

ISSN 0976 - 8165



THE CRITERION

AN INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL IN ENGLISH

11th Year of Open Access

**Bi-Monthly Refereed and Peer-Reviewed
Open Access e-Journal**

Vol. XI, Issue-5 (October 2020)

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ISSN 2278-9529

Galaxy: International Multidisciplinary Research Journal
www.galaxyimrj.com

Historical Novel and Early Odia Fiction: A Study of Dayanidhi Mishra's *Sanjukta and Rana Pratap Singh*

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Article History: Submitted-27/09/2020, Revised-17/10/2020, Accepted-19/10/2020, Published-31/10/2020.

Abstract:

This paper aims to focus on a less discussed author belonging to the phase of Early Odia Fiction namely Dayanidhi Mishra and his two path breaking novelettes named *Sanjukta* and *Rana Pratap Singh*. Many important creations of Mishra remain oblivious due to frequent focus given to few iconic writers and canonical texts only for decades. In an era when the dividing line between literatures of different language has become non-existent it is high time to bring into life some exemplary texts that could enable us to understand the trends and times of the forgotten phases of past. *Sanjukta* and *Rana Pratap Singh*, written during the early phase of modern Odia literature by Mishra needs a thorough discussion due to their significance in the literary history of Odisha and to understand the evolution of 'Historical Novel' as a genre in Odia language and literature. They represent the most important period in Indian history and reflect the saga of patriotism, bravery, hatred, jealousy, backstabbing and sacrifice.

Keywords: *Sanjukta, Rana Pratap Singh, Dayanidhi Mishra.*

History and literature are complementary and supplementary to each other, yet they are definitely not the same. And the literary artist needs to be considered as per his creative and descriptive ability and not mere presentation of facts. That's why at times there remain huge difference between history and literature. But the greatest historical writer is he, who without too much modifying the facts presents it to the readers as a creative gift and Dayanidhi Mishra falls into this category. History is based on facts. Literature is the art of fiction. History is skeleton and literature is flesh and blood. Walter Scott, the Irish novelist is credited to be the first author to write historical novels. Since then it became a popular approach and has been applied in

various literatures of the world. In Odia literature the very first attempt in novel writing i.e. *Soudamini* (1878) written by Ram Shankar Ray is based on history. His other novel *Bibasini* (1891) too is a historical novel. Moreover, the first complete novel in Odia literature by Umesh Chandra Sarkar i.e. *Padmamali* (1888) too is a historical novel; based on Nilagiri Gadjat movement in Baleswar district of Odisha. The other novels written during that time were mostly historical. The most influential literary creator of Odisha, Fakir Mohan Senapati's epoch making novel *Lacchhama* (1914) needs to be mentioned here. After Fakir Mohan, one Odia writer did his best in this area and he is none other than Dayanidhi Mishra; by writing *Sanjukta* (1921) and *Rana Pratap Singh* (1922-23). One great quality of a good novel is it inspires the reader and these two novels do the same.

Surendranath Panigrahi writes in his book *Odia Uanyasa Sahityara Itihasa*, "The number of historical novels during pre-independent period (1888-1946) is limited; but their qualitative value is more." (87, My Translation) It is a fact that the number of novels in Odia literature was very less as compared to Bangla literature during that period. And other than Fakir Mohan Senapati, Dayanidhi Mishra was one among the foremost creators to address this dearth of fiction in Odia literature. Gopinath Mohanty's long and detailed introduction to *Nayanatara*, a social and special novel by Dayanidhi Mishra, bears a significant place in establishing Mishra's importance and the value of his contributions. He writes, "Since 1922 to 1924 he was the assistant editor of the famous literary magazine of that time 'Mukura'. His literary creation started since 1910 with the publication of his poem 'Baidhabya-Brahmacharya' in 'Mukura'. From 1911 to 1916 in every edition probably of 'Mukura' and 'Utkala Sahitya' his poems or stories were getting published. His fame had been established as the creator of historical novel after the publication of his historical novel *Sanjukta* in 1921. *Sanjukta* had become very famous then. Dayanidhi Mishra's historical novels: *Sanjukta* (1921), *Rana Pratap Singh* (1922-23) social novel *Manabhanjana* (1923-24) had been publishing in *Mukura* periodically." (ii, My Translation) It was a very important phase in the life of Mishra. He was a man of patriotic ideas since childhood and acted as a student leader later. He wanted to actively participate in the freedom struggle. During this time, he had quit his government job and joined the non-cooperation movement led by Gandhijee. As a patriotic author he wanted to infuse the idea of nationalism into the mind of the readers and educated mass. Hence, he decided to highlight the

glorious tale of two significant figures of Indian history i.e. Prithviraj Chouhan and Maharana Pratap respectively.

