

Women in Odia Drama: A Critical Study

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by

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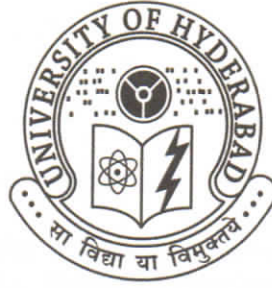
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Chapter 1

Introduction

The present study attempts to analyse the role of women as playwrights and characters in the twentieth-century Odia drama. This research work contextualises the modern Odia drama by tracing its origin, evolution, influences, concerns, and relevance since the nineteenth century. It analyses the women question in Odia drama through the social contexts as reflected in the selected Odia plays. The main focus of the study is to explore the women question in Odia drama as reflected in the portrayal of characters, movements, and social issues. Social realities are reflected not only through the presentation of the concerns and characters in the drama but also in the functioning of Drama as a medium. Drama is considered as a major source of historical information in understanding the societal conditions prevalent in different eras. The interactions and interrelationships among different groups in the society are reflected in drama. In this regard, the present study explores the conditions of women in Odia society by analysing the plot, characters, and presentations in selected plays and probes into the challenges and opportunities for women playwrights.

The nineteenth century was a period of turmoil for India with a surge in social, political, and religious movements against the social evils existing in the society. Modern education inspired the social cultural reform movements against the practices of sati, child-marriage, caste discriminations, purdah, and ban on widow-marriage and so on. Further, spread of nationalist movements brought along with it the demands for women's education and an expansion in the role of women in the society. This was a period of social reforms and religious refinement. The reforms are often seen in line with similar transformations in the West. But unlike the West, the Indian renaissance, however, did not focus on complete structural transformation but sought changes within the very structure. Instead of attacking the social system as a whole, the reform movements targeted the evil social practices. For

example, while attacking idolatry or untouchability, reformers sought inspiration from the religious texts. Swami Dayanand Saraswati advocated women's education and abolition of child marriage while giving a call to 'Go back to Vedas'. The main concern was regeneration of the society through social and educational reforms which was possible through internal realisation within the society rather than any external pressure. Mediums like theatre/drama played a significant role in highlighting this change in social aspirations. Regional theatres all over the country underwent visible changes by moving from prescriptive mythological values to reflect the realities of feudal and colonial India. Oppression of women and their status as second-class citizens got prominence in the writings as well as presentation on theatre stage.

Women writers in India and abroad inspired the Indian women, hitherto restricted to domestic sphere in the society, to stand up for themselves and speak out against the injustice and realise their power and potential. Many women in India have excelled in various fields like arts, literature, politics, sports, etc. proving that they can match up to their male counterparts provided they receive equal support and education on par with men. One of the major challenges for them has been to come out of the stereotype of the 'ideal woman'. Throughout history, various cultures have created a boundary for women, and if a woman exceeds that barrier, she is regarded to have committed an awful crime. They have always been treated as inferior to men and are restricted to the four walls of the house living as second-class citizens. A look at the human civilization and political history around the world suggests that this injustice was not limited to any specific country or culture but has been a global phenomenon. The patriarchal society all over the world is deeply biased against women when it comes to rights, opportunities and scope to achieve their potential. Women, in general, have been considered as an aide to their husbands, brothers, or fathers with their place in relation to the male members of the family rather than as an independent individuals.

The blame of being 'the weaker sex' has been imposed on them and an equal platform to prove themselves is denied.

The Holy Scriptures and Upanishads have placed women in a different category from that of men with different roles, responsibilities and abilities. According to them, women have to live under men's shadow as a dependent or a facilitator for men to achieve the greater goals of the society. But with modern education and social reforms, the scenario is gradually changing. Women have started doing what was unthinkable earlier and are breaking the stereotypes. They are growing and learning with the advanced world but still many of them are living a life at the mercy of men, their family, and the society. Under every condition a woman has been asked to deal with her destiny while being judged by the society for no fault of hers. The whole world would have been a different place, had the women got equal opportunities and status in family and society. While examining the causes of gender discriminations in the society, Partha N. Mukherji in his chapter on 'Sex and Social Structure' in the book *Socialisation, Education and Women: Exploration in Gender Identity* (1988) observes that gender discrimination in the society evolved over a period of time with categorisation of societal roles. Activities of production, administration and ecclesiastics were monopolised by the male sex. Women were dissuaded from participating in economic, political and public spheres to a domestic role of wives and mothers due to their biological capacity to reproduce and care. This differentiation was justified citing the different biological and natural capabilities of men and women and soon led to discrimination of women. This discrimination was further institutionalised by creation of traditions, customs, and rituals (40).

The struggle for equal rights for women has not been limited to any particular sphere of activity. One of the initial voices of resistance came in the field of literature with questions

raised by writers and activists on rights, status, and treatment of women in the society. The paradigms of reforms that were articulated in nineteenth century were influenced by various factors like English education, growing cultural interactions, development of socio-political consciousness, etc. Similarly, the emergence of a strong middle class and impact of western concepts and values on the Indian society are considered to have great influence on the nineteenth century reform movements.

Drama being one of the popular mediums of expression and entertainment has a very significant role in the society. The presentation of issues and views can promote dialogues and debates about existing ills in the society as well as the applicability of proposed reforms. The history and origin of drama in India is traced to *Natyashastra*. Similarly, Greek and Roman literature has been rich with plays depicting various mythological stories. It has acted as bearer of history throughout different periods with promotion by emperors and intellectuals in different eras. Drama presents a reflection of society and the dramatist offers a picture of this to the audience. The more vividly the texture of daily life is rendered in a play, the greater becomes its appeal. Unrealistic portrayals fail to leave a powerful effect on our minds. The poet composes songs inspired by a vision of the future. Captivating the mind of the listener through sweet rhythm and rhyme, the poet makes the listener oblivious to reality for a time. Enthralled by the music, the listener ceases to care for its truth or unreality. It is true that the novelist depicts society as it is; however, employing deft narrative techniques s/he manages to make something unreal appear real. But if anything unreal is introduced into a play while it is being staged, the audience feel disconcerted and alienated. As the dramatist has to remain offstage, s/he cannot use his/her skills to give the unreal the appearance of reality. It will therefore be necessary to discuss the portrayal of social life in plays.

Among other mediums of entertainment and social awareness, drama as a genre begins in earnest at the turn of the twentieth century. Theatre and drama occupy an important

position in the development of a society. Theatre, as a visual medium, shapes the perspectives on various issues in a society in addition to entertaining the audience and reflecting the popular opinion. It includes many forms of expression, such as gesture, music, dance, role play, etc. to present a viewpoint on themes that are relevant as well as of interest to the audience. Since the initial days of theatre, it has mostly stood in confirmation with the popular beliefs, and majority traditions. However, with the awakening of marginalised sections, theatres have emerged to reflect challenging voices with demands for rights, equality, and justice. These demands are more eloquent in countries like India where great diversity exists in language, culture, economy, and religious aspects. India as a multilingual and multicultural country encompasses various cultures, traditions, rituals, festivals and similarly various forms of theatre. Among these, theatre in Odisha holds a unique place with Odia language being recognised as one of the six classical Indian languages. Odia drama has developed over a period of time reflecting various themes such as mythological, socio-cultural and reformative, etc. A playwright, in this regard, wields a powerful weapon to present, persuade, mobilise, and convince the audience through presentation of concerns and characters.

This thesis examines the women question in Odia drama in the twentieth century and the role of social consciousness in constructing gender identity in the society. It also explores how Odia drama facilitates the re- construction of identity among the women in Odisha through its portrayal of various social issues and relations. The present study attempts to analyse the role and impact of selected playwrights in the evolution of Odia drama and in highlighting the woman question in particular. It begins with the contextualisation of Odia drama by tracing the history of Odia drama and theatre and goes on to examine the contribution of a group of ‘new women’ in Odia drama as writers, artists, characters and directors. It also attempts to examine the various discourses such as gender, myth, and social

issues such as women's education, exploitation of women and caste discrimination that are inherent in the very fabric of the plays that have been chosen for a detailed study in this research.

The twentieth century Odisha witnessed emergence of several drama clubs including the Jagannath Club located at Puri. Most of the art-loving educated people were part of it including Siris Chandra Ghosh, a renowned theatre director and arts patron. Mr. Ghosh was highly excited about the new medium of cinema after watching an English film during one of his Calcutta visits. He shared his experience with Mohan Sundar Deba Goswami, popularly known as the father of Odia cinema. Mr. Goswami had formed a touring theatre troupe that was quite popular for the performance of *rasa*, an indigenous form of theatre in Odisha. Already an established theatre personality, Mr. Goswami was instrumental in introducing films to Odia people by producing the first Odia film *Sita Vivaha* in 1936, a popular story from *The Ramayana*. The subsequent Odia films like *Lalita* (1949) and *Shri Jagannath* (1950) were based on mythological stories. As Shayamahari Chakra points out, most of the Odia plays, like films, also focused on mythological stories capturing the popular sentiment and emotion of the people (Gokulsing and Dissanayake 64). It may be noted here that the development of theatres and films in Odisha has been influenced by the recognition of Odisha and Odia as a separate state and language respectively. The construction of the Odia identity encouraged many theatre owners to take the medium of drama from local to regional level by touring across the state and to explore the social and cultural issues of gender, education, class and caste oppression through their plays.

Along with Mr. Goswami's theatre group which used to perform not only in Odisha but also in the city of Kolkata, several other theatres emerged in the state during this period. Somnath Das formed *Jayadurga Natya Mandali* in 1933 as an Opera party from

Khandualkote village of Puri. The group was revamped as a theatre party in the year 1935. Annapurna Theatre¹, one of the popular theatre groups in Odisha, emerged as a full-fledged theatre group in 1936. The emergence and evolution of theatre groups in Odisha will be discussed in detail in subsequent chapters. The issues and subjects that the plays have focused gradually shifted from mythological to social indulging the audience in the issues of traditions and practices.

Among other issues, women's education was highlighted as one of the modern concepts that struck at the core of traditional Odia values. The writings in Odia newspapers and magazines along with the portrayal of women in Odia drama opened up debates on the changing role of women in family and the society in general. However, the resistance to this change implied that the objective of women's education still remained a dream for the majority of women. To cite from an author who wrote under the pseudonym of 'Sree Paribarika' (Mr. Family-man) in the popular Odia journal *Utkal Sahitya* of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century:

Education is the most important way through which daughters can be brought up as good housewives. The main aim of women's education in our country should be to educate girls in such a way that it would bring fortune, peace and

¹ Annapurna Theatre is one of the pioneers in the spread of drama and theatres in Odisha. Established in 1936, it was stationed at Puri and subsequently expanded to Cuttack under the name Annapurna-B. Remarkably, it covered two of the hubs of Odia theatre industry, i.e. Puri and Cuttack. Started as an opera group named *Jayadurga Natya Mandali*, it evolved as a touring troupe with artists from various small theatre groups. Shri Bouri Bandhu Mohanty, the manager of Annapurna A had played a significant role in the expansion of the theatre company. Both the Annapurna Theatres – A & B were huge success and their popularity reached peak during 1945-60. However, both the theatre groups closed down in 1970s owing to lack of popular interest in Odia theatres.

happiness in the family. The kind of education the women of our country are given at present, aims at preparing them to be clerks and masters. This kind of education is not helpful in the development of motherhood of women. The kind of western education given to women does not help in educating them as good housewives or mothers. (Biswal 195).

It is significant to note that in the early years of the twentieth century, an Odia identity was pitted against the Bengali identity within the historical context of Odia nationalism. The figure of woman became the site for this contestation. The Odia woman was posed as a counter to the Bengali woman who was westernised, and in contrast, the Odia woman was considered the upholder of traditions and moral values (Biswal 199). Odia women are traditionally identified with the ideals of Lakshmi unlike the identification of Bengali women with Durga or Kali, the more assertive, powerful and destructive goddesses worshipped in Bengali culture. Lakshmi, on the other hand, is considered to be the symbol of domestic virtues. The goddess Lakshmi is being devoutly worshipped by middle class upper caste Odia women right from the nineteenth century. As several Odia writers of the early twentieth century pointed out, an Odia woman, as the Lakshmi of the domestic space, must serve without expectation and be the embodiment of modesty and sacrifice. The *Lakshmi Purana*² remains a conduct book for upper caste women to this day. Keeping together a joint family is

² Lakshmi Purana is an Odia literary creation by the 15th century poet, Balarama Dasa, depicting a story linked with worshipping of Goddess Lakshmi. The purana narrates how Lord Jagannath and his elder brother Lord Balaram had to suffer due to the anger of Goddess Lakshmi. Along with the story, it offers the directions for worshipping the Goddess. The purana is recited on the occasion of *Manabasa Gurubara* (Worshipping of the Goddess Lakshmi) on a specific Thursday in the month of Margashira (Odia calendar) which is followed in most of the traditional Odia households. Lakshmi purana is a sacred text in Odia and is often considered as a symbol of revolt against women oppression. It also touches on the issues of caste discrimination and gender restrictions.

considered a noble duty of all women as the responsibility for a successful marriage or peaceful family life rests on the shoulders of women. It is lamented that the greed of women caused the breakup of joint families.

Significantly, such idealisation of the Odia woman also sets her up not just against the Bengali woman but also against the lower caste/class woman. The women from lower castes who had to work outside the confines of the domestic for a living (for example, women who sold oil, puffed rice etc or the fisher women) were *the other* for the *bhadra* Odia woman. To quote Biswal:

The middle class educated Odia women also came to be defined against the “other” illiterate, lower caste and lower-class women. The life situations of middle class educated women were depicted as the “situation of women” in Odisha. Though few writings recognized the existence of lower caste and lower class women, an “otherness” got attached to their life by describing it as low, hence to be rejected (200).

The history of the concept of ‘Ideal Odia Womanhood’ developed and became an entrenched phenomenon in the upper caste imagination in Odisha since the nineteenth century through the portrayal of women characters in Odia drama. The analysis of the drama in the subsequent chapters explores the construction of an ideal image for a woman to follow. It may be noted that most often the women protagonists are named after goddesses like Sita, Lakshmi, Savitri, etc. imposing the ideal character since birth.

We can thus see that the concept of the ideal woman, entrenched in the popular imagination of Odisha, has been the product of socialisation, and historical reasons going back to the nationalist discourse of the nineteenth century. Upper caste Odia women read/recited religious/conduct books that spelt out the *neeti* (conduct) of a woman, preparing

her for the role of *Gruhalakshmi*. Such texts focus on the desirable conduct of the ideal woman before and after marriage. Books like *Gruhalakshmi*, which was written by Jagabandhu Singh in the mid-1900s, pronounced that women's schooling carried a negative impact of western society, and that higher education led to the deterioration of the moral values of women and distracted them from the traditional household work, which was a crucial responsibility for an Odia woman.

Indian drama encompasses diverse cultural manifestations. The portrayal of women has been deconstructed by Indian women dramatists lately. The ideals established in the society, the norms binding its people, and the roles assigned to different groups are now studied from the point of view of gender. This has necessitated a re-examination of existing methodology, ideas, and goals. Especially, the literature on women and marginalised sections have come under scrutiny with the emergence of new consciousness. As Tharu and Lalita note, "Till recently, literary criticism with its universalistic assumptions has systematically obscured questions relating to women as writers, women as readers and the representation of women in literary texts" (16). The sidelined role for women and other marginalized groups are being focused and the debate around their historical position is brought to the forefront.

Generally, women as playwrights have rarely figured in literary history. Their presence in theatre has been mostly to serve as a 'looking glass' projecting an inflated image of man (Woolf 43). The connection between woman and stage is as old as ancient Indian society. Anita Singh in her book *Gender, Space and Resistance: Women and Theatre in India* (2013) has pointed out that the *Natyashastra*, the first Indian treatise on dramaturgy, provides for the presentation of women on stage. The presence of women was not banned on the Sanskrit stage, but women's movement in public space was monitored and controlled. By the eighth century, women were no longer accepted on stage. Society provided a solution to it by

introducing young boys below 14 years to impersonate women characters in the plays. Biased notions in literature and in social life debarred women's presence in theatre or any other public scenario. The early decades of the twentieth century were a time of transition during which the public image of Indian womanhood was being crafted not only through literature and social experiments but also through the commercial media of the Parsi theatre (which was highly influential between the 1850s and 1930s) and the silent cinema (Singh 151). This took place during a time when India was in the midst of the independence movement. Mrinal Pande in her paper titled *Women in Hindustani Parsi Theatre and Early Hindi Films* observes the Indian society in the 1920s was a society divided on the bases of caste, class and gender. The gender discrimination, however was not limited to any particular caste or class but cut across different social categories to emerge in one form or the other. Even women from affluent families faced restrictions at home as they were not allowed to living rooms when the other guests were present. While the male members of the family were busy in merrymaking in their very house, the women had to confine themselves to kitchen and bedrooms. The hypocrisy of restricting the women in the family from joining stage and theatre while partying and dancing with other girls was present in the male mindset of all communities including the Parsis, who were considered to be progressive and modern in their approach at that time. The common apprehension was that women joining the theatre groups and performing on the stage would lead to erosion of moral values and break down of family system. Hence, all the groups of male members in the theatres including directors, theatre owners, editors, and female impersonators came together to block the entry of women on stage (1646).

Feminism and movements for women's rights in India may be traced back to the time of Ram Mohan Roy, who founded the Atmiya Sabha in 1814. This movement was part of many other attempts at social reform against caste rigidities, idolatry, brahmanical rituals, etc.

The early reformers were men who sought to improve upper caste Hindu culture by tackling societal problems such as child marriage, dowry, illiteracy, and the practice of Sati. These men were the first to call for the elimination of these practices. The All India Women's Conferences in 1927 and 1930 together with the National Council of Women in 1921 staged demonstrations against the feudal forces that placed Indian women in a position of subjugation. The first time that women were granted the right to vote was in 1920 in the states of Cochin and Travancore, followed by 1921 in the presidency of Madras. After India gained its independence in 1947, a number of legislations, such as the Hindu Marriage Act and the Hindu Succession Act of 1956, the Dowry Prohibition Act of 1961, and the Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act of 1971, were enacted in order to grant Indian women a greater variety of rights (Singh 152).

Feminist theatre as a modern perspective to this genre emerged in 1970s. Experimental theatre groups as well as the women's movements were responsible for the rise of the Feminist theatre. The devices of the experimental theatre were employed to project the issues raised by the women's movements through the plays. Feminist theatre, according to Anita Singh, is as much a political as theatrical attempt that questioned orthodoxy and phallocentrism in society and theoretical representation. It deconstructed patriarchal metaphysics by placing the women and their experiences at the center of narration, scope and subject of the theatres. Giving the authority of writing and acting into the hands of women defied the sexual differences which was the norm of theatrical practices where male domination prevailed. Women characters were given the subject position which transformed the structural and ideological apparatus. Women-centric plays initiated new debates on the issues of representation and highlighted the role of social contexts and conditions in creation of societal role and behaviour. This led to a rise in number of plays on this issue with active contribution from women as playwrights. All women playwrights cannot be clubbed together

as explicitly feminist authors as many of them followed the traditional pattern of male-centrism and mythological prescription of values in their writings. The effects of women playwrights were not limited to only highlighting of women's issues but the social realities of their time. For example, the plays by Mahasweta Devi are based on her personal observations of tribal life which have, nevertheless, a universal appeal. She offers a social examination of history, tradition, culture, and religion in order to understand the social divisions and hierarchies. The novel *Hajar Churasir Ma* (1974), based on the political events that are taking place in Naxalite Bengal, concentrates on the oppression and deprivation of the tribal and the marginalised people, the landless and the plague of landlordism and feudalism, and most importantly, the plight of women, which is neglected and subjugated. The story is about "the awakening of an apolitical mother," and it is placed in an urban middle class neighbourhood. Later on, it was written as a drama titled *Mother of 1084* (1997) as it became an effective tool for exposing and destroying social problems and injustice. Mahasweta Devi has always engaged herself socially and ethically in order to offer a voice to those who are oppressed. She used drama to rebel against authority and other societal restraints (Chakraborty 100). The plays by Dina Mehta, Manjula Padmanabhan, Polie Sengupta, and others reveal the various aspects of lives of women and children in the society. These plays depict contemporary Indian reality from the perspective of women.

In the context of Odisha, the number of women playwrights is gradually increasing. The Odia playwrights have attempted to sensitise the audience to the problems in society especially that are faced by women. Women playwrights in Odia have brought back the focus of the theatre to women's issues in society. They depict how women struggle to survive in constraining circumstances, facing various challenges under oppressive patriarchy. These playwrights not only address the issues but also provide a hope to bring a change in society in

terms of actions and attitudes. A detailed analysis of the plays on women's issues as projected by male and female playwrights is presented in subsequent chapters.

The history of modernity in India may be traced back to British colonialism. Both the British and the Indians had reservations about modernity. While the Indians viewed it as a foreign philosophy foisted on them by the occupying force, the British showed limited interest in social change and reforms. The British, though, were interested to introduce modern education, values, and reforms, they did not wish to destabilise the Indian social systems. The Indian subcontinent was home to numerous castes, tribes, and racial groups, each of which had its own unique set of cultural practices and norms. The sole effect that British colonisation had on Indian society was to graft parts of modernity onto a social system that was primarily feudal. Rise of a 'middle class' was considered crucial for the social reforms. Tanika Sarkar and Sumit Sarkar's *Women and Social Reform in Modern India* (2007) argues that social reform must be understood in the context of evolving "gender norms and practices" affected by regional and material specificities, particularly the development of print cultures. They challenge the usefulness of terminology like "middle class," claiming that it shouldn't be considered as a fully constituted identity and the supposed target and beneficiary of reform; instead, the middle class's constitution should be explored keeping in view the emerging concepts over the time (1-3). This word of caution should be taken into consideration in the current situation, in which the rapidly expanding middle classes in developing countries like India are assumed to be a self-evident group. Similarly, the term "debate," which is typically used to refer to the conflicts between colonial and Indian authorities over the antecedents, shapes, and forms of certain reforms, should be broadened up to explore how the public sphere came to be, in which debate was possible. The authors suggest using reforms from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to examine concurrent shifts in gendered systems of social regulation, particularly

through religious orthodox and revivalist movements, and gendered engagements with the state, especially through law, in order to illuminate the social and cultural contexts obscured by such shortcuts. Women's investments, agency, and political activism are important to the reforms, whether as women writers or social activists and critics (5). According to Partha Chatterjee's *Colonialism, Nationalism, and Colonialized Women: The Contest in India*, "the Colonial texts condemned the treatment of women in India by identifying a scriptural tradition. The nationalist response was to construct a reformed tradition and defend it on the grounds of modernity" (1). Through this, a concept of 'new woman' was created that was the result of the analysis of concerns from Western women, traditional and lower-class women. This new patriarchy invested women with the dubious honour of representing a distinctively modern national culture.

Chatterjee argued that the social and political reality have a power that normalises, and that this normalising took place through the discourses of the nation, particularly history. Chatterjee developed an anti-history perspective, seeing that the history being created in India favoured the upper class. This argument put him in the side of those who wanted to dismantle European Enlightenment history. "Histories from below" shows how he and other Subaltern scholars fought an enlightenment historical paradigm. According to the quote, subaltern history is separate from elite history. Sovereign hegemonic doctrine makes it "unreasonable." This idea relates to how a subaltern understands his place in a political rebellion. During the second half of the nineteenth century, a new obligation to the truthful, accurate representation of Indian life from the perspectives of common individuals infused literature with a new 'realist' aesthetic. K. Suneetha Rani's *Influence of English on Indian Women Writers: Voices from Regional Languages* examines the growth of English through the lens of gender. The Editor in her Introduction interprets language in connection to gender by linking the English language and education with masculinity, since men were the

first to access modernity through colonialism. At the same time, regional languages and the ways in which they are used are perceived to have a connection with women or femininity. This may also be interpreted as a sign of the power the English language has over regional languages, analogous to the socio-political control over women and their writing. Thus, language inequities are connected with gender inequality. Many regional writers became accomplished at transcribing the pragmatic situation through idioms of local dialects in their efforts to make their characters' dialogue mimic the way people really talked. Women writers expressed the ethnographic realities of people and peculiarities of regional culture in their writings. They expressed their realist ideas, emphasising the particularities of geographical locations, describing the distinctive culture, language, and society of specific regions of India in their writings. It is true that the most popular phrases are often used, such as "expression of society" or "mirror of life", but their meaning was practically identical with reflection. These phrases were applied to nearly everything social and cultural as well as biological and geological. At one time or another, It was generally believed that literature would reflect economics, family relationships, climate and landscapes, attitudes, morals, races, social classes, political events, wars, religion, and a great deal of other, more specific components of the environment and social life. Literature reflects a culture's conventions and ideals.

