



Quest for a New Epoch Progressive Movement in Odia Literature



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Article history:

Received: 10 June 2016

Revised: 15 July 2016

Approved: 11 August 2016

Published: 1 September 2016

Keywords:

Association;

Odia literature;

Progressive Writers;

Nabajuga Sahitya Samsad;

Bhagabati Charan Panigrahi;

Pragatibadi Sahitya Parampara;

Abstract

The Progressive Writers' Movement has been seen by literary historians as a defining phase in the history of Indian literature(s). It easily caught the imagination of the writers and intellectuals, and soon took the shape of a widespread movement influencing the thinking and writing of the succeeding generations. It has been universally believed that the Movement had its inception in India at the Progressive Writers' Conference held at Lucknow in April 1936. In my paper, I seek to historicize the genesis and development of the idea of progressivism abroad and the subsequent formation of the Progressive Writers' Association, first in London and then in India; with emphasis on the Movement in colonial Odisha under the leadership of Bhagabati Charan Panigrahi which has almost gone unnoticed and unacknowledged by scholars and historians.

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1. Introduction

The Progressive Writers' Movement, which engulfed the literary culture of India in the 1930s has been seen by literary historians as a defining phase in the history of Indian literature(s). Described as an influx of the Marxist ideology in the intellectual life of the poets, writers and thinkers in a large part of the world, it easily caught the imagination of the creative individuals and took the shape of a widespread movement influencing, in one way or the other, the thinking and writing of the succeeding generations. In tune with the ongoing development, a group of young writers in Odia literature also promptly reciprocated to it and ushered in the movement in Odisha.

In this paper, I seek to historicize the genesis and development of the idea of progressivism abroad and the subsequent formation of the Progressive Writers' Association, first in London and then in India; with emphasis

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on the Movement in colonial Odisha which has almost gone unnoticed and unacknowledged by scholars and historians.

After the October Revolution of 1917 and the subsequent formation of the Soviet Union in the 1920s, there was an upsurge of Marxist/Leftist ideology the world over, and it had its impact on the literature of the world. During the celebration of the tenth anniversary of the October Revolution, the first International Conference of Proletarian and Revolutionary Writers was held in Moscow in November 1927. Writers and artists from fourteen countries participated in it and it was resolved that an International Bureau for Revolutionary Literature (IBRL) be constituted to promote the formation of associations of the “proletarian and revolutionary” writers, especially in the capitalist countries. By the time of the second conference of the Proletarian and Revolutionary Writers took place at Charkov in November 1930, such organizations had already been formed in Austria, Czechoslovakia, Germany, Hungary, Japan, Poland, and the USA. More than a hundred delegates from twenty-three countries attended the event and the IBRL was rechristened as the International Union of Revolutionary Writers (IURW). A twenty-five member executive council was also elected. The new nomenclature came with a policy change in character: the IURW would thenceforth be a writers’ organizations, not a union of individuals (Murphy 37-38).

Oleg Jegorow, the renowned Soviet literary historian sums up the resolution of the aforesaid conference, which also spells out the agenda of a future culture of leftist literature:

Soviet literature and the proletarian literature in the capitalist countries develop under different conditions, and each one of them has its own distinct features. What is necessary is the struggle for the hegemony of revolutionary literature in every country. This struggle must be conducted in alliance with ... fellow-travelers. It is necessary to proceed immediately with the organizing of associations of proletarian and revolutionary writers in the capitalist countries. (qtd. in Murphy 38)

2. Research Method

In December 1932, Angare [Burning Coals], an Urdu anthology of five short stories by Sajjad Zaheer (1905-73), two short stories by Ahmed Ali (1910-94), a story and a play by Dr Rashid Jahan (1905–1952) and one short story by Mahmuduzzafar [aka Mahmud-uz-Zaffar] (1908-1954) was published by Nizami Press, Lucknow. Apparently, the writings were quite radical and unconventional in view of the time and unacceptable to sections of the society. The book invited unprecedented controversies: there were harsh and aggressive reviews and media responses, and reportedly, even the civil society found it unacceptable. The colonial Government of the United Provinces declared that the book was against the religious sentiments of the Muslims and prescribed it, under Section 295A of the Indian Penal Code on 15 March 1933. Although Angare courted such controversy at the time of its publication, it brought in a lot of transformation in the conventional perceptions of literature and the freedom of authorship in the Indian context.

Sometime after the prescription of the book, the authors of Angare issued a statement at Delhi, drafted by Mahmuduzzafar, which was published in The Leader (Allahabad) on 5 April 1933 entitled as ‘In Defence of Angare: Shall We Submit to Gagging?’. In this article, the young writers asserted that they “stand for the right of free criticism and free expression in all matters of highest importance to the human race in general and the Indian people in particular” and expressed the need for “the formation immediately of a League of Progressive Authors which should bring forth similar collections from time to time, both in English and various vernaculars of our country” (qtd. in Mahmud 451).

3. Results and Analysis

During 21-26 June 1935, the ‘International Congress for the Defense of Culture’, organized by the most distinguished French litterateurs like Andre Gide, Henry Barbusse, Romaine Rolland and Andre Malraux met in Paris. The importance of the Congress was enhanced by the participation of some of the major European writers, including E. M. Forster who also made a speech on ‘Liberty in England’ on the first evening itself. Sajjad Zaheer, the co-author of *Angare*, and Mulk Raj Anand (1905-2004), who would later be known as an iconic Indian English novelist, had attended the conference and actively participated in the deliberations. Madam Sophia Wadia (1901-86), the well-known Theosophist and the founder of PEN India participated as the Indian representative². At the conclusion of the conference, an International Centre of Progressive Literary Movement was founded in Paris. This is how the leftist project of “proletarian and revolutionary” literature began to percolate into the rest of the world.

