

Available online at <http://www.ijims.com>

ISSN: 2348 – 0343

Role of Vernacular newspapers in Odisha's struggle for independent state province

Swadhin Shakti Prasad

Press Information Bureau, Cuttack

M/o Information & Broadcasting, Govt of India

Abstract

Media is one of the best platform to inform, aware and motivate the people at large. It helps to create mass consensus in bringing out socio-cultural and political change in society. There are ample instances around the globe in which media has helped in large scale social movements to change the status quo of the society .History of India speaks a volume on the role of Press in general and vernacular Press in particular in India's freedom struggle. Vernacular newspapers have more impact on the people as it is published in the local language of an area eying the local socio cultural norms and focusing on local issues of immediate effect. People can connect to it easily, so it can easily generate public opinion and create mass awareness. The present study is based on a historical backdrop. It aims to highlight the impact of vernacular Press in Odisha's struggle for independent statehood.

Keywords: Media, Vernacular newspapers, social movements, Independent statehood.

Introduction

Odisha lost it's independence in 1568 A.D after the defeat and demise of last Hindu King Mukund Harichandan Dev. After that Odisha was subsequently ruled by Muslims and Marathas and lastly occupied by the Britishers in 1803 AD. At the beginning of their rule Britishers faced a stiff opposition from the brave odia people. The famous 'Paik Rebellion' of Khurda erupted in 1817 which completely shook the existence of British administration. Thus out of sheer revenge, the British rulers planned to somehow ruin the unity of fearless odia race. With a calculated move the Britishers annexed the coastal belt of Odisha with Bengal presidency , the southern part with Madras presidency and the western part with Central province as a result of which the Odia speaking tracts were scattered and the Odias were segregated from each other. Due to merger of different parts of Odisha with the neighbouring provinces like Bengal, Bihar, Madras and Madhya Pradesh, the Odias were compelled to suffer humiliation in the cultural , administrative and socio- economic field.

But in the midst of 19th century there was a sea change in the socio-political arena of Odisha. Due to publication of odia newspapers, the odias became well aware of their rights. A new odia intellectual society was created in course of time , which tried hard for the all round development of odisha through the medium of newspaper and literature. Because they were aware of the power of Press in educating, motivating and empowering the mass. After a persistent struggle, Odisha finally became the first separate province on linguistic basis on 1st April 1936. The vernacular Press played an important role in the formation of separate Odisha province.

Brief History of Odisha's struggle for unification.

Demand for separate statehood started gaining momentum in midst of 19th century. For protecting the interest of the common people many social, cultural and religious organisations were formed. The inhabitants of Ganjam and Sambalpur started protest meetings and agitations for the unification of odia speaking tracts. They became successful in introducing the odia language at the Govt level in the year 1890 and 1901 respectively.

The emergence of Utkal Gaurab Madhusudan Das in the socio-political realm of odisha created new vigour in the minds of odia young men. Madhusudan Das inculcated patriotism and odia nationalism in their hearts and minds.

In the year 1903 'Ganjam Jatiya Samiti' was formed at Rambha and it's first session was inaugurated at Berhampur where resolutions were passed regarding the all round development of odisha. This session was attended by Utkal Gourav Madhusudan Das and Vyasa Kabi Fakirmohan Senapati. The success of 'Ganjam Jatiya Samiti' meeting inspired Madhu babu. As a result of which an organisation namely 'Utkal Sammilani' was formed to solve different problems of odias. The first session of 'Utkal Sammilani' was held at Idga Padia of Cuttack on 30th December 1903. Maharaja Sriram Chandra Bhanja Deo, the king of Mayurbhanj presided over the meeting. This session of Utkal Sammilani was attended by Garjat Kings, Zamindars, Govt employees, lawyers and students where odia nationalism took it's form. Later on the leaders of Utkal Sammilani had drawn the attention of British Government regarding various problems through seminars, symposiums, youth sessions and general meetings.

Instead of pointing out the defects of British rule Madhubabu was determined to fulfil the hopes of odias by keeping good rapport with the Englishmen. Social reformation, women emancipation, eradication of untouchability, development of farmers and agriculture, unification of odia speaking tracts and above all creation of odia nationalism was the goal and motto of Utkal Sammilani. Through odia newspapers "Asha", "Utkal Dipika", "Prajabandhu" and English newspaper "The Odia" attention of british rulers was drawn regarding the various demands of odias. In different annual sessions of Utkal Sammilani, resolutions were passed regarding unification of odia speaking tracts which often yielded results. Due to the demands of odias Sambalpur was merged with Odisha Division in 1905 AD by the British Govt.