Odisha in the nineteenth century was bearing with double-colonialism: politically in the hands of the colonisers, culturally and linguistically in the hands of the dominant languages from its neighbouring states. The politically dismembered Odia-speaking territory was scattered virtually across the presidencies of Bengal, Bihar, Madras, and Central Province, which reduced the status of Odia to a linguistic minority in each region. It witnessed the linguistic discrimination, social and cultural subjugation, and the threat of detachment of Odia language from academics and administration based on the arguments

such as lack of books available in Odia for primary education and the need of the fragmented territory to adopt the language of opportunity for educational and administrative purposes. Meanwhile, the publication of the book titled *Odia Ekti Bhasha Noye* (Odia is not a language) by Kantichandra Bhattacharya that claimed Odia as a variant of Bangla (Mohanty 55), the proposal to replace Odia with Bangla as the official language by Rajendralal Mitra, and the suggestion to adopt the Bangla script for Odia writing by Umacharan Halder created havoc in the literary spheres of Odisha (Pattnaik 3). Moreover, the administrative problems in the four different presidencies were planned to be dealt with by displacing the language Odia.

The identity crisis of Odia as a language took a rebellious turn in the colonial period when the language was virtually on the verge of extinction. The consciousness regarding the linguistic colonialism generated interests of the intellectuals in promoting Odia literature to restore its territorial integrity. Odisha was both linguistically and politically prepared to legitimise the language by enriching Odia literature through the translation of Anglophone literature into Odia. Fakir Mohan Senapati, Radhanath Ray, Khirondhara Raychoudhury, Bichandacharan Pattnayak, Jaganmohan Lala, Sitanath Ray, Govinda Pattnaik, and Madhusudan Rao served as the pillars and expanded the literary horizon of Odia literature. They adopted foreign literary models and manipulated texts to retain individuality.

The first printing of the Odia language was done by Christian missionaries in 1836, which revolutionised Odia literature by replacing palm leaf inscriptions. After this, books were printed and journals and magazines were available in Odia. 1861 saw the publication of *Bodha Dayini*, the first Odia magazine. For the purpose of promoting Odia literature and

drawing attention to government failures, *The Utkal Deepika*³, the first Odia newspaper was first published by Gourishankar Ray and Bichitrananda in 1866. *The Utkal Deepika* ran a campaign to unite all Odia-speaking regions under a single administration, to promote Odia culture and literature, and to safeguard Odia interests.

Bhagavati Charan Das founded the *Utkal Subhakari* journal in 1869 to spread the Brahmo Samaj ideology. Several newspapers were published in Odia during the final three decades of the nineteenth century. *Utkal Deepika*, *Utkal Putra*, *Utkal Hiteisini* from Cuttack, *Utkal Darpan* and *Sambada Vahika* from Balasore, and *Sambalpur Hiteisini* from Deogarh were some of the prominent periodicals during this period. It was clear that the people of Odisha were committed to protect their right to free speech and the press as they worked towards independence from British rule along with their struggle for cultural and linguistic identity. An additional benefit of these publications was that they promoted modern literature and provided a broad reading audience for Odia-language authors. As a result of the publications' accessibility, Odia literature inspired intellectuals within the society (Mohanty 278).

One of the most well-known poets who lived during this time period was Radhanath Ray (1849–1908). *Chandrabhaga*, *Nandikeshwari*, *Usha*, *Mahajatra*, *Darbar*, and *Chilika*

³ *Utkal Deepika* started in 1866 was the first Odia newspaper from Odisha. It appeared during the critical period of Na-Anka Durbhiksha (Famine). The famine was of such a catastrophe that more than one million people which was nearly one-third of the population of the state at that time lost their lives. During this challenging period, the newspaper was founded by Karma Veera Gaurishankar Ray, an intellectual and writer par excellence. Published as a weekly newspaper, it raised various issues regarding the development of Odisha. It played an important role in Odia Language movement by bringing together all the Odia intellectuals and countering the attacks faced by the language at that time. It continued till 1936, until Odisha attained separate statehood consolidating the Odia speaking people from Bihar and Odisha provinces.

were some of the kavyas (length poems) he authored, and he was influenced by Western writing styles when he penned them. This generation also included one of the most famous Odia fiction writers, Fakir Mohan Senapati⁴ (1843–1918), who lived during this time. He is known as the Vyasakabi, which translates to “beginning poet”, of the Odia language. Senapati was an administrator of the colonial government by profession. He was born and raised in the town of Balasore, which is located on the seashore of Bay of Bengal. He started his writing a little late in his life after being incensed by the Bengalis' efforts to eradicate or supplant the Odia language. Though he also worked as a translator from Sanskrit, composed poetry, and experimented with many different types of writing, he is primarily recognised as the founder of contemporary Odia prose fiction. It is generally agreed that his *Rebati* (1898) was the first Odia short story ever written. The story tells the tale of a young and naive girl named Rebati, who longs to receive an education despite living in a backward village in Odisha that is in the midst of a cholera epidemic. How the urge for education of the girl child is being blamed as the reason for the death of the parents, the fiancé and economic depravity forms the core of the story. This takes place against the backdrop of an orthodox society with its dogmas and superstitions against women education. His previous collections of short fiction include *Patent Medicine*, *Dak Munshi*, and *Adharma Bitta*. In addition to that, Senapati is famous for his novel *Chha Maana Atha Guntha* (1896) that depicts exploitation of peasants by the feudal lords in colonial Odisha. Written way before the

⁴ Fakir Mohan Senapati, known as Vyasa Kabi or Odia's Vyasa, was a leading figure in the movement of Odia identity. For his contribution to the field of Odia literature and Odia identity, he is considered as the father of Odia Nationalism and father of Modern Odia literature. His notable contributions include novels like *Chha Maana Atha Guntha*, *Mamu*, *Lachhama* and short story *Rebati* realities of socio-political Odisha during that time.

October revolution in Russia and the emergence of Marxist movement's ideals in India, it reflected the oppression of working class, and inspired movements against feudalism.

So, it has been noticed that culture can be treated as a tool to interpret the social history of any nation, define the goals of a society, and present the socio-economic conditions of an otherwise scattered population. The interrelationship among culture, language, literature, and society also has a significant role in the analysis of Odia drama. The plays written by women writers reflect the way of living for women, their consciousness, demands, caste operations, and re-examination of myths which are the main objective of this proposed research.

Literary Movements in Odisha

A new period in literary thought evolved about the same time that freedom movements were getting started, and it was heavily influenced by Gandhi and the growing trend of nationalism. Pandit Gopabandhu Das was a significant contributor to this idealistic movement in Odisha. He along with the other members of *Pancha Sakha*⁵ established a school in Satyabadi, Puri which had a significant impact on the careers of many authors during this period. Other important writers of the period included Godabarisha Mishra, Nilakantha Dash, Harihara Acharya, and Krupasindhu Mishra. Gopabandhu himself was a

⁵ *Pancha Sakha*, in this context, refers to the five writers and social reformers of modern Odisha (Satyabadi period) who played major roles in spreading of education and patriotism in pre-independence Odisha. This group should not be mistaken with *Pancha Sakhas* of medieval Odisha that consisted of five saints and Bhakti poets- Balarama Das, Jagannatha Das, Achyutananda Das, Yasobanta Das, and Sisu Ananta Das.

notable author during this period. They are referred to as Panchasakhas. Poetry, criticism, and essays were the primary forms that they wrote in.

During the 1930s, when progressive Marxist organisations dominated Odia Literature, Kalindi Charan Panigrahi (brother of Bhagabati Charan Panigrahi who introduced Marxism in Odisha) formed "Sabuja Samiti" alongside Annada Shankar Ray and Baikuntha Patnaik. This brief period in Odia writing was ultimately integrated into Gandhian and Marxist activities. Annada Shankar Ray departed for Bengali writing, while Kalindi Charan Panigrahi wrote Gandhi-influenced *Matira Manisha*. Mayadhar Mansingh was a famous Romantic poet during this period, but he avoided Rabindranath's influence of nationalism.

When the Nabajuga Sahitya Sansad was established in 1935, it was considered to be one of India's first progressive literary organisations. Nabakrushna Choudhury, Bhagabati Panigrahi, and Ananta Patnaik were the leaders of the Progressive Movement in Odisha. Malati Choudhury, a renowned Gandhian freedom fighter, sang "Nabeena Jugara Taruna Jagare" by Ananta Patnaik at the opening session of the Nabajuga Sahitya Sansad. *Adhunika*, first progressive Odia literary magazine, served as Nabajuga Sahitya Sansad's official mouthpiece. Bhagabati Charan Panigrahi and Ananta Patnaik were the brains behind *Adhunika's* conception, inception, editing, publication, and upkeep. In those days, *Adhunika* was a popular forum for writing in Odia language (Mund 52).

In the early 1980s, a group of Odia poets with innovative ideas and writing styles emerged and exceeded the preceding generation's work in the literary genre. Their Odia poems were able to capture not just the rich heritage and culture of their people but also the everyday feelings of people. Because there was so little room for interpretation in their expression, it gave the impression that they were somehow more connected to the audience. Manasi Pradhan was one of the most notable poets during this period. These new poets are

sometimes referred to as the modern poet generation by critics. Poets like Pravasini Mahakud, Mamata Dash, and Giribala Mohanty have contributed to the development of modern women's poetry in Odia. These poets' works have been published in multiple anthologies and have been translated into English.

Women and Modern Literature

Women's status in society has varied significantly throughout cultures and time periods. Nonetheless, a reality universal to all societies is that women have always been seen as inferior to men. Women have been imprisoned by patriarchy for ages. The ancient Indian woman is shown in different positions as a mother, a wife, a daughter, and a sister in the family, but never as an individual claiming her life as her own and seeking personal satisfaction and self-fulfilment. Women in ancient India took pride in their service and sacrifice. They had established role models like Sita and Anasuya whom they attempted to imitate. Apart from religious and cultural influences, historical and political events seem to have influenced the position of women in ancient India. Sati, child marriages, and the prohibition of widow re-marriages are some of the atrocities that further reduced women's position in Indian culture.

Women's consciousness against male domination gradually pushed women to reject society's patriarchal structures. As Simone Beauvoir states, "The emancipated woman wants to be active, a taker and refuses the passivity man means to impose on her. The 'modern' women accept masculine values: she prides herself on thinking, taking action working, creating on the same term as men; instead of seeking to disparage them, she declares herself their equal" (238). In *The Second Sex* she argues that women have been forced to occupy a secondary position in relation to men like minority races, in spite of the fact they are certainly not in minority but constitute one half of human race. Beauvoir argues that it is not the law of

the nature to consider women secondary; rather it is due to the strong social, traditional and educational system controlled by men. As a result, women are not able to achieve the place of dignity as independent and full individuals. This system has not only crushed their dreams and given rise to many social evils but it even had an adverse effect on man--woman relationships. According to Beauvoir, men always think that they are right and women are wrong. Though the world is changing, and along with-it women too are changing steadily, women “are exhorted to be women, remain women, and become women” (251). Beauvoir further argues that women are trained to think of themselves as inferior. So, in order to get emancipated, women must become not only financially independent but also avoid marriage and children. She even frankly discusses the taboo- ridden topics like sexual pleasure for women. She even asserts that the bond between man and woman should be based on common love and sharing which will be helpful to find solutions to the problems in man-woman relationships.

Kate Millett’s *Sexual Politics* (1969) argues for equal status to women in society. According to Millett, marriage is an arrangement whereby “one group of persons is controlled by another” (61). She describes the man-woman relationship as utterly biased. Millett agrees with Frederic Engels's conclusion that men and women were treated equally among the primitive tribes, and worked together for betterment of their society. But with the beginning of trade, the concept of private property came into existence and left women in a more pathetic condition. Due to their capacity to reproduce and with private property emerging, various strict rules and norms were imposed on women. Millett argues against the monogamous family and advocates that children should be raised by trained practitioners and not by parents.

Maya Pandit in “Towards Indian Feminist Literary Criticism” argues that women's liberation beliefs and movements have become part of the Indian women's movement. Its

theoretical underpinnings are liberal and Gandhian based on Marxian and ecofeminist notions. She points out that feminist literary criticism can be traced back to the works of women writers such as Tarabai Shinde in nineteenth century. Historically, women's issues have been a component of India's cultural and political movements since the colonial era. While radical and liberal feminist approaches developed in the West by the 1960s, a spurt of feminist literary criticism has emerged in Indian academia as a result of their influence. Women's Studies, Gender Studies, and Feminism have all established themselves as important fields in Indian academics over the last few decades. Recently, it has been recognised that examining gender issues without taking into account other power systems operative in the community, such as caste and class, will be superficial and ineffective. Further Maya Pandit observes, "There have been significant beginnings of research which are based upon the assumption that there are different ideologies of gender and they are class, caste and race bound" (310). Indian feminist criticism aims to recreate women's writing history in India. Susie Tharu and K. Lalita's book *Women Writing in India: 600 BC to the Present* (1991) and Gayatri Chakravarti Spivak's *In Other World: Essays in Cultural Politics* (1987) use this approach. Susie Tharu points out that the sphere of literary writing was always male-dominated and a few women writers who were accommodated had to be moderate in their approach (9). Consequently, feminist studies must not only retrieve women's writing but also establish contexts within which that literature might be found to be effective. It must give historical and analytical contexts for the value of women's literature as well as their silences. How can we reveal the aesthetic methods that mark women's writing in different periods? (Tharu & Lalita 2). *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics*, Gayatri Spivak uses subaltern politics to analyse Mahashweta Devi's writings and demonstrates how she challenges imperialist and patriarchal norms. It is further claimed in *Recasting Women* (1989) by Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid that women constituted the core of the concept

of nation and therefore are crucial in upholding the values and norms of a nation's identity. (Pandit 311).

During the colonial rule in India, there was a consciousness of the need to improve women's conditions, and the movement for women's education was revived. During the nineteenth century, the emergence of two movements, the Social Reform Movement and the Freedom Movement, had significant effects on the position of women. Indian women's liberation from the constraints of literacy and ignorance marked the advent of their independence, figuratively and practically. The quest for knowledge and need for recognition were reawakened, and her potential which was hitherto hidden, started to come to light. As a result, the new woman expresses dissent and resentment at being imprisoned by restrictive constraints. It is true that women's education, citizenship and other legal rights, and most importantly, employment and economic independence, have had a significant impact on her perspective on conjugal relationships and attitude towards marriage. She is developing a new sensibility and awareness that will no longer accept the stifling family, institutional, political, and cultural norms that put her in a degrading subject position, instead she will rebel against them. The new woman argues that discrimination against women must be stopped. If a woman is capable of establishing a name for herself in any field, she should be acknowledged and treated on an equal footing with men. Unlike previous generations, the modern woman does not want to adhere to the conventional image. She wants to be given her due, to be given her proper position beside her male counterpart in Indian society.

Kuntala Kumari Sabat (1900-1938) is the first important Odia female poet. She is considered to be Odisha's Charlotte Bronte. Charlotte Bronte, one of the greatest novelists of all time from early nineteenth century England, lived only for 38 years but left behind her timeless classic, *Jane Eyre*. Sabat also lived only for 38 years, but she achieved a significant name in social service, liberation struggle, and literature. Unlike other Indian women writers

of the past who primarily wrote religious concepts, she raised her voice against social problems such as purdah, child marriage, casteism, untouchability, and prejudice against women, and promoted women's rights, measures towards their empowerment, and widow remarriage (Panda 2-3). Slowly but surely, the flames of the western women insurrection were being blown to India. As Sarala Devi recalls in her article, "The Rights of Women", "the pain and oppression women traditionally suffered for ages are responsible for the flame of rebellion now burning in society. Needless to say, it is clearly the disrespect and neglect shown to women that has led to this calamity" (4). Sarala Devi argues that the patriarchal hegemony is entirely accountable for the subjugation of women in society. Alterations need to be made to the social structure in order to provide women with equal position in society. Sarala Devi was a radical Western feminist who blamed patriarchy for women's subjection or "otherness." Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1949) examines the patriarchal view of women as per the interpretation of the men. Beauvoir explains "she is thus called 'the sex', meaning that the male sees her essentially as a sexed being; for him she is sex, so she is it in the absolute. She is determined and differentiated in relation to man, while he is not in relation to her; she is the inessential in front of the essential. He is the Subject; he is the Absolute. She is the other" (26).

Sarala Devi has been criticised by many writers of that time for her unorthodox ideas. Sarala Devi had the audacity to speak out for women's equality in a patriarchal environment. She also made efforts to raise awareness about the undermined status of women in society through her writings and social activism. In contemporary Odia literature, Sarojini Sahoo is widely recognised as a pivotal personality and a pioneer in the field of feminism. For her, feminism is not about confronting male hegemony; it is about solving gender-related issues. It is different from Judith Butler and Virginia Woolf. Her works of fiction consistently express a feminine sensibility from puberty to menopause (Nawale 1). She is the recipient of

several awards, including the Jhankar Award in 1992, the Bhubaneswar Book Fair Award, the Prajatantra Award, and the Odisha Sahitya Academy Award from 1993. Eight collections of short stories and five novels have been published by her. Pratibha Ray is another notable Odia novelist and short story writer in Odia. In her stories, she has attempted to unravel the hidden corners of the modern world. She made the transition from romanticism to realism focusing on women as the subject matter of her writings. When it comes to writing a novel or short story, she has many different interests and preferences. Her writings represent the many aspects of modern life, the alienation of individuals, hedonistic philosophy, corruption in the narrow lanes of politics, and moral decay. Pratibha Ray's *Yajnaseni* is one of the best-selling novels in Odia and has been reprinted multiple times. In 1993, for her novel *Yajnaseni*, the author received the renowned Bharatiya Jnanpith's ninth Moorti Devi Award.

In the movement for women's representation, the starting of Odia magazine *Sucharita* in 1975 has been a significant milestone. It offered women writers a platform to share their experience, viewpoint, and ideas. These women writers were the initiators of a literary movement which inspired Odia women of future generations to voice their worldview without any social restrictions. Giribala Mohanty, Jayanti Rath, Susmita Bagchi, Paramita Satpathy, Hiranmayee Mishra, Chirashree Indra Singh, Sairindhree Sahoo, Supriya Panda, Gayatri Saraf, Suniti Mund and Mamatamayi Chowdhry are to name a few such writers. Giribala Mohanty (1947–) is one of the prominent writers whose writings reflected a deep sensitiveness to women's issues. She has portrayed the contrasting emotions of women such as the helplessness at the face of social apathy as well as the determination to overcome all social challenges. These emotions are intrinsic to a woman's character and Mohanty beautifully presents such binaries in her poem collections such as *Streeloka* (Women), *Kalijhia* (The Dark complexion Girl), *Ma Habara Dukha* (The sorrow of being a mother) and *Kati Katia Katyayani*. Sarojini Sahoo, another such writer paved the way for a feminist

interpretation of social experiences through her writings. She used fiction to analyse the gender, society and sexuality. Suniti Mund represent a similar aspect of feminism theory in her storybooks and novels like *Anustupa*, *Jhia*, *Abhisapta*, *Agarbatira Ghara*, *Matrimony dot com*, and *Gigolo*.

The transition and change astound us, especially when we consider the traditional position of women in Indian society. The same may be seen in the literature of the contemporary period. In recent years, the new women who have stood up to fight against the traditional patriarchy in society and strongly advocate in favour of women rights are known as feminists. For the feminists, one of the most fundamental and essential issues is establishing the notion that a woman is a self-sufficient individual who is capable of discovering her own path to salvation via trial and error. They have expressed their dissatisfaction with the relationship between the sexes, in which women have been relegated to a secondary position as a result of powerful cultural and social traditions. One of the reasons why women have taken up writing in such great numbers is because it has provided them with the opportunity to construct their own identity. Similarly, a large number of women have taken up reading women's writing because it provides a secure space in which they can connect with different characters and their existence. That is why women's writing has been such an integral part of women's life. There are many outstanding innovative women authors in today's literary scene, writing in all Indian languages. A brief examination of the plays by major women playwrights of Odia may enable us to examine the position of women in Odia society, her gradual conversion to modernity in the aftermath of women's liberation movements, and the post-independence projection of the 'New Woman' by women playwrights.

The proposed thesis is intended to examine the many ways and techniques of defiance of patriarchy that have been chosen by new women in today's society. Specifically, the

present research focuses on the major women playwrights who have depicted the emergence of the new woman of the educated middle and upper classes who is aware of her rights and who raises her voice against the centuries-old imbalance in the patriarchal structure of society in their plays.

In order to evaluate the status of women in the plays, we must first take a thorough look into the history from a gender perspective. It is very difficult to assess the status of women in society at various points in history. Legal, economic, and social restrictions on the fundamental rights of women have existed throughout history and in all civilizations throughout human existence. The women authors who spoke out against inequality created a feminist consciousness characterised by the awareness of one's own oppression. Taking the form of a philosophy of life, it aspires to rediscover and alter the more subtle but equally damaging root causes of women's suffocation. The basic idea of equality has undergone significant transformation in the light of contemporary feminist theories, which claim that feminism is an impossibly difficult stance to hold. Feminism is dedicated to the fight for women's equality, as well as the endeavour to make women self-sufficient in society.

The position of regional women playwrights is being marginalised because of their gender and regional identity. This research selects to study the works by major women playwrights in Odia. They are not only neglected in the mainstream Indian literature but also in the Odia literature. It is felt that the regional women playwrights should be given proper readership and viewership and finally recognition for their specific contributions. The expression of gynocentric concerns when a woman rejects patriarchy in favour of feminine experiences must be highlighted and appreciated. The realisation of 'self' and the quest to establish their identity in the society inspired the women playwrights to express themselves through the plays. The undiluted projection of their experiences was possible through writing

in Indian languages. “Womanist scripts and productions are characterised by the projection of the ‘consciousness’ and the condition of women as women” (Mukherjee 17). The success of such a venture would obviously affect attendance. While urbanisation and industrialisation opened new horizons for India, political and social turmoil following the Independence created new challenges. The present chapter deals with the aspects of western influence and search for women’s identity as seen in Odia drama. The modern Odia drama has undergone influences of the themes and perspectives of western and eastern literature and culture. Ramesh Panigrahi observes in *Perspectives in Odissi Theatre* that “the drama of nineteenth century seems to be a queer mixture of Sanskrit plays, *Sangeetakas*, *Rasas*, *Leelas*, and other folk forms”(1). It has been noticed that Kharavela, one of the greatest kings of Utkal, started the theatrical traditions in the third year of his accession to rejoice the military victories. Similarly, a traditional theatre has been discovered at the Sun temple of Konark glorifying the theatrical traditions of ancient Odisha. The icons portrayed in the temples and different parts of sculptures can be taken into consideration to show the name and nature of ancient Odia Drama. The theories of ancient drama were followed in the nineteenth century by the modern Odia dramatists. One of the most fertile grounds for interpretation of modernity and struggle for women identity is the evolution of regional theatre as reflected in Odia drama staged in various theatres in colonial Odisha.

The concept of modernity entered into Odisha by inviting different literary genres which were established in the Bengali literature. *Jatra* as a form of theatre spread from Bengal to Puri under the patronage of Prataprudra Dev, the then king of Puri. It promoted Vaishnavism and Bhakti movement with integration of *Jatra* into Odia traditions. Influence of Bengali theatre and drama can be seen in the forms as well as the nature of Odia drama. The signs of modernity in Odia drama reflected in the social contexts of the drama, reformist orientations of the plays, introduction of women artists, and use of technology. Issues and

practices concerning women were brought to public scrutiny through drama and plays. However, most research on Odia drama neglects the evolution a gender perspective. The present work is an attempt to analyse and establish a link between modernity and the position of women in Odia drama. As discussed earlier, drama is basically a socio-cultural construct that represents the perceptions and realities of the contemporary society. That is why drama is considered as one of the most distinctive literary genres which always exposes the historical, socio cultural and psychological realities of human beings living in the society. The drama projects the laws of social consciousness towards building up a better human life.