Mund, S. (2016). *Quest for a new epoch progressive movement in odia literature. International Journal of Linguistics, Literature and Culture*, 2(3), 56-68.
<https://sloap.org/journals/index.php/ijllc/article/view/118>

In England, the Communist Party of Great Britain was founded in 1920 by the merger of several smaller Marxist parties like the British Socialist Party, the Communist Unity Group of the Socialist Labour Party and the South Wales Socialist Society. The leftist ideology had already begun to exert influence on the elite class. The Oxford Group of Left-wing young poets/intellectuals (aka 'Auden Group', 'Thirties Poets'), which comprised of such young talents like W. H. Auden, Stephen Spender, Louis MacNeice, Cecil Day-Lewis, et al had already been active since the early 1930s.

Anand, who came to London as a student in 1924, had been quite active in the literary as well as political circuits. A champion of social justice all through his eventful life, he had been briefly imprisoned in India for his participation in the Civil Disobedience in 1921. Very soon, he became active in left-wing politics and even joined a Marxist study circle at the home of the trade unionist Alan Hutt. He would often come out openly in support of the working class as was seen during the strike of the coal miners and the subsequent [General Strike \(4-13 May 1926\)](#). He was also an active member of the 'India League' (1929->), founded by [V. K. Krishna Menon \(1896-1974\)](#) which worked for the freedom of India from England. He came into contact with eminent British intellectuals like [Bertrand Russell \(1872-1970\)](#), [Henry Noel Brailsford \(1873-1958\)](#) and [Michael Foot \(1913-2010\)](#) who had leftist leanings.

[Syed Sajjad Zaheer \(1905-73\)](#), who came to England in 1927 as a Law student at the University of Oxford, also got involved in Marxist politics during his stay there. He was one of the first South Asians to become a member of the Communist Party of Great Britain. While in England, he started editing a periodical called the *Bharat*, the mouthpiece of socialist activism of the South Asian students at Oxford University. In his 'Reminiscences', Zaheer narrates how he was distressed by the "the dictatorship of Hitler and his Nazi party", and "its fearful shades on Europe" (33). He writes, "In London and Paris, we daily came across the miserable refugees who had escaped or were exiled from Germany. Everywhere one could hear the painful stories of fascist repression..." (*Marxist Cultural Movement in India* 34). Thus, Zaheer had already been inclined towards Marxism and being a creative writer, he wanted to organize a similar movement in India.

Zaheer returned to London in 1933 in the wake of the *Angare* controversy in India. Both the writers, Anand and Zaheer, young and talented, were like-minded in many respects, especially in their faith in Marxism and their awareness of the evils of capitalism, Fascism, imperialism and colonial rule. They were in regular touch with the Marxists as well as progressive-minded writers and intellectuals in London and attended their meetings. They were immensely inspired by their experience during the Paris Conference and it gave them the idea of the formation of an All India Progressive Writers' Association. After their return to London, they formed the London Progressive Writers' Association of the Indians and got it affiliated with the International Centre of Progressive Literary Movement.

In his *History of Indian Literature: 1911-1956, Struggle for Freedom: Triumph and Tragedy*, Sisir Kumar Das devotes one complete section called 'Political Movements and Indian writers' (61-93) to the history and development of the Progressive Movement. According to him, during a conversation with Ralph Winston Fox, whose *The Novel and the People* was popular among writers Zaheer got the idea of forming the Progressive Writers' Association. Along with Anand, he had attended several meetings the Bloomsbury Group and was impressed by the liberal, modernist views of the British poets and writers. Zaheer and Anand had laid the foundations for the All India Progressive Writers' Association at a gathering in a London restaurant where they drafted the Manifesto. It was Anand who prepared the first draft of the manifesto of the proposed association which was further edited and was eventually published in the *Hans*, the most reputable literary journal of the time, edited by Munshi Premchand in October 1935; and another version, a revised one, came out in the February 1936 number of the *Left Review* in London (Das 87).

In 'On the Progressive Writers' Movement', the first essay in *Marxist Cultural Movement in India: Chronicles and Documents (1936-47)*³, edited by Sudhi Pradhan, Anand recounts the genesis and development of the 'movement'. He remembers "those dark foggy November days of the year 1935 in London", how a few of them "emerged from the slough of despondency of the cafes and garrets of Bloomsbury and formed the nucleus of the Progressive Writers' Association". He further writes:

For, since the historic meeting in the Nanking restaurant in Denmark Street where the original manifesto was read, through the eager, well-attended fortnightly meetings of the London branch where essays, stories, and poems were read and lectures delivered (and through less eager, ill attended meetings) through the first All-India Progressive Writers' Conference held in Lucknow in April 1936, and the opening of branches or committees in the various linguistic zones through the

provincial conference and the opening of more branches, our organisation has, today gathered into it or around it, the most significant writers in India and commands membership so large that it forms, quantitatively, one of the largest blocks for the defence of culture in the world. (“On the Progressive Writers' Movement” 1)

