

A Tale from Prachi Valley

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Abstract

In the historical geography of India, Odisha has been an important entity since the 3rd century BC, if not from an early age. Right from its ancient past, the people of this place have played a significant role in making the cultural and political fragment of the whole country. Situated in the eastern part of India, Orissa is hemmed at the west by thick clad of the jungle and mountainous ranges and at the east by the Bay of Bengal, forms an ideal ground that makes a unique history. Although the land of Odisha has been a territorial, political and cultural entity since the time of Mahabharata and its part had different nomenclatures. This area is known by different names since ancient times as Utkal, Kalinga, Trikalika, Kosala, Odra, Orissa (as it's Anglicized form) and now at present called Odisha, is the best of all the reasons for Bharatavarsha (India). And the subject of our concern, the Prachi river that flows in-between this land just dividing into two halves is the holiest river of Odisha that makes its history most outstanding and glorious. However, the origin of Prachi valley is still a mystery. No one can imagine such a glorious civilisation flourished on the bank of a small river in comparison to the mighty Mahanadi, Brahmani, etc. Being ruled by several important dynasties, Odisha, was culturally and economically vibrant region, prosperous with sea-faring trade, which continued till the late 18th century. This paper aims the study on accounts of travel in ancient Odisha through folk narratives of origins and nomadic journey which has its cultural history and tries to explore socio-cultural and the economic conditions that propel seafaring trade within the country and overseas that glorifies through an Odia folk tale from a lost civilisation.

Keywords: history, folk narratives, mystery, lost civilisation.

Introduction

The land of Odisha has seen through edges through the rising and mighty empires and kingdom, powerful religious ferments, rising of gigantic monuments in stone and prosperous oversea trade. Odisha in, her past, had a stronghold of several great religions, namely Jainism, Buddhism, Saivism, Vaishnavism and Shaktism. Buddhism and other religious cults, together with the basic system of belief and their iconographical, cultural traditions, impacted on this land from the period of their inception. Each such cult coming in contact with the local culture got transformed into something new that was not original contained in its ideology. Archaeological and literary sources give us the evidence that a great civilisation flourished on the banks of the Prachi River of Odisha from the 7th century A.D. to the 14th century A.D., which was known as the Prachi valley civilisation. Now nothing remains neither the temple nor the

goddess all vanished into the vast sheet of water of these two rivers. All we could see, the archaeological remnants and the folklores and the popular sayings about the sea voyages of the merchants of Odisha in the past that were presented to its people in the 1st phase of the 20th century by the number of historians.

In the historical geography of India, Orissa has been an important entity since the 3rd century BC, if not from an early age. Right from its ancient past, the people of this place have played a significant role in making the cultural and political fragment of the whole country. Situated in the eastern part of India, Orissa is hemmed at the west by thick clad of the jungle and mountainous ranges and at the east by the Bay of Bengal, forms an ideal ground that makes a unique history. The dominant tribal elements in Orissa's population presupposes the existence of pre-Aryan or pre-historic stone-age culture in Orissa.

That is why Aryans of the north consider Orissa as an impure region. The original inhabitants of this place, which the anthropologists believe to be the stains of Proto Austroloid race and brachycephalic type. Besides these, two minor groups such as Mongoloid and Mediterranean were also found. The remnants of pre-historic culture belonging to the old, middle and new stone age have been found all over Orissa.

Originally Orissa had a tribal culture, but however, this land underwent a major cultural transformation with the influx of Aryan culture from the north and the Dravidian from the south. Thus, the traditional Orissan culture before Islamic and western influence was mainly a synthesis of tribal, Aryan and Dravidian culture. Although the land of Orissa has been a territorial, political and cultural entity since the time of Mahabharata and its part had different nomenclatures. This area is known by various names since ancient times as Utkal, Kalinga, Trikalika, Kosala, Odra, Orissa (as its Anglicized form) and now at present called Odisha, is the best of all the reasons of Bharatavarsha (India). This is well proved from the Sanskrit shloka, which says: "*Varshanam Bharata Sreshthah desanam Utkala sutra, Utkalasya sama desah, nastiha mahitale*". (S.S. Tripathi Page.1-3)