The reformation of Odia literary genres and the principles of literary canon formation were actually patronised by the British. Basically, the functions of multilingualism facilitated the verbalisation of the literary championship and made clinical adjustment of borrowing themes and perspectives of European literature into Odia through translation and trans-creation activities. The British language policy, missionary activities, British administration, the introduction of modern Odia drama and theatre tradition in Odisha were influenced by a number of factors, including the movement to preserve the Odia language, the impact of Bengali theatre, the development of English translations, the Sanskrit tradition of drama, and the English tradition of drama. The system of English education and importance of English brought out a radical change over the linguistic discourses in Odisha. People who are educated in English are facing difficulties when it comes to understanding modern Odia literature as well as the cultural identity of its speakers.

Though there are quite a few research works that have been published on the subject of theatre and society, a systematic study of various themes and perspectives from the playwrights' point of view are found missing. Some of the major studies on this theme include Gilbert and Tompkin's *Post-colonial Drama: Theory, Practice, Politics* (1996), and

J. Ellen Gainor's *Imperialism and Theatre: Essays on World Theatre, Drama and Performance* (1995). Gilbert and Tompkins themselves point out that Indian drama and theatre's history is extremely complex, and it is impossible to do justice to Indian drama in a broadly comparative study. Similarly, Kartik Ghosh's *Odisha Rangamancha O Mora Nata Jibana* (1977), Hemant Kumar Das's *Odia Natya Sahitya Bikasha Dhara* (1981) offer ideas about history of Odia drama and theatre in the simplest manner wherein critical discourse is found to be missing. Sarbeswar Dash's *Odia Natya Sahitya* (1981) (Odia Dramatic Literature) interrogates the trends and development of colonial and post-colonial Odia drama. The present study is an attempt to provide a sociological interpretation of Odia drama published and stated in the colonial period. The review of relevant literature shows that an in-depth analysis of growth and development of Odia drama from a gender perspective is missing. The present research is an attempt at exploring the role, impact, and perspectives of Odia women dramatists on the nature and focus of drama through different periods.

The review of literature demonstrates the ideas about the research on a particular theme generally outlining the research gaps. In this way, the present chapter discusses the review of literature in locating the research gaps. This section contains a brief analysis of research works on Odia drama, theatre, and the presence of women in this field. This section is limited to analyse the selected research works which are going to throw some ideas about the critical appraisals of women playwrights in the global as well as in regional context. The following research works are intended to be discussed in outlining the previous research works and finding the ways to bridge the research gaps in the existing research findings.

The feminist literary movement has been aptly contextualised by Sue Ellen Case's *Performing Feminism: Feminist Critical Theory and Theatre* (1990) and her research work

consists of critical essays on women playwrights and critical feminist approaches to the field of theatre. The essays focus on the ideological notions of the self/ identity and identification of plot and narrative. The author looks at the feminist gestures as feminist hysterical excess and she foregrounds the transferential underpinnings of the realistic acting. Along with the theatre identity, the protest against dominance also took place in theorising the facts. In this line, the *Voice to the Voiceless: Power of the People's Theatre in India* (1994) by Jacob Srampickal explores the connection between the stage and societal issues in this insightful article. The purpose of this book is to investigate the development of traditional and modern theatre in India, including its nature, the processes involved, and the methods that are used. It also tries to highlight the significance of Indian theatres both inside and outside of the country. The author makes the case that from its earliest days, Indian theatre has been concerned with political and social themes. Folk theatre has a history of openly taunting those who commit wrongdoing, and Indian theatre in the nineteenth century helped build popular consciousness against British rule. Many plays were put in jeopardy of being banned as the independence movement gained momentum. The Indian People's Theatre Association was established in 1941 with the goal of developing rural audiences. In the late 1940s, an explosion of radical political theatre led to the development of the street theatre movement, which dramatised the exploitation of capitalists and castes. Plays have been employed by successive governments in India and its states for the purpose of educating the public on topics such as birth control, alcohol use, and the application of fertilisers, among the other topics.

Lizbeth Godman and Gay's *The Routledge Reader in Gender and Performance* (1998) explores the process through which sexuality has been investigated and expressed in new types of performance art, dance, and other forms of the performing arts. The authors made an effort to provide an overview of the contributions that women have made to the

history of theatre and investigated the ways in which theatre has portrayed women throughout the years. The authors had provided a comprehensive overview of significant theoretical perspectives and issues pertaining to gender, body, and cross-dressing. This book examines gender in the theatres of South Africa and post-communist Russia from a global viewpoint. The writers have presented their case that gender roles and experiments involving performance are merely metaphors for things that cannot be known. According to the opinions of Godman and Gay, Gender and Performance are such novel notions that require investigation with reference to the past, significant roles, and the responses of spectators with a variety of interpretations. The authors suggest that issues pertaining to gender would one day appear to be less controversial. The last part of this book offered a glimmer of optimism for a future world in which the embrace and acceptance of gender might find their place. The value of gender and its interpretation in Indian theatre has been vividly pointed out by Ralph Yarrow's *Indian Theatre: Theatre of Origin, Theatre of Freedom* (2000). The author examines the traditional and contemporary theatre in India and also its processes and practice. The author also discusses the transformations of individuals and groups through performances and the performative dynamic of 'self' and 'other'. The book tries to explore the role of Indian theatre in attracting the western scholars and theatre workers to the terrain of Indian theatrical conventions and traditions. The author also tries to conceptualise the role of Indian theatre in political and social movements, with a particular focus on the potential of diverse art forms to advance principles of non-violence and civic debates. This book talks in brief about history of the Indian theatre and the diverse issues that it has dealt with in the past years. There are a few research works which can be highlighted in this regard.

Women, Theatre and Performance: New Histories, New Historiographies (2000) by Maggie B. Gale and Viv Gardner examines the central topics in the study of the history of women in the theatre and unearths a few histories of women performers that were previously

unknown. The writings cover a time period of three hundred years and cover a variety of issues, such as the repositioning of women performers, the concept of inter-theatricality, and gender and theatrical space. This book is about the 1960s, which was a time when there was a surge in the activities of feminist theatre. For the first time in history, women had a significant collective impact on theatre. This was a groundbreaking development. No longer content with portraying women's experiences that were created from a male imagination and only occupying a few isolated positions in theatre organisations, women, inspired by the growing feminist movement, formed theatre groups across the country that were heterogeneous in size, repertory, organisation, and politics. These groups aimed to challenge the status quo of portraying women's experiences that were created from a male imagination. An insightful look at a pivotal time in feminist and theatrical history. This edited edition contains the essays that position dynamic feminist theatres and also provides stories of the thrill, difficulties, and inventions that defined women's experience from the author's first-hand perspective. This book discusses the politics and practises that defined and shaped the activity of theatre groups throughout history. It also investigates the history of theatrical groups and their formation. The book also discusses the contributions that they made to the theatre as well as the response that they received from spectators and critics.

Poetics, Plays and Performances (2006) by Vasudha Dalmia addresses the political and aesthetic concerns of modern Indian theatre pushed by the urban interest in folk theatre. The analysis of the author starts with the question on what theatrical practice could the newly realised "national" theatre invoke. Was there any dramatic composition in modern Hindi, or did it have any theatrical tradition? The book focuses on issues like tradition and modernity, national identity and intercultural interactions. The last chapter discusses some of the routes taken by the women directors of the last decade of the twentieth century. The author tries to link the rise of Indian theatre with the forces of nationalism of the mid-nineteenth century

exemplified in the figure of Bharatendu Harishchandra. The author even presents the modern theatre within the imaginary of India as linked with the language politics of newly emergent nation.

Modern Indian Theatre: A Reader (2008) by Nandi Bhatia argues that beginning in the latter half of the nineteenth century, theatre has been an important factor in the development of social and political consciousness in India. It asks how theatre promotes social change, how it responds to mass media and western media in India, and how gender, class, and caste influence drama's vocabulary, forms, and aesthetics. The book is divided into five sections. As the first three sections focus mostly on colonial era, the last two chapters interrogate issues related to the contemporary India post 1947 period. This book gives an overall idea about modern Indian theatre.

Theatre in Colonial India: Play- House of Power (2009) by Lata Singh advocated for theatre and performances of the dramatic arts in colonial India. The author further states that, even in pre-colonial times, theatre was an integral component of India's cultural life and popular entertainment. The author further states that, even in pre-colonial times, theatre was an integral component of India's cultural life and popular entertainment. This book contextualises the performing arts within the broader social and political framework by conceiving of theatre as a popular arena of hegemonic and counter-hegemonic struggle. It examines the political and historical connections between colonial theatre and contemporary performance. The chapters also provide an emphasis on the many facets of the intricate interaction that exists between gender and theatre. The main objective is to show how women's relationship with theatre was problematic during this time. Women actors were barred from participating in the new nation state due to the pervasive politics of class, gender, and nationalism in the theatre. The intersection of political and cultural activity, however,

could also serve to draw attention to women's contributions to society. This book is divided into two sections. In the first, titled "Theatre: A Contested Platform of Modernity and Appropriation," the authors argue that theatre is an important hegemonic site for the rising middle class in India. It examines middle-class appropriation from folk-popular culture and its high-low culture classification. These six essays discuss contemporary performance trends that borrow from Western and indigenous styles. In the book, the author explores the time period during which the discourse was hegemonic in its approach and alienating in its language. For instance, middle-class feminist discourses on "actresses" tend to skip over the issue of class entirely. The author's proposal to recognise actresses as artists and workers is a significant move in Indian theatre discourse.

Engendering Performance: Indian Women Performers in Search of an Identity (2010) by Bishnupriya Dutta, Urmimala Sarkar Munsri gives a history of women artists working in Indian theatre and dance during the colonial and post-colonial centuries. In order to present a comprehensive overview of women performers in India, the authors have focused on topics such as sexuality and colonialism, as well as culture and society. The book is organised into two six-part sections: the first concentrates on actresses and the second on dancers to show how each grew.

Ravinder Kaul's "Redefining Femininity in Modern Indian Theatre" (2010) claims that the early period of Indian history was a time of equality between the sexes as well as a celebration of femininity. The presence of a large number of women leaders of significant prominence in India's fight for independence may be seen reflected in the theatre that developed in India after the country gained its freedom. The author illustrates the contrast between modern Indian theatre and western theatre through the use of strong and highly individualistic women characters in Indian plays. These characters are at ease with their

femininity, whereas women characters in western plays are forced to take on male characteristics in order to exert their power in the society. The author has categorically argued that sexuality and spirituality are treated in Indian philosophy as complementing factors of existence responsible for physical and metaphysical growth of the human race.

The position of women in the public sphere has been given utmost priority in the feminist literary discourse. The book on *Performing Women, Performing Womanhood: Theatre, Politics and Dissent in North India* (2010) by Nandi Bhatia focuses on the contributions of forgotten and well-known women in North Indian theatre history in Hindi, Urdu, and Punjabi to strengthen their place in the Indian Theatre canon. The piece examines the many different modes of dramatic representation and performance, such as myth, folklore, ritual, and history, as well as the everyday discourse that women have used to intervene in and oppose the agenda of social movements. The author argues that women's involvement in theatre as actors, playwrights, directors, organisers, and characters shaped the discussion on gender and nationality throughout colonial and postcolonial history. In addition to this, it discusses the role that women play in modern Indian theatre as well as the development of this role throughout India in the twentieth century. Bhatia examines how women performers, housewives, dalits, and other members of society are portrayed in literary, cinematic, and autobiographical materials as well as in plays and performances. She also looks at how these figures are portrayed in performances and plays. Starting with the tale of Premchand and continuing on through a variety of films and plays, Bhatia highlights significant historical and sociopolitical episodes that occurred in Northern India. In addition to this, it engages with textual analysis based on archival documents, political statements, reviews, interviews, and journalistic discussions in order to highlight the connections between gender, colonialism, nationalism, political protest, and theatre. The author argues that women performers and their audiences changed the commercial stage, gender

conceptions, and women's public life. The development of new forms of performance, celebration, and entrepreneurship by women in modern India expanded public womanhood and drew middle class women audiences. This popularisation of new kinds of women performance and celebration occurred within a fight over the ownership and class structure of theatre, in which the status of women performers became essential. The question of gender in performance is one that continues to shape thoughts either within or around performance spaces. By focusing on the actress, dancer, and performer as the central figure, it is crucial to highlight the roles that she was able to play, despite the equivocal positions she held, in the process of forming the culture of the colony and, by extension, the culture of the nation. Despite the fact that Bhatia's argument is presented from an academic perspective, the extent to which women in the theatre have historically been subjected to a greater risk than males comes across with considerable force. This book is divided into five chapters, each focusing on a strand of women's contribution to Indian theatre, from history of nautanki performance to the effects of Partition on women playwrights.

Soni Wadhwa's article titled "Realizing Gender in Women's Theatre" (2013) argues that as a result of the growth of colonial power in India, women characters began to be treated as though they belonged to a separate body or community that required improvement. Women's challenges and problems became one of the most heavily contested concerns for Indian national leaders, writers, and playwrights as a result of the opposing influences of the reform system that was imposed by the British on the one hand, and the emergence of Indian nationalism on the other. The next sections of this literature review will examine research done by a variety of academics on Odia drama discourse. The study of Odia drama is a relatively new field of research. The researchers have focused on the historical evolution of Odia drama and women's representation in the drama. The following research works are highlighted in a historical order.

Odisha Rangamancha Ra Itihas (History of Odia theatre 1971) edited by Sarada Prasad Dalabehera explores the history and development of Odia theatre during 1894- 1966. In this book the significant aspect of the theatres and associate dramatists, actors are highlighted. However, the book does not mention anything about women dramatists or their writing. Srinivas Udgata's *Oriya Nataka* (Odia Drama 1978) discusses the articles on popular dramatists. These articles are based on the development of Odia drama. Ratnakar Chaini's *Oriya Nataka Ra Udhbhav O Bikash* (1979) discusses the definition, nature and types of Odia drama and the influence of Sanskrit drama on Odia. He has outlined a historical sketch from 1877 to 1939 but the role of women dramatists has largely been ignored. Hemant Kumar Das's *Oriya Natya Sahitya Ra Bikash Dhara* (Development of Odia Drama 1981) deals with definition of Odia drama, its content, different aspects, folk theatre, influence of Sanskrit plays, different eras of Odia drama i.e., from the beginning to postmodern drama.

Hemanta Kumar Das's *Oriya Natyakar Ramshankar Ray* (1982) discusses the life and contribution of Ramshankar Ray to Odia drama. This book is a monograph of the Odia drama. This book includes a brief history of Odia plays and explores the role of women in Odia drama. In this context, Hemant Kumar Das's *Oriya Nataka ra Bikash Dhara* (1983) also outlines the study of social plays and major playwrights of that period. This book primarily deals with the chronological development of Odia drama and very less attention is given to the role of women in those plays.

Oriya Jatra O Loko Natya Parikrama (Odia theatre and Tradition of Folk Drama 1985) edited by Baishnab Charan Samal and Hrushikesh Mallick includes various essays on Odia theatre and drama. There are thirty research publications that focus on various facets of folk drama, folk dramatists, and theatre groups; nonetheless, the contribution of women writers is neglected. A famous dramatist and critic Niladri Bhushan Harichandan's *Adhunika*

Natakara Bastava O Udbhata Chetana (Realism of Modern Odia Drama and Absurd Thoughts 1988) discusses the theatrical trends of Odia drama i.e., naturalism, absurdism, realism, existentialism, modern opera and theatre. Apart from the drama and theatre, the folk drama and puppet shows are also taken into consideration for positioning gender roles in the public sphere. *Oriya Lokonataka Parampara O Kande Natcha* (Folk Drama Tradition and Puppet 1993) is a Ph.D. work of Gouranga Charan Das published in 1993. In this book, he has defined the concept of folk drama, types of folk drama, and nature of folk drama. Significantly, he has represented the history and nature of puppetry in Odisha. Similarly, Hemanta Kumar Das has written a book titled as *Oriya Loko Nataka* (Odia Folk Drama 1991). This is a monumental work wherein he has not only explored the Indian tradition of folk drama but also given special attention while defining various folk drama and their social and religious dimensions in Odisha context. However, the book offers only a descriptive narration of instances of female impersonation in the folk dramas without going into the details of societal restrictions and their implications on women.

The period from 1990 to 2020 has witnessed the research works concentrated mostly on the different sub-themes of Odia drama. In a very traditional way, the scholars have narrated the themes and perspectives of Odia drama. Rabi Nayak's *Oriya Natya Sahitya Ra Sankhipta Itihasa* (A Brief History of Odia Drama 1993) discusses the evolution of Odia drama, thematic issues and types of Odia drama. He has also discussed the development of folk drama, pre-independent and post-independent Odia drama, Odia dramatists and their important works. Sanghamitra Mishra's *Byapti O Dipti* (Spread and Fire 1994) discusses the articles on Odia drama and its various aspects. The main themes and perspectives of Odia drama are highlighted by the scholars. The role of women in the society and their reflections on life style in Odia drama are discussed in a systematic order. Ramesh Dalai's *Oriya Jatra O Ramachandra Swain* (Odia Theatre and Ramachandra Swain 1995) discusses the evolution

and development of Odia *Jatra* and life sketch of Ramachandra Swain and his important works. Narayan Sahu's book *Swaditnatha ra Parbarti Oriya Natak* (1995) deals with the post-independence drama, new movement theatre, epic theatre, People's Theatre, Café Theatre, Children's Play, and Street Theatre. The historical plays, absurd plays and development of stage craft are also vividly discussed by the scholar. But he has not given any attention to the women and contributions of women in the society. Niladri Bhushan Harichandan's *Athihasika Nataka Ra Mula Sutra* (Roots of Odia Historical Drama 1995) discusses the historical plays, Rasa theory, themes, etc. Hemanta Kumar Das's *Oriya Mancha Parikrama* (Odia Theatre Sphere 1996) discusses the Odia theatres, Odia drama and theatres, Indian Theatres, Odisha Group Theatre, position of Odia theatres and a detailed discussion about the theatres. But the women's participation in those theatres is not established by the scholar.

Orissa Ra Loka Nataka (Folk Drama of Odisha 1998) edited by Braja Mohan Mohanty (1998), tries to glorify the tradition of the folk drama and its endangerment. The main purpose is to represent the micro and macro features of folk drama. In order to describe these two aspects, he has theorised the different ways of folk drama and also examined the earlier research works on the theme. Hemanta Kumar Das's *Oriya Nataka O Rangamancha* (Odia Drama and Theatre 2000) discussed the tradition of folk Odia drama, modern Odia drama, pre independent and post independent Odia drama along with one-act plays. He has also vividly discussed Odia theatre namely Annapurna, Janata and associated dramatists and actors. He has mentioned the names of a few women artist and their participation in Odia drama. He has also discussed the Odisha Theatre and Kali Charan Pattnaik's contribution. Rabi Nayak's *Odia Samajika Nataka O Natyakara Ashwini Kumar* (2002) deals with the social drama, biography of the famous playwright Ashwini Kumar and his major works. Bidyut Prava Nayak's *Odia Natakara Subharna Juga O Natyakara Bhanjha Kishore* (Golden

Era of Odia Drama and Bhanja Kishore 2001) discusses the biography of Notable playwright Bhanja Kishore, the beginning and development of Odia drama and his contribution to Odia drama.

Girija Shankar Ray's *Odia Natya Kala* (Art of Odia theatre 2004) states that *Kanchi Kaveri* is the first Odia play rather than *Babaji* by Jaganmohan Lala. He has also discussed the theoretical aspects of playwriting, characters, contents, and costumes of the Odia drama. Ajay Kumar Mishra's *Odia Jatra* (The Beginning and The Development 2008) is a research work on *Jatra*. It discusses folk theatre and different aspects of folk theatre, and how Odia *Jatra* changed its acting pattern and stage craft. It also deals with jatra as a genre and commercial industry, influence of other language cinema and television, interview of famous actors of opera, importance of stage craft. Dhira Mallick's *Abhinaya O Sikhya* (Acting and Learning 2008) discusses performance and stage. As both are co-related, it focuses on different types of acting, stage requirement for acting, different aspects of theatre, modulations of dialogues, analysis of characters. Krushna Charan Behera's *Natya Sahitya Parichaya* (Introduction to Odia Theatre 2008) discusses the theory of Odia drama i.e., the costumes, equipment, division of plays, ancient Greek drama and stage, ancient Indian drama, and Western playwrights. Surendra Kumar Maharana's *Natyakar Bala Krushna Mohanty* (2008) is a monograph on Balakrushna Mohanty. It discusses the life sketch of Bala Krushna Mohanty and his important works. Bishnupriya Otta's *Natya Shrusti O Natya Drusti* (2009) discusses twelve plays of major playwrights. Sanghamitra Mishra and Bijay Kumar Sathpathy's *Orissa Ra Natya Parampara* (Tradition of Odia Drama 2009-10) is a collection of 13 essays on folk theatres to postmodern period. It focusses on various aspects of Odia drama, but discussion on women's participation is absent in their work.

Hemant Kumar Das's *Oriya Nataka Athiha and Paramapara* (History and Tradition of Odia Drama 2011) discusses the history of Odia drama from folk theatre to modern plays. It focuses on stage, characters, themes, and contents of the play, Western playwrights, children's play and Odia drama in post-independence. It also focusses on comparative study of Odia trends and global trends. Rajalaxmi Panda's *Hindi O Odia Samashya Nataka* (2011) gives a comparative analysis between Laxmi Narayan Das's play and Manoranjan Das's play. She has also discussed Sanskrit plays and religious plays, as well as the cultural and historical significance of plays in Sanskrit. Ravi Satpathy's *Shabad Ra Akash O Drushyra Digbalaya* (2012) is a research work based on radio plays. He elaborates on the definition of mass media, its content, and presents a comparative study of radio plays and television plays, their special characteristics and different aspects. Jayram Swain's *Odisha Ra Natya Andolan O Adi Natyakar Jaganmohan Lal* (Drama Movement in Odisha and Jaganmohan Lal 2013) discusses the life sketch and the important works of the first Odia dramatist Jaganmohan Lal, development of Odia drama, etc. Sanghamitra Mishra's *Nataka, Kabita Prasarita* (2013) focuses on a few selected works by major playwrights and analysis by the critics. Further, it looks at different trends of poets and their major works. Sanghamitra Mishra's *Odia Nataka Ra Sthiti O Bistruti* (2014) discusses the development of Odia drama, problematic plays, its expansions, and contribution of selected dramatists, but excludes women dramatists and their works.

Gyani Debasis Mishra's *Nata, Natya O Natyayana* (2015) focuses on Narayan Sahu's major work and its analysis. Narayan Sahu's *Mancha O Nataka: Kala aau Kousala* (Art and Technique of Stage and Drama) discusses definitions of drama, contents of drama, and theoretical techniques of oriental and western drama. It also elaborates on the evolution of Odia drama and critics of Western drama. It also focuses on realistic play, symbolic play, radio play, television play, lyrical play, musical play, dance-drama play and screen play etc.

Prabhat Kumar Rath's *Ramesh Das nka Nataka Ra Shilpa Chetna* (2015) is a research work on Ramesh Das's Odia drama and its major work and analysis, its socio-cultural aspects, impact of communism, psychological analysis, and representation of rural life.