The leftist swing in Indian literature came after the formation of Indian Progressive Writers' Association in London in 1935. After his return to India via Paris in 1935, Zaheer began the spadework of the proposed Progressive Writers' Association [*aka* ‘Akhil Bharatiya Pragatisheel Lekhak Sangh’ in Hindi, and ‘Anjuman Taraqqi Pasand Mussanafin-e-Hind’ in Urdu] and finally its first national conference was scheduled to be held at the Rafah-e-Aam Hall in Lucknow on 10 April 1936. He and his compatriots planned to have the conference in Lucknow in April 1936 and it turned out to be strategically very astute. The time was ripe for any move towards change, as in nationalist politics, the mass movement led by Mahatma Gandhi was at its peak, and the educated Indian middle class was becoming more aware of the evils of imperialism, Fascism, Nazism, and capitalism. In the sphere of literature in India also, there was an urge for change.

In April 1936, the annual meeting of the Indian National Congress was scheduled to be held at Congress Nagar in Lucknow and Jawaharlal Nehru was supposed to preside over its sessions. Besides, the founding conference of the All-India Kisan Congress (later renamed Kisan Sabha) was also slated to be organized than in Lucknow. It was quite apparent that the Congress, under the influence of Nehru, was swinging towards socialist ideology and it was no surprise that he accepted the invitation of to attend the conference and even addressed the participant writers. Nehru consented to attend the conference also because he liked Zaheer and had even made him the General Secretary of the Allahabad Congress Committee where he was himself the President⁴.

Besides Nehru, many important personalities also attended the conference. Sarojini Naidu, yet another eminent Congress leader, who was more renowned as a poet, sent an encouraging message. The other well-known personalities who attended the conference were Jai Prakash Narain, Yusuf Mahraly, Indulal Yajnik, Kamala Devi Chattopadhyaya and Miran Iftikhar-ud-Din. Nehru, in his speech, put emphasis on realism in literature: “... unless a writer has a connection with reality, with actual life, his work cannot prove enduring” while, in his message, Rabindranath Tagore wrote, “... literature that is not in harmony with mankind is destined for failure” (qtd. Noor Zaheer).

Most importantly, Munshi Premchand, perhaps the most popular writer of the time, especially among the Hindi/Urdu readership, presided over the conference and, in tune with the wind of change ushered in by the Movement, talked about the “rapid transformation” of “literary taste” in his Presidential Address:

Our literary taste is undergoing a rapid transformation. It is coming more and to grips with the realities of life; it interests itself with society or man as a social unit. It is not satisfied now with the singing of frustrated love, or with writing to satisfy only our sense of wonder; it concerns itself with the problems of our lives and such themes as having a social value. The literature which does not arouse in us a critical spirit, or satisfies our spiritual needs, which is not ‘force-giving’ and dynamic, which does not awaken our sense of beauty, which does not make us face the grim realities of life in a spirit of determination, has no use for us today. It cannot even be termed as literature.” (‘The Nature and Purpose of Literature’ *Marxist Cultural Movement in India: Chronicles and Documents* 53)

In his address, Premchand also told that it was a writer’s duty to be “more realistic” in his stories and “to help all those who are downtrodden, oppressed and exploited-individuals or groups-and to advocate their cause”. He further argued, “It is not even enough that from a psychological point of view his characters resembled human beings; we must further be satisfied that they are *real* human beings of bone and flesh. We do not believe in an imaginary man; his acts and his thoughts do not impress us” (‘The Nature and Purpose of Literature’ *Marxist Cultural Movement in India* 53-54).

The Conference issued an extensive ‘Manifesto’ which basically professed the objectives of the Association and the duties and responsibilities of “Indian writers”. The first and foremost was “to give expression to the changes taking place in Indian life and to assist spirit of progress in the county by introducing scientific rationalism in literature”, and that the “object” of the Association “to rescue literature and other arts from the conservative classes in whose hands they have been degenerating so long, to bring arts into the closest touch with the people and to make them vital organs which will register the actualities of life as well as lead us to the future

we envisage". It also said that "the new literature of India must deal with the basic problems of our existence today-the problems of hunger and poverty, social backwardness and political subjection". The Conference also adopted a number of "resolutions" on the "organisations of writers to correspond to the various linguistic zones of India"; "holding conferences", publication and translation of books; and most importantly, to protect the interests of authors; to help authors who require and deserve assistance for the publication of their works; and to fight for the right of free expression of thought and opinion", etc..

The formation of the Association and the conference had a far-reaching influence on the contemporary Indian literary scene. Soon its branches were set up in Calcutta (July 1936), Bombay, Poona, Ahmadabad, Patna, Aligarh, and other places. *Jeeval Sahityam* was formed in Malayalam literature which held its conference at Thrissur on 20 April 1937. The first Progressive Writers' Conference in Kerala was held in January 1944. According to P. G. Govinda Pillai, the name of the organization was changed into 'Purogamana Sahitya Sangham' at the instance of E. M. S. Namboodiripad ('E.M.S as a Literary Critic and Cultural Activist').