And the subject of our concern the Prachi river flows in-between this land, just dividing into two halves. It is the holiest river of Odisha that makes its history most outstanding and glorious. However, the origin of Prachi valley is still a mystery. No one can imagine such a glorious civilisation flourished on the bank of a small river in comparison to the mighty Mahanadi, Brahmani, Birupa etc. Mahanadi, the longest river in Odisha, has on its bank cradled civilisation as old as the known history of the state. Prachi river though shorter in length had also nourished the culture and civilisation of Odisha since ancient times. It has contributed a lot to the cultural

tradition of the state. The river played an important role to create a distinct identity for Odisha. The archaeological remnant found from this valley testify to a glorious past. Even though the present Prachi river is just a remnant of the past, its cultural significance still stands prominent. The Prachi today is just a small tributary of the Mahanadi and is believed to be one of the oldest and most sacred rivers of Odisha. The source of this ancient river can be traced to Dakamba (a small village) near Naraj of Cuttack district. It flowed through the coastal region of the undivided Puri district before it merges in the Bay of Bengal by way of two bifurcations, one at Astarang and the other near Konark (S.S. Tripathi Pg. 11-13).

The "Prachi", even in its present semi-extinct form, is still considered as the most sacred river of Odisha, and its name has its references in the Markandeya Purana, Kapila Samhita, Prachi Mahatmya, Surya Samhita, Gyanakosha, Samba Purana, Brahma Purana and the Skanda Purana. Sarala Das's Oriya Mahabharata of 14th century A.D, to mentions about Prachi river. Besides epigraphical records found, evidence found from the Hatigumpha inscriptions, numerous copper plates and ancient and medieval texts too shed light on the antiquity of the region. The copper plate grants recovered from Chaurasi, Kenduli and Kuapada throw light on the political and cultural history of the people of the time. The inscription of Sri Vaidyanatha found in Sovaneswara Temple at Niali is another epigraphical record that mentions this river civilisation. This valley region which roughly spreads over an area of 3600 km, had come under the rules of several dynasties of ancient Kalinga. Prominent among them is the Chedi, the Murunda, the Mana, the Vighraha, the Bhaumakaras, the Somovamsi, the Suryavamsis and the Gangas. Not only with the rise in empires and kingdoms, but the land of Odisha has also seen

through edges the rise of different religions, namely Jainism, Buddhism, Saivism, Vaishnavism and Shaktism (A.C. Pradhan, Pg 1-5). Every religion in its different form was drawn to the sanctity of the river and established its settlements and strongholds on this riverbank.

The importance of the valley was first reported by Govinda Rath in 1906 after he discovered a palm leaf manuscript of the Prachi Mahatmya in a Math near Konark. They were written in Odia, the literary work of the 19th century highlights the historical prominence of the Prachi Valley. In vain, he tried to publish some manuscripts but could not do so. After studying the Prachi Mahatmya, Narayan Tripathy had published a series of articles on the archaeological remains of the place from the period 1928-32. These were published in various vernacular and English newspapers, besides the Bihar Orissa Historical Research Journal. It was only in 1935 that the first printed version of Prachi Mahatmya in Odia language was published by Akuli Chandra Mishra.

If we speak about the other features of this beautiful Prachi valley civilisation, eminent researcher Dr Panda in his work have highlighted in his research work that there were about 18 deeps prominently found in that valley. And within the living memories of the local people, i.e. during the pre-independence days, these places were frequented by alligators principally of 5 varieties. They remained protected by the then British Government, and later on, these government officials frequently visited these places on hunting missions. However, by the year 1960, these alligators got exterminated, while the other wild animals that lived also vanished slowly with the cutting of the jungle by the local villagers for cultivation and township. A statistical report published in Orissa Statistical Account of Puri states that William Hunter in 1866 had reported that the depth of

Prachi was 1043 feet and had a calculated discharge of water is 95 feet per second. (Orissa Vol II- Pg-3).

