished in Orissa gave Oriya or Oudi as he really preferred to call it, the status of a *bhasa*, or a full-fledged language. One is surprised to observe that even Biswanatha Mahapatra of the *Sahitya Darpana* fame who came quite a few centuries earlier and must have used *Oudri* at home in day to day parlance did not think the question had a relevance. According to Markande'ya Kabindra *Oudri* had evolved out of a combination of words spoken in the tracts of *Surasena* and *Udra* with the *Sabari* tongue. It has been supposed that the language used in the Ashokan stone edicts at Dhauligiri and also that used in the Hathigumpha

inscription of Kharavela on the Kumari hill were not the tongues spoken in the land itself during the two kings' respective times. Nevertheless the land did have a language of its own. It was a part of the very life of the people who then inhabited the land. It was thus a living language, one that was being evolved gradually in spite of the condemnations and rejections of the court and by the learned scholars.

To sum up, Oriya as a language has its very first base in the *Sabari* or the Austric language, has been nourished to subsequent shapes and forms by its contact with the Dravidian speech, enriched with the elements of Magadhi and Saurase'ni. Then has come Sanskrit as such, Orissa has to her credit many scholars of repute who have contributed commendably to Sanskrit learning and literature. With the Moguls and the Muslims, we have had influences from Arabic, Persian and Urdu. And lastly there has been the impact of the European languages, predominantly of English. Modern Oriya, then, or the medium of Oriya literature to-day is thus a product which has to be grateful to so many sources. The exposures and contaminations have always been to its advantage. The contaminations do continue.

Evolution of the Oriya Language

In the Mahayana Buddhist text *Lalitavistara*, it is mentioned that Gautama Buddha was well-versed with no less than sixty-four languages. Some scholars have surmised Udri to be one of these languages. One does well to take these inferences with a grain of salt, because, the Mahayana attitude towards Buddha thought it quite reasonable to associate all the extraordinary qualities with one it wanted to establish as a god. A more correct hypothesis will perhaps be that by the time *Lalitavistara* was written, *Odrabhasa* had come to be known in the eastern region of the country as a local variation of *prakrit*.

Oriya as a language was very much in a formative state till about the end of the first millennium A.D. It was spoken much before it could claim anything written for itself as literature. There was no doubt an oral tradition and thus a literature also. Another very important point to be taken note of is that because of the status given to Sanskrit in India by the elite powers that be and because of the sacrosanct halo created around it for predominantly utilitarian reasons, the regional vernaculars were deemed below status to be treated with fairness. It was a collusion between the ruling Kshatriyas and the monopolizing Brahmins that kept the spoken language of all people including the Kshatriyas and the Brahmins relegated and denounced to an inferior status. To look down upon the common usage language in favour of the language of scriptures and ceremonies has been the Indian style almost through all the ages, and the dichotomy continues even till to-day, although in a different garb. A society faithfully basing itself on class and caste could not perhaps do anything else. As in the case of the society in India, there has been also in the field of literature a class of Brahmins who dominate.

The attitude of looking at one's own language and literature as *my* language and *my* literature came much later after India had acquired the nationalistic way of looking at things. Collective egos did not take much time to be formed, and thus tongues began to be looked upon as mothers tongues. The sense of sentimentality that is often associated with an attitude like this has often stood very much in the way of an assessment of the regional literature as literature. The people and society who have always been the real matrix for all development in literature have been lost sight of in the enthusiastic pull. The drive to sentimentalize has often made people one-eyed as it were and has persuaded them to forget the inevitable fact that creativity in literature and its expression does always have a social dimension. The excuse of nationalism has tended to make much of literary assessment very parochial and prejudiced, almost drastically dissociated from the whole that is Indian literature. One could always afford to be more critical, more full of a real love for truth and for creativity. Oriya literature should get our attention primarily because it is literature and should submit to an assessment on the basis of how totally it has reflected the respective ages from time to time and also how totally it has projected itself to us so that we confront our real challenges as adequately as possible.