Soon after the Lucknow conference, the International Writers Association met for the second time on 19-23 June 1936 in London (from the), and a Manifesto signed by Rabindranath Tagore, Sarat Chandra Chatterjee, Munshi Prem Chand, P. C. Ray, Jawaharlal Nehru, Pramatha Choudhury, Ramananda Chatterjee, Nandalal Bose and others was sent by the Progressive Writers' Association. It said,

On our own and on behalf of our countrymen we take this opportunity to declare with one voice with the people of other countries that we detest war and want to abjure it and that we have no interest in war. We are against the participation of India in any imperialist war for we know that the future of civilization will be a stake in the next war. (Foreword *Marxist Cultural Movement in India* vii)

Namboodiripad, the renowned Marxist informs that the conference also had its bearing on the contemporary Indian politics. According to him, "That session was remarkable for the new turn to the left given to the Congress policy". He further elaborates:

The presidential address delivered by Jawaharlal Nehru and the resolutions adopted at the session showed the clear impact of two important events in the development of the left movement in the country -- first, the emergence of an organised central leadership for the Communist Party of India which unified all the scattered Communist groups working throughout the country, secondly, the formation of the Congress Socialist Party. The ideas of the left movement propagated by the CPI [Communist Party of India] and the newly-formed CSP [Congress Socialist Party] were echoed in the presidential address and the resolution adopted at the Congress session. ('Half a Century of Marxist Cultural Movement in India')

Progressive Writers' Movement in Odisha

As we have seen above, the first conference of the All India Progressive Writers' Association was held in Lucknow on 9-10 April 1936, and the Progressive Writers' Association was formed in Calcutta in July 1936. Soon, branches of the Association were formed in a number of places in India and conferences were also held. Progressive Writers' Movement has been a very significant phenomenon in the postcolonial Indian political and cultural life, and a number of researchers have chronicled the history of the genesis and development of the movement in various languages, but it is surprising that there is hardly any mention of the Progressive Writers' Movement in Odisha.

It may surprise many, but it is a fact that Odisha saw the inception of the Progressive Writers' Movement as early as 1934, in the form of an organization of eight founding members called 'Nabajuga Sahitya Samsad' ('Literary Society of the New Era'). Under the leadership of a young man named Bhagabati Charan Panigrahi (1908-43), it was formed on the historic premises of Ravenshaw College (Cuttack), with Anant Patnaik (1910-88), his brother Guru Charan Pattnaik (1917-2009), Bijay Chandra Das, et al as associates. The objective of the Samsad was to "disseminate progressive, revolutionary and radical ideas" among the youth, and "The forum marked the germination and spread of the communist movement in Orissa" (Nanda 56). It also functioned as the cultural wing of 'Utkal Congress Samyabadi Sangha' (Utkal Congress Socialist Party) under the influence of Nabakrushna Chaudhury (1901-84), who later on became the Chief Minister of Odisha. The Samsad attracted the educated, progressive-minded creative young men to its fold and soon Ram Prasad Singh, [Guru Charan Pattnaik \(1917-2009\)](#), [Prananath Pattnaik](#), [Sachidanada Rautray \(1916-2004\)](#), [Biswanath Pashayat \(1912-64\)](#), et al joined hands.

Bhagabati Panigrahi, the founder of the Samsad was the younger brother of Kalindi Charan Panigrahi (1901-91), the writer of the epoch-making novel *Matira Manisha* (1931), which had redefined the trend of social realism in the contemporary context. Bhagabati was the pioneer of the Progressive movement in Odia literature and, with his compatriots like Anant Pattnaik and Guru Charan Pattnaik was also the founder of the Communist Party (1938) of Odisha. He began his political career as a follower of Mahatma Gandhi, but eventually, he became disillusioned because of the withdrawal of non-cooperation and civil disobedience movements. When the Congress Socialist Party was formed in 1934 with Ram Manohar Lohia, Acharya Narendra Dev and Jayaprakash Narayan as its founders, Utkal Congress Samyabadi Sangha, the Congress faction in Odisha led by Nabakrushna Choudhury merged in it. In fact, Choudhury was one of the major influences in founding the Samsad. Panigrahi, who had joined the newly formed Congress Socialist Party, eventually founded the Communist Party in Odisha after a couple of years⁵.

The Nabajuga Sahitya Samsad was formally instituted in an eight-day long Conference held at Cuttack between 29 November and 6 December 1935, about four months before the Lucknow Conference and much before the formation of the Association in Calcutta and other places. Nabajuga Sahitya Samsad became associated with the All India Progressive Writers' Association when Bhagabati Charan Panigrahi attended the Lucknow Conference (Pati 86). Most importantly, Jawaharlal Nehru who was present in the inaugural conference of the Progressive Writers' Association at Lucknow, attended a conference of the Samsad and also made a speech during his visit to Odisha in 1936 (Nanda 58).

The advent of Nabajuga Sahitya Samsad was important not only because it sought to give a new direction to Odia writing, but also to bring in new ideas and thoughts, especially western, to the Odia world. It happened at a time when the Odia society and Odia literature were passing through an era of transition. Nabajuga Sahitya Samsad and the Progressive Movement could be significantly situated in the social, cultural and political context of the times in the sense that they came up not only at a time of great upheaval, but the milieu was also ready for the transition. There were such factors as Gandhian nationalist politics, the post-First World War international politics, Odia Language movement which had been striving for the independent provincial status of Odisha; upheaval of the nationalist peasants' movement under the aegis of Prajamandal Andolan, as well as the advent of new ideologies like Socialism, Marxism and Humanism, even Fascism and Nazism, which the writers and intellectuals could not have ignored.