In the year 1912 the Bihar –Odisha province was formed by the British Govt. In 1914 AD the annual session of Utkal Sammilani was held at Paralakhemundi under the Presidentship of Bikram Devburma, the king of Jaypur. For the first time Maharaja Krushna Chandra Gajapati the king of Paralakhemundi opined in this annual session of Utkal Sammilni regarding the formation of a separate Odisha province instead of unification of odia speaking tracts.

In the year 1919, Maharaja of Parala met Montague Chemsford Committee to put forth the demand of giving facility of voting rights to odia residents in Madras province. As a result the odia residents of Madras were capable enough in electing ten odia members to represent in Madras assembly. But the Government of Madras vehemently opposed the demand to bring odias under one province. In the year 1922, Utkal Gauraba

Madhusudan Das, while he was a minister of Bihar-Odisha, a resolution was approved in Bihar – Odisha provincial council in favour of bringing odia language dominating area under one province.

In 1924, Phillip-Duff committee was formed in which the British commissioner and political agent Mr C.L Phillips and Collector Mr, A.C. Duff were members. While the committee was touring Ganjam , the inhabitants of that locality strongly demanded for merger of Ganjam Jaypur and Bisakhapatna with odisha division through a memorandum. Starting the investigation since the month of October 1924, the Phillip-Duff committee completed the preparation of its final report regarding the unification of odia speaking tracts in the month of Dec 1924. This committee had opined in favour of merger of odia speaking tracts with Odisha division which were under the Madras Presidency. In 1927, presenting the resolution in Central Council Pandit Nilakantha Das said that “For formation of a separate odisha province, the united efforts of odias was badly necessary.”In 1928, Sir John Simon came to India as the Chief of seven members Parliamentary commission for investigating the constitutional reformation system. Indian National Congress called on the people of India to boycott the Simon Commission as there was not a single Indian member included in that commission. Responding to the call the Congress workers staged protest meetings, demonstrations and processions showing black flags and placards containing slogan ”Simon Go Back” in every nook and corner of India.

But without caring the call of Indian National Congress Utkal Gourab Madhusudan Das greeted and paid large ovation to Simon Commission at Patna railway station on behalf of Utkal Sammilani and handed over a memorandum to the commission regarding formation of a separate Odisha province. Simon commission formed a sub-committee appointing C.R.Atley as it’s Chairman to look into the matter. The sub-committee recommended in favour of formation of a separate odisha province.

Maharaja Krushna Chandra Gajapati went to London in 1930 with a view to attend the Round table conference. He was able to influence the British authority through a leaflet titled “The Odias-Their needs and reasons for a separate Odisha province “. The British appointed a Boundary committee which recommended in favour of formation of separate Odisha province in the month of April 1932.

As Sir Samuel Hoare through a white paper published on 18th March 1933 had excluded the odia speaking tracts of Paralakhemundi, Jaypur and Jalantar from the proposed odisha province, a special session of Utkal Sammilani was called for in the month of May 1933 to discuss regarding the high – handedness of Britishers and it was unanimously resolved in that session to stage peoples movement and protest meetings against the decision of British Govt.

On 11th February 1934 it was resolved in the annual conference of Utkal Sammilani held at Berhampur that “if Jaypur and Paralakhemundi were not included with the proposed odisha province, the odias would not accept that odisha province.

Maharaja Krushna Chandra Gajapati again proceeded to London leading a group of odia representatives in which the Rajasaheb of Khalikote, Lingaraj Panigrahi , Bhubananda Das and Shyam Sundar Das were included . Maharaja Krushna Chandra Gajapati gave a memorandum to the secretary of state of the joint select committee

for merger of Paralakhemundi in the proposed Odisha province . At last a report was published on behalf of the joint select committee which was accepted by the British Parliament.

As a result the formation of separate odisha province took the real shape. On January 21, 1936 the orders of Government of India regarding formation of odisha province was presented before the emperor of Britain for its final approval on 7th March 1936. After the approval of the emperor this order was executed on 1st April 1936 and the separate Odisha province was formed. The newly formed Odisha consisted of six districts namely Cuttack, Puri, Balasore, Sambalpur, Koraput and Ganjam. Sir John Austin Hubbak took oath of office and became the first Governor of Odisha province.