Gopinath Mohanty further writes, “I too remember a personal experience. It was 1924. I was then the student of class six (present day five) of Sonepur Maharaja High English School. Adjacent to our quarter was the quarter of our dear friend from Noakhali Bangladesh and my school teacher Sri Barendranath Ray. His children showing me the Bengali novels of his home were taunting to me in kidding wit.” (ii, My Translation) Once they brought some novels and showing them to Mohanty asked whether they have such books in Odia. To this Gopinath answered in affirmative and so he was asked to show the proof. When Gopinath asked his father regarding this he too answered in affirmative. Then Gopinath Mohanty writes, “The only Odia book seller’s address we knew was Pundit Akula Mishra, Kabyateertha. We wrote a letter to him asking for sending Odia novels and stories through VP and he had sent Fakirmohan’s *Chha Mana Atha Guntha*, *Mamu*, *Lachama*, *Utkala Kahani*, *Arabi Kahani*, *Gule Bakabali*, *Fula Changudi* etc. Chintamani Mohanty’s *Bula Fakira*, *Tanka Gacha*, Kuntalakumari Sabat’s *Kalibohu*, *Natundi* and Dayanidhi Mishra’s *Sanjukta* and *Rana Pratap Singh*.” (iii, My Translation) This introduction proves and justifies Dayanidhi Mishra’s importance and place in Odia literature.

When considered on the size of *Sanjukta* and *Rana Pratap Singh*, they fall into the category of novelettes and Dayanidhi Mishra can be regarded as the first writer to write novelettes in the history of Odia literature. *Sanjukta* consists of 42 pages and *Rana Pratap Singh* consists of 60 pages. The author has dedicated the earlier to his mother and the latter to his father. Later on, Kanhu Charan Mohanty and Gopinath Mohanty developed the tradition of novelette writing by their creations such as *Jakhya*, *Dadibudha* etc. respectively.

Sanjukta is the first historical novelette written by Dayanidhi Mishra and stands as the fourth novel in the history of Odia literature. It was first published in 1921 by Berhampur Students’ Store and was the very first published novel of the author. It is an inspired novel which has been mentioned by the novelist in the preface itself. He writes, “I don’t claim the complete originality of this book. I have collected and included materials in the main story from various books written in English, Hindi and Bengali. However, it should be noted here that this book is not a literal translation of any book. Even though there are translations from the original text, I

have tried my best to maintain my individuality. I hope the readers would pardon my mistakes that might have been present as this is my first ever attempt.” (289, My Translation) The idea of nationalism and the backdrop of freedom struggle have been influential in writing such a text based on a true story of Indian history that is well known to all Indian folk. Prithvi Raj Chauhan, the last Hindu emperor and his conflict with Jai Chand and then the subsequent fight with Mohammad Ghoree is the basis of this novelette. Delhi's emperor Anangpal was issueless. Jaichand was the son of her elder daughter and Prithviraj was the son of his younger daughter. As the heir of the elder daughter Jaichand had the natural desire to acquire the throne after his grandfather. But Anangpal gave his right to Prithviraj as he was more capable in this regard. Thus, began the saga of jealousy and hatred that cost a lot to the Indian nation. Both Jaichand and Prithviraj were dynamic in quality. But Prithviraj was humble and popular among the subjects. Jaichand had some human flaws like ego and hatred that resulted in bringing slavery to the entire nation. Prithviraj and Sanjukta fell in love and Prithviraj took her away from the *swayambar sabha* arranged by Jaichand where he had invited all the kings except Prithviraj. This caused the concrete animosity among the two and Jaichand sought the help of Ghoree; whom he had once defeated by helping Prithviraj. However, after Prithviraj's demise in the battle, Ghoree also killed Jaichand. But he could not enjoy the throne for long. In his absence the subjects of Ghor became unruly and on his way return to Ghor, Ghoree he was killed by the dacoits. This is how a grand saga comes to an end. Here it may be noted that there are some differences between historians regarding the end of Prithviraj's life. However, the author has maintained the balance by providing believable fact only. At one instance he has too mentioned that the character of Jaichand was not entirely negative from the beginning as it is generally claimed by the western historians. He only became vengeful due to not getting the throne of Delhi and subsequently his daughter's marriage with Prithviraj.

