



Cultural Identity and Diversity of Odisha: A Conceptual Study

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ABSTRACT

In ancient times Odisha was known as Odra, Kalinga and Utkal for its art, architecture, sculpture, dance, music literature, customs, religion, beliefs and traditions. The people of Odisha-Odias were very brave, bold, courageous, victorious and patriot. They sailed across the sea to Java, Sumatra, Balli islands of Indonesia for the sea trade in boats. They are called Sadhavas. The ancient monuments and archaeological sites in different parts of Odisha still today remain as their foot prints. It is the 8th largest state in terms of land and the 11th largest state in the terms of population in India. Odisha is the home of India's 3rd largest number of schedule tribes where 62 types of ancient tribes are still living here having their own cultures, traditions , customs and languages. Odisha is a land of predominant Jagannath Culture along with a number of castes, tribes, religions and languages. Regional disparity shows its multiculturalism and diversity with the identity of its culture. The Odia language of Odisha is one of the ancient languages of the world having its rich literature. This paper attempts to asses Odisha as a multicultural state by highlighting its cultural Identity and diversity through its own ancient heritage and literature and tries to explore the idea of multiculturalism is manifested in diversity.

Introduction:-

" Barshanaang Bharata srestha

deshanaang utakal shruta

Utkalsya sama desha

desha naasti mahitale."

It is the description of the Mundaka Upanishad on the heritagical importance of Odisha - a renowned spiritual land in the eastern India. According to this Upanishad Odisha is a great province having rich heritage literature. Among the four shrines (Dhams) of the Hindu religion, the Jagannath Dham-Puri in Odisha is one of them . Puri in Odisha is world famous for lord Jagannath who is believed as the incarnation of lord Vishnu, lord Ram and lord Krishna. The history of Jagannath temple and lord Jagannath himself is full of mistry. The ancient great epics of Hinduism depict the glory and importance of lord Jagannath in our society. The temple of Jagannath is known as Srimandir and Puri on the seabeach of the Bay of Bengal is called 'Mohodadhi' is popularly known as - Srikshetra. It means the greatest and the holiest place in the world.

Culture of Odisha :-

The culture of Odisha is generally inhabited by lord Jagannath. He is worshipped by the people in their hearts as a own family member. Lord Jagannath is the soul centre odishan culture and religion. The festivals, traditions, customs and beliefs everything are surrounded by him. The people of Odisha believe him very much irrespective of their religion ,caste , race, gender and community. The Rath yatra - Car festival of lord Jagannath in the month of June and Puri are the meeting place of all religions and communities across the world. There is no restrictions to pull the newly made three wooden cars (rathas) of lord Jagannath, lord Balabhadra and goddess Subhadra. It is very often well known that, lord Jagannath's Ratha is called Nandighosh, Balabhadra's ratha is Taladhwaja and Shubhadra's Rath is Devidalan or Darpadalan. Many pilgrims across the world come to Puri to see the Chaturdhamurty on the golden throne of Srimandir.

During ratha Yatra millions of people come to Puri to see the lords on rathas under the open blue sky. Lord Jagannath himself comes from the temple with his elder brother and younger sister to visit the Gundicha house which is about three kilometres away from the temple. There is a vast open ground in front of the simhadwar where these three rathas come to the Gundicha house every year. It is a short visit of only 9 days of lord Jagannath to his aunt's house. Not only Odisha but also all Jaganaath dhamas of the world used to celebrate this car festival on the same day as per the rituals of Puri temple and Odia

culture. A spiritual atmosphere is being created there by the devotees saying loudly ' Jay Jagannath '..... Many foreigners visit Puri to see the Jagannath temple and the flag of Neelachakra -- Patitapabana bana. They believe, having seen it once all types of anxieties, sorrows, sufferings and pains vanish away in a while. They come here to seek the blessings of lord Jagannath for a happy, healthy and prosperous life. It is their believe, it saves and protects them from all types of misfortunes . It is obvious to say that lord Jagannath is worshipped by countless devotees of Hindu, Islam, Buddha ,Jaina and Sikh religions . He is initially worshipped by Adivasis - the ancient tribal peoples. So lord Jagannath and Jagannath Culture is the symbol of humanism where all human beings are equal. There is no discrimination among them as they are created by the God.

In Social life :-

In social life of the people of Odisha, lord Jagannath has an important role to guide them. All festivals, bratas and ritual ceremonies are devoted and dedicated to him. He is the root of all types of ritual performances of Odisha. In every Odia family believe and worship him from birth to death, from marriage to thread ceremony. Every day people bow down their heads under his feet to seek his blessings.