As the Mahanadi enters into Odisha from its original place Raipur now in Chhattisgarh, it passes through many regions, which continues to become important and historical. Strangely enough, along this long line of the riverbed, we find the number of architectural and sculptural remains abruptly found that stop at Cuttack and begins to appear on the bank of the Prachi river. Hence it could be said that the continuity of art and architecture of the upper Mahanadi valley was well maintained in Prachi valley. Thus Mahanadi, therefore, descending the hilly region near Naraj (Cuttack), made a southward turn and entered into the plains, following the courses that formed the Prachi river. At present, Mahanadi beyond Cuttack city was too small and a narrow river. The bulk of the floodwater coming from the upper catchment area of Mahanadi flowed down by the Prachi. rendering it the principal navigable river of Odisha.

The land of Odisha, known by many names in early times was commanding a very high position in the maritime activities of India since the past. At different epochs of history, its territory extended from the Ganges in the North to the Godavari in the South. It's studded with excellent ports and harbours during the ancient period that play an important role in the maritime activities of a country. Archaeological remains and literary texts of the early and medieval period provide spectacular evidence on the maritime activities of the merchants of Odisha. The Prachi has many tributary and distributary rivers which, of course, are by now silted up and can be traced along the shallow fields lined on both sides by dunes. Some of them which could be traced during the rainy season. The entire catchment area of the Prachi and its branch rivers are called Prachi valley. The largest branch river of the Prachi is called the Kadua river.

After several interlacing and convolutions, all the branch rivers finally converge into Prachi and the Kadua at different places. After several curves, these two rivers come closer and move seaward. Further moving, the muddy water of river Kadua and the blue water of the Prachi become united. The triangular promontory of the village Sirei, which is the meeting point of these two rivers goes by "Mundiamara". In ancient days when the Sadhavas were passing through this point in their journey to the foreign lands, they used to cast anchor for a while and pay obeisance to the goddess by placing their head at feet and seeking her blessings; hence the name originated "Mundiamara". Now nothing remains neither the temple nor the goddess all vanished into the vast sheet of water of these two rivers. All we could see, the archaeological remnants and the folklores and the popular sayings about the sea voyages of the merchants of Odisha in the past that were presented to its people in the 1st phase of the 20th century by the number of historians. (S.S. Tripathi Pg.15-17)

The travel writers who participated in the travel with the ancient maritime travellers and documented the transformations of historical geography and cultural history, by which the then Kalinga was transformed into a textual space that was understood through the various discursive models.

Accepting the plurality of histories beyond simply a scientific rendering allowed for alternative perspectives. Other developments include the recognition of the importance of oral history and also a form of cultural history that allowed the subjective and immersed perspectives of history to gain attraction. Besides the writings of Pliny and Ptolemy, the Periplus of the Erythraean Sea, Kautilya's Arthashastra, the jataka tales and other Buddhist texts make ample reference to the maritime trade and industry of ancient Odisha. Archaeological findings

from the Sisupalgarh reveal that ancient Kalinga (Odisha) had trade relations with the Roman Empire in ancient times, and the Kalingan sailor were depicted as Kalingosahasika (the brave Kalingans). Odisha established maritime relations with the far-off south-eastern lands of Java, Sumatra, Bali, Borneo, Malaya, Burma, Cambodia and Indochina. In the Raghuvamsa, Kalidas has referred to the king of Kalinga as 'Mahodadhipati' (the king of the ocean), Sarala Das in the Mahabharata, Narasimha Sena in his Parimala Kavya, Yosawant Das in Tika Govinda Chandra, Upendra Bhanja in Lavanyavati, and Dinakrushna Das in Rasa Kollola have used the terms related to maritime terms like: "Boita", "Naha", "Sadhaba". Sadhabani, "Manga". "Nabika" ect. And island-like Srilanka, Java, Bali, Subarna Dwipa, Bramhadesh etc. The Araya Manjusri Mulakalpa, a Mahayana text, refers to the Bay of Bengal as the Kalinga Sea. Many of the ancient texts mention 'Kalinga Sahasika' while referring to the brave son of Kalinga. Odia literature was greatly influenced by its maritime activities as there are references of sea-voyages in Lavanyavati and Vaidehisa Vilasa of the celebrated Odia poet Upendra Bhanja: Dinakrushna Das in Rasakollola speaks about overseas tread and shipwreck by storm; Kavya Purnimala by Narasimha Sen also refers to ancient Odisha trade with Ceylon. Archaeological findings, literary sources, epigraphic evidence, art, and sculptural remains of Odisha's emphasis these ports, ship-building activities and their trading and cultural contacts with other countries. The port towns around Chilika Lake (Odisha) had established their cultural and commercial contacts with Ceylon, Java, Sumatra, Borneo, China, Rome and African countries during the early centuries of the Christian era. Kalinga's sea trade and cultural relations with Bali, Sumatra, Borneo and Indonesia has traces in the rock carvings at the Puri Jagannath temple. The famous ports of