In Odia literature, the great aura of Phakir Mohan Senapati (1843-1918), Radhanath Ray (1848-1908), Madhusudan Rao (1853-1912), Gangadhar Meher (1962-1924), et al still persisted, although there were several new phenomena which waited in the wings to appear and engulf the thinking and creative Odia minds. While a group of young men -- Kalindi Charan Panigrahi (1901-91), Annada Shankar Ray, Baikuntha Nath Pattnaik, Harihara Mohapatra and Sharat Chandra Mukherjee -- had formed 'Sabuja Sahitya Samiti' and were forging a revival of romanticism in what is famously known as the Sabuja School of poetry; the Satyabadi School of Odia literature -- with writers and activists like Pandit Gopabandhu Das (1877-1928), Pandit Godavarish Mishra (1886-1956), Pandit Neelakantha Das (1884-1969), Acharya Harihar Das (1869-1971) and Krupasindhu Mishra (1887-1926) -- was trying to strike a balance between Gandhian nationalism and the Odia subnationalism. One agrees with Chitta Ranjan Das (1923-2014) that "Nabajuga was a reaction to the reversion of the Sabujas and such traditions" (254). With its commitment to social realism, Nabajuga Sahitya Samsad came up as a counter movement of the romanticism of the Sabuja poets.

Interestingly, the Progressive Movement in Odisha became, in a way, complementary to the nationalist movement and literature because of its anti-imperialist, anti-fascist and anti-capitalist position. It was also a movement of the left-oriented writers and activists against feudalism in Odisha in the form of Prajamandal Andolan. Paradoxically, but most importantly, this movement also paved the way for the advent of modernism in Odia literature. In short, the Progressive Movement, though short-lived in Odisha, was very eventful in the sense that it found its expression through the literary writings of the founding poets and writers of Nabajuga Sahitya Samsad.

The first convention of Nabajuga Sahitya Samsad presided over by Kalindi Charan Panigrahi was held at Cuttack from 29 November to 6 December 1935. Anant Pattnaik, one of the great poets of modern times, and the elder brother of Guru Charan who was elected the first President of Nabajuga Sahitya Samsad, wrote the now famous 'Udbodhani', and Malati Choudhury, the great social worker, and wife of Nabakrushna Choudhury sang it as the opening song of the Conference. Here are a few lines:

Awake, the youth of the new age,
 Awake, and break your fetters,
 Pour your heart's blood
 And spread fire in million lives
 Break all bonds
 Dry all tears
 Destroy all castes
 Unite all countries
 Blow the conch of all humanity
 Let the sorrows go
 And, arise, arise, awake, awake! (qtd. in Mohanty 307)

Ram Prasad Singh, the noted novelist and a participant of the civil disobedience movement articulated the objective of the Samsad in the following words:

In order to attain freedom, human beings need an independent literature. This literature should have no connections with God. It should concentrate on human issues. ...Oriya literature was constituted of the rich, the zamindars and kings. This was not the literature of the people; nor have the people anything to do with it. (qtd. in Pati 86-87)

The conference was attended by a good number of poets, writers, activists, intellectuals and common individuals had many sessions where participants discussed various theoretical issues, political philosophies and scientific discoveries in relation to history, society, and literature. The various sessions of the Conference were chaired/addressed by Bhagabati Charan Panigrahi ('Artha o Paramartha': 'Money and Salvation'), Damodar Mishra ('Bijnana, Darshana o Dharmara Samanwaya': 'Synthesis of Religion, Philosophy and Science'), Ram Prasad Singh ('Bartaman Sahityare Nutan Bhabadharara Abahana': 'Invocation of New Thoughts and Ideas in Contemporary Literature'), Guru Charan Pattnaik ('Samasamayika Itihaasara Gatidhara': 'Developments in Contemporary History'), Kedar Nath Mohapatra ('Jati Gathanare Itihasara Sthana': 'The Role of History in Nation Building'), iconic Odia poet Radhanath Ray's son Shashi Bhusan Roy ('Sahitya Prabhab': 'Influence of Literature'), et al. The organisers enlightened the participants on the genesis and development of progressive literature in the different parts of the country (Pati 86). In fact, many of the participants had already published articles, poems, essays, booklets, etc. where they had demonstrated their awareness of the ideological developments as well as the political scenario in the world without.

It is important to note here that the impact of this conference and the Odia Progressive Writers' Movement which came to be known as Odia Pragatibadi Sahitya Andolan [Odia Progressive Literature Movement] was immediate. Odia journalists and writers published favorable responses in periodicals. Soon after the conference, Pandit Nilakantha Das (1884-1969), the great Odia scholar, writer and firebrand leader published the lectures given at the conference in the January 1936 issue of the *Naba Bharata* edited by him. Ram Prasad Singh's lecture, 'Bartaman Sahityare Nutan Bhabadharara Abahana' ['Invocation of New Thoughts and Ideas in Contemporary Literature'] published in this issue articulates how the Movement defined literature:

The greatest thinking persons and writers of the world have already started a massive crusade against the stereotyped traditions, prejudices, superstitions, and thoughtlessness. The priests of original thoughts and revolutionary ideas like Einstein, Freud, Marx, Russell, Bernard Shaw, Romaine Roland, Gorky, and Louis Clare are well-known to the world. By clinging to our past, we have confined ourselves to our small family and therefore failed to witness the progression of human civilization. We basically lack in free thinking and liberal attitude. Therefore, this organization intends to introduce a new kind of culture, new kind of civilization in our country.