Narayan Sethi's *Natya Charcha* (2016) highlights Indian dramaturgy, different aspects, major playwrights and their famous work. Ramesh Prasad Panigrahi's *Mukta Dhara Ra Nataka* (2016) deals with different trends of western theatre and the influence of western themes. Rashmi Nandita Jena's *1980 Parabarti Odia Nataka: Samaj O Shila Drusti* (2017) deals with an analysis of twenty years of Odia drama. It mainly focuses on the beginning to the modern age and how theatre has developed in playwriting, style of presentation, dialogues, music, stage craft, myth and folk elements used in Odia drama. Manindra Mohanty's *Natyashree* (2018) discusses the absurd Odia drama, stage management, radio plays, dialogues, characters, children's play, method of acting and music. Sachidanada Mishra's *Eka sata Barsa Ra Odia Mancha O Nataka* (Hundred years of Odia Drama and Stage 2018) gives a detailed study of Odia drama from 1877-1977. It discusses the history of Odia drama, stage, mythological plays, folk plays, major writers, national integration through theatre, western trends and major western writers. Sanghamitra Mishra's *Nataka Ra Nabamulyana* (2018) discusses various aspects of Odia drama, its forms and characteristics. The components discussed in the book are Lasya Rasa, Odia theatre, experimental plays, political plays, music and problematic plays. Sanghamitra Mishra's *Nataka Parampara O Paribhasha* (2018) discusses drama, theatre, one act plays, modern drama, future of Odia drama and few renowned dramatists' important works, dramatic language etc. Upendra Prasad Nayak's book on *Odia Lokonataka Parampara O Jagannatha Pani* (2018) highlights different types of Odia folk drama and contribution of a popular folk dramatist Jagannath Pani. He has defined the tradition of "Geeti Natya", "Leela", "Farce" and other musical forms

of folk drama. The purpose of these plays is not only to entertain the people but also to bring in the social consciousness among the people.

Biranchi Kumar Sahoo, Prassana Swain, Pravakar Swain in the book *Swadinata Parbati Odia Nataka O Natyakar* (2019) have done a critical study on thirty selected playwrights. Writers have discussed major playwrights and their contribution to Odia Drama including playwrights like Pranabandhu Kar, Mahendra Acharaya, and others. Debi Prasad Satpathy's *Swadinata Parbati Odia Nataka Re Loko Upadana Ra Prayog* (2019) deals with folk literature, its definition, different forms of folk literature, and its characteristics. It discusses how folk elements are used in Indian theatre and Odia theatre. It also discusses the major playwrights and their important works on folk drama. Narayan Sahu's *Natya Charcha O Anya Prasanga* (2020) focuses on folk theatre, modern plays, and other major plays in Odia. Sarbeswar Das's *Odia Natya Sahitya* (2020) discusses the history of Odia drama. The chapters are divided into four segments: pre-modern period, modern period, post-modern and theatre movement. It also presents a critical analysis of the major drama in Odia.

In the review of literature, it is found that the major research works discuss the history and development of Odia drama and theatre. However, there are no substantial research works claiming to present the impact of Women dramatists on Odia theatre. Therefore, the proposed research work attempts to analyse the developments in Odia drama by examining the elements of modernity through a feminist lens. The present study intends to examine the evolution of various perspectives in the history of Odia drama. In this regard, influence of women playwrights on the themes and issues reflected in Odia drama, issues of gender and caste and their reflection of social realities of the colonial period are critically analysed. Various factors like women's education, social reform, and political participation have resulted in emergence of an awakened group of leaders and influencers broadly categorised

as '*New Woman*'. This study highlights such new women who have marked their places in the foundation of Odisha through their contributions in various fields. In this light, the main objectives of this thesis may be enumerated as:

1. To study the emergence of the woman question in Odia drama
2. To analyse the historical development of theatre in Odisha and examine the factors that influenced its evolution
3. To explore the representation of women characters in Odia drama and
4. To analyse the concerns and contributions of women playwrights to Odia drama.

Both primary and secondary sources of information will be used for this study. Primary sources constitute of interviews of selected women playwrights in Odia. Further, archived books, journals, and articles from newspapers from Odisha State Archives. As the majority of plays are out of print, the researcher visited various libraries including Odisha State Library, Odisha Museum Library, Utkal Sangeet Mahavidyalaya, Utkal University Library, and Utkal Sahitya Samaj Library. Resources from personal libraries of theatre personalities like Narayan Sahu, Ramesh Panigrahi, Sanghamitra Mishra, Subodh Pattnaik and Ananta Mahapatra were accessed and analysed. In order to understand the presentation of drama, its acceptance among audiences, and projection of women characters on stage, the researcher attended many theatre festivals at Rabindra Mandap, Bhanjakala Mandap, and Natya Chetana in Odisha. Considering the copyright restrictions in accessing the radio interviews of women artists, the researcher has also visited All India Radio, Cuttack and Natya Shodh Sansthan, Kolkata. Secondary sources include books, articles, newspapers, journals, and web portals containing analyses and interpretations of various texts. The researcher has used MLA 9th edition for citation and reference.

The present research is an attempt to study the Odia drama that has become a platform for women to highlight women's issues and theatre as a space becoming more and more amicable to women. Male playwrights have tried to construct women's identity through their works such as Ramshankar Ray's *Kanchanmali* (1904), Kalicharan Pattnaik's *Girls' School* (1944), Gopal Chottray's *Sankha Sindura* (1955), *Nasta Urvashi* (1956), Manoranjan Das's *Katha Ghoda* (1972), Bijay Mishra's *Timira Tirtha* (1973) and *Tata Niranjana* (1980).

Women playwrights have also significantly contributed to Odia drama especially since the dawn of the twentieth century. Sulochana Devi's *Savitri* (1928), *Sansar Chitra* (1945), Sitadevi Khadanga's *Mandira Prabesh* (1947), and *Nispati* (1971), Basant Kumari Pattnaik's *Juar Bhata* (1956), *Marichika*, *Parinati* and *Besura*, Sarala Devi's *Sura Sundari* (1959), Bina Devi's *Dahani* (1988), Bidyut Prava Devi's *Vivah* (1989), Binapani Mohanty's *Kranti* (1999) have been chosen for this study.

The selected plays deal with the social issues like domestic violence, gender discrimination, widow re-marriage, caste, exploitation of women, witch hunting and women's education in post-colonial Odisha. In their plays, one might feel the author's desire to create a way of life that would answer the deepest yearnings of the Odia women for self-emancipation and self-dignity. The women writers in Odia have attempted to comprehend the situation of their women characters on a personal level. The young women yearn for the freedom to pursue their own interests and goals that they are denied. These women are fed up with their sheltered and overprotected upbringing, as well as the condescending and prejudiced treatment they have received from society and their own family. They feel trapped by patriarchy's constraints and express themselves through their writings.

The thesis tries to present a systematic study of the evolution of Odia drama and theatre along with the evolving focus of the plays. The social context of the plays and

perspectives of playwrights have been critically analysed. Also, a phenomenon which is known as 'New Woman' is identified as a pathbreaking idea inspiring women to excel in different fields in society. The thesis is organised into five chapters, the scheme of which is given below.

The introductory chapter includes a brief overview of the study, the background and contexts in which it is located, the research questions, objectives of the study as well as the methodology used for collection of data and its analysis. A brief introduction to the research area followed by review of relevant literature sets the scope of the study. Identifying the gaps in existing research, the chapter presents a theoretical framework for the present research. The chapter concludes with the description of the chapters and an acknowledgement of the limitations of the study.

The Second Chapter titled as *The Rise of Modern Odia Drama* discusses Odia Drama, its rise and development. The major playwrights and their impact on the evolution of Odia theatre have been explored. The chapter includes a historical description of origin of Odia theatre and its development while analysing the influence of factors like Bengali theatre, Sanskrit plays, social reform movements and English education. This chapter focuses on contextualising the Odia drama as a form of entertainment and a medium of communication while highlighting the contributions of notable personalities and organisations in its growth and development.

The Third Chapter titled as *Women as Characters and Themes* concentrates on the portrayal of women characters by male playwrights. The chapter traces presentation of women as central characters of the selected plays. Here, I intend to choose plays to examine the varied approaches, locations and issues. A close examination of the contexts, issues, and significance of the women characters as presented by male playwrights enables us to

assess the contribution of initial playwrights and also identify the differences in their approach vis-à-vis the women playwrights.

The Fourth Chapter titled as Women Playwrights in Odia deals with the contribution of women playwrights to Odia Drama. It also deals with the issues of women's education, literary consciousness and women's rights as reflected in Odia drama. When nationalism and the anti-reservation movement gained traction, Odia dramas began to explore the intricate issues of the society like gender and caste identity. The chapter focuses on issues of gender, gender rights, and gender equality. This chapter introduces the women playwrights and their works and analyses the representation of women and women's issues in their plays. Highlighting the contributions of women to Odia drama, the chapter traces the origin and development of 'New Woman' in the fields of politics, literature, and social reform. This chapter includes an analysis of women artists' experiences, ideas and values in Odia Drama and performances as expressed through personal interviews and questionnaires.

The concluding chapter sums up the arguments in the thesis and also briefly discusses the historical impact on the role of women in Odia Drama. While studying the origin, evolution, and contribution of women to emphasising gender issues in plays, we must comprehend the numerous theories linked with the subject. Feminist approach, one of the major approaches has influenced not only the socio-political demands in current times but also made its mark through a critique of the literary studies. The concluding chapter intends to examine the aspects of Odia drama linking them with various facets of feminist movement.

Like any other academic study, the present study is also subject to certain limitations. To bring focus, this study has been restricted to study the role of playwrights, both male and female, while acknowledging the various factors that have influenced the development of theatre in Odisha. Among many forms of literary expressions, this study considers only

published plays by the selected playwrights to study the reflection of social realities of the colonial and post-colonial Odisha. The study limits itself to the analysis of plays from twentieth century while noting the cultural context of Odia drama of nineteenth century. The focus of the study is limited to the examination of gender issues only while the researcher acknowledges the presence of other issues like feudalism, urbanisation, and class conflicts in the plays during this period.

This chapter provided an overview of the fundamental ideas and methods that will be utilised during the course of this investigation. In addition to that, it offers condensed analyses of significant literary works and theatrical works pertaining to the empowerment of women. This chapter includes not only a comprehensive overview of the relevant literature but also an explanation of its objectives as well as its limitations. The next chapter examines the beginnings of Odia drama as well as its development throughout history.

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Chapter 2

The Rise of Modern Odia Drama

The present chapter deals with the historical development of Odia drama and its development through various phases of Odisha history. This study attempts to explore the Western and the Eastern influences on the Odia drama. It aims to examine the influence of different factors on Odia drama. This chapter also discusses the changes in the Odia society as represented in the Odia drama, and the evolution of Odia language during the colonial rule. It also focuses on the journey of Odia drama and theatre from ancient to modern times and sheds light on the development of Odia drama in the modern era.

Odia Drama: Historical Perspectives

The literary creations of India show that the drama was one of the most popular genres among other literary genres such as epic, poetry and prose. In this context, Bharat Muni's *Natyashastra* can be considered as the oldest in relation to discourses on drama. The following names such as Bhasa, Kalidas, Sudraka, Bhavabhuti, Shri Harsha, Vishakhadatta, and Mahendravikram have to be mentioned as the notable dramatists of India while tracing the history of drama in India (Mansinha 205). The history of Odia drama is as old as the civilization of Odisha. The word for drama in Odia is *nataka* which means dance and drama. The dual meaning of the word refers to not only dance but also to music, action, and poetry with prosody. The study of Odia drama and its thematic appraisals are relatively unexplored. The meta-discussion of Odia drama and synchronisation of themes, characters, dialogues, and technological apparatus used in the theatre also need to be discussed.

This chapter highlights the ways in which modernity entered Odia literature, especially Odia drama. The socio-political changes in the colonial Odisha such as British

language policy, missionary activities towards literary compositions, Odia language movement, influence of Bengali theatre, and English translation of Odia texts, influence of Sanskrit and English tradition of drama brought radical changes in the Odia society. The social changes filtered the process of literary canon formation and raised questions about the status of women in literary forms like drama, fiction and others. Both male and female dramatists understood the value of women as per their own convention and accordingly portrayed their life and livelihood in Odia drama. With the growing debates around the role of women in domestic and public sphere, a similar change is also reflected in the representation of gender reality in Odia drama. The modern Odia women playwrights have focused on the brutality and conspiracy against women, dowry deaths, inter-caste marriages, girls' education and empowerment, child marriage and struggle for women's identity.

Modern Odia Drama: Influence, Adaptation and Translation

The history of modern Odia drama demonstrates the socio-cultural picture of the colonial Odisha. The modern Odia drama is influenced by the themes and perspectives of Western and Eastern theatre and drama. As mentioned earlier “the drama of nineteenth century seems to be a queer mixture of Sanskrit plays, *Sangeetakas*, *Rasas*, *Leelas*, and other folk forms”. It has been argued that Kharavela, one of the greatest kings of Utkal, had started the theatrical traditions in the third year of his accession to rejoice the military victories. Similarly, a traditional theatre namely *Natamandapa* (drama pandal) has been discovered at the Sun temple of Konark which glorifies the theatrical tradition of ancient Odisha. The icons portrayed in the temples and different parts of sculptures can be taken into considerations for an understanding of the names and nature of ancient Odia drama.

Influence of Sanskrit Drama

The Sanskrit dramatic culture of Odisha has a prodigious role in the development of the modern Odia drama. In Odia drama, the mythological themes, characters and dramatic aesthetics, concert, music, and song have been introduced with the influence of Sanskrit dramatic tradition. In fact, the ancient and medieval literature of Odisha reveals significant influence of Sanskrit epics and drama. As Mansinha Singh's *History of Odia Literature* says that "there had been a long tradition of Sanskrit plays in Odisha from which the local Odia drama gradually came up in the nineteenth century. Till the early years of the twentieth century, no playwright could free himself from the Sanskrit traditions" (99). There are a number of examples such as Pandita Bhatta Narayan's Sanskrit drama, namely, *Beni Samhara*, Sri Murari Mishra's *Anargha Raghava*, Krushna Mishra's *Prabandha Chandrodaya*, Chandrasekhar Das's *Puspamali*, Vishwanath Kaviraj's *Chandrakala* and *Pravabati* and Pandit of the royal court of Shree Prataprudra Deva's and his poet Jiba Devacharjya's drama *Bhakti Baibhabam*, Kapilendra Dev's *Parshuram Bijaya*, Purushottama Deva's *Abhinaba Beni Samharam*, and Jayadeva's *Piushalahari Natika* and *Baishnabamruta*. These plays written in the medieval period establish the influence of Sanskrit drama on modern Odia drama. The names and characters of modern Odia drama are basically adopted from the source of Sanskrit drama. During the colonial period, Odia dramatists, namely, Pandit Gopinath Nanda Sharma, Harihar Mishra, and Pandit Mrutyunjaya Rath and others have left behind translations of almost all the important Sanskrit drama in Odia. In the middle of eighteenth century, Odia translation of Sanskrit drama were performed at Paralakhemundi and Cuttack. The Odia drama was usually staged by adopting the traditional techniques which underwent significant changes due to the influence of the Bengali theatre (Mansinha 208).

It is interesting to note that contrary to popular perception, women have been significantly contributing to Sanskrit Literature. It has been mentioned that the Vaishnavi poetess Madhavi Dasi composed a play in Sanskrit titled *Purusottama Deva*. She is considered to be the first and foremost Odia woman writer whose compositions have been preserved in palm leaf manuscripts (Rout 79). Savitri Rout further mentions that “the number of women dramatists who have composed drama in Sanskrit Language are meagre, as Sanskrit is a very difficult language to master and drama moreover is one of the greatest mediums of human expression” (79). Odia drama has been one of the major mediums to interpret modernity and identify the struggle for identity of Odia women. The drama has been considered as one of the oldest genres of Indian literary discourse, as old as Bharata’s *Natyashastra*. The *Natyashastra* was the first theoretical description of ancient drama. The conceptual notions of ancient drama were modified and glorified during the British administration in Odisha. The people of Odisha extensively participated in writing of modern Odia drama, and were involved in preparing theatres in Odisha towards popularisation of its themes and values.

From the nineteenth century Indian literatures and cultural discourses have undergone radical changes due to several socio-political and educational developments. Although the modern Indian literatures present the conventional themes and forms they have borrowed from Sanskrit, Prakrit, Pali, and Persian literatures, these techniques completely lost their vitality and relevance and gave way to a pattern in Indian literature. In this context, Hemant Das’s book *Odisha Ra Rangamancha Ra Bikash Dhara* points out “it would be wrong to expect a uniformity in the pattern of change throughout the country as each linguistic area had its own distinctiveness and each of them responded independently either to the past literary tradition or to the new” (49). The whole of Odia literature shows a unique growth in the various aspects of new literary genres such as translation, short story, novel, drama,

criticism, lyric, ballad, sonnet, biography, travelogue, and autobiography and others. All these became popular in transgressing the frontiers of traditional literary fashions. Along with these, printing press and publication of literary journals, magazines and periodicals were introduced. All these factors turned into milestones of modern Odia literature. It should be pointed out in this debate that the English education and emphasis on English brought a radical change in the linguistic discourses in Odisha, the modern Odia literature, and the Odia cultural identity became a challenge among the English educated people.

The British were instrumental in reshaping Odia literary genres with the introduction of printing press in Odisha in the year 1837. Modern Odia drama and theatre were influenced by missionary activities, British administration, the Odia language movement, English translations, and the Sanskrit and English tradition of Drama.

Missionary Influence and Literary Activities in Odisha

In the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century, missionaries of various denominations worked in Odisha. The General Baptists of England were the most active among them. The General Baptists Missionary society was established in 1822 at Cuttack by William Carey. Their main objective was to preach Christianity; they undertook the humanitarian works to attract people to Christianity. Their activities deeply influenced socio-cultural life of the people of Odisha (Swaro 439). The General Baptists established their stations at Cuttack, Puri, Sambalpur, Ganjam, and many other places in Odisha. The American Freewill Baptist Missionaries commenced their activities in Odisha Division at Balasore in 1838. Later they established their stations at Jaleswar, Shantipur, Chandbali, Bhadrak and Conti (Swaro 440).

Enough evidences of the Odia translation by the missionaries shows their attempts to spread Christian Literature of the western understanding and the reality of human life in the form of literary compositions that were written, trans-created and transcribed into Odia. The Serampore missionaries helped a lot in establishing the Orissa Mission Press at Cuttack by the General Baptists. William Carey of Serampore was the first missionary to devote his main efforts to the translations of the *Bible*. In 1813, the Bible was translated into twenty-four languages. The translation of *Bible*, other religious scriptures and pamphlets helped the Odia people to understand Christianity and accept it. The history of translation in Odisha begins with translations of *Bible* and other religious texts into Odia language. N.C. Behuria observes that Balasore was the entry point for Christian missionaries from Midnapore (Bengal). Balasore also served as the primary training centre for religious preachers, where they were trained to deal with the native people. It may be noted that the first printing press in Odisha named as Cuttack Printing Press was established by the Baptist missionaries in 1837, and vernacular books and tracts were prepared by them (438).

The first Odia proscenium theatre was set up by the missionaries in Cuttack. Several Bengali and English books that had been chosen as textbooks were translated by the missionaries. Amos Sutton has translated John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* into Odia as *Sworgiya Jatrira Brutanta* and *The Holy War* was translated into Odia as *Dharma Juddhara Bruttanta* by William Charles Lacey in 1880 (Blumhardt 15). Later, it was rewritten by William Brooks from the original Odia translation that was done by William Charles Lacey and was given the same name, *Dharma Juddhara Bruttanta* (1880) by Cuttack Mission Press. Similarly, *Dharma Pustakara Sahakāri* (Companion to the Bible) was another religious text which was revised and published by J. Buckley based on the foundations of Amos Sutton's translated book which was published by Cuttack Mission Press in the year 1880. Philip Doddridge's *The Rise and Progress of Religion in the Soul (Part-1)* was translated into Odia

as *Manushyara Manare Dharmara Utpatti* (1840). Similarly, W.C Lacey translated Rajkrishna Vandyopadhyaya's *Bengali Nitibodha* (1864) and Tarinicharana Chattopadhyaya's *BhugoLa BibaraNa* (1859) into Odia. William Miller translated J. Vaughan's *Missionary* into Odia as *Saphala Bhabishyavāni* (1878) (Blumhardt 34). The command on languages allowed the missionaries to write textbooks, grammar books, and dictionaries in vernacular languages and the colonial government patronised them for this. To popularise their religion and make it grounded, they supported the native education with the help of the local government. The missionaries enriched the local language with their contribution to the formation of dictionary and introduction of grammar. On the advice of the British Government, Amos Sutton wrote *Odia Grammars* in 1831.

Several Odia magazines, journals, periodicals, and newspapers were published with the help of the missionaries. Under the patronage of the missionaries, books like *Prabodha Chandrikā* (1856), *Arunodaya* (1861), *Agyyani* (1872), *Tāraka* (1883), and *Prabhāti Tārā* (1896) were published. Among these, *Prabodha Chandrikā* was the most popular one. The first monthly Odia magazine *Gyānaruna* (1849) was published with William Charles Lacey as the editor. Madhusudan Pati talks about the contribution of missionaries in his book titled *Gourishankar Ray* where he states, “*Gyanaruna*, a literary and news magazine edited by William Charles Lacey and brought out under the hearty support of Christian Mission, was distinguished for its liberal outlook, and commitment to local culture and interests” (14). The Lutherans published a monthly magazine from 1931 to 1942 known as *Christian Mitra*. The Canadian Baptists published a journal namely *Bartabahak* from 1939 to 1941 under the patronage of J.N. West. In 1941, another journal named *Dharmabhanu* was published by the Christians of Ashrayagada Mandali. The Roman Catholics edited *Prabha* and *Christaraj* (Pani 44).

The Christian missionaries influenced the development of the Odia language, literature, culture, education, and print media also by means of religious conversions. These changes were not accepted immediately by the natives as they had their own religious traditions. The missionary education was also not accepted by the Odia people. “Since Odias had avoided schooling out of concern over religious conversions, there were very few with formal education. Therefore, many Bengalis were appointed as teachers not just in the high schools of major towns like Cuttack, Puri, and Balasore, but even in more remote places like Charchika, Angul, Bhadrakh, and Jajpur” (Mohanty 64). So, Bengalis occupied most of the administrative positions in Odisha's administrative division. They subjugated the Odia people by their multilingual skills, and tried to monopolise English education. Due to various reasons, implementation of Odia as the language of law and education in Odisha got delayed. As Mohanty states, “first, the top government posts in Orissa were held by British officers and the other senior posts by Bengalis and other ‘foreigners. Neither British nor Bengalis knew the Odia language. Second, there was a shortage of educated literate Odias to do this work” (58). Due to these reasons, Bengalis not only joined the government of British but also tried to replace Odia by Bengali in Odisha. Around 1840s, Odia language came under attack by the Bengalis on the plea that it was a dialect of Bengali Language (Das 128).

The women of Brahmo Samaj and Christian communities took some courageous steps for the propagation and spreading of education in Odisha among the uneducated women. In 1918, Sailabala Das was in England with her father Madhusudan Das. During her stay, she used to write a diary under the caption “*Bilat Prabasa*” (Journey in England) which was published regularly in “*Utkal Sahitya*”. She tried to bring the style of prose in her writings. She tried to start a girls' school in Cuttack after she returned from England. However, an Odia and Bengali-medium school for girls already existed. A lot of well-known people graduated from such institution, including the well-known author Reba Ray. However, the school was

closed in 1893. In the year 1905, Reba Ray established a school for girls and named it Model Girls' School in Cuttack. She brought some male Brahmo teachers and women teachers for teaching. Sailabala Das, in partnership with Reba Ray, converted the Model Girls' School into Ravenshaw Girls' School. This was a milestone in the advancement of women's education in Odisha. (Devi 16). Later, the school was renamed as Sailabala Women's College, Cuttack, and now it serves as a college for women.

The catastrophic famine of 1866 played an important role in initiating women's education. The missionaries put in a lot of effort to keep their boarding houses open. The division and discrimination of caste system were blurred for a short period due to the widespread starvations, deaths, and poverty (Panda 61). Orphanages became a haven for women in need. The Baptist missionaries did an exceptional job of managing the government-sponsored women's orphanages that were set up to care for orphans during the Orissa famine. In 1866-67, Europeans and Eurasians established schools in Cuttack. Majority of the students at this institution were women (Panda 62). The Catholic Mission took the responsibility of these schools and they appointed two nuns for teaching. Thus, the missionaries introduced women's education through their orphanages.