ancient Kalinga were Tamralipti, Palur, Pithunda, Gopalpur, Chelitalo etc.

Overseas trade is an important element of the history of Odisha. There were many harbours in the river Prachi; though small in size, the "Sadhabas" or the merchants were sailing through their ships to the Bay of Bengal. A Banyan tree called "Boita Bandha" banyan tree located to the west of the village Jharillo, under Govindpur PS, where the boats were said to be taking shelter. Another place on Amaresvara Road a site named "Kudhapatana" ships were taking shelter while on their way to their respective destination. Now under a banyan tree, a hermitage has been built, and Lord Jagannath is worshipped. Very close to place "Khudapatana", another mound called "Goplakuda" is located. Here there is a very magnificent statue of Lord Ramachandra in a thatched house, and according to local tradition, the "Sadhabas" on their way used to halt for a while here and pay homage to God for a safe journey. Mention may be made on the river Chitrotpala, a tributary of Prachi. It is known from the famous Greek traveller Ptolemy's stamen that there was a famous port at Konark which might have flourished in the 1st century A.D. The Kadua, a tributary of the Prachi river, has merged with the Bay of Bengal at Chitresvari. This site is named after the Goddess, seated in padmasana, being worshipped as Chitresvari. Near to this temple, the Siva Temple known as Utpalesvara stands in a dilapidated condition. Amidst heaps of sand, a light post is seen. This post acted as a signal to the ships sailing on the Bay of Bengal and Prachi. Chinese traveller, Huen-Tsang, probably had visited Chitresvari amidst the forest. Here one broken palace is found. It is known as Gollargarh. People say that the king of this Gollargarh was a tyrant. Here lived pirates who robbed the wealth of Sadhabas, and even killed Sadhabas and sailors for wealth. (S.S. Tripathi Pg.2-3)

As such several boats were moving in the river Prachi, some markets were established along the river coast. Those markets still now hold their old names. So, there were many ports in the river Prachi and navigating this river. Oriya traders were wealthier than others. Today it reminds the past when we see the worship of boats in the river Prachi.

However, from these maritime trades and the shipbuilding activities of ancient Odisha, numerous references to sea voyages can be found in the stories, folk tales and songs, traditional festivities, religious activities which have been contained through generations of Odia people are of a more substantial nature and afford more reliable proofs of sea voyages. One such tale or one of the most popular folklore of Prachi valley is the tale of "Taapoi". Folklore is one such parameter in which there are traces of Odishan culture, tradition, value and beliefs exist. It represents the moral codes and ethics of a society. Likewise, a festival brings with them loads of fun, merry-making and waves of nostalgia. Each of them is pragmatic with an interesting story traced back to ancient times. One such festivity celebrated by Odias is Khudurukuni Osha also known as Bhalukuni Osha. It is mainly observed in the coastal districts of Odisha during the month of Bhadraba (Aug-Sept) on Sundays after the Gahma Purnima (Full moon day of Shravana). During this festival, Goddess Mangala is worshipped by young girls primarily who seek the safety, prosperity and good health of their brothers. This portrays the sanctity and beauty of the relationship between Brother and Sister.