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The best definition of literature is that it is a discourse of life. The imaginary representation of horrid romantic love presented in our literature by our literary ancestors in the name of human feelings and sentiments does not qualify for the fulfillment of life; it is merely luxurious pathos. The orchestra of

shringar rasa has always overshadowed the pitiful moaning of the poor's cry. It is as if literature has closed its eyes to the realities of life and world. (qtd in Gahan 74)⁷

Pyarishankar Roy, in the Editorial of the *Pragati* (1st year, 2nd issue, 6 April 1936), seemed to echo the theme of the Movement when he wrote, "A good litterateur is one who can beautifully portray one's own experience in life and events happening in the society". In the same issue of the periodical, Ananta Patnaik, a founding member of the Nabajuga Sahitya Samsad and the Progressive Movement wrote an essay called '*Juddha kana Abashyambhabi?*' [Is War Inevitable?]. Perhaps for the first time in Odia literature, we see here a discussion on world politics, Fascism, Nazism, Japan's militarization, the attack of Italy on Abyssinia, attack on Manchuria and the imminent World War. And the young writer calls upon the farmers and workers of the world not take part in the war and to unite and fight against imperialism⁸.

Yet another contribution of Bhagabati Charan Panigrahi to Progressive Writers' Movement and modern Odia literature was the literary periodical called the *Adhunika*, which he edited and published. It was short-lived, like its founder Bhagabati: it could not even complete one year. But its impact on Odia literature has been immense. In fact, *Adhunika* intended to be a literary movement, not political. Bhagabati affirmed the objective of the *Adhunika* in the very first Editorial (May 1936). He wrote that the *Adhunika* looked forward to the resolution of the ongoing conflict between classes and vested interests in the world and for the sake of the progress of the society, individual convictions may be ignored. He further affirmed:

There is the indication of a momentous change in all parts of the world and this change is expressed in various ways everywhere. The appearance of *Adhunika* in Odisha is such an initiative *Adhunika* does not intend to do literature for the sake of literature; it rather intends to bring about an awareness in Odisha about this worldwide movement. (qtd. in Gahan 74)

Importantly, most of the writers of this school were Bhagabati's compatriots in his political activism. They were highly educated, politically committed, and took to writing seriously⁹.

Unfortunately, the life of the Samsad was as short-lived as that of its founder, Bhagabati Charan Panigrahi and his periodical, the *Adhunika*. Besides the untimely death of Bhagabati, there were several other factors which slowed down the pace of the Progressive Movement. One of the significant reasons for this could be the involvement of the Progressive writers in people's struggles like the rising militant anti-feudal movement in the gadgets as Prajamandal Andolan (Peasants' Rebellion), as well as satyagraha movement, and later on, the Quit India Movement. Politically active as all the pioneers of the Movement were, the turbulent times in the state and the country claimed their services.

However, the short-lived movement had both immediate and far-reaching influence over the literature and the intellectual life of Odisha. However, many of them continued writing, and in course of time, many more joined them in writing committed literature. Their efforts gave birth to what is now known as 'Pragatibadi Sahitya Parampara' (Tradition of Progressive Literature). According to Gopinath Mohanty, the iconic Odia novelist, who wrote chiefly on the marginalized people of the society, Marxist consciousness found expression in Odia literature first in poetry and then in fiction after the advent of the *Adhunika* ('Interview' 82). He further observes that it is because of the influence of Bhagabati and the *Adhunika* that "A great change took place in the tradition of romantic fiction" and "The picture of the sorrow and suffering of the common people" found a place in the Odia short stories (Interview 83). According to Chitta Ranjan Das, the well-known writer and cultural historian,

It [*Adhunika*] died before completing one year of publication but it left its unique imprint on the evolution of Odia literature. It opened up a new purpose in Odia literature. It connected Odia literary aspiration to an international filament for all times to come. (256)

Dr. Mayadhar Mansinha (1905-73), a distinguished Odia poet and scholar, who had been a camp-follower of the Sabuja poets, derides the Progressive Movement and Marxist literature, but he cannot help recognizing the worth of Bhagabati Charan Panigrahi in his *A History of Oriya Literature*:

The real pioneer in this field was, however, a quiet, unobtrusive, but intrinsically very highly cultured young man, whose words were as clear as crystal and who had no hypocrisy nor any pretensions. He

was the late Bhagavati [*sic*] Charan Panigrahi, younger brother of Kalindi Charan Panigrahi.... Through stories, essays and other publications, and actual political fieldwork, he laid the foundation of Leftist thought in Orissa. (243)