Methodology

The study is descriptive and qualitative in nature. It tries to find out the impact of newspapers on the struggle for unification by analysing their content which includes news, feature and special articles. It also tries to find out some special articles which were published for some specific causes. For this both the history of Odisha and the history of odia journalism are thoroughly analysed. Though the study is based on a historic backdrop, still it has it's relevance in current age. Because through this study the researcher tries to establish the impact of vernacular newspaper in bringing out positive social change.

Role of Vernacular newspapers

Early years of Journalism in Odisha were remarkable for three distinguished features.

1. Their social reformist role.
2. Their contribution towards the development of Odia language and literature.
3. Role in the movement for unification of odia speaking areas.

During this period gradually nationalistic ideas and philosophy began to be reflected in newspapers and periodicals .The Press began to proclaim power and influence over masses and became a formidable force for social reform and political awakening. It started demanding political power. Along with this a sizable section of the Press gradually tried to assert it's odia identity and began to demand for a separate state.

As a result of the relentless demand Odisha became the first separate province on linguistic basis. Starting from first Odia journal 'Gyanaruna'(1849) to first odia magazine 'Bodha dayini'(1866) there were many publication which started their operation, yet 1865 was considered to be a remarkable year. Because 'Utkal Deepika' the first Odia newspaper in real sense started it's publication on Aug 4 1865.

Role of Utkal Deepika

Glorious history of odia journalism unfolds with Utkal Deepika. It was born at a time when odisha was besieged with many problems. Utkal Deepika played a significant role for the amalgamation of outlying odia speaking areas which remained scattered under different provincial administration . The Utkal Deepika carried on a vigorous campaign for bringing all the odia-speaking areas under one administration , development of odia language and literature and protection of odia interests.

Remarkable instances

1. In 1920 the demand of the odias for unification under one administration got its intensity. An interesting feature on this aspect of odia unification appeared in an issue of Utkal Deepika (May 8, 1920). According to that report – The odias have been crying hoarse over the subject for the last ten years and what is the result of their crying?

They are told that the Govt of the day has no positive knowledge that odias living in the outlying parts are really willing and anxious to be united to their country. We may as well ask Govt whether it had any positive knowledge about the same matter when Govt of Lord Curzon proposed the same amalgamation in 1903. The Article also stated, “ Assam is a small country like Odisha, but in order to make the province self-supporting two or three fertile Bengal districts have been kept annexed to it whereas natural Odisha in spite of her peculiar condition has been vivisected and placed under four different Govt. The benign British Govt takes pride in raising fake nationalities.

2. On 6th March, 1920, Utkal Deepika published a news on how the Raja Saheb of Kanika in the Central Council delivered an interesting talk on the unification of odia speaking areas under one administration. He strangely projected the demand by several cogent arguments. The dismemberment of Odisha according to him was responsible for the paralysis of a respectable race. He also pleaded for homogeneity.

3. On 19th February 1927, Utkal Deepika published a report on the proposal given by Pandit Nilakatha Das in the Central council for the union of odia speaking areas. He said that there would be no rest to the odias till the achievement of the unification and they would launch wide spread movement for that purpose.

Role of Dainik Asha

In 1928 Sashi Bhusan Rath started the Odia Daily “Asha” from Berhampur. This was a remarkable moment for the people of Odisha as it had helped the people to launch their struggle more effectively and vigorously to secure the unification of the outlying odia areas under one administration.

“Asha” strongly denounced the Telugu ascendancy over Ganjam and pleaded for the fulfilment of the odia demand.

1. Krupasindhu Hota, a noted congress activist in an interesting article in Asha of 3rd Nov 1924 pleaded for the unification of the odia areas of Ganjam, Jeypore, Medinapur, Singhbhum, Phuljhar with Odisha for Odia Mulaka.

2. The odias of Berhampur taluk presented a memorandum to the odia amalgamation to the enquiry committee at a public meeting held on 29th November 1924. Asha gave it a wide publicity by publishing this memorandum.

3. The odia weekly Asha then very emphatically demanded the formation of Orissa province on the basis of language which was supported in the past by illustrious Viceroys like Lord Curzon, Lord Harding and others.

Not only leaders wanted to mobilize the people for the purpose of amalgamation of odia areas, many poets and writers started writing on the burning issues of Odisha union which could provoke the people in many areas. Mayadhar Mansingh on behalf of ‘Pragati Sangha’ composed a poem titled Uttisha Utkal (Awaken O Utkal) which was published in Asha of 12th October 1931. A part of the poem has been quoted here

Uthare Supata Jati

Nidrabhara dekhi Pratibeshi

Nebe to Anga Kati

Uttare achi Chatura Banga

Dakshine rahichi taki Telenga

Gudhra samana katibe anga

Nebe anande banti.