The missionaries contributed not only to Odia language and literature but also to the development of women's education. The issue of women's education was not so popular in Odisha till independence. The Christian missionaries have played a pivotal role in initiating women's education by establishing all-girls schools, spreading awareness about the need for women's empowerment, social upliftment and there by enriching Odia cultural consciousness.

Influence of Bengali Theatre and Drama

The history and development of Indian drama, however, did not show a modest linear movement. As Das states “The Parsi theatre, the European theatre, and the two important traditions, Sanskrit and the folk, created a complicated fabric, and the Indian dramatist was in constant tension” (67). In the progress of modern Odia theatre, Bengali theatre has showed a magnum path to establish many theatres in Odisha.

The first public theatre in Bengal, the National Theatre was established in 1872. Theatre in Bengali language was introduced by Gerasim Lebedev, a Russian Linguist and a forerunner of Bengali theatre who launched the European style proscenium drama theatre in India in 1795. Raha Kironmoy’s *Bengali Theatre* narrates the development of Bengali theatre and the two aspects of it, first the existence of traditional forms which embraced the new forms from west to make it more entertaining. Secondly, the rise of middle class which accepted the change and formed a new Bengali theatre (1). Odisha being the neighbouring state of Bengal, these developments highly influenced the Odia theatre. When the Britishers came to Odisha in 1803, they also brought Bengali administrative officers with them. By that time, in imitation of the English plays and theatrical performances by the British residents of Calcutta, the Bengali stage and drama had already come into existence. Similarly, the Bengali officers in Odisha started arranging performances of Bengali plays on social occasions like Dussehra at Cuttack (Mansinha 208). Bengali Zamindars patronised and introduced theatres in Odisha, though it is claimed that the tradition of theatre and many folk forms were performed even during the reign of Emperor Kharavela in 2nd century B.C. as evident from inscriptions of Khandagiri Cave.

In 1868, Bahubazar Theatre of Calcutta staged *Ramabhishek* written by Manmohan Basu of Cuttack. This play was staged in front of Zamindar Gopal Chandra Bose on 7th

February 1878. Later, in 1878, the drama was re-staged before the British audience. Bengali theatre was influenced and introduced to proscenium theatre from English, hence Odia theatre also followed the same tradition, and other forms were popular and patronised by Zamindars and Kings. Ramesh Panigrahi's *Colonial Odia Literature* states, "The Bengali feudals allowed drama to be staged in their drawing rooms in proscenium format" (191). The first theatre in English Language was probably staged in 1753 at *The Playhouse*, which was destroyed and re-established as *New Playhouse* in 1775. Many theatres were established during this period but *Chowringhee Theatre*, *Dumdum Theatre*, *Sans Souci Theatre* were particularly popular and could sustain for a long time. In the meantime, Hindu theatre by Prasana Kumar Thakur initially staged Bengali plays and set the foundation of staging of Bengali language plays in proscenium format in 1831. Bengali Drama had become a part of social activities patronised by influential personalities like Dwarkanath Thakur, Motilal Sil. The theatre was subsequently expanded to stage Marathi plays with patronage from influential industrialists.

Hindu theatre pioneered Bengali drama but also translated English plays. Later, *Shyambazar Theatre*, *Belgachia Theatre*, *Metropolitan Theatre*, *Shobha Bazar Theatre*, *Joda Sankha theatre*, *National Theatre*, *Oriental Theatre*, *Bengal Theatre*, *Star Theatre* and *Minerva Theatre* were established and flourished. *Star Theatre*, built in 1912, remained the representative of contemporary Indian theatre. Binodini Dasi is credited as the first South Asian actress working in the theatre who also penned her memoir. Her autobiography discusses a segment of the Bengali world in the nineteenth century that was at ease with European ideas yet cognizant enough to carefully subjugate the woman to the domain of the household. Apart from the fact that her outstanding performance earned her titles such as "*Moon of the Star Theatre*" and "*Flower of the Native Stage*," she also won other awards (Rani 470). From 1893-1912, for twenty years, *Minerva Theatre* produced nearly eighty

plays on various themes ranging from historical to nationalist plays thereby laying the foundation for socio-political awareness in pre-independence Odisha. In later years, Utpal Dutt staged his much-acclaimed play *Kallol* taking *Minerva Theatre* for lease. However, professional theatre saw a decline with the rise of a strong amateur theatre movement. They relied upon the Group Theatre for experimentation of forms, contents, and revolutionary ideas adopted in plays (Kironmoy 98).

Revolutionary drama movement saw its forerunners in Bijan Bhattacharya, Salil Sen, Tulsi Lahiri and Digin Banerjee. Badal Sircar and Mohit Chatterjee adopted Theatre of Absurd while Utpal Dutt followed the revolutionary style in theatre (Datta 1068). The modern theatre was confined to Calcutta, which was the main hub of East India Company. Interestingly, Bengali theatre was the first to involve women artists while they became a part of stage in other theatres by mid twentieth century (Jain 67). The Bengali settlements in Dixitpada, Asureswar and Raghunathpur villages used to stage Bengali drama in their villages. Even the Bengali zamindars allowed drama to be staged in their drawing rooms in proscenium format. However, the Odia audience was eager to watch the proscenium play as it was newly introduced (Panigrahi 341). This kind of stage performances continued till 1894 when Satish Chandra Sarkar started a commercial proscenium theatre named The Magnetic Theatre. Many Bengali mythological plays were staged there. Later, Binapani Theatre was established at Cuttack in 1898 (Panigrahi 341). With the rise in number of theatres, Odia plays were staged in different parts of Odisha.

Odia Language Movement

During the 1800s Odia literature was facing an identity and language crisis, which resulted in the Odia Language Movement. When the Britishers came to colonise Odisha, they began to 'reform' the education practices. As Panchanan Mohanty wrote in his article

“British Language Policy in 19th Century India and Odia Language Movement”, the British wanted the local language to be the medium of instruction, but as the Bengalis were in higher positions, they chose Bengali over it. This decision was not agreeable to some of the Odia intellectuals, and so they began a campaign by developing textbooks in Odia. This debate continued for two years, and finally, Odia was declared as the official language for the region in 1839. The main purpose of this language movement was to unite the Odias to have their own identity. Subhendhu Mund’s *Odia Identity* states:

The Odia Movement, which began as a Bhasha Andolan (Language Movement), was characterised by its efforts to culturally unite the Odias for the unification of different Odia speaking tracts into one province under one administration. Many writers came forward to prevent Odia language through their writings. In this context, Gangadhar Meher says, “If you wish to be great, first make your mother tongue great, if you consider those with no love in their hearts for their motherland and their mother tongue as erudite, and where will the ignorant go?” (Mund 99).

Social Reform in Colonial Odisha

The most irrational social custom that prevailed in Odisha during the nineteenth century was ‘Sati’. Sati is the name given in India to the woman who immolated herself on the funeral pyre of her husband or was buried alive with his body. It was supposed to convey that the woman wanted to prove herself faithful to him even into death. (Sharma 4). The custom was prevalent among the higher as well as other classes of Hindus of Ganjam, Vizianagaram and other districts of Southern Odisha and in the Tributary Mahals of Northern Odisha. A report on the cases of Sati in Odisha from 1815 to 1828 mentions the number of instances to be one hundred and thirty-five. In Ganjam, 81 cases of Sati occurred between 1814 and 1819 (Sharma 5). Though the custom was abolished by Act XVII of 1829, it was

found to prevail in some parts of the province for a long time i.e., till 1842, because of the strong sentiments of the people in support of the custom. From the evidence furnished by the Christian missionaries and from the proceedings of the Nizamat Adalat, it may be presumed that the custom of Sati was popular in Odisha partly due to the miserable economic conditions and partly because of the irrational beliefs and superstition of the people.

With regard to development of women education, Sutton's *Orissa and Its Evangelization* (1850) notes the expansion of missionary schools in Odisha. The establishment of first Girls' School in 1838 at Cuttack was a landmark in this journey. To understand the societal concerns as well as gender restrictions, two women missionaries travelled through the state having discussions with various groups of locals. They identified the reasons for lack of interest for women's education to be a multi-pronged one with social restrictions, cultural subordination and economic depravity being the major factors. Another Girls' school was started in Jaleswar with initiative from Mrs. Crawford, a Christian Missionary. During the period of Great famine of 1866, several orphanages were established which were subsequently developed as centres for women's education. To address the societal restrictions on women, the missionaries also introduced Zenana system in Balasore, Odisha in 1869. This was an innovative system at that point of time where interested girls students were able to avail education at their home (232).

The Missionaries were the first to raise a crusade against the prevalent social evils like, Sati, female infanticide, child marriages, etc. before legislations were passed to that effect. The education system introduced by the missionaries facilitated a social change and helped in situating a middle-class society in Odisha. After missionary evangelising began, the Brahmo Samaj was created and social reforms were implemented in Odisha.

The Brahmo Samaj in Odisha played an important role in social reform. The founders of the Brahmo Samaj in Orissa advocated and practised simple Brahmo marriage, which involved neither expenditure nor complex procedure on the part of the bride's parents. They also advocated inter-caste marriages, removal of Purdah, abolition of polygamy, abolition of child marriage, introduction of widow remarriage and reforming other age-old customs pertaining to women. The Brahmo Samaj had also set up a Girls' School at Cuttack.

Women's education was very dear to the social reformers. They worked hard for educating women by establishing schools and colleges. Among them, Madhusudan Das played a very important role in breaking the barriers that prevented women from entering the field of law. He was the first intellectual leader who demanded franchise for women. On his initiative a widow training Centre was started, and a Girls' School was opened at Cuttack in 1908. Following his footsteps Gopabandhu Das also championed the cause of women's liberation in Odisha. His best contributions were towards the rehabilitation of the poor, helpless, unfortunate widows. He founded The Jagannath Widow's Ashram at Puri to train them in useful crafts and make them self-sufficient to live a dedicated life.

In Odisha, widow re-marriage was allowed in castes other than Brahmin and Kshatriya. *Utkal Deepika* supporting the cause in above two castes published articles on 7th June 1873, 6th July 1873, and 3rd September 1881. Journals like *Utkal Deepika* and *Sambalpur Hiteshini* published several articles in favour of widow re-marriage. On 1st March 1885, "Utkal Deepika" published a news article 'Aryani Pradip Samaj' of Biranarasinhapur, a forum to discuss the social issues and especially on widow-remarriage. Another forum in the name of 'Cuttack Graduate Sabha' was established. In one of its meetings, Kalidasa Mukherjee gave a speech on 'Hindu Social Reforms' supporting widow-remarriage and highlighted the negative impact of child marriage (Pattnaik 625). On the other hand, Ishwar Chandra

Vidyasagar continuously published articles on the widow re-marriage and the upliftment of the women in Bengal. In 1856, the Hindu Widows' Remarriage Act was passed and it was the first major step taken towards the social reformation after the abolition of Sati. According to *Utkal Deepika* dated 9th September 1909, the first widow who remarried was the famous Odia playwright Jaganmohan Lala's daughter. Everyone praised Jaganmohan Lala's decision, and this brought a great change in Odisha regarding widow remarriage. *Utkal Deepika* dated 11th September 1909, published about an organization named '*Bidhaba Bibaha Samaj*' established in Ganjam Purushottampur and it also mentioned about the financial help of rupees five hundred to the boys who would marry the widow. The first Odia play on widow remarriage was *Sashikala Parinaya* (1906) by Sribatsa Panda. This play was staged and published to create awareness among the people of Odisha. Ramshankar Ray wrote *Lilabati* (1912) where he depicted the pathetic condition of widows and suggested the ways to improve the same (Das 317). There are ample literary sources such as stories, poems, and novels that depicted the widow remarriage issue in Odia.

Odisha was full of superstitions and blind beliefs during nineteenth century. Child marriage, old-age marriage and mis-match marriage were widely prevalent in the society. In Odisha, child marriage at the age of eight or nine was prevalent among all the castes except the Karanas (Sharma 3). S. L. Maddox's "Final Report on the Survey and Settlement of the Province of Orissa, 1890-1900" highlights '*Balya Bidhaba Nibarini Sabha*' which was established at Cuttack to discuss the issue of child marriage (123). A similar organisation was established in the name of '*Aryaniti Sabha*' in Biranarasinhapur. Famous poet Bir Bikram wrote a play named *Balya Bibaha* (1903) to create awareness against child marriage. Ramshankar Ray's *Budhabara* (1892) and Bir Bikram Dev's *Brudha Bibhaha* (1905) plays are also based on malpractices of old-marriage. Through this reformative drama. The author tries to condemn the practice of child brides married off to old zamindars and other

influential people as it always led to suppression of young brides by old zamindars. During nineteenth century in Bengal, old-age marriage was a serious problem. Though it was also prevalent in Odisha, only a few newspapers reported this practice. It was reported by *Utkal Deepika* on 5th November 1892, *Sambad Bahika* on 20th October 1892 and *Naba Sambad* on 24th May 1893.

The then society was predominated by another social dogma named dowry. Though the nineteenth century saw significant social reforms across the country, Odisha lagged behind since the dowry problem was not properly represented in Odia drama until the twentieth century. Notable Odia playwright Bhikari Charan Pattnaik wrote a play based on dowry named *Sansarchitra* (1915) and a farce named *Jouthuka* (1924) to initiate the drama with serious concern for social problems in Odia society (Das 373).

Despite changes and improvements, the aspect of social development in the province of Odisha was very slow till late nineteenth century. The reforms remained ineffective for some time. Women remained too uninformed and dependent on men to think for themselves or question the social rigidities or discrimination. With awakening of women and their advent in public life in early twentieth century, the society began to move forward. The establishment of girls' schools and publication of women's journals were significant steps that will be discussed in the next section. The social development in any country depends on the awakening and co-operation of women who constitute half the population. At the same time, co-operation of women is possible when women themselves are enlightened and enjoy equal status on par with men. When women are backward, society is backward and when they are static, society is also static. The "Women Problem" was very rightly connected with education and to overcome these problems, popular lectures, newspaper writings, awareness campaigns, and social organizations were undertaken by women reformers.

English Education in Odisha

The English education and importance of English brought out a radical change in the literary discourses in Odisha. The preservation of modern Odia literature and its cultural identity became a challenge among the English educated people. The reformation of Odia literary genres and the principles of literary canon formation were patronised by the British. Basically, the functions of multilingualism facilitated verbalising of the literary championship and allowed the western themes and perspectives to be borrowed into regional literature through translation and adaptation. English education in colonial Odisha resulted in introduction of a new social class and the people belonging to that class influenced the society through the life and livelihood of colonial culture. Samal points out that,

The progress of English education rescued Odias from a number of disadvantages. They had no place in the lower services of British bureaucratic machinery. People from outside Odisha monopolized all kinds of services. Without English education, the people of Odisha had a little contact with outside provinces. In view of many such drawbacks, the introduction of higher western education resulted in a gradual transformation of the mental horizon of people. In course of time, as everywhere in India, there developed a political consciousness based on western ideas. The leading minds of Odisha began to think of social changes in the wake of western education (156).

It is observed that the influence of English literature was one of the crucial factors for introduction of modernity in Odia literature as well as Odia society in general. Most of the Odia writers, who were considered pioneers of modern consciousness in Odisha, revealed in their literature the profound influence of Western ideas on their thoughts. Modern Odia dramatists were influenced by Bengali writers to a great extent, and patrons and artists from

Bengali theatre helped in introduction of modern techniques and themes as discussed earlier in this chapter.

In 1835, when Bentinck made the landmark decision of introducing English language education in the country, initiatives of the government as well as social reformers and political leaders resulted in the establishment of first English school in Puri in November 1835. This school hired a teacher from Calcutta. In the beginning, 25 pupils were admitted. The Presidency's General Committee on Public Education maintained control over the school. The school's student population steadily grew, reaching 75 in 1838-39. However, the Education Committee did not support the maintenance of the school in Puri citing a dearth of qualified instructors. In reality, the provincial government was unwilling to make substantial financial investments in the expansion of educational opportunities in Orissa. Henry Ricketts, the Commissioner, criticised the government for neglecting education in Orissa. He proposed a quick government aid for a school in Cuttack. In addition to that Henry Ricketts wrote a letter to the Government, "There is no place in our dominions where liberality and assistance on the part of the Government is more called for and I earnestly recommend that the same aid should be afforded as has been asked for Cuttack. We owe this province a debt which will be best paid by liberally supporting the proposed schools" (Samal 1). For a long period, the situation remained unchanged. Though there were a few schools established during 1841-1854, they were, to a large extent, inadequate and ineffective to fulfil the demands.

In the year 1844, Henry Harding's decisions resulted in the establishment of a number of English language schools all over the Bengal Presidency. In response to this, a total of eight schools teaching in the English medium were established in three different districts of Odisha. However, majority of the parents showed apprehension to enrolling their children in these schools owing to their preconceived notions about the religious practises in such

schools. The fact that most of these schools were under the control of Christian Missionaries further added to the disapproval.

In 1854, modern education was first introduced in Odisha through Wood's Despatch. It established a detailed education growth plan. It proposed a distinct education department, universities, a grant-in-aid system, and Anglo-Vernacular education. Odisha slowly benefited from the government's educational agenda (Panigrahi and Pal 4).

Odisha being considered a conservative state, women's education was not given due importance. Earlier the modes of education such as Chhatasali, Gurukul, and others in practice, but women were hardly allowed into public places. According to *Utkal Deepika* dated 21st May 1881, there were some aristocratic families that were imparting education at home, but they were not interested in allowing their women to go to any public places. People began to campaign for the education of women in the latter half of the nineteenth century. *Utkal Deepika* dated 18th November 1882 published a letter on "Women's Education" stating that, "If you want to develop the country, and if you want educate your children, you should give attention to the education and upliftment of the women. We hope, the educated Odia will try their best to give education to women" (6). Gourishankar Ray, the founder and editor of *Utkal Deepika* dated 10th October 1868 that only through education women can be confident enough to raise their voice against odds. He also mentioned that the efforts of intellectuals of Hindu society regarding women's education was limited to thoughts and words. He further mentioned that a woman should not be deprived of education. Through education they can bring development to the society (Das 400). In the year 1871, a Girls' School named Hindu Balika Vidyalaya was established in Cuttack with a few girl students. *Utkal Deepika* dated 30th September 1871 states that a nation's growth depends on its women's education, and co-education can bring equality in society.

Further, the journal states that “If a mother is not educated, then a nation cannot be developed in its true sense, and we should be giving more priority to women’s education” (7th July 1877). The *Utkal Deepika* continued to publish a series of articles on women’s achievements which influenced Reba Ray to start a monthly journal named *Asha* in 1892. Reba Roy says, “The motto of this journal is neither to promote any litterateur nor to propagate any religion, but to spread female education in Orissa” (1). This was the first women’s journal in Odisha by a woman as the editor. The *Utkal Deepika* dated on 23rd January 1892 states that a woman can understand women’s problems and issues and can deliver a better message to the readers. The main motive of this journal was to create consciousness among women. *Sambalpur Hiteishini* dated 12th August 1891 emphasised that homemakers must be educated as they have many responsibilities at home and that a man should not be silent in this regard. It may be noted that primary education for women started around 1905 on a large scale. *The Progress of Education in the Orissa Division*, a report by the Commissioner of Orissa dated 31st March 1907, states that, “Women’s Education made a remarkable advance during the last five years, the number of girls under the institution, both in the girl’s and boy’s schools having doubled.”(4). Odia drama has also showcased the issue of women’s education in many plays and some of them were women-centric plays such as *Sati* (1866) by Jaganmohan Lal, Ramashankar Ray’s *Kalikala* (1883), *Kanchi Kaveri* (1888), *Bishamodak* (1900), *Kanchanmali* (1904) *Lilavati* (1912), *Savitri* (1917) by Ashwini Kumar Ghosh, *Sadhaba Jhia* (1948) by Adwaitya Chandra Mohanty, *Lakhysaheera* (1956) by Karthik Kumar Ghosh, *Ehi Juga Ra Jhia* (1957) by Bhanja Kishore Patnaik, *Sukhanya* (1978) by Nilakanta Mishra, *Krushna* (1985) by Chandrashekhar Nanda, *Pingala Sahita Gotie Rati* (1980) by Purna Mallick. They played a crucial role in promotion of women’s education, women’s empowerment and awareness on social issues.

Modern Odia Drama: The Western Influences (New Drama Movement)

Though many scholars have discussed the history of modern Odia drama, a systematic study of modern Odia drama written by women has not been taken up yet. The initial works on Odia drama and theatre which were contextualised by Birakishore Das's *Juge Juge Natya Sahitya* (The Drama for the Different Ages 1972), Kalicharan Patnaik's autobiography *Kumbhara Chaka* (The Wheel) (1975), Kulamani Raut's *Odia Natya Sahitya O Ramashankar* (Odia Drama literature and Ramashankar) (1983), Kartik Ghosh's *Odisha Rangamancha O Mora Nata Jibana* (Theatre of Odisha and My Drama Life) (1977), Hemanta Kumar Das's *Odishara Rangamachara Bikasha Dhara* (Development of Theatres in Odisha) (1997), *Odia Natya Sahitya Bikasha Dhara* (Development of Odia Drama Literature) (1981), and Ramesh P. Panigrahi's *Perspectives on Odissi Theatre* (1998), offer thoughts on history of Odia drama and theatre in a lucid manner but postmodern discourse analysis is absent. Sarbeswar Dash's book *Odia Natya Sahitya* (Odia Drama Literature) (1981) examine the trends and development of colonial and post-colonial Odia drama. According to the *Encyclopaedia of Indian Literature: Devraj to Jyoti*,

This period (1950-60) was be named as the 'golden age' of modern Oriya drama. There were four professional stages in Orissa during that period which gave ample opportunity to new dramatists to stage their plays. Different social problems have found place in the drama of that period. But mainly the middle-class family and its various problems have attracted the dramatists. A struggle between the eastern and the western cultures was taken as the common factor in most of the drama, designed both for preaching and entertainment (1094).

Odia theatre accepted a new trend in the mid-60s rejecting the traditional colonial trend of theatre. Novelty of research in drama composition, a new theatrical language and

expression changed the practice of theatre. Odia drama witnessed changes on the lines of western writers such as Henrik Ibsen, Anton Chekhov, Bertolt Brecht, Samuel Beckett, and Arthur Miller. Playwrights like Manoranjan Das, Biswajit Das, Bijay Mishra, Ratnakar Chaini and Kartik Rath introduced a new language of theatre. It marked the beginning of new contemporary Odia theatre (Rout 84). Meanwhile, the dramatic society of Ravenshaw College staged four plays which were adopted from Hauptmann's *Weavers*, Galsworthy's *Strife*, Chekhov's *The Cherry Orchard* and Ostrovsky's *The Diary of a Scoundrel* during 1955-58 (Datta 1094). Adaptation played a key role in Odia drama. Many major writings were adapted from English to Odia. Ramashanakar Ray's *Banamala* (1881) was an Odia adaptation of Shakespeare's play *The Tempest* (Datta 1091). Plays like *Caligula* as *Samrat* (1972), *Inspector General* as *Pratapgada-Ra-Di Dina* (1967) by Biswajit Das, *Othello* as *Othello* (1945) by Mayadhar Mansinha, *Crime and Punishment* as *Kadei* (1957) by Ashwini Kumar Ghosh, *A Doll's House* as *Kandhei Ghara* (1964) by Upendra Kumar Das, *Prisoner of Zenda* as *Gopana Katha* (1962) by Byomkesh Tripathy, *An Inspector Calls* as *Sagar Manthan* (1964) by Manoranjan Das were some of the famous plays translated into Odia. Some women writers also translated Hindi, Bengali and English works into Odia. Sulochana Devi translated Shakespeare's Plays in the form of stories in 1937, Annapurna Devi translated Narahari Parikh's *Taruni Kanya Prati* and *Stripurusa Maryada*. Sitadevi Khadanga translated Rabindranath Tagore's novel *Ghore Baire*, Shanti Devi translated *Lauha Kapat* by Jarasandha. Nihar Mohapatra and Uma Das translated Premchand's *Nari Jiban ki Kahania* and *Nirmala*. Louis Fischer's famous book *The Life of Mahatma Gandhi* was translated by Shanti Pattnaik as *Bapu Jibani O Sandes*, Narmada Kar translated Leo Tolstoy's works and published them as *Bandi*, *Bibada Bhanjana*, *Parinama*, *Dandabidhana*, *Trusna*, *Kuhuka* and *Santi*, etc. Ivan Turgenev's *Dream* was translated as *Swapna* and *Peter Bell* as *Bideshi Kavyagrantha* by Narmada Devi (Rout 82).