Although a number of talented poets, writers and activists were associated with Bhagabati Charan Panigrahi in the movement, it is he who proved to be the most influential among them. He was very talented as a writer, and truly a trend-setter; but his political activities and brief life allowed him only thirteen short stories¹⁰: ‘Junglee’ [The Wild One, 1929], ‘Mishranka Kopa’ [Mishra’s Wrath, 1932], ‘Meemansha’ [The Resolve], ‘Mrutyura Chetana’ [The Conscience of Death], ‘Jeebanara Samadhi’ [The Burial of Life, 1932], ‘Samayatita’ [Timeless, 1932], ‘Banchita’ [The Deprived, 1932], ‘Jhada’ [The Storm, 1934], ‘Arambha o Shesha’ [The Beginning and the End, 1934], ‘Majlis’ [‘Carousing’], ‘Mrutyura Bibechana’ (Death’s Discretion, 1934), ‘*Hatudi o Daa*’ [The Hammer and the Sickle, 1936], ‘Sweekarokti’ (Odia translation of ‘Confession’), ‘Shikar’ [The Hunt, 1936], and ‘Confession’, in English¹¹. ‘Shikar’, now considered a classic, is his most popular story. Mrinal Sen’s Hindi movie *Mrigaya* (1976), which had bagged National Awards for the Best Film and Best Actor (Mithun Chakraborty), is the cinematic version of ‘Shikar’. In this story, Ghinua¹², the protagonist, is a young villager who kills the atrocious landlord because he [the landlord] had killed so many human beings, destroyed their lives, taken the modesty of so many women, and has also snatched away Ghinua’s landed property and made it his own. That evening he had even tried to rape his wife. Is he not another Jhapat Singh? Is he not a man-eating tiger? If the Government rewarded the murderer of Jhapat Singh, they could very well reward Ghinua also. So the simple and innocent Ghinua kills Gobind Sardar and goes to the residence of the British officer with the head of the “human-tiger” believing that he would be rewarded by the government. He does not understand anything out of the trial against him; he rather keeps naively thinking, till he is taken to the scaffold, even till being hanged, that all these are government rituals for giving him the ‘prize’. Like ‘Shikar’, most of the stories of Bhagabati fictionalize exploitation and class struggle and intend to awaken the common people against social injustice.

Another major novelist who can be called a representative writer of the Progressive Movement is Ram Prasad Singh. A participant of Gandhian civil disobedience movement, he too switched over to progressive writing. Among his novels, *Pratihinsa* (‘Revenge’, written in [Hazaribagh jail, 1930-31](#)), *Homasikha* [‘The Flame of the Altar’, 1937], *Agnipathe* [‘In the Path of Fire’], *Samapti* [The Ending] and *Pujara Bali* [The Sacrifice in the Ritual] are noteworthy for the themes of exploitation and social justice.

Anant Pattnaik, Sachidanand Routray, and Guru Charan Pattnaik, the contemporaries of Bhagabati who had associated with him are illustrious poets and writers who brought in a new way of looking at life and commitment to social realities. Anant Pattnaik and Sachidanand Routray, the two great poets of the contemporary Odia literature have been emulated by the succeeding generations of creative writers. Anant Pattnaik, the most influential poet of this tradition has been known for his lyrical outbursts and compassionate short stories (*Raktshikha*, *Aloda Loda Tarapana Kare Aji*, *Chadha Utara*). Sachidanand Routray, the most celebrated poet of our times. Though he was not quite with the pioneers of the Movement (he was in Calcutta then), he had already shown his penchant for the weak and downtrodden even earlier. Many of his poems included in *Pandulipi* (1946), as well as such other volumes as *Abhijan*, *Pallishree*, and *Baji Rout*; and his short stories like ‘Anguthi’ [Finger], ‘Rickshawalla’, ‘Galpa Nuhe’ [Not a Story], bear testimony to this fact. Though he did not continue as a fiction writer, he wrote quite a few stories (Viz. ‘Anguthi, Bisarjana’, ‘Rickshawalla’, ‘Galpa Nuhe’) which reflect his affiliation to the Progressive Movement. It is the influence of this tradition that created a number of Pragatibadi [Progressive] poets and writers like Man Mohan Mishra, Brajanath Rath, Rabi Singh, Jatayu (alias Raghunath Das), Rabindra Nath Singh (b. 1933), and later, Prasanna Patsani, Shailaj Rabi, Sadashib Dash, Husen Rabi Gandhi, Ashutos Parida, Aswini Kumar Mishra, and many others.

Besides, the influence of the Odia Progressive Movement had been such that a number of budding, as well as eminent writers of the time – even the neo-romantics --, turned their attention to themes of exploitation, social injustice, hunger, deprivation and the like. Through early fiction writers like [Kantakabi Laxmikanta Mohapatra \(1888- 1953\)](#), [Godavarish Mohapatra \(1895-1965\)](#), [Kanhu Charan Mohanty \(1906-94\)](#), [Nityananda Mohapatra \(1912-2012\)](#), [Gopinath Mohanty \(1914-93\)](#), [Raj Kishor Ray \(b. 1914\)](#), [Raj Kishor Pattnaik \(1916-97\)](#), [Surendra Mohanty \(1920-92\)](#), Ananta Panda, Harischandra Badal, Brahmananda Panda, Basanta Kumari Pattnaik, Binod Routray, et al, the trend passed on to the succeeding generations. Even the writing of the pioneers of the neo-romantic Sabuja School like Kalindi Charan Panigrahi and Baikuntha Nath Pattnaik reflected the influence of Progressive Movement.

4. Conclusion

Thus, Nabajuga Sahitya Samsad, the Odia avatar of the Progressive Writers' Movement and its founder Bhagabati Charan Panigrahi brought about a revolution in the creative and intellectual life of Odisha, although their enduring contribution is hardly acknowledged by historians of the Progressive Movement in particular and Indian literature in general. The contribution of Bhagabati and Progressive Writers' Movement in Odia literature is gradually being eroded from the collective memory because of hegemonic politics of historiography. Bhagabati, Nabajuga Sahitya Samsad, and Odia Pragatibadi Sahitya Parampara could significantly be situated in the social, cultural and political context of the times in the sense that they came up not only at a time of a great upheaval, but also an aura of a sociocultural transition. There was an environment ready for change; an eagerness to resist as well as assimilate. Now when the historiography of Progressive Writers' Movement is being reconstructed, the contribution of Bhagabati and his colleagues towards the movement ought to be acknowledged and chronicled.