Odisha is a meeting pot of cultures including Aryans and Dravidians. Many festivals highlight the aspects of their cultures through out the year.

Boat trade of Odisha:-

On the full moon day of Kartika (October) the people of Odisha sail boats of banana barks and dry solos in the water of pond , river and seas to recall the past memories of Odia Sadhavas and their sea trade to the far away land of Java, Sumatra, Barnio and Balli of Indonesia. On the fond memories of Sadhavas, ancient Bali Yatra is organised by the govt of Odisha in the beds of the Mahanadi of Cuttack. Every Odia people remember them and their glorious past of Odisha still today.

Odia language :-

Odia is the mother tongue of Odisha. It is one of the ancient language of the world . Odia language is the 6th classical language of India after Sanskrit as the Indo - Aryan language. Other four languages - Tamil, Telegu, Kannada and Malayalam having the classical status belong to Dravidian language group. When British literature developed in Europe in 11th and 12th centuries Odia language and literature in

ancient Odisha were in its own origin and identity. From sudramuni Sarala Das to onwards the journey of Odia language has its own pace in full spirit . Sarala Das is the great architect of giving dimension to it. He is regarded as the founder of polished Odia language from Prakrit and Apabhransha language of Odisha.

Language is the cultural realisation of a nation. It is needless to say language is an identity of heritage of a nation. If a nation wants to be developed, at first the development of its language is indispensable. It is obviously said that mother and mother tongue are the greater than heaven. Language and literature of a nation are inseparable from each other. Thoughts, Feelings, Emotions and imaginations are expressed easily through language of a nation or a community either orally or written form, then it becomes its literature. The literary treasure house of Odisha is full of by the immense contributions of many known and unknown poets and laureates.

During the British rule, when ancient Odisha was merged in Madras, Calcutta and Bombay presidency, there was no unit among the Odia speaking people. By the 'Divide & Rule' policy of British Government, then Kranti Chandra Bhattacharya a Bengali teacher of Balasore Zilla School and some of other Bengalis said , Odia is not a special language- 'Odia ekata bhasa noy '.At that time some great lovers of Odia language - Fakir Mohan Senapati, Radha Nath Ray, Gourishankar Ray, Nilamani Bidyaratna, Madhusudan Das, Gopabandhu Das and others had raised their voice against them and proved that Odia is an ancient original language of the soil of Odisha. Their struggle to save the language from the foreign invasion was a remarkable land mark in the journey of Odia language and odia literature. The history of Odia language and its literature is very ancient and strange one. Before Sarala Das the Charyagitika of Buddhism was composed by the monk Sabaripa and Luipa belonged to Mayurbhanj district of odisha. A great epics of Sanskrit ' Gitagovinda' was written by a great scholar Jaydev born in Kendubilwa village on the bank of the Prachi river near Puri - the shrine of lord Jagannath.

When the printing press set up by Christian missionaries in odisha in 19 th century , many weekly magazines, newspapers , books and many religious scriptures were published in provincial Odia language. Undoubtedly it helped the progress of Odia language and literature and collapsed the unwanted conflict of Odia language by the mid of 1870.

It is the great achievement of odias, Odisha was firstly formed and declared a new province on 1st April 1936 on the basis of language by the British government.

Odia literature :-

Particularly Odia literature is very rich to highlight the glorious past of Odisha. The Paika Bidroha-Paika rebellion of Khurdha in 1718 is the first freedom struggle of India against the British rule. But unfortunately, it is still today not certified the government of India as the first freedom struggle instead of Sepoy mutiny in 1857 due to the lack of political will. Mainly Jagannath culture, rituals, beliefs, religion, social life, bravery, heroic deeds,, sacrifice and contributions of the people of Odisha from ancient period to till date are vividly highlighted in Odia literature by many indigenous Odia laureates. From 12th century to onwards Odia literature focuses on the various aspects of religion and social life. This Odia literature becomes an integral part of world literature today. When the western literature developed in Europe continent in Italy, Rome and England simultaneously Odia literature was developed in full swing. Adikabi Sarala Das in 12 th century wrote the Odia Mahabharata on palm leaves highlighting Odisha's own culture and Jagannath culture, traditions and customs. After then Panchasakhas had their own writings based on Odisha's own culture, heritage and religion. Among them Odia Bhagabata of Jagannath Das is very popular among the people of Odisha. It is really a holy book provides moral and ethical values to the society and guide the people whether they are literate or illiterate. The Bhagabata of Jagannath Das is worshipped as 'Bhagabata Gosein' in Bhagabata Tungji in the villages of Odisha till today. The literary contributions of Balaram Das, Ananta Das, Achyutananda Das, jasobanta Das and others like Dinakrushna Das, Banamali Das are the mile stone of the development of Odia literature. Their writings are especially dedicated to lord Jagannath creating a spiritual atmosphere in Odisha.