Odia theatre experienced a great transformation towards the end of 1950s. This transformation brought a new thinking that emanated from the West, more specifically from the 'Theatre of the Absurd'. The theatre of the absurd was born as Europe was experiencing the post war effect of loneliness, helplessness and alienation. A few writers took the same theme in their plays and gave Odia theatre a new direction. With this the New Theatre Movement started in Odia in 1950s. Manoranjan Das pioneered this movement and wrote his first experimental play *Agami* (1950). It introduced the audience to several new concepts. Western texts like Eugene O' Neill's *Emperor Jones* (1920), T.S. Eliot's "Burnt Norton" in *Four Quartets* (1943) influenced Manoranjan Das. He tried to use the technique of stream of consciousness, time as flux hypothesis, and the concept of eternity in his plays. His play *Aranya Fasal* (1950) set the trend for new drama in Odisha (Tripathy 24).

A new amateur theatre group was formed in 1963 named *Srujani* by Ananta Mahapatra. He tried to introduce new concepts that were a blend of western and indigenous cultures. Theatre became a matter of social prestige for the ruling class. Some kings established their own theatre companies and some others patronised theatre companies during nineteenth century. *Odia Theatre through Decades* by Anant Mahapatra discussed how the theatre companies gradually disappeared. Heavy-headedness, nepotism, partiality, selfishness, and mismanagement weakened some theatre companies and later they dissolved or collapsed (207). In 1960s, the Odia dramatists started *Naba Natya Andolan* (The New Drama Revolution) against the prevalent conventional theatrical practices and norms set for the audience.

A close look at the Odia dramas during this period shows the social divisions and emergence of a new social class in the colonial Indian society. The social stratification was gradually seen at various levels of human psychology and the socio-psychological attitudes

were also reflected in Odia drama. Modernism in Odia drama discovered its expression in the writings of Jaganmohan Lala, Ramasankar Ray, Bhikari Charan Pattnaik, Aswini Kumar Ghosh, Bhanja Kishore Pattnaik, and Kalicharan Pattnaik among other dramatists. They were the dramatists who brought out massive changes in Odia drama tradition. The new era of Odia drama not only sought to challenge the establishment in dramatic forms but also made changes in choosing the themes and contents of the drama. The primary focus of these writers was to represent the social issues in a dramatic form that is accessible to common people and can sensitise about the social evils.

One of the major themes for Odia dramatists was the portrayal of the conduct of women in Odia domestic life to accentuate gender discrimination and entangle the social reality in their drama. It was one of the most fertile grounds for interpretation of modernity and struggle for women's identity. This is an attempt to analyse and establish a link between modernity and the position of women in Odia drama. As it has been well defined, drama is basically a socio-cultural construct, and it represents various ways of perceiving and expressing reality reflected in society. The present study seeks to highlight the way in which modernity entered Odia drama and how the male playwrights presented social realities in Odia drama.

Transformation in the society and changes in the tastes and attitudes of the audience alienated Odia theatre. Technological advancements in cinema attracted mass audience and offered an alternative medium of mass entertainment for the common people. Some leading actors like Samuel Sahu and directors and mentors like Ananta Mahapatra's contributions in analysing both the alternative mediums of popular entertainment and refurbishing the process of theatre for the Odia audience is noteworthy. However, inspite of these efforts, Odia theatre as a commercial endeavour could not sustain as most of these theatre companies were colosed

down by 1970s. It is sad to note that Odia theatre has not been able to re-emerge as commercially sustainable since then.

Lately, Odia dramatists have attempted to revive the unique folk forms in Odia literature and drama by introducing music, dance, humour while bringing stories from myths, legends, and history to revive Odia theatre. In the 1960s, Manoranjan Das had introduced experimental theatre into Odia theatre. This tradition was carried forward by writers like Bijay Mishra, Biswajit Das, Kartik Rath, Ramesh Prasad Panigrahi, Pramod Kumar Tripathy, Ratnakar Chaini, Ranjit Patnaik, and Purna Chandra Mallick. Pramod Tripathy and Purna Chandra Mallick's contribution to the growth and development of the immensely popular and thought-provoking Lok Nataka (folklore) on social issues and the commitment to reform the system and society is well-recognised. Though commercially modern theatre movement was a failure, it still exists in different amateur theatre units and in different drama competitions. However, unlike these modern theatres, the commercialised *Jatras* have had their economic success.

Group theatres and dramatists now struggle hard for their existence. The proscenium stage is slowly disappearing, and its place is increasingly occupied by *Jatra*. Occasionally, a traditional play is performed on an improvised platform in rural areas. Odia theatre in the recent days has gained a massive alteration. In the absence of professional theatre in Odisha, amateur groups form the only source of hope for Odia theatre.

Women and Representation of Social Class

It is a well-known fact that the nineteenth century was considered an era of social reform movements, i.e., women's education, child marriage, widow remarriage, sati system, and polygamy which were the central issues all over India. Geraldine Forbes in *The New Cambridge History of India* explained that nineteenth-century male reformers viewed women

as their subject- to be changed through argument, social action, education, and legislation (4). As Elaine Showalter says, “Women are estranged from their own experience and unable to perceive its shape and authenticity, in part, because they do not see it mirrored and given resonance in literature” (111). Although women were featured in men’s narratives, they only appeared in roles that were determined by men. The society in Odisha played a significant role in the development of women. According to *Utkal Deepika* dated 29th March 1873, “The Odias were conservative. They disliked any societal change. They strongly opposed western cultures” (23). Odisha was regarded as one of the most important religious centres. Ritualism and superstitions may have contributed to the people's conservatism, particularly among women. W.W. Hunter’s book *Orissa* observes that “From time immemorial the Odias have been the priest-ridden race kept in subjection by the Brahmin and Gurus and subjection to all the influences of religious superstitions and caste prejudice” (139-140). Several superstitions prevalent in Odia society got reflected in Odia drama during that period. The next chapter will examine modern Odia drama's emphasis on social themes and gender discrimination.

The tradition of Odia drama and various aspects have been critically discussed to introduce the themes and perspectives of Odia drama. The origin and development of Odia drama have been analysed in this chapter to trace the historical journey of Odia drama and theatre. This chapter also highlighted the influence of western and eastern dramatic traditions. The Odia language movement, literary activities of missionaries, translation of Odia drama, contemporary social and political factors are given special attention in this context. In fact, the new Odia women writers and their literary contributions which have been discussed in subsequent chapters are founded on the pillars of social reforms and other factors as discussed in this chapter. The next chapter details the contribution of male playwrights in highlighting women’s issues through their plays.

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Chapter 3

Women as Characters and Themes

The present chapter explores the significance of women as characters and themes in twentieth century Odia drama. An analysis of the major plays by the selected playwrights undertaken in the present chapter would offer an insight into the Odia society and the emergence of women characters as central figures. The chapter deals with the portrayal of women and their role within the family and the twentieth century Odia society as depicted by some of the major playwrights of Odisha. Five male playwrights have been selected for this study, namely, Ramshankar Ray (1857-1931), Kalicharan Pattnaik (1898-1978), Gopal Chhotray (1916-2003), Manoranjan Das (1923-2013), and Bijay Mishra (1936-2020), who are considered the trendsetters in Odia drama. These playwrights have contributed immensely to the growth of Odia drama and are known for the variety of themes and issues that they depicted in their plays. The Odia drama during this period (1900-1999) highlighted the issues of poverty, dowry system, caste and class divide in the society, women's empowerment and social emancipation, and encouraged demolition of feudal order. The portrayal of rural life in contrast to the life in towns and cities reflects the social realities of caste and class oppression. These playwrights have brought out a radical change in Odia drama tradition. This change can be observed not only in the form of dramatic presentation but also in the choice of themes and contents of the drama.

The first Odia theatre was established in 1875 at Kotpada. In 1877, the first modern Odia drama *Babaji* by Jaganmohan Lala (1838-1913) was staged and that changed the whole scenario of the Odia theatre. His second play, *Sati*, was about a woman who struggled to maintain her honour in the face of deceitful advances made by a king. The struggle against power and the vindication of her chastity forms the plot of the play. Lala as a dramatist not only portrayed the day-to-day struggles of women but also examined various kinds of

oppression and their impact on women. The story of *Sati* deals with the realities of colonial Odia society in which zamindars oppressed and exploited poor women from peasant families. It was not new for women to be treated as commodities and objects of entertainment and sexual exploitation. Since the mythological days of *The Mahabharata* and stories of King Harishchandra, women have been treated as a property to be owned, sold, and gambled with. Ironically, at the same time, they are also considered as the torch-bearers of family reputation.

Patriarchy emerges in different ways, including gender inequalities, hierarchies, and the devaluation of women in society. The issue of patriarchy and the role of patriarchal institutions like family, marriage, religion, and motherhood in oppressing women by regulating their sexuality and bodies, and restricting them to gendered roles of compassion, nurture, and passivity are represented in the plays composed during this period. The issue of patriarchy working through social agencies to limit women's rights and freedoms, ultimately lowering their social position is also depicted in the drama of this time. Women have been portrayed as both revolutionaries and subdued characters in the drama. Women's subordinate status was first brought to light by some radical feminists in the Second Wave of the Feminist Movement, who asserted that patriarchy's social and cultural institutions (the family, the church, and the academy) were to blame, as well as their claim that the 'personal is political,' thereby locating the family and the sexual identities formed within it, as the primary site of power relations (Rosemarie 3). Kate Millet was one of the founding members of the radical feminist movement, which was later joined by Radical feminists such as Shulamith Firestone, Mary Daly, Marilyn French, and others who asserted that “the roots of women's oppression are buried deep in patriarchy's sex/gender system” (Rosemarie 95). According to Kate Millet, “masculinity” is seen as the dominant and “femininity” as the submissive in patriarchal ideology. Further, Millet says, “This ideology is particularly effective since

through conditioning, men typically acquire the apparent assent of the exact women they oppress” (27). Kamla Bhasin’s *Understanding Patriarchy* defines patriarchy as “male dominance, power relationships in which men rule women, and a system in which women are kept submissive in many ways” (4). Patriarchy is a power structure that believes men are superior to women. Different agencies including the state, law and politics manifest it in diverse forms of discrimination, inequality and hierarchy. Sylvia Walby defines patriarchy as “a system of societal structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress, and exploit women” (56). The African American feminist Bell Hooks define patriarchy as:

A political-social system that insists that males are inherently dominating, superior to everything and everyone deemed weak, especially females, and endowed with the right to dominate and rule over the weak and to maintain that dominance through various forms of psychological terrorism and violence (77).

Bell Hooks also draws attention towards the damage caused by patriarchy to the women as well as the society in general. Gerda Lerner in her book *The Creation of Patriarchy* emphasises the role and importance of family in creating a hierarchical system that reflects the existing hierarchy in the society. The patriarchal social system not only validates the existing hierarchy but also reinforces it training the new generations in that social order. Culture, religion, caste, and social class are just a few of the variables that have had a significant impact on this system, especially in India. According to Uma Chakravati, historically, caste and gender hierarchies shaped Indian patriarchy. The brahmanical code maintained caste and gender hierarchies, reinforcing the patriarchal society.

Significantly, the women have been bound by these laws since birth and are required to fulfil certain predetermined positions in society. Men are considered superiors in society,

and they afford a wide range of rights and freedom. They see themselves as both the creators and the destroyers of civilization, and they take great pride in this. Women must fulfil certain pre-set roles to be considered successful in society. Their personalities are determined by their roles. And the services they provide to men determine their character and behaviour. Women play the roles of a wife, a sister, a friend, and a mother, but they seldom receive the recognition that they deserve, despite fulfilling their obligations. Although women have many responsibilities at home and outside, men have power and strength since they work in outside. They want to express themselves and their feelings, but they are unable to do so because they live in a marginalised society. In Henrik Ibsen's play *A Doll's House*, Nora raises her voice:

Helmer: First and foremost, you are a wife and mother

Nora: That I don't believe anymore. I believe that first and foremost, I am an individual, just as much as you are.

In British Literature, since the Age of Chaucer to postmodern, women have been measured as property and as objects of enjoyment. Shakespeare had great heroines who broke the old image of woman and also broke the bar of stereotypes, some of them being Julia from *Gentleman of Verona*, Portia from *The Merchant of Venice*, and Rosalind from *As You Like It*. Although the playwrights tried to break the stereotypes and barriers through portrayal of their characters, society was reluctant to accept that until something magnificent happened. In Victorian era, women did not have the right to vote, many women had taken to prostitution for survival. In the late eighteenth century, there occurred a revaluation of women's empowerment. All the literary creations showed a great interest in women and their private lives. Whether they were men writers or women writers, they showed great enthusiasm for women-related. Both men and women writers tried their best to bring out the real issues faced by women.

In the Indian context, the influence of British literature was immense which was visible in Indian fiction and non-fiction. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, writers were deeply concerned about social evils, gender roles, cultural hegemony and the taboos existing in Indian society. Their concern to highlight those social evils and sensitise the public for a rational examination of such traditions and practices are evident from a number of plays written during this period. The twentieth century male playwrights had resurrected the role of women in their plays. Asif Currimbhoy, Girish Karnad, Vijay Tendulkar and others not only presented the problems faced by women in feudal-patriarchal societies, but also represented strong women who confronted the oppressive forces. For instance, Jennie in Asif Currimbhoy's *Darjeeling Tea* confronts the oppressive patriarchal notions about the home-bound women.

Jennie: (Stung for no apparent reason) Mac, I don't believe in occupying myself like other women do with the house and (Changes the word and says)...parties...

Mac: (cautiously) whether it is. I like to see you like this.

Jennie: (Again aggressive, self-conscious, nervous for no reason) I mean ...I am....somewhat different....as a woman....you might say (Currimbhoy 22).

Asif Currimbhoy gives more leverage to his women and creates an exceptional role in constructing women's identity. The contemporary circumstances were the reason for the creation of these women-centric plays. Like him, Girish Karnad also took the trend to the highest level through mythological stories. His stories are borrowed but the contemporary touch he gives to the stories enables them to generate different perspectives. His plays like *Yayati* and *Naga Mandala* outline the issues of women rights, obligations and justice. Chitrlekha from *Yayati* spews her comments against male chauvinism in marriage, expressing her rage, aggravation, and irritation.

Chitralekha: I didn't know Prince Pooru when I married him. I married him for his youth, for his potential to plant the seed of the Bharat in my womb. He does not possess any qualities for which I married him. But you do (Karnad 65).

Evidences of assertions of their role forced the society to take note of the potential and demands of women, albeit with reservations that had foundations in traditional values and customs. The role of women expanded to public spheres in addition of to responsibilities of family and society. The traditional responsibilities were not to be shed but accompanied in their pursuit of individuality. Writings of Currimbhoy and Karnad reflect the changing perspectives of the society towards women. Similarly, Vijay Tendulkar's characterisation of sentimental yet self-assertive women presents the reality of male-hegemonic society as well as the struggle of women towards an equitable and just society guaranteeing fair opportunity to establish their own identity. The self-assertive woman in the Indian plays is often credited to influence of Western drama. Tendulkar's *Silence! The Court is in Session* (1967) which is the English version of '*Shantata! Court Chalu Ahe*' raises some significant questions which sparked the women movement. Women were trying to come out from the conventional roles of domestic sphere and taking their stand on public affairs. But societal traumas and religious pressures did not let them be free. The protagonist of this play, named Leela Benare, voices her self-assertion, her desires with the intention of breaking the norms and attacking the patriarchy.

Benare: They are holding an enquiry, if you please! But my teaching's perfect. I have put my whole life into it. I have worn myself to a shadow in this job! Just because of one bit of slender, what can they do to me? My life is my own. I have not sold it to anyone for a job! My will is my own. My wishes are my own" (Tendulkar 5).

During this period, Male dramatists dominated the Indian theatre, whereas number of women dramatists was mostly negligible. The early Indian drama represented women in stereotyped ways. But with the advent of nationalism, writers like Mohan Rakesh, Badal Sircar, Vijay Tendulkar, Girish Karnad and others tried to create a new identity for women. These male writers, on the other hand, object to being referred to as feminists. However, they consider themselves to be humanists, and they believe that it is their responsibility to advocate on behalf of women. They try to convey their emotions. Although they have not always justified the role of women, they have sought to describe the woman's world in a way that makes them relatable to build their own identity.

The late nineteenth century and early twentieth century witnessed emergence of many professional and amateur theatres such as The Radhakanta Theatre (1875), The Kotpada Theatre (1875), The Padmanav Theatre (1890), The Bikram Theatre (1910), The Usha Theatre (1913), and The Basanti Theatre (1910), etc. They were established and simultaneously gained popularity in Odisha. Many historical, mythological, biographical, and social plays were staged in these theatres highlighting social issues of that time.

According to the history of Odia literature, Odia literary scenario was highly active during this period. This was also the time when the atmosphere was charged with powerful socio-political movements, i.e. the advent of Gandhi, the struggle for separate identity for Odias, the Marxist ideology's influence, which had a wide-ranging and profound effect on the people of Odisha. This was the time of 'Sabuja Andolana' or 'Green Movement' and 'Nabajuga Sahitya Sansad' or 'The Literary Association of the New Age' which are considered as a poetic movement and literary movement in Odia literature respectively. (Mohanty 352). *Basanti* (1931) a notable novel written in the early twentieth century was published in the journal *Utkal Sahitya*. *Basanti* is a fine literary creation to Odia fiction from the Sabuja period of literature.

Participation of women in social movements grew significantly with spread of education. Women from various sectors were directly implicated in these events and processes, both as active participants and as victims of uncontrollable conflagrations. The term woman came up frequently in the nineteenth century arguments over the creation of modern India. Women's engagement in various mass movements, particularly at the pan-Indian level, has frequently contributed to the dismantling of communal barriers and the eradication of traditional gender roles, while also assisting in the consolidation of a nascent nationalist consciousness. Women's issues turned out into major concerns in the nineteenth century reform movements. Reformers focused on issues like sati, women's education, and widow re-marriage rights, raising the minimum age for marriage, and polygamy during this phase. The status of Indian women and their right to dignity formed the heart of the social reform movement of this era, and it was this that laid the foundation for the subsequent struggle for women's suffrage and equal rights for all. However, the reformers were mostly male with pioneered efforts to construct institutions for women's education. These initiatives spawned a group of educated women who would subsequently become active in various fields and even lead the feminist movement by the turn of the century (Mazumdar 328-329).

One of the most essential aspects of the nineteenth century social reform movement was its narrow social base, consisting mostly of upper-class and the rising, western-educated Indian middle classes, which flourished under British colonial control and in some ways benefited from British rule. The Bengal Renaissance's social inconsistencies and limitations may be best represented during the 1857 phase, when the reformers and the exploited and impoverished peasantry, along with the rulers, fought the "First War of Indian Independence". However, social reformers like Jyotiba Phule and Periyar Ramaswami Naicker in the 1920s and 1930s opposed the Brahmanical patriarchal system which led to the

assumption that the women's question was no longer on the nationalist agenda during the later phase of colonial history, that is, from the mid-to-late nineteenth century.

All the regional languages played their significant role in bringing out the problems of the tribal women in the broad mirror and what made it possible was the translation. Other regional writers of India did their part of bringing social evils into the broader arena. Odia writers also came forward and tried their hand in it. In the late nineteenth century, the need for a history of Odia literature was articulated with a mounting sense of urgency. Attempts were made to move beyond Upendra Bhanja and expand the Odia literary canon by situating Odia authors in a longer historical time frame of possibilities. When Manmohan Chakravarti brought religious poems into literary history and criticism, it was very helpful. In the early decades of the twentieth century, many contributors to the *Utkal Sahitya* devoted their energies to trace the origin of Odia language and literature. Notable among them were Mohini Mohan Senapati (1881-1845), who wrote a perspective essay on “Odia folk tales “(1902), and Tarini Charan Rath (1883-1922).

The twentieth century Odia writers did a tremendous job by critiquing superstitions, taboos and social issues in the public domain. Men and women writers of Odisha were concerned about the details of domestic life in every nook and corner of Odisha. From class system, cultural identity, caste system, child marriage to women's education, gender equality, they had collectively brought out most of the problems in the Odia society. They examined people's responses, emotions and feelings to their circumstances from close quarters. They brought Odia life and Odia consciousness to the forefront in their writings. Odisha was rich in its culture and heritage and the impact it had on the people of Odisha was immeasurable. People tried to accept modernity not only in literature but also in their lives. With the growth of nationalism, people understood the real problems that existed in the society and tried to resolve them, while the writers played a crucial role in this endeavour. Growing literacy rate

and exposure to ideas of emancipation motivated people towards social change. In the inaugural issue of the *Utkal Sahitya*, its editor Biswanath Kar announced a truce in the battle between the champions of tradition and advocates of modernity. The following observation reveals Biswanath's judiciously balanced perspective:

It will be utterly foolish to resist the forces of progress out of blind loyalty to the past. At the same time, however, it would be equally terrible to discuss ancient traditions out of immoderate admiration for the modern. Only those who can successfully negotiate between these two worlds are wise. The great and the good in all enlightened ages and developed lands have upheld this ideal. So long as we remain alive we would sincerely follow this golden precept (Kar 2).

The Odia people were battling with a crisis related to their identity and self-assertion. Education and the national movement inspired them to become consciousness about their search for their identity. The two leading literary periodicals of the early twentieth century in Odisha, The *Utkal Sahitya* and *The Mukur* have been rightly described as the training ground for the new writers. Several new literary forms such as the novel, short story, sonnet, lyric and essay were zealously nurtured by these periodicals. A substantial body of new literature awaited sustained critical attention. The function of the critic, thus, consisted of revising the old criteria of evaluation, forging new ones and explaining innovation.

Twentieth century writers like Ramshankar Ray, Kalicharan Pattnaik, Gopal Chhotray, Bijay Mishra and Manoranjan Das have raised their voices against all the forms of discriminations in society through their writings. The evolution of machines and electronic equipment in media and television made their work highly popular among the people of Odisha and abroad. The All India Radio had been a medium to spread the voices of Odia

people to every corner of the state. These developments had a considerable impact on the consciousness of women inspiring them to strive towards an equitable society. They were able to articulate about their rights and also consolidate the demands aligning them with broader reform movements as well as the nationalist movement. Both men and women empathised with the suffering women and asserted the need for social transformation. However, most of these could only touch upon the periphery of women's psyche and sensibility while representing the women's concerns as their portrayals came out of their observation but not out of experience.

Ramshankar Ray (1857-1931) was a major playwright who gave a forceful lead to Odia drama at the turn of the century. He was born at Dixitpada village of Cuttack district. In 1878, he saw a Bengali drama which influenced him to write drama in Odia. He started writing drama in Odia on historical, mythological and social themes based on Odia patriotism, identity and socio-cultural aspects. He followed the Shakespearean style of writing. He adapted *The Tempest* as *Batiabala* in 1882. Most of his drama tried to reform the Odia society and culture. His themes were based on alcoholism, intoxication, old-age marriage, women's education, unemployment, dowry system and others. His main goal was to create a consciousness of Odia identity among the audience. He was one of those who fought for Odia Language Movement (Mohanty 316).

