

Discussion

Fabled Orissa: A Critique

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Under the edifices of the three principal subjects, “Firstly, how Orissa had achieved legendary status in the ancient time; secondly how those achievements and glories vanished and how the province cleared ways for its invaders; and finally how the present generation has forgotten the fabled past and succumbed to the foreign imposed subjugation from where it never managed an escape till the present time”, Saroj Kumar Rath developed his article “Fabled Orissa: From Glory and Grandeur to Colonisation”. Nevertheless, the author has fall short of certain points and as he encompassed millennia for his study, he fail to address all his hypotheses in historical context. The author had set a new chord to the rhythm of the costal Orissan history not to the “fabled Orissa”, which he claimed. Nonetheless, somehow he fails to provide fine-tuning to his musical accord of “from glory and grandeur to colonisation”. When the author talks about Orissa from the past to present the first and foremost point which need to be analysed are: What was and what is Orissa at least in the sense of geo-political boundary? How it became present Orissa? In the historical context who represented Orissa? Secondly, when the author raised the most vital point how Orissa lost her glory, the chronological sequences and factor that played vital roles to the colonisation of Orissa are conspicuous by its absence. Thirdly, the author accused the present generation for forgetting the rich history of their ancestors but he never provided adequate reasons to prove his hypothesis. By looking in to the content and context of the article, I would like to divide my critical observation into two parts. The first part will be supposition to the author’s imagination and contextualization of Orissan history and the second part will be a critical approach with valid reasons on the observation, hypotheses and question raises by the author.

Part-I

The author educes a multi dimensional intervention in the historical writing of the so called ancient Orissan history particularly Kalingan period. His conceptualisation and contextualisation of the Kalinga history unquestionably prove him as an erudite scholar. The way he correlated local history to regional, then trans-regional and finally to global

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with historical facts as well as personal observation hypnotise cross section of readers. On the basis of archaeology, literature and travelers' accounts, he systematically projected the rich political and cultural heritage of Kalinga. One could not move out from the author's view that "Kalinga surpassed all others in prominence in its maritime activities". He appropriately answered the questions – why and how Kalinga dominated the maritime world. Among the three questions under which the author developed his arguments in short he rightly justified his first argument.

Part-II

Apart from the above positive aspects, the author's narration has been missing some chronological as well as structural sequences. When he was taking about "fabled Orissa" he somehow fails to find out what was Orissa. Orissa in ancient and medieval time was much larger than the present one. It extended from the mouth of the Ganga in the north to Godavari in the south; it had included Raipur and Bilaspur districts of present Chhattisgarh state, Chhotanagpur region of Jharkhand, Midnapur district of West Bengal, and Srikakulam, Vijayanagaram and Visakhapatnam district of Andhra Pradesh. The geographical boundary of the author's "fabled Orissa" was divided with several political units such as Kalinga, Kosala, Odra and Utkala. Nevertheless, a large portion of the erstwhile province were either ignored or never considered in the article and hence the historiography and story about the vicissitudes of those regions were conveniently remained unobserved.

The author's primary emphasis remained focused on only a marginal part of the Kalinga. Kalinga itself was extended from Ganga in the north to Godavari in the south and Bay of Bengal in the east to Amarkantak hill of the Vindhya in the west. The state was divided into three parts in the time of yore. Firstly, the Gangarides Callinga (near the mouth of Ganga), secondly, the Macco Calingae, probably middle or central region comprising Utkala (Portion of present Mayurbhanj and Keonjhar district of Orissa; Ranchi and Singhbhum district of Jharkhand; and portion of Midnapur district of West Bengal), Odra (presently the area lies in the south of Mayurbhanj and Keonjhar district to the borders of Phulvani, Ganjam, Kalahandi and Koraput district of Orissa) and Tosali (presently extended from river Baitarani to Bay of Bengal in Orissa) and Calingae proper (present Ganjam district of Orissa) (Pliny 1890: 42-44).

The early Indian literature, both Brahminical and Buddhist, repeatedly refers to the Kalingas, the Odras, the Utkalas and the Kosalas as people, which suppose that states were named after the ruling tribes (Sahu 1997: 54). It was Kharavela who hold over the entire Kalinga and after his death it was reduced to a small kingdom between Risikulya River and the Godavari River.¹ In fact, it was not Kaling but Odra, Utkala and Tosali, which represented the ancient Orissa. It was Kapilendra Deva, who in 1435, considering the sentiment of the people made his kingdom as Odisha Rajya and made Oriya as official language (Patnaik 1988: 40). However, South Koshal, which was extended its kingdom in geometrical proportion, was broadly divided into two parts. The western part represented the present districts of Bilaspur, Raipur, Durg and Raigarh of Chhattisgarh and the eastern part represented the undivided districts of Sambalpur, Bolangir and Kalahandi of Orissa (Sahu 2011: 40). This geographical area famous under the nomenclature South Koshal

had never been a part of the author's "fabled Orissa". It was only in 1 April 1936, the eastern part of Koshala merge with Orissa.