Nilakantha Das from Nayabasana area wrote a letter to the editor of Asha on 26th November 1931 about the anti odia feeling of Birendra Sasmal of Kanthi. He insisted on the merger of Medinapur with Odisha on linguistic and historical ground. Then there was great protest against the anti odia attitude of Birendra sasmal in the Asha.

4. In 1924 the number of odias and telugus in Ganjam Mal areas was represented in a list in Asha. The list is given below.

Area	Total Population	Odia	Telugu	Tribes
Udayagiri	78013	16792	37	61189
Ramgiri	148957	53326	3341	92290
Baliguda	105928	37952	34	72942
Total	332898	103070	3407	226421

The tribals of these areas could understand odia and speak corrupt odia(Asha, 3rd November 1924)

Like this report Adha also published another report on demographics of Jeypore Mal areas. These reports had brought a clear picture for the administration, leaders and common people. Everyone understood that the demand for the merger of these areas was reasonable and justified. Through all these reports and articles Asha was successful in creating awareness for the unification of Odisha.

Nabeen

Nabeen was published from Berhampur which also covered the issues regarding unification of state extensively. Nabeen particularly published on works of Maharaja of Paralakhemundi Krushna Chandra Gajapati Dev who was very active at that time. The most remarkable achievement was maharaja presented a note in the Round table conference in 1930. The memorial by the Rajasaheb described the need for a separate province . He spoke about the dismembered condition of the odias and their desire to remain united. He presented the significance of the past of the odias and their economic potency . Nabeen published a number of articles on all these issues.

Medinibandhava

In 1931, there was great awakening in the Medinapur, Singhbhum and Manbhum for the union of odia speaking areas with Odisha. Godavarisha Mohapatra, an enthusiastic odia organiser in 1931 pleaded strongly for the unification of Medinapur with Odisha. Medinibhavana, the news weekly from Mdinapur was pro- odia since 1915. It published many articles and supported the movement to add Medinapur with Odisha.

Samaj

Pandit Gopabandhu Das founded the Samaj as a weekly in 1919 to highlight the plight of the people of Odisha and to bring it to the notice of the administration for separate state province. Pandit Gopabandhu Das himself was an effortless fighter and was editing this historic newspaper. Samaj published many articles and features to support the cause of unification.

Prajantra

Prajantra first started its publication as a weekly from Balasore on Oct 2, 1923. Then it was shifted to Cuttack . Dr Harekrushna Mahatab, the founder was fighting for the unification and he wrote many articles in this newspaper. Jatiya Kabi Birakishore Das who was especially known for his energetic writings to motivate the mass for the cause of freedom movement was associated with Prajantra and wrote many articles to awaken the mass. It ceased publication on Dec 28, 1930 in protest against the Britishers.

Sambalpur Hiteisini :

It was first real newspaper of western Odisha. Raja Sudhala Dev of the then Bamanda state , a part of Western Odisha was patronising the paper titled ‘ Sambalpur Hiteisini’ which was edited by Pandit Nilamani Vidyaratna. He joined the Sambalpur Hiteisini in the last decade of nineteenth century and gave a new fillip to the cause of amalgamation movement . It tried to analyse issues and events through incisive articles by eminent writers and thinkers of that time like Fakir Mohan Senapati, Gangadhar Meher, Biswanath Kar, Sashibhusab Rath, Radhanath Roy and Dharinidhar Mishra etc.

On the 19th of January 1895, Hindi was introduced in Sambalpur by abolishing Oriya as Sambalpur was a part of Madhya Pradesh(Central Province). On March 5, 1895 in the "Sambalpur Hiteisini" the great poet Gangadhar in his poem captioned "Appeal of Utkal Bharati" expressed :

"The mother is fated to remain in exile. We are also fated to become motherless. Whatever is going to happen is fated to happen. But we should not become cowards and keep up with our struggle"

Nilamani campaigned persistently against this in the pages of Hitaisini and forced Government to replace Hindi with odia as official language.