Many plays started emphasising on social issues and gender discrimination with the advent of modern education and awareness. Ramshankar Ray's *Kanchanmali* (1904) reveals the perception of gender division and the hierarchical power structure between man and woman of the colonial Odisha. Through this play, he introduces women's education and inter-caste marriage which were prohibited during that period. He basically deals with the social position of women against the religious beliefs and practices in the colonial Odia society. Through his play, Ray tries to break the barriers of gender and caste with the lead

character Kanchanmali, a young girl from a fishing community, projected as a revolutionary, independent, educated girl who wins accolades from the king for her knowledge, intellect and courage. The king decides to promote women's education by opening a school for girls under the guidance of Kanchanmali. She goes on to break the barrier of caste system by getting married to an upper caste man, Suryamani and protesting the social stigma. She catches the thieves and sends them to prison with the help of a young man, Suryamani, in the court of the king, Prataparudra. And she also makes it clear to Suryamani that she herself can handle any situation, she's not ashamed of her femininity. She proclaims that she considers it an abuse if she is called delicate. (Sc 4 p 12). In recognition of the braveness of Kanchanmali, the king ties a royal costume to her head and at the same time, the king assures her to establish a girls' school in the village under the her Kanchanmali. The play challenges the existing traditions and shows the reformist agenda of Ramshankar Ray. Kanchanmali can be called the new woman who refuses to fit into the debilitating models of femininity inflicted on women. As Sisir Das describes, "Ray was a dramatist of real merit, constantly experimenting with new themes and new forms, constantly in search of new areas of human experience, noble in intention, catholic in mind and rooted to his own heritage" (280).

Similarly, Fakir Mohan Senapati's *Rebati* (1898) is based on women's education. In 1848, Savitribai Phule was promoting the cause of women's education in Pune, establishing the city's first girls' school. Fifty years later, through *Rebati*, the situation of women's education in Odisha is described by contextualising women's education in a superstitious society which believes that educating girl children brings misfortune to the family. (Mishra 2021). The most important question is whether women in India, particularly in rural regions, have been able to successfully overcome the difficulties that *Rebati* encountered. Fakir Mohan Senapati has attempted to uplift Odia culture and Odia womanhood through the story. This character's silence, courage, and seclusion in misery and poverty were all explained by

the author. Senapati brings out the aspirations of Rebati who dreams of love with her young tutor and at the same time her forbidden quest for education. The love and blame by the grandma towards Rebati, in fact, shows the perplexity of the society and women in particular towards women's education. (Sen and Ranjan 27).

Kalicharan Pattnaik (1898-1978) was a major figure in Odia drama. He belongs to Badamba village of Odisha. He had great interest in music and drama. He had his own Rasleela group and later he established *Orissa Theatres*, which was one of the major theatre groups of Odisha. He has done extensive research on Odissi dance form connecting with *Natyashastra*. He was the first one to bring women as participants on the stage and break the stereotype culture of Odisha. Most of his plays were based on social issues. He even wrote the script for the famous Odia movie *Sita Bibabha* which was influenced by the *Natyashastra*. He had used the concept of Rasas in the movie which makes it unique (Roy 105). Kalicharan Pattnaik's main aim was to bring the traditional folk form into a new modern form for the audience.

Kalicharan Pattnaik's *Girls' School* (1942) is based on the changing role of women in the society and the play presents the impact of education on women through two contrasting characters, Bela and Renu. The play is one of the most popular plays by the playwright due to its realistic portrayal of the newly-educated youths in the society (Chaini 524). It was staged for the first time in 1942 at the Odisha Theatre. The play is considered a path breaking creation resulting from the social awakening, struggle and rise of the intellectual debates at that time (Ojha 215). The *Girls' School* is a symbol of expansion of women's education and its impact on the society. The play *Girls' School* depicts two contrasting women characters who are relatable in their own ways while being poles apart from each other. The playwright tries to present the consequences of indiscipline, immoral, and arrogant behaviours in the modern educated youth in the society. The play also shows the positive side of the modern

education that makes women to be independent, self-sufficient, and confident in decision making. The character of Bela is presented as an ideal outcome of the education system who in contrast to Renu remains grounded and uses her education for betterment of the society and to support her husband. The play revolves around four characters, Sagar, Bela, and Rasika, and Renu who are romantically involved. Though Bela and Renu are in love with Sagar and Rasika respectively, the nature and commitment of the relationship are quite opposite and fall on either side of the societal acceptance. The writer creates two examples of extreme opposites in the form of Bela and Renu. The characters of the play reflect the societal perceptions in general and the playwright's in particular of the ideal woman and the prescribed behaviour for a woman. The boundary created for women is justified with the sufferings of Renu who is punished for her 'indiscipline' and 'shameless' behaviour. The society doesn't hold Rasika guilty of cheating in love, but blames Renu for getting pregnant before marriage. The vices of Rasika are considered acceptable while all the blame falls on Renu for being uncontrolled. The society teaches a lesson to Renu and all the crimes of Rasika are forgiven at the end reflecting the biased treatment towards the two genders.

The depiction of two women characters presenting two extremes may seem natural and the treatment dished out to both may seem justified, however, when compared to the male characters, the bias towards male-dominance, and the conservative notions towards women are quite evident. The women characters are presented as symbols of virtue and vice while they both just bear different personalities which are natural within their individual boundaries. The character of Renu is judged against the perceived image of a woman created by the society. Her behaviour is treated as 'shameful' as she goes beyond the acceptable actions for a woman and not an individual. Here, the playwright implicitly tries to create a framework of an ideal woman through Bela by creating an example of Renu for defying the

rules. The consequences faced by Renu are portrayed as the results of her own actions whereas the betrayal of Rasika is excused.

The story revolves around two women characters Bela and Renu and their story of creating identity in the society. Both are highly educated girls and they have their freedom to choose the options available to them. It is usually presumed that with education and unbridled freedom, a woman will bring shame to family and society. Pattnaik tries to change this perception of the society. Women are neither inferior to men nor they are superior to men but they are equal and have the right to take their own decisions. People make fun of women's freedom and liberation and treat women as their own subordinates. Bela and Renu created a special position in the heart of everyone through their exceptional performance in the society. In this male dominated society women's freedom is often seen as 'wrong' but women who really get freedom and understand the meaning of freedom create a bright future for the people around them. Bela is educated, well behaved and at the same time a shy girl. She believes in herself and knows what is right for her. On the other hand, Renu is a smart, liberated and rational woman who believes her freedom is the ticket to exercise all kinds of activities. The author emphasises, "In this modern society where in the name of school and college, women do wrong things, Bela stays positive and follows all her ethics and traditions" (56). A woman has no right to live a life of pride and she is not accepted by the society if she tries to break the societal rules. She has no right to take her own decisions. Bela strongly denies to go out for a movie when asked by Renu, Sagar and Rasika as she does not trust men. In this male dominated society women are afraid to trust a man, and hesitate to believe men, especially strangers. Her decision of not going out for a movie creates animosity between Bela and Renu but she is strong in her decision and in her belief in her culture and values. However, the society has no problem with a woman marrying a complete stranger selected by her family and she is expected to adjust with the stranger. From the very first

sight Sagar falls in love with Bela, and he does not irritate her but supports and understands her.

In modern times women's identity is a myth as they are expected to suppress all their dreams and follow the societal path all through their lives. In the name of freedom, many lose their true self and drag themselves to unfamiliar situations. For Renu her freedom creates a miserable condition drawing sympathy from the audience. Renu becomes pregnant by her lover Rasika and suffers a lot after being betrayed. It becomes a scandalous news in the hostel. With the misuse of her freedom, not only does she bring shame to the institution but also to her close ones. On the other hand, Bela creates an example for every girl who takes herself to be delicate. When she instructs Sagar to stay at home because Rasika is threatening his life, his attitude is like every other man who thinks he is more powerful and superior to women which reveals the image of women in the eyes of men. No matter how much educated they are or open minded they claim to be, they always have the preconception that women are meek and sensitive. This reflects in the words of Sagar, when he reiterates: Sagar: Oh! The meaning of your statement is that, I will become weak like you, will hide in corner from the fear of Rasika, and you will come and go like a man without any obstacles, Is it? Impossible (Sc 7 pp 65)

All the daring and fierce activities are the actions of men and only they are capable of such acts whereas women are born to stay at home. But Bela proves Sagar wrong and rebelliously comes to his house. Such step of a woman is totally outstanding. It is said that after marriage women lose their identity as well as freedom but if a woman is educated and comes to her own terms, she can do wonderful things. In her in-law's house Bela creates a special identity not as Sagar's wife or a Zamindar's daughter-in-law but as an educated woman who not only wants to take the village further but also uplift every individual through women's education. She is a perfect mixture of culture, value, morality and intelligence. She

is an inspiration for all the women out there. People think if a woman gets opportunity and education, she will corrupt the human civilization but Bela proves everyone wrong with her decisions. Everyone praises Bela for her decisions. As far as men are concerned, a woman is nothing more than an object to be played with, and then discarded. When Rasika abandons Renu and allows her to die in her current state, a similar scenario occurs. Renu suffers a lot in the hands of the people who consider her a commodity but against such odds she does not lose her hope and keeps moving as she does not wish to accept her defeat. Her life becomes void and meaningless. Her existence is a question for her and there is no option left for her. Despite this she does not depend on anybody, rather chooses her own path of living. She knows that this male dominated society only knows how to exploit women. Even though Bela and Renu are good friends, their relationship is never solid due to a number of lingering problems. Bela sends the letter and helps Renu to come out of the hell. Bela is very helpful and thinks of everyone. She even tries Renu and Rasika to get married. She builds a school for girls and teaches there. If a woman is educated and cultured, she can take the family as well as the whole civilisation further. Bela is the perfect example of it. A woman is neither weak nor naïve. In fact, she has the power and strength to face any situation, any adversity on her own, without anyone's help, Renu is the perfect example of this.

Kalicharan Pattnaik's *Bhata* (1944) deals with the peasant's life. It was written before the end of the Second World War. Sarala Devi states "It is my belief that *Bhata* announces a new Orissa into being based on new ideals. There is a great power in his pen and with that he can resurrect the fallen destiny of the poor Oriyas, exploited by nature and human beings" (9). The plot revolves around the peasants and their suffering at the hands of the colonial authorities. The author attempts to demonstrate cultural identity through the women characters in the drama. The peasants are portrayed by the author as helpless and voiceless people.

In the story, a young poor girl named Rama falls in love with Jayi, the son of the Zamindar Bir Bikram, and the two become engaged. The author attempts to bring attention to the social class system and its impact on women through the medium of the play. The Odia society is replete with many rules and regulations and the major part of the burden is on women. It does not matter which class a woman belongs to; she is always looked down upon by the male dominated society. The author tries to showcase the two women in the characters of Rama and Bijaya. Every culture, tradition, morals, and values are always against women in a patriarchal system. People always want their daughters, wives, mothers to be like Sita and Savitri but they never understand the inner turmoil they go through in their lives. In the name of caste, class and religion, women always suffer. Women are believed to be calm and sensitive in general. If anybody finds a woman disobeying the rule, she will surely be counted as an unidealistic woman. The protagonist Rama is a bonded labourer's daughter, used to be simple and submissive. She is an ideal woman. A woman has no freedom and she is confined to the household chores. She is there to obey her father and all the men in her family. Specifically, in a family, woman has all the responsibilities from doing household chores to taking care of her children, and even after all this, she is never admired or acknowledged in the family. Rama fulfils all the household responsibilities and takes care of her father. She is naive but not that much that she cannot raise her voice against any discrimination. She boldly opposes the servants of the landlord who try to take her father when her father fails to deposit the taxes. From their birth, women are taught to stay silent and not shout or smile publicly, Rama's attitude towards the suppression of her father in the hands of the servants of the landlord generates anger in those servants, especially Dama who secretly loves her. She doesn't fall a prey to him but strongly opposes him whenever he tries to harass her. Rama: Dama! Move back, it won't be good, will call out now (Sc 6 p-12).

The women are bound to play certain roles in the name of religion, culture and traditions and it is seen that often these are the reasons for women's suppression than the male attitude towards women. Class plays a great role in women's subjugation. Their class makes them more vulnerable and suffocated. Dama continuously chases her and tries to molest her. But here Rama's character is shown as a very strong person, who can raise her voice against the male dominated society. Her rebellious attitude towards Dama shows her strength and power. Due to her poor class, she could not take a stand for Jayi, who belongs to the upper class. Jayi wants to change the system through his liberal values. On the other hand, Bijaya, another woman character of the play, is portrayed as a well-educated modern girl who is more attracted towards a life of luxury. She loves to watch movies and go to theatre. She belongs to an upper-class family where women are treated on par with males. The entire play tries to show the class difference between the two women. One gets all the facilities and the other is kept suppressed and subjugated. But Rama tries to fight against all the odds and prove herself as an ideal woman. She tries to show the right path to the society by making all understand the superstition of class system and believe the value of individual freedom and happiness. Bijaya tries to teach everyone that individual life is important and one should take one's own decisions. They both create a special position in the society through their actions. The author in overall talks about the peasant's life and struggle but he twists it into another central theme of inter- caste marriage so that the readers could divert their attention to other themes.

Gopal Chhotray (1916-2003) was another eminent and popular writer of Odia Literature who has immensely contributed to the transformation of Odia theatre. He was born in Puranagar village of present Jagatsinghpur district in Odisha. For his impact on the directions and support to the industry, he is considered one of the chief architects of modern Odia Theatre. He shaped and changed the old form of Odia plays and brought major changes

in the theme and structure of Odia plays. He rescued Odia plays from the influence of neighbouring Bengal and Sanskrit influence. Gopal Chhotray dominated the Odia professional theatre for more than three decades. Beginning from 1946, he wrote more than 15 original stage plays and 8 adaptations of eminent Odia novels, most of which were a massive success in his professional career. There were days when many theatres of Cuttack used to stage his plays on a daily basis. He not only adapted works of renowned Odia novelists like Upendra Kishore Das's *Mala Janha*, Basant Kumari Pattnaik's *Amadabata*, Kanhu Charan Mohanty's *Jhanha* and Dr. Harekrushna Mahtab's *Pratibha* but also adapted Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay's *Ramer Sumati*, Henrik Ibsen's *Enemy of my People*, A. A. Milne's *Man in the Bowler's Hat*, Henry Fielding's *Mock Doctor* and the English thriller of R. Lance Hill's *The Evil that Men Do*. He received many state awards like Sarala Samman, Bisuva Samman and Governor's plaque of Honour (1991) and National Awards like Kendriya Sahitya Akademi Award in 1982 and Kendriya Sangeet Natak Akademi Award in 1987.

Gopal Chhotray's *Sankha Sindura* (1955) is based on the question of women's identity in the patriarchal framework. The plot of the play revolves around the life of Bani and Sarat, who are happily leading a conjugal life but with the entry of two other female characters, Madhavi and Lalita, the play takes a different turn. The play has used the elements like doubt, trust and hate to portray the relationships. The play revolves around three central characters, Bani, Lalita and Madhavi who try to find their space and identity in a male dominated society. They struggle to get the equal position in the society where women are marginalised and subordinated.

The ideology of 'pativrata,' which literally translates as "virtuous wife," has controlled the lives of women in Indian society. It has also contributed to the preservation of the patriarchal framework that gave rise to this ideology in the first place. The concept of

pativrata is the woman's unwavering love to her spouse. Pativratas should be willing to die for their husbands and should be true help in all aspects of their lives (Dhruvaranjan 89). This ideology also influenced the social structure to guarantee that women accepted their lower status in comparison to men. Perhaps more crucially, it served to strengthen the patriarchal structure of Indian society.

Bani, a homemaker is represented as an ideal Hindu woman, who considers her husband to be her God. She lives in an atmosphere where she cannot figure out her own existence. Bani tries to make everyone happy but she loses her own identity. In a patriarchal society, a woman is always looked down as an object to meet the others' needs. But here Bani is educated and tries to question her husband. Whenever she tries to ask any question to her husband, she is told to shut her mouth in the name of ethics. Chhotray tries to draw the attention of the audience to the patriarchal dominance on women in the twentieth century Odisha. Bani makes it a point to have her opinion heard on everything, which causes Sarat, her husband, to become tense and frustrated because she suddenly becomes demanding.

Chhotray tries to portray Lalita as a modern and powerful woman. Her rebellious attitude makes her character more powerful. She thinks herself equal to men and her dressing sense is ultra-modern compared to other women. She tries to instigate Bani to suspect her husband because she can take advantage out of it. She is legally separated from her husband. She does not reveal her personal life to anyone. She tries to move close to Sarat. On the other hand, Madhavi is the reason behind Bani's aggression. Madhavi is a courtesan but she wants to live a simple life, however, on the contrary, the prevalent society does not let her live her life. She is considered sinful and impure. Bani tries to restrain her husband from seeing Madhavi.

Bani: No, No, you don't know, wherever she goes, that place will be destroyed. Her breath will burn everything. Why did you go there? Why did you listen to her?

Madhavi's identity of being a prostitute's daughter creates problems for her to live peacefully in the society. Madhavi wants to shun that identity and create an identity of her own in the society. She wants to marry someone who can understand her and accept her.

These three characters Bani, Lalita and Madhavi revolt against the male dominated society and create their own identity in their own ways. Bani and Madhavi find their loyalty in the form of Sarat and Purusottam, whereas Lalita struggles to create a niche for herself. Although she is broken inside but not defeated yet, she holds the knife like a valiant warrior to kill anyone who come in her way. Her rebellion against male hegemony is not yet over. The author tries to create a mirror through his plays for the contemporary Odia society. The struggle for the individual space for happiness can be seen in the characters.

Gopal Chhotray's *Nasta Urvashi* (1956) is a play based on question of women's chastity. The play is about the main protagonist Urvashi, a well-educated village girl who is mortgaged by her father for a loan. As a woman, she has no right to choose her life partner. The suffering she went through is beyond description. The society points finger towards her character though she was the victim of a molestation, and blames her for the mishap. The society never questions man, the culprit. A woman's position in the society is always negligible. Even if people criticise, blame, and assassinate Urvashi's character, she is a strong young woman. According to the patriarchal society, a woman's identity lies in her virginity. If she loses her virginity, she loses her identity and character. But Urvashi comes out as a very strong and bold lady. She joins as a nurse and deals with the situation. After all the incidents, she recovers from her sufferings when she meets Gyan. She is very happy when she finds that he not only understands but also accepts her with her flaws. But this does not

last long. The patriarchal ideals influence Gyan to leave Urvashi. She again feels devastated but regains her strength. She fights against the society to preserve an identity of her own. She protests against Madan when he tries to come back to her life and attempts to molest her. This time she is not docile, rather she fights back. On the other hand, Gyan returns to Urvashi after realising his mistake. Gyan takes a stand against Madan and tries to tell him the reality of the problems that women face in society. As Gyan defends Urvashi with “She is not a clay toy Das Saheb”, the writer’s stand the changing status of women comes to the fore (Sc 7 pp 82).

When someone fights for herself, the real revolution begins. Women are the creators of their own fate. If a woman knows her worth, then no one can stop her from achieving her dream. Through the character of Urvashi, the author tries to narrate that a woman is not helpless or weak, she can fight with her own destiny to create a niche for herself. A woman is a prey and not the culprit in a rape case. The society needs to change its perception. This play was written around the time when mythology and history used to be the central themes of drama. Here the author tries to take reference from “The Mahabharata”, where Kunti faced the same problem when she lost her chastity. As a woman she had to hide her identity from the society and she never had the courage to tell the society what happened to her. But here the author tries to bring the same theme in a different way and as a social issue through the character of Urvashi. The title of the play *Nasta* means ‘wayward’ or ‘destroyed’ and *Urvashi* is the name of the girl. Despite Urvashi's life being ruined as a result of a vicious crime by an arrogant man, the society held her responsible for it. Mother Goddess is worshipped in various forms, but at the same time women are made to suffer as domestic slaves. C Neelima’s *Women’s Place in a Patriarchal Society: A Critical Analysis of Arundhati Roy’s The God of Small Things*, holds that “The suppression of women starts in their own house and is a consequence of a family and social mechanism that has evolved over centuries in traditional Indian Society” (38). Karthika V.K.’s “Re-reading the Myths of Female

Subjectivity: A Comparative Critiquing” states that “This notion of chastity is considered as a part of the pristine Indian culture which is different from the western culture which does not create a lot of difference between men and women” (45).

Manoranjan Das (1923-2013) was another influential Indian dramatists and pioneer of modernism in Odia literature. He belongs to the district of Cuttack in Odisha. After completion of his graduation, he joined All India Radio in 1942. He was known for his experimentalism and socio-political awareness in Odia drama. He has tried to depict the characters against the backdrop of social realities, modernity and contemporary challenges. Many of his writings have been translated into English. He is not only a dramatist but also a script writer known for his major contribution in the field of Odia cinema. *Smruti Sanlap* (A Dialogue with Memory) is Manoranjan Das' memoir about the development of Odia drama. Das's dramatic works blended Pani and Patnaik's greatest features with Western theatre. This led to a new theatre in Odisha that blended folk elements with modern methods. Das' plays inspired a future generation of dramatists. Das' memoir analyses the fall of the commercial Odia stage. Das was a significant contributor to the formation of Odisha's cultural policy as well as the establishment of institutions that encouraged the development of a strong sense of cultural identity. His vast skills as a dramatist, his engagement with policy-making processes at the national level, and his familiarity with Western theatre all assisted him in efficiently fulfilling this role (Mohanty and Nayak 1). He was a recipient of Sahitya Akademi Award (1971) and Padma Shri (2004).

Katha Ghoda of Manoranjan Das (1972) employs psychoanalytical approach. The play was written during the period of post-modernism. Among Odia genres, post-modernism influenced stories, novels, and poems rather than drama. One of the major reasons for this is the collapse of Odia theatre by 1980s. Some of the amateur groups in Odia drama attempted to revive the Odia drama, but to little success. During this period Western themes were used

in Odia drama. This is an experimental play where he has used the “geetinatya” or poetic style form in the play. The play attempts to show the life after marriage, how marriage affects psychologically both the genders and they become lifeless like wooden horses devoid of any emotional and human attachments. As human beings if we are not happy in our life, we feel suffocated. Same way, if we are not happy in our married lives, marriage becomes a burden to the respective couple, and it will lead to domestic violence and mental harassment. Sometimes the husband dominates the wife and vice versa. Here the play tries to question how marriage does affect more the psychological health than the physical. The author tries to explore various issues of violence and how society accepts oppression by the husband. It also raises questions about the ways in which gender-oppressive ideology and behaviour are maintained, regardless of an individual's level of education, social class, or political affiliation. It warns people how a successful marriage could be violent, oppressive and abusive. The story is about Deepa and the ways she undergoes subjugation, marital violence and identity crisis. The story depicts the hollowness and futile existence of a domestic life in Odia society. Women in Odia society basically have one purpose and that is to serve the family/men. According to the author, “In a Hindu-Odia house, domestic life is regarded as the most sensitive and important issue” (45). Deepa comes from a society where she is brought up as a submissive woman. She is trained to serve and worship her husband. In Odia household, women are considered ‘Gruha Laxmi’ whose only duty is to serve her family. Through the character the author tries to portray the typical Odia daughter-in-law’s life. The husband’s attitude towards wife are the outcome of the male hegemony. In mythology, women are generally challenged in favour of masculine societal norms. For example, *The Mahabharat* in Anushasan Parva Chapter 40 claims, “There is no creature more sinful than woman”. So, women are always instructed to be submissive, silent and subordinate. Further Virginia Saldanha’s “The Power of Religion over Women in India” comments:

Men have been dominant as recipients, interpreters and transmitters of divine messages, while women have largely remained passive receivers of teachings and ardent practitioners of the religious rituals. Attitudes developed around patriarchal interpretations of religious beliefs have defined and shaped the social and cultural contexts of Indian women resulting in their disempowerment and second-class status (01).