Notes

- ¹ For detailed information on the contemporary responses to *Angare*, the controversy around the book, and subsequent prescription by the colonial administration see, Carlo Coppola, 'The Angare Group: The Enfant Terribles of Urdu Literature', *Annual of Urdu Studies*, Vol. I, 1981, pp.57-69; Shabana Mahamud, 'Angare and the Founding of Progressive Writers Association', *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. XXX, No. 2, 1996, pp.448-467; Girija Kumar, *The Book on Trial: Fundamentalism and Censorship in India*, Har Anand Publications, New Delhi, 1997, pp.115-128; Sajjad Zaheer, 'Reminiscences' in Sudhi Pradhan, ed., *Marxist Cultural Movements in India: Chronicles and Documents (1936-1947)*, National Book Agency, Calcutta, 1979, pp. 33-47; and Rakshanda Jalil, *Liking Progress, Loving Change* (OUP, 2014).
- ² Sophia Wadia (1901-86), née Sophia Camacho, was a Colombian-born naturalized Indian theosophist and litterateur. She was the founder of the PEN All India Centre (1930) and the founding editor of its journal, *The Indian PEN*, as well as *The Aryan Path*. She "represented" India in the Paris Conference and participated in the session on 'For the Defense of Culture' in which she located the cradle of civilization in India but also insisted that "we consider the root of all Indian culture to be Aryan". However, Sajjad Zaheer was reportedly unhappy over her representation and her views. He thought such views to be the antithesis of the PWA stance against facism [sic] and imperialism". In his 'Reminiscences', Zaheer writes, "it would have been better to leave India unrepresented rather than send her to represent". For more details, see, Rosemary Marangoly George (2013), *Indian English and the Fiction of National Literature*, Cambridge University Press, p. 218; and Sajjad Zaheer, 'Reminiscences', *Marxist Cultural Movement in India: Chronicles and Documents (1936-47)*, Vol. I, 1979, pp. 33-47.
- ³ *Marxist Cultural Movement in India* (Vol. I, 1979), edited by Sudhi Pradhan chronicles the details of the upsurge of the movement in the different parts of the subcontinent.
- ⁴ For details, see, A. G. Noorani, 'A Versatile Communist', *Frontline*. 29:15, 28 Jul.-10 Aug. 2012. The Odisha state headquarters of the Communist Party of India in Bhubaneswar is called 'Bhagabati Bhawan'.
- ⁵ The state headquarters of the Communist party of India at Bhubaneswar is called 'Bhagabati Bhavan'.
- ⁶ The Hindi rendering of 'Artha o Paramartha', done by Bhagabati's wife Saraswati Panigrahi was published in the *Hans*, edited by Premchand in September 1936.
- ⁷ All translations of Odia texts, except where indicated, are mine.
- ⁸ For details, see, 'Duiti Bismruta Patrika' ['Two Forgotten Periodicals'] by Binod Raoutray, *Konark*, March-April 1990, pp. 20-30.
- ⁹ It is a unique feature in Odishan politics: since the early twentieth century, a good number of Odia politicians, viz. Madhusudan Das (1848-1934), Gopabandhu Das, Bhagabati Charan Panigrahi, Guru Charan Pattnaik, Neelakantha Das, Godabarish Mishra, Dr Harekrushna Mahatab, Surendra Mohanty, Nabakrushna Choudhury, Nandini Satapathy, Janaki Ballav Pattnaik, even the present Chief Minister of Odisha, Naveen Pattnaik have been acclaimed writers/journalists.
- ¹⁰ For details on the short stories of Bhagabati Charan Panigrahi (*Bhagabati Charan Galpamala*, edited with an Introduction by Bijay Kumar Satapathy; New Delhi, National Book Trust, 2008), see my review article 'Social Injustice and Suffering', *The Book Review*, Special Issue on Progressive Literature Movement, Vol. XXXV, No. 4, April 2011, 33-34.
- ¹¹ Bhagabati Charan Panigrahi had written a short story in English called 'Confession', which was retrieved as a manuscript by the enthusiastic members of an organisation run by Bhagabati's daughter Susama Panigrahi. It was translated in Odia by Man Mohan Mishra, one of the worthy followers of Bhagabati and a well-known progressive poet in his own right. For the first time, this story, titled as 'Sweekarokti' has been included in *Bhagabati Charan Galpamala*, edited by Bijay Kumar Satapathy (NBT, 2011).
- ¹² It is interesting to inform that in late November 2009, there were newspaper reports of police encounters with so-called 'Ghenua Bahini', the frontal militant organisation of the 'Chasi Mulia Adivasi Sangh' (CMAS) at Narayanpatna in south Orissa. It is believed in certain sections that this organisation has been named after the protagonist in Bhagabati's story.


Acknowledgments

I am thankful to Sahitya Akademi (National Academy of Literature, New Delhi) and Indian Association for Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies for inviting me to give a presentation on this subject at the Birth-Centenary Conference on 'Ahmed Ali, Progressive Writers, and Bilingual Creativity' organized at Lucknow University (India) on 10-12 February 2011. I thank *The Book Review* for giving me an opportunity to research more for my paper published in their Special Issue on Progressive Literature Movement (April 2011). I am also grateful to those libraries where I could collect secondary source materials.

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