Although, the article raised numerous questions like: "What happened to the virility, vigor, strength and sophistication of Kalinga? When exactly the state succumbed to the foreign invasion? What led to the colonisation of a whole warrior class, famous for colonising far and distant land?" it failed to provide substantial historical facts to supplement his generic answer. An article of such standard should have bear the historical imprint while addressing historical questions of such vitality. The author had offered answers to those raging questions as per his own understanding of those historical events, which although satisfies the curiosity of lay readers, the experts would never hesitate to call those explanations as sweeping. Apart from this pedagogic limitation, there were many gaps in between events covered in the article. The sheer length of the time opted by the article has its own limitation and it was but natural to have gaps in between events. The most stirring gap is when the author moved swiftly from the high point of Orissa's fabled past straight to the Afghan, Mughal, Maratha and British period that mostly involved not to acquire the lost glory of Kalinga but to control over the Odisha Rajya.² Historically, the fact is that, the emergence of small circles of states in and around the late Kharavella Empire, the political fight among these states on regular interval to establish themselves and invasion from the north and south of India were some of the major factors for the decline of the maritime trade of Kalinga. Side by side, the Kalingan merchants could not overcome the challenges from the Arab merchants. However, Kalinga got her territorial sovereignty not maritime under the imperial Gajapati with a different name, Odisha Rajya. It was in the first half of the 16th century the Gajapati Empire collapsed and that political crisis brought some major upheavals and changes in historiography of India.

Afghan emerged as a powerful monarch in eastern India, and regional and sub-regional states emerged in Orissa from the edifice of Gajapati Empire. The coastal tract of Orissa virtually became a playground for Mughal-Afghan supremacy on the one hand and petty and subordinate leaders of late Gajapati Empire on the other hand (Mishra 2011: 53). Everyone wanted to capture the late Gajapati Empire from their point of view mainly to gain upper hand in territorial supremacy and obtaining a strategic state. For the Afghans, the capture of Orissa was considered as a ray of hope for their further strength to stretch their position in the eastern India. For the Mughal, it was strategically important as Orissa was situated in between Bengal and Nizam states of eastern and southern India respectively. For the local powers, capturing Orissa means to capture Gajapati legacy. Finally, Orissa succumbed to the Afghan first, to the Mughal next, to the Marathas after that and finally to the British.

Coming to the final point of the author, where he is hypothetical and made allegations to the present generation for forgetting the rich historical past of their ancestors, it can safely ascertained that the author has relied on meager economic parameters and nothing beyond. This portion should have been more focused and substantiation of facts where issues like political, economic, social and cultural standings of the state should have been discussed. If the present generation of Orissa had not associated at all with their rich history of "fable Orissa" how would they remember? It was due to the

historical disparity where both the rulers and the ruled identified themselves accordingly their area where they established themselves with pompous titles such as Kalingadhipati, Trikalingadipati, Utakladhipati, Kosaladhipati, so on and so forth not as one homogeneous unit. They were very much co-related or even identify themselves with the lineage of their regional identity rather than the great traditions of Kalinga. It was in the beginning of the 20th century the language agitation of the coastal tract, which enabled for the creation of a separate province. Due to the appraisal policy of the modern states the descendant of the old regime developed a parochial approach to share a common fraternity among their fellow brethren to build up a distinct identify of their own rather than the pan-Orissan or India identity. It is true that the present generation of scattered Orissa forget the rich history of the Kalinga period but not the history of their ancestors. It is because of their history of ancestors the demand for a separate of Koshala land is still raging.³

Conclusion

With the admixture of fable and glory, the author put forward some major points in his manuscript. Although the author failed to find the historical geography of Kalinga and Orissa, he successfully contributed to the three dimensional visualisation of the history of coastal Orissa. He represented the lower and upper layer of the history of costal Orissa in a lucid and fluid form. Indeed his work is a humble intervention in the layer and share of historical writing on Orissa.

Notes

¹ The great Kalinga empire was re-established by Kharavela in the first century B.C. which extended from the mouth of Ganges to the Godavari. The elephant cave inscription discloses that the hegemony of Kharavela extended from Mathura on the north to the Pandya kingdom in the south and to the territories of Rathikas and Bhojaks or the region of Maharashtra region in the west. For more detail see: *Epigraphia Indica*, Vol. XX, 1929-30, pp.87-88.

² Kapilendra Deva, the founder of the Gajapati dynasty in 15th century respecting the sentiment of the people name his kingdom as Odisha Rajya and made a first proclamation in Oriya language which is inscribed in the Jagannath temple of Puri. For more detail see: *Journal of Asiatic Society of Bengal*, Vol. LXIX, No. 3, 190, p. 93.

³ People of the region of the western Orissa are demanding a politically separate Koshala state from Orissa on the basic of their distinct cultural identity and regional imbalance from the center. For more detail see: <http://kddfonline.com/>

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