Other Prominent newspapers

“Balasore Sambad Vahika” was published on July 1868 from Balasore with Fakir Mohan Senapati and Govind Chandra Patnaik as editors. ‘Nava Sambad’ was a newspaper published from Balasore. In 1903, Oidas under the leadership of Raja of Khalikhote, Raja Harihara Mardaraj and with the guiding inspirations of Pandit Nilamani Vidyaratna, a veteran journalist and social reformer of that time formed Ganjam Samiti to demand for the unification of Ganjam with other odia areas. Vidyaratna started an weekly newspaper ‘Praja Bandhu’ from Rambha, Ganjam to espouse the cause of odias and the amalgamation movement. The other papers of Ganjam of this period were weekly “Odia Hitavadini” from Berhampur. “Ganjam Guna Darpan” from Digapahandi and

“Utkal Vasi” from Ichhapur (Now in Andhra Pradesh). These papers campaigned for the formation of separate Odisha province based on Odia language and also to advance the cause of the freedom movement.

Hirakhand was a journal published from Sambalpur. The government servant had no difficulty in the introduction of Hindi as official language. But during 1901 Census, the Hindi-knowing Government servants experienced much difficulty which was not unusual. Conduct of Census among the Oriya knowing people was mostly an impossible task. One young Oriya, Late Baikunth Nath Pujhari was then working as Assistant Commissioner. The Census was carried out in Oriya with his help"

The monthly Journal 'The Hirakhand' reports as follows: `Cudos to this great hero and his moral courage. For the whole day he was engaged in government work but during the evening hours Baikunth Nath spent the night mostly on horse-back and travelled from village to village. During his journey he used to explain to the people the various questions the Collector might put to them in course of his visit through his simple arguments. He used to remain present in distant villages during the night hours. He used to explain to the people that this will pave the way for the introduction of Oriya. During the Census the entire population of Sambalpur was 7 lakhs 96 thousand and 413 and the population of Oriya-speaking people was 5 lakhs 95 thousand and 601.

“Utkal Darpan” was first published as a monthly literary magazine on Jan 1, 1873 with the patronage of Raja Baikunthanath Dey. It closed down around 1885 primarily because it earned the wrath of British administration for its anti-Government articles.”Mayurbhanj Pakshika Patrika” was published from Baripada with the financial help of Maharaja Krushna Chandra Bhanja Deo. The main objective was to disseminate political matters regarding unification of Odisha in simple Odia language. Some other newspapers like “Utkal Bandhu” published in 1896 from Talcher by Brajabandhu Mishra with patronage of the king of Talcher and “Odia O nabasambad” from Balasore also made their impact on the mass movement.

Journalism in Odisha was used to further the cause of nationalism. It was used to make people aware of their political right. It was also used to assert Odia identity, first for the official recognition of Odia language and then for a separate state on linguistic basis. Press in Odisha played a major role in creating a separate Odisha state, after a prolonged agitation, which came into being on April 1, 1936. Odisha was the first state to be created on linguistic basis.

Conclusion

Vernacular newspapers have immense impact on the readers. From the above study it can be concluded that the Odia newspapers played a significant role in promoting Odia language, creating awareness and motivating the people for the struggle for independent statehood. The news, feature and analytical stories published in the newspapers ignited the minds of people as well as drew the attention of British administration. In the absence of any kind of mass media during that period, the language newspapers and journals acted like a connecting link between people and prominent Odia leaders. As a result of this mass movement Odisha became a united province.

From the above study it can be stated that Vernacular newspaper if used properly can bring out positive social change. It is because people across different strata of society connect to it easily as it is published in their local language, includes local stories of their immediate concern and caters to their socio cultural ethos.

References

- 1.Mahtab H.K, History of Odisha, Vol.I, Cuttack, 1959; p.6
- 2.Acharya S, Stipulation through Socio-Eco-Political Fortitude: Stature of Separate Odisha Province, Odisha Review,201; Vol.LXX No9-10, P-10
- 3.Shastry R.P, History of Press in Odisha, Odisha Reference Manual, Cuttack, Govt of Odisha,2005; P.198-203
- 4.Chatarjee M, History of Journalism in Odisha, Dhenkanal, Scephali Communication, 2013
- 5.Samantray N, Odia Sahityara Itihasa, Cuttack, 1996
- 6.Paikray B, Formation of Separate Orissa Province: The Historical Backdrop, Odisha Review, April-2008;P.17-19
- 7.Dash K.C, A study of the formation of the Separate Province of Orissa, Odisha Review, April-2010;P.18-27
- 8.Supakar S, The contribution of Sambalpur in the formation of a separate state of Orissa, Odisha Review, April-2005.