The novel is however named after Sanjukta, the daughter of Jai Chand and wife of Prithviraj, who holds a very significant position in Indian history. Though the novel is focused upon Prithviraj's adventure, the novelist has named it after the heroine as an ideal practice. He believed in women empowerment and most of his writings reflect this clearly. Moreover, women play an important role in causing and shaping the character and fate of men. Hence like Draupadi in Mahabharat, Sanjukta in Indian history holds a very important position without whom the turn of history would have been entirely different. The entire novelette revolves around the life and

thoughts of Sanjukta and it too ends with a distinct note where she herself appears on the battlefield as the epitome of power and saves her husband's corpse from getting destroyed by the enemies and loss a royal farewell.

Rana Pratap Singh, first published by Berhampur Students' Store around 1922-23, is the second historical novelette by Dayanidhi Mishra. It is little bigger in size than the previous one and is written in the same pattern. Moreover, it is the only novel by Mishra to have a hero only and no heroine. Otherwise his creations are generally centered upon the heroine other than being named after them too in most of the cases. The main reason behind this may be due to the commitment of the author to history and thus he has not attempted to bring any fictitious character or non-significant element in the text. This can be treated as an exemplary practice in historical writings where modification or infiltration has been avoided by the creative artist and the focus is given upon the description. The conflict and outcome of the fight between Rana Pratap Singh and Akbar is the theme of this novel.

Rana Pratap's patriotism was matchless. His sense of honour and freedom was equally unique. He had no intention to compromise with the foreign rulers in India unlike many other kings who sold their soul to Akbar to gain life and bread. Rana Pratap the great had sleepless nights for not being able to make his land free from the clutches of slavery. Still he vowed to maintain the freedom of Mewar at least and keep its glory intact. He quit his royal lifestyle and started to live like a monk. He arranged army and trained them in warfare. Slowly he became the biggest challenge to Akbar who in no way could catch him or defeat him. Living the life of dignity and courage he breathed his last due to old age and decreased health. And thus, set the glorious sun of Indian history. However, Akbar too could not enjoy the power for long. Trying to kill Maan Singh; his brother-in-law and main warrior, he himself got killed unfortunately by taking the poisonous meal prepared for Maan Singh. Pratap's personality, achievements, rebellious nature, free spirit, patriotic mindset, flawless warfare and supreme sacrifice has been lively described by the author that is capable to give goose bumps to every proud Indian and inspire them for patriotic cause. The text marks the best use of refined language, unique style and loaded content.

Both the novelettes i.e. *Sanjukta* and *Rana Pratap Singh* are charged with nationalistic fever. It needs to be mentioned here that both the texts were written soon after the author quit

government job in Ganjam to join the freedom struggle. He was imprisoned by the British too for carrying out anti-government activity. After that he came to Cuttack and served as the assistant editor of *Mukura*, the then famous literary magazine; both the creations belong to this phase of author's life. This phase of Mishra's life saw the heights of nationalism and how he used literature as a tool to inspire the readers and motivate them for the national cause. Moreover, unlike many other Gandhians, he never had any hesitation in glorifying the different types of struggle and openly celebrated the great warriors of past and present with equal respect. His significant contribution to credit national heroes has been proven through his writings and *Sanjukta* and *Rana Pratap Singh* are the logical outcome of his conviction and creativity. There is also an added fictional dimension to this historical theme. But it has not affected his historical narrative from a negative point of view; rather it has enriched the creative theme of the novel.

These two novelettes gained popularity soon after publication and proved their merit by becoming the part of the academic curriculum in the pre-independent era. *Sanjukta* was selected as the textbook for IA class under Patna University. Similarly, *Rana Pratap Singh* was selected as the text book for Final class of schools under Madras Presidency. It is really a matter of surprise that such patriotic creations got celebrated during the British rule, but unfortunately enough they have lost their identity and position in independent India. Both the novelettes are now available in *Dayanidhi Katha Samagra*, published by Cuttack Students' Store in 1991, and has been used here as the reference text. Re-inclusion of such timeless creations in school and university syllabus would be more productive in recent times when selfishness is at its peak and patriotism or nationalism is being deliberately treated as something obscure by the so-called intellectual/educated mass. Translation of significant texts into other languages often serves as a tool to revive them and reach out to the larger audience. As a humble but needful attempt to revive such forgotten classics both *Sanjukta* and *Rana Pratap Singh* have been translated by me into English and are ready for publication.

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