Modern-day celebrations of Khudurukuni Osha include young girls waking up early in the morning and collecting various flowers. After taking a bath, they pray to the Sun by making small mounts called **B(h)aluka** of clay or sand on the banks of ponds or rivers and decorating it with turmeric

powder, vermilion and all types of flowers even, like vegetable flowers (cucumber flower, ridge gourd flower etc. (Ghadai 62-64). In some regions, the paddy is pounded in a village is cleaned and smeared with cow dung. Thereafter, they sit down to stitch massive garlands for the Goddess. Alpanas or Jhotis designs are drawn on the floor. Then idol of the Goddess is installed, and the worship and rituals begin in the evening.

Khuda Bhaja (Broken Rice) hence the name Khudurukuni. Ukhuda (fried paddy sweetened with molasses), Chuda (flattened paddy), Kanti Kakudi (a type of thorny Cucumber), Lia (fried paddy), Mishri (Sugar candy), Coconut and all types of fruits.

The word Khudurukuni came from the word Khuda - Rankuni. Khudurukuni means one who is very eager for Khuda (broken rice). It is said that the young girl Tapoi survived on Khuda after her brothers left. She was given nothing else to eat.

During the Puja, episodes from the life of Tapoi is sung by the girls.

*"Aadi Divya Jyothi Mahaa Kaali Maa Namu
Devi Shakthi Mahaa Shakthi Kaali Maa Namu
Kaali Maa Namu, Sathya Sai Maa Namu
Shringa Shaila Vaasini Kaali Maa Namu
Sankata Haarini Mangala Kaarini Kaali Maa
Namu*

Kaali Maa Namu, Sathya Sai Maa Namu"

The first episode narrates the story of Goddess Durga defeating Demon Mahishasura. The second episode is the story of the young girl Tapoi mistreated by her sisters-in-law when her sailor brothers were away. But according to the book, "Khudurukuni e atai, Jaha magiba taha pai". It means: "Goddess Khudurukuni can fulfil all your wishes".

This festival's rituals are based on the legend of a young girl named Tapoi. She had to undergo suffering at the hands of her sister-in-law (except the youngest one) when her brothers were on a sea

journey. Therefore, there is a belief that the ritual is observed by women for the safe return of their relatives, especially brothers who venture into the sea.

It is believed that in early days' traders from Odisha travelled far and wide (mostly to Java and Sumatra Islands) in ships (Boitas) to do business. Their family members bid them adieu and pray for their good health and safe homecoming.

The name "**Tapoi**" is prevalent in this festivity, and this is how her story goes. Tapoi was the only and the youngest sister to her seven brothers. They belonged to a rich trader family. Being the only sister, she was loved and pampered by her parents and all brothers and their wives alike. All her demands were fulfilled in no time. Once she demanded a golden moon (a moon-shaped ornament made of gold), to which her family obliged despite a few hiccups. By the completion of the golden moon, both her parents died.

Thereafter, the family's financial condition worsened a lot and, when the time of maritime voyages arrived, all the seven brothers went out for trading, cautioning their wives to take good care of their sister, Tapoi. Here the folk song beautifully highlights the success of the maritime trade of ancient Odisha. The song is as follows:

*"Boite jauacchu ambhe gharasambhali thiba
tumbhe Dekha he daibarakrutya pita sangarare
gale mata Jemante jhia na jhuriba semante seba
karuthiba Bhojana karaiba ani kahi apurba rasa
bani Dolire doli panchaiba nimise helana kariba"
(Bruhat Tapoi-3)*

English Translation

We are going away sailing on the boat, take care of the household See the Lord's plans, our father along with mother died too. Take care **of the** girl as she does not cherish us Feed her by saying caring

and assuring words Make her swing, and we will come back soon.

“Jaucha jebe banijyare anithibati alankare Ke bole mora suna chudi anithibati ratna jhadi Ke bole hirara basani mohara pain thiba ani Ke bole subarna kankana aniba moha nimantena Ke bole astharatna tara ke bole khanja moti hira Ke bole hira malli kadhi uttama rupe thiba ghadi Bhainki bole Tapoyi Mo pain hirara kandhai” (Bruhat Tapoi-3)

English Translation

In English translation: When you are going for trade, bring us jewellery and ornaments Someone says bring me gold bangles with jewels on it Someone says bring me diamond nose ring Someone says bring me eight precious stones and a pearl and diamond-studded star, and Tapoi asks her brothers to bring her diamond dolls.