After the Panchasakha age, Riti age, Age of Radhanath and the age of satyabadi, the poets and writers had their genre contributions to the development of Odia literature . Upendra Bhanja, Abhimanyu Samanta Simhar , Baladev Rath , Radhanath, Fakir Mohan Senapati, Gopinath Mohanty, Sachi Routray, Rabi Singh and Manoj Das writings highlight the Odia culture, history, religion and social life with the contemporary issues. In modern age , Ramakanta Rath, Sitakanta Mahapatra, Prativa Ray, Jayanta Mahapatra and others are eagerly dedicated towards the development of Odia literature.

We cannot ignore the writings of the Satyabadi Panchasakhas to create a patriotic environment during the freedom struggle of India. Among them Utkalmani Gopabandhu's writings are especially useful to create harmony and patriotism among the people against the British imperialism.

Many victorious writings of Odia writers are translated into English and other foreign languages which is being a part of Indo - English literature as well as world literature.

Art and culture:-

Odisha is very famous for its filigree work, art, sculpture and architecture. Culture of Odisha is characterized by a plethora of temples and manuments. There are found many ancient temples in Odisha's own art style. The sun temple in Konark, Lingaraj temple, Rajarani temple in Bhubaneswar, Kichakeswari temple in khiching, Mayurbhanj etc are famous for their fine arts. These temples were constructed within 11th to 12th centuries. The art of rock caves of Khandagiri, Udayagiri and Lalitgiri attract many visitors from our country and abroad. The Pattachitra of Raghuraj Pur in Puri , Chandua of Pipil, handloom sarees of sambalpur and Maniabandha are based on Odisha's art and culture. Jhooti chita of Odia family is the centre of attraction of the art of Odisha.

Dance and music :-

Odisha is also a centre of illustrious musical culture. It is also famous for Odissi songs and odissi dance which are reflected on the walls of ancient temples. Apart from Odissi dance, Devadasi dance , Gotipua dance in Jagannath temple, Chhau dance of Mayurbhanj, Dalkhai dance of Sambalpur, Ghumura dance, Chadheya dance in coastal area, Sahijata of Puri depict the religious beliefs, rituals of the people of Odisha. These are purely the classical dances of Odisha perform to the accompaniment of indigenous instruments. Pala, Daskathia and Bharataleela of Ganjam also highlight the mythology of our epics.

Religion :-

Generally most of the people of Odisha are Hindus but Odisha is a land of multi religious people. Hindus Muslims, Sikhs, Buddhists, jainas and Christians are living here together . So we have found all cultures are inter mixed here.but above all, Jagannath culture is the main source of humanism. There is good co-ordination as well as good cooperation among them. They all believe in brotherhood and friendship. Each respects to each other by forgetting religious taboos. The Kalinga war in 266 AD of Odisha was a remarkable event in modern Indian history that changes the Chandasoka to Dharmasoka. From many historical events it is proved that Odisha is a multicultural state.

Conclusion :-

From the above analysis it can be concluded that Odisha is a multicultural state in the sense of its cultural diversity defined in terms of religion, language, literature, caste, race and tribe. The assimilation of diverse tribal cultures in the dominant of costal culture and western culture has an effective role to highlight its identity. The culture of Odisha is unique in the world for its art, artitecture, dance, music, festivals, traditions, language along with its rich literature.

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The author Dr P.L. Rout is now teaching English Language & Literature to both UG & PG students in a Degree College of Odisha since 2013. He is now continuing his Research in English of Kalinga University, Raipur, Chhattisgarh. He is a well-known Poet and writer both in English & Odia language. He got his PhD award in Odia literature from Utkal University, Bhubaneswar in 2014. He is awarded MA Degree in English from Dr BR Ambedkar University, Agra and MA Degree in Economics and Odia from Utkal University, Bhubaneswar,LLB from North Odisha University, Baripada, BEd Degree from University of Jammu . He was felicitated by the Governor of Odisha in 2023 for the outstanding contribution to Anglo Indian literature.