As the story continues, however, influenced by the fallacious ideas of a Brahmin widow, all her sisters-in-law barring the youngest one, started ill-treating Tapoi. Despite being treated very badly and inhumanly, Tapoi patiently waited for her brothers to return. But it was only her youngest sister-in-law who was affectionate and supportive towards Tapoi.

Treated in an ill-mannered way, Tapoi, while wandering one day, saw some girls worshipping Maa Mangala. By getting aware of her distress, the young girls said to Tapoi that if she wants to get respite from all her sufferings and seek the safe return of her brothers, then she must pray devotedly and seek blessings of Maa Mangala. She was also advised by them to fast on those particular Sundays. She offered Khuda to the Goddess as she had nothing else to offer.

Soon her prayers were answered, and her brothers returned. Knowing their sisters' plight, all these brothers unanimously decided to teach their wives a lesson. The brothers decked up Tapoi as a

goddess, and thereafter the wives were informed to visit the ships and welcome their husbands back home. Tapoi then avenged her sufferings by cutting each of the wives' noses except for the youngest one. Since then, Goddess Mangala is worshipped by all young girls during the Khudurukuni Osha or Bhalukuni Osha for the well-being of their brothers.

We get glimpses of the sea-faring merchants and their trading activities from diverse socio-historical sources in Odisha. The Odia literary and socio-cultural history and folk tradition also serve as a source material being embedded within its contemporary social systems, religious and cultural practices. Folklore provides a unique and effective source of information for the better understanding of a specific socio-cultural history of a community. Thus, this particular folklore represents the socio-cultural ethos of the then Odia merchant community. Although the river Prachi is dead now, it is considered one of the oldest civilisations that survived the ravages of time. The rivers link with Mahanadi, and its navigation channel to the sea made it a centre for inward and outward trade. The Prachi valley's contribution to shaping the history of ancient Kalinga is unbeatable.

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Literature Review

The references to the Prachi river in Markandeya Purana, Kapilasamhita, the Prachi Mahatmya, the Oriya Mahabharat, the Suryasamhita, the Gyanakosha, the Sambapurana, the Hatigumpha inscription, the Bramhapurana, the Skandapurana etc. and local legends provide interesting clues. The local legends and the Prachi Mahatmya as cited to uphold the view that the word Prachi is derived from "Prachina", meaning ancient. Scholars also cite the reference to the river in Saraladasa's Oriya Mahabharata, a work of the 14th century A.D. The traditions suggest that at one-time extensive trade and commerce was carried on in this valley. According to the local tradition, the stone required for

the Sun Temple at Konark were transported by big boats through the river Prachi.

Dr. Devala Mitra is an eminent researcher in certain selected parts of the valley. Their works reflect sound wisdom and vast experience.

Sri Shyam Sunder Tripathy in his extensive and magnificent work on 'Buddhism and Other Religious cult of South East Asia', describe in detail the topic under different rulers in the history of Orissa. His vast knowledge in research has been a tremendous help for present and future researchers.

A.C. Pradhan. History of Orissa is a magnificent work on the History of Odisha that highlights on the political and social history of Odisha since ancient times.

Birupakshya Kara & K.S Behera, in their work, gives a vivid description of Odisha's (which was known as Kalinga) maritime trade since ancient times.

Methodology

The proposed research will be chiefly focused on the folklore of Prachi valley. Literary data was collected from University Library and Institution as well. Mainly the data was collected from

- State achieves Orissa, Bhubaneswar
- State Museum Library, Bhubaneswar
- Kedarnath Gabeshana Kendra, Old Town, Bhubaneswar
- Shahid Bhavan Library, Cuttack

Analysis of the collected data was done mainly using related myths, Kathas and other literature. The method of content analysis was used for the literary readers. The content and recovered information were contextualised with the then-contemporary socio-cultural milieu.