As pointed out by many writers, women's position as sub-ordinate and complementary to the men was an imposition by the patriarchal society rather than a natural differentiation. A common Indian woman identifies herself with her husband, father or son rather than with her own individuality and identity. Her life revolves around such social relations, trying to accommodate the demands from others and support others in carrying out their lives. Her dependency stems from the insecurity in the society and therefore she always searches for a support in her husband, father, and son (Friedan 72). Deepa's husband Pitamber does not think of her as a human being, rather considers her a maid servant. Deepa, like many Odia wives, struggles under her husband's authority. She tolerates and does not say a word in return. Many women in the household have to tolerate or bear the attitude of her husband as she cannot escape from the relationship for her own happiness. The relation between a husband and a wife is very crucial and sacred as described in the Vedas and Upanishads. Women have to be unconditional followers of their husbands. Pitamber's behaviour towards Deepa is the result of the liberation men get from society and culture. Deepa loses her child because of the physical assault by Pitamber. He treats his wife like an animal; he never understands her grief and feelings. He holds a hunter and beats Deepa; she tolerates it silently. She cannot break the bond between her and her husband as she gets social identity and economic support from him. The society will not accept if she breaks her marriage bond. The modern society cannot change the mindset of a man but it encourages the

idea of dominance in the minds of men. They become increasingly cruel and dominant to their wives. And wives oscillate between their hard reality and wish for freedom. She wants to break every bond to achieve eternity but her position as an ideal Odia wife stops her from doing this. Women are so much tied to the societal culture, tradition and values that it makes them suffocated. They seek a medium through which they can come out from the repressive situation. On the other hand, there are also women who break the old traditions of the society and create a new identity. Sikha is an educated, courageous and bold woman who believes in power. She dominates her husband which is not quite common in the society. Sikha and Arun are living a reverse life in comparison to Deepa and Pitamber. The author tries to depict two types of women, one is submissive like an ideal woman and the other who has an opposite attitude unlike other women. The harmony between the traditional and modern ideals as presented through both the women shows the reality of the society. Like the saying 'If there is a will, there is a way,' Deepa needs someone in her life who will understand her pain behind her smile and she finds it in Arun because both have been suffering the same way. Sometimes it is difficult to fulfil all of one's wishes. Her wish for liberation is being fulfilled by Arun but she is not ready to accept the reality she has created. In her heart she is puzzled as she has made the wrong decision according to her. Their escape from their location is not acceptable to the society. One cannot take such a step because there are certain rules and regulations in the society which cannot be broken. If one does, the consequences may be dire. Every human being who lives in the society is afraid of going against the societal rules. One can accept modernity without violating social norms. It is the fear of the society, values, and morals that leads Deepa and Arun to death. Individual freedom is nothing in the wider arena of the society. Here everyone is a servant to the social articulation. Sikha and Pitamber live together but their existence is harder and proves painful for both. There is always an impact of the social systems on people and it makes human life harder, it worsens their existence.

Women have been options for men. They never consider women in their decisions. Our surroundings, circumstances, perceptions, and prejudiced beliefs create a thick layer of illusion through which the faults of men are never visible.

Bijay Mishra (1936-2020) was another noted dramatist, screenwriter and lyricist of Odisha. He belongs to Balasore district in Odisha. He was a pioneer of modern theatre movement in Odisha. Mishra began his playwriting in 1960 with *Janini* which was staged in Annapurna Theatre, Cuttack. His widely acclaimed drama *Tata Niranjana* was translated into several languages and won him National award from All India Radio. His drama and movies are based on social issues of that time. He has influenced many writers to raise their voice against social injustice happening in the society. He tried to present the Odia culture and traditions in his drama. He was a recipient of the Odisha Sahitya Akademi (1968, 1988) and Kendra Sangeet Natak Akademi Award (1994).

Bijay Mishra's *Tata Niranjana* (1980) is based on the realisation of self through Gautam Buddha's teachings. The story depicts three women who lead to the realisation of self-consciousness in Gautam Buddha and make him understand the mistakes of his life. Religion and religious organisations are sensitive and their effect on human life especially on women's life is immense. They have rules and regulations stipulated in the name of the God. It creates a web in its surroundings and a fear among those who follow it. It is a story which revolts against religion, religious organisation and its teachings. The characters of Ichhamati, Sujata and Gopa question Buddha's several years of prayers and his decision to desert his family. Ichhamati and Nila are in love but Nila's decision of choosing a life of Buddhist monk shatters Ichhamati's aspirations. For her, Nila is everything. She tries to make him understand that nobody on this earth can get salvation by abandoning his physical desires and wishes. She is a loyal woman and follows the footsteps of Nila, as if a woman's life is nothing without her man. Impact of religion, societal values, cultures and traditions are to be

followed by women because they are the subordinates. All the festivals have several rules and regulations which women abide by and men are the tools of it. The religion asks to dissociate oneself from all types of desires like physical desires, sadness, happiness, illusions of this mortal world and go for Nirvana because nothing in this world is real. All the religions and religious organisations are somehow the reason for the downward journey of women. Through the Holy Scriptures, Upanishads and Epics, it creates a web for women in the set of restrictions and it also maintains that women are the reason for man's downfall. Men have all the rights in sex and possessions, and women are there to follow the orders of men. Religion and its effects on society create a puzzle for women from which they are not able to detach themselves. Ichhamati goes against all those restrictions and rules, and asks questions of Nila as well as of Buddha, the originator of the institution. A woman's questions on his decisions shakes Buddha from inside.

Nobody is free from the worldly desires. Everybody has to live here and fulfil all the wishes, personal and societal. Distracting oneself from it to get 'nirvana' is not right. It is not only his decision but he makes those relations who are connected to her suffer. A man never thinks twice before leaving his home for nirvana but a woman cannot do so easily because she has to think about others before doing that. The ideology of sangha cannot apply to everyone but it is useless for those who live in the society. Sujata's advice to Buddha penetrates him to think again about Gopa and his decision. Buddha's one decision impacted Gopa's life immensely. She suffered the most in the whole journey. For men everything is about self and the position of women is not considered in their decisions. They think women as their followers and subordinates. Women have to obey their husbands in all respects. Buddha leaves the palace but Gopa cannot, she is helpless and at the same time practical about life. She cannot leave because she has to take care of all those relationships Buddha has left in the palace. For her nirvana is living in her own house and playing the role of a

housewife. Buddha easily does it but for Gopa it is like crossing one thousand oceans. She is bound in traditions, cultures and all the worldly affairs which she cannot break herself from. Even Buddha himself is not fully detached from physical relations. After spending the night with Gopa, he flees the palace and decides to retain her for the rest of his life. One cannot give advice to others when one is not perfect and not true to those words. Buddha faces a tide of questions. His mind becomes slips into confusion about his own preaching. The three women show him the true faces of the society he never wanted to see. It is not always right to shun the worldly desires and become a monk because one cannot manage oneself in real life. Religion and Godly worlds are a part of life but not the whole life. A man has to live in the society, follow every rule of it and also be careful about the relationships he has. Through the book the writer wants to show how religion and its beliefs make life intolerable. One has to accept it as a part of life, not make it one's whole life and destination.

The division of work in the society has always been considered sacrosanct. Every section has to follow his/her predetermined professions and if one does not follow it, one becomes a criminal in the eyes of society. And it is seen that all the societal rules and regulations are applied to women. They are forcefully admitted to take some profession because their parents are part of it. Odia society is no exception to the rule when it comes to these kinds of incidents.

Bijay Mishra's *Timira Tirtha* (1973) depicts the life of Nandini who rises above her rank in the male dominated society. People are praised and criticised for the work they do but there are some sections of people in the society who are always criticised without any fault like wage workers, poor class, lower caste people, sex workers etc. According to the society, they have no right to live in this society with honour as their actions are considered to be impure and polluted. People of these sections live in the dark side of the world and live upon the mercy of the so-called civilized people. Rupa who is a courtesan by profession wants to

live a simple life rather than living in the dark world but the society never lets her live her life peacefully. Everyone in the society considers her as an object and they want to use her for their needs. Rupa feels suffocated in this field and wants freedom and a new identity. But people like Bikram and Seth are always ready to attack her. She wants a normal life like other women live in the society. But unfortunately, the society does not accept her as a worthy woman.

She thinks her dream was turning into reality in the form of Sanjay but again the society is a big barrier to her life. She becomes Nandini from Rupa but she cannot forget her past life, her roots. It is not yet socially acceptable for her to be married. Women of her category do not deserve to be somebody's wife. Sanjay comes forward and accepts Rupa with all her past. The repressive mindset of the people towards prostitutes is the outcome of the prejudiced ideas about genders and their needs and dependence relationship. They also have a right to live with honour but nobody gives them the freedom they need. They are oppressed by the male dominated society. The hatred they get is not a recent occurrence but it has been happening since the Vedic ages. But modernity has made their life meaningful with the spread of education and growth of media. They are now aware of their rights and realise their worth. Rupa's life is tough, she has suffered a miserable loss in the hands of those whom she thought to be her own. She shows a militant attitude to everyone who in some stage of her life molested her. She spends nights with new men and takes wine all day like a professional drunkard. She fails everywhere in her past life as well as in her housewife life, because of her past identity. She sells her body like a vendor sells his vegetables. She wants to lose her body. After her revenge, she kills herself as after that there is no meaning of her living in the society. The society and the people never accepted her and let her live freely. The author's concern and genuine thought towards prostitutes are the outcome of his progressive thinking.

On the other hand, the drama represents a reflection of society and the dramatist offers a picture of this to the audience. The more vivid texture of daily life is rendered in the play, the greater becomes its appeal. Unrealistic portrayals fail to leave a powerful effect on our minds. While the poet composes songs inspired by a vision of the future, the novelist depicts the realities of the present. The colonial Odisha suffered from social division in terms of caste and religion along with feudalism spread across the region. Hunger, poverty, illiteracy and social taboos were prevalent in the society. There were writers and educated people who described the effects of modern values in their writings. Odia writers were under pressure to react to the social evils existing in the society. Colonial modernity brought massive changes in the people and one of them is the idea of liberation. People moved from common life to individual life, they prefer individual right and freedom over the social. It aroused selfish motifs in the people. Eradication of culture bolsters men to focus on own self and own growth. Odia's heart lived in its villages where economic organisations were established on the division of works, which was interrupted by the modern culture and tradition. The way it was practised in the village areas changed. Adoption of modernity created poverty among the people who were meek enough to accept and adapt themselves to the changes. They were not ready to accept the changes. There was a rise in population and it became difficult to form an identity and to understand the self. That led to the tension between individual life and community life. On the other side, in the urban areas, modernity spread fast high rate and it led to the internal break down in modern individuals. Odia society due to corruption and growth of modernity became handicapped. Literary thinking wished that the rural life should not lose its authenticity to become modern. Village life presented the true Odianess. Any modern changes in rural life and in tribal people were a danger to the Odia people because its village depicted the reflection of the true Odia.

The most outstanding literary writings were those which attempted to bring out the problems of the Odia society, their beliefs, the influence of modernity on them and overall, an authentic presentation of an Odia self. The drama, novels, poems showed the richness of the surroundings of an Odia self. The characters depicted in those were the bearer of Odia roots and legacy. The flag bearers of modernism and poor illiterate of Odia soil after a life in modernity found themselves in confusion and dilemma and could not find their identity. They got lost in the absurd world. But after wondering when they returned to their own place where they were idealised, they found modernism meaningless. The success of the writings depended upon those lifeless, labour, poverty stricken rural characters who brought the true essence of Odia. The identity of Odisha was in the people living in the rural areas, they were the holder of the cultural, social and traditional identity of the typical Odia society. Odia people might have lived a life without industry and sound economy but they were so rich in culture. Their superiority was in following their heredity. Living in a rural area, they were so close to each other. They shared their life with each other. Modernity was also a reason for the development of Odia culture, it let its culture cross the border and reach Calcutta and Andhra Pradesh. These literary works not only showcased rural life but also their emotions and feelings in its truest and purest form.

In general, people lived their lives in one of two distinct ways: the first was the way they presented themselves, and the second was the way they presented themselves to society. Their emotions were not fully shown in the second structure. There were two sections of the people, one who followed every traditional and ethical rule in the face of modernity and there was the other group that eradicated all the social values and became ultra-modern. In both the cases they failed to achieve their identity and got lost in illusion. Religion and religious affairs tied them in such a bond that they were not able to take decisions of their life individually. The public life of the people living in rural areas became worse. They were

afraid to face the educated and elite people because they were afraid of losing their culture and social values. All the Odia writers on the Odia soil tried to create their own society with the Odia characters. Writers took an Odia setting with an average looking man, a beautiful Odia girl who was so much connected with her soil. They constituted an ideal hero who made his atmosphere beautiful with his thoughts.

Most importantly the settings were local and urban areas. Through this they wanted to show us the difference one felt when one migrated to the city. The spread of modernity attracted more youths to the city. They got more fascinated by the city than living in a rural setting to work as labourers and farmers. They migrated to cities in large numbers but they found city more alienating and exasperating. They resisted their parents' interventions as they got education and the idea of freedom. The city and its elite people's influence were largely seen on the youth. It affected their thought process and feelings. They tried to take their own decisions individually. The most and massive effect of modernity was on women of the then society. They became more rational and rebellious towards the old beliefs that had reduced them to toys in the hands of men. Whether it is marriage or any other big decision of their life, the youth did not consider their parents as part of their life. In the name of freedom and self-love, they made mistakes and became a prey to evil forces. Women chose their own life partners and eventually fell a prey to their own actions. Educated women entered marital life with the expectations that their husband will love and respect them, which will ultimately lead to an ethical union. The failure of individual life, marriage life as well as communal life was the great concern of the writers. Modernity created a void in the hearts of modern men and women.

Against the changing conditions of modernity, writers tried to depict the values of the society. The confusion, dilemma, crisis in the contemporary society was clearly seen in Kalicharan Pattnaik's *Bhata*, Gopal Chhotray's *Sankha Sindhura* and *Nasta Urvashi*, and

Manoranjan Das *Katha Ghoda*. Writers' quest to bring out the problems of Odia society was remarkable. These books presented Odia ideas, superstitions, anger, values, traditions, and cultures. All the writers were influenced by the growth of nationalism among the Indians. They wanted to create a new Odia society by eradicating the colonial value system which was derogatory to its own people. And at the same time, they wished to hold on to the social values and traditions which were the foundations of the Odia society. For them there was no need to sanctify the past because it does not hold the sacred truth, it can stand with change which was important in that scenario. They were not fully against the modern society but they wanted a collaboration of it with the old.

The stories represented Odia lives with Odia authenticity. Their focus was on the people's domestic life and their common problems. Some of the issues included the suffering of women in the private domain, their readiness to accept the change and the issues haunting the joint family system. The reason behind the negligence of the joint family system was people's modern education, which made them self-centred and selfish. Their only focus was on their own growth and achievement. The middle-class people who were generous in heart and followed every culture and tradition, understood everyone's emotions and feelings. They had known the value of agriculture but chose to live as labourers in the factories and government employees. The upper-class people who accepted modernity became wanderers in their life. The people of the lower strata of the society who were peasants, labourers, and workers, lived happily in their own domain because they did not want to change and accept change but rather be happy with whatever existence they had. For them their agriculture, simple life, sober attitudes, beliefs mattered. They were the true sections of the Odia society who created an identity based on their Odia roots. The declining religiosity was another impact of modernity and it was the major concern. It was not only a ritual but a thread that binds the lives together. This is the sign that Odia society was moving towards a massive

destruction. During that period, books were crucial in forming the identity of the Odia people and served as the initial step towards the revolution.

Odisha is very rich in culture and heritage, not only in temples and caves but also in its literatures. Starting from women's education in Ramshankar Ray's *Kanchanmali* and Kalicharan Pattnaik's *Girls' School* to oppression of women in Bijay Mishra's *Timira Tirtha*, Odia writers created a set of ideals that guides the society. Women's education was considered a taboo in the Odia society and on the ground of this belief Ray created the powerful character Kanchanmali, who became an icon for every woman. The education and the effects it had on women was the major concern of the play. The effect of modernity on women made them restless and they sought to create an identity of their own among those Odia people. Specifically, the rural setting of the play gave it a beautiful effect. And the writers chose the rural setting for their plays because they knew where change was needed. Kanchanmali's modern beliefs and mindsets were the effects of the education and knowledge she got. In the village she became the symbol of development and modernity. In a village, for an Odia girl it was quite difficult to portray that image but she was strong and valiant like any revolutionary woman character. City life and English education might be the reasons for her downfall but it led to self-realisation. English education not only had its bad influence on women but it also made them strong and generous like Bela from *Girls' School*, where modern education and meaning of liberation brought destruction to Renu whereas the same education made Bela exemplary. Everything has its negative dimension and it depends upon what one chooses. Although modern education and knowledge led Odia women towards pride, arrogance and prejudice, it also gave them the right path to find their true self. Those women were not degrading the society but showed the society their true strength.

Oppression of women had been a major issue in Odisha society and culture. It was not considered evil until some writers tried to bring up this discussion in their works. In every

middle-class Odia household, women play the role of creators and survivors. Their position in the society was negligible. But the growth of culture and development of state depended upon its women. Unfortunately, at the ground level, women had been oppressed by their own men. They lost their voice in the fast-growing modernity that somehow gave more importance to men. They became helpless and submissive but they never wanted to become slaves in the hands of their husbands and other men. Their education gave them a chance to rise, to question their existence. Bani from Gopal Chhotray's *Sankha Sindhura* confronts her husband when she finds him to be disloyal. In the society, people took advantage of other's plight and made them helpless as well. Still there were people like Purusottam who believed in purity of heart and soul rather than judge someone by his appearance. Through this character the playwrights attempted to bring revolution among common people.

There were issues of the sex workers which needed attention and it was done by two fictional characters like Nandini from Bijay Mishra's *Timira Tirtha* and Madhavi from Gopal Chhotray's *Sankha Sindhura*. Both, through their characters, showed the dark lives of sex workers and their unmatched struggle to rise above their profession. But, the society did not accept them as human beings and abused them for their profession. They lived in the dark but what made them confident was their wish to get an identity. They pursued education and it gave them the strength to show their militant attitude towards men who had cowed them down. They had their lives and had the right to live their life according to their wish. Madhavi and Nandini through their rebellious attitudes proved that women, no matter what their professions are, have to be respected in the society. Although it would have been proper on the part of the author to have given Nandini's character a better ending rather than suicide.

The lack of freedom among Odia women was a major concern. The more they got to know the world, the more they became detached from their ethics. Western education replaced the existing social hierarchy with a new one. The more people got attracted towards

the outer life, the more their social life became hollow inside. Their identity, roots, morals and values meant nothing to them. They discarded their family values and started giving importance to themselves. Odia women in the modern society and societal structures found themselves deserted and oppressed. Their freedom was at stake when they got married. Male ego and attitude made a hell of their life. Deepa from Manoranjan Das's *Katha Ghoda* was presented as an unacknowledged wife. Her suppression and oppression by her husband in a toxic domestic life created a rage among those wives who shared a similar experience. Women's determination and fearlessness created a spark in the men. With the help of modernisation, they started going against those men who let them down. The pain and suffering of Deepa's domestic life made her flee from the situation. Not only women but also men were suffering from suppression in their domestic life like Arun. Society progressed but individuals became self-oriented. Women in the rural areas were also taking part in the modern growth. The women who were basically the daughters of landlords, peasants, and middle-class women in the rural areas took themselves more seriously. In Kalicharan Pattnaik's *Bhata*, Rama the heroine stood against the discrimination she faced. In the rural setting, social class created a border between the rich and the poor. This difference created educational, social, political hostility between the two groups. Bijaya and Rama had very different educational backgrounds reflecting diverse personalities.

Literature is the mirror of the society and it chooses to depict the happenings in its surroundings. Odia people live under the shadow of their rich past because the present is not meaningful. Writers through their literary works, try to show Odia society with its faults and richness. A great literature is that which tells the story of their own people in their own ways. The primary focus of these writers is to represent the social issues in the dramatic form so that the common people will have an access to watch their issues being represented on the

stage. The next chapter presents a critical analysis of the contribution of women playwrights in Odia.

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Chapter 4

Women Playwrights in Odia

This chapter explores the women's issues that have been addressed by women playwrights. This chapter largely focuses on the contributions made by the women in various capacities towards the development of Odia society in general and Odia drama in particular. It describes the emergence of women's participation in disciplines such as politics, literature, and social reform, as well as the development of this participation over time. It discusses issues pertaining to women's education, literary consciousness, and the rights of women as they are portrayed in Odia drama. It also highlights the entry of women artists into Odia drama by discussing the evolution of Odia drama and theatre industry.

The concept of 'new woman' was introduced to depict the rise of women leaders who have attempted to dismantle social barriers and bring out a radical change in society where women can stand alone. These women fought against social inequality and gender discrimination for establishing women's empowerment in various spaces of life such as social, political, educational, and economic domains in a patriarchal society. The movement for women's rights in the West has witnessed the emergence of several leaders, activists, reformers, and writers. Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792) initiated a debate on the role of the educated women in the society. This further influenced many writers like Emily Davies, Charlotte Elizabeth Tonna, among others. In this context, the concept of '*New Woman*' emerged in the late nineteenth century which had a great influence on the women's movements all over the world. The phrase '*New Woman*' was first introduced by the Irish writer Sarah Grand in 1894. In an influential article titled "The New Aspect of the Woman Question" published in the *North American Review*, she used the term to refer to independent women who want to bring out changes in society.

The idea of 'New Woman' is an emerging genre of feminism, wherein one can take stand against the patriarchal society. The *New Woman* is basically known as a feminist ideology that gradually developed in Europe and North America in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. The main goal of the feminist approach was to generate new gender-sensitive norms and values while fighting against inequality, discrimination, and oppression of women. Establishment of educated and empowered women in various spaces of life such as social, political, educational, and economic in patriarchal societies is seen as a precondition to the feminist goal of dismantling the hierarchy between men and women.

The emergence of new woman is identical with various ideologies explored by the feminists which were propagated against the male-dominated society. Simone De Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* states, "One is not born but rather becomes a woman" (295). The demand for equality by the new woman is a conscious assertion of her rights while retaining the identity of womanhood. K Meera Bai opines, "The word New Woman has come to signify the awakening of women into a new realization of her place and position in family and society. Conscious of her individuality, the new woman has been trying to assert her rights as a human being and is determined to fight for equal treatment with man" (16). The European theory of feminism influenced the discourse in the colonial Indian subcontinent and the feminist way of understanding the patriarchal society in Odisha started in the late nineteenth century. Though it was started by men through their writings on gender issues, women soon assumed the central role in taking this movement forward.

According to Partha Chatterjee, the nation produced the figure of the new woman, who merged the selectively acquired western characteristics with traditional spiritual virtues, and was distinct from not only the westernised woman but also the traditional lady as well as the 'coarse' and 'vulgar' woman of the lower ranks. The new woman carried a range of markers, from religious to dressing to speaking and writing style. The patriarchy that

supported the 'new woman' was also a 'new patriarchy' since it was willing to accept new ideas about womanhood. By constructing this icon of new woman and presenting her as a sign of national spiritual supremacy, the nationalist patriarchy supposedly resolved the women's question. Such a resolution determined the nationalist response to initiatives for social transformation through colonial legislative enactments. The nation refused to make the women's question a matter of female emancipation in the late nineteenth century (154-155). Even further, he brings up Binodini Das's autobiography, *Amar Katha* (1913), which points out that the relations between the people and the nation, as well as the nation and the state—relations that nationalism asserts to have solved once and for all—are relations that continue to be contested and, as a result, are open to negotiation all over again. The field of discourse, he points out, is 'one of contention, peopled by several subjects, several consciousnesses'. He states

We must think of a discourse as situated within fields of power, not only constituting that field but constituted by it. Dominance here cannot exhaust the claim to subjectivity, for even the dominated must always retain an aspect of autonomy. Otherwise, power would cease to be a relation, it would no longer be constituted by struggle (137).

Partha Chatterjee talks broadly about a resolution of the women's question, its acceptance by most middle-class women in late colonial Bengal, and their complicity in framing the hegemonic strategies of the nation. However, he also draws attention to an unresolved contestation in a field of power constituted by and constituting the nation and its fragments despite the totalising claims of a nationalist discourse. These new women are not only the symbols of emancipated and independent women but also promoters of women's equality and inspiration to generations of women to come. Several such women achievers have come up in various fields of art, politics, and social services in Odisha. A brief description of such

women who have excelled in the field of drama and established themselves as notable playwrights in Odia is presented in the following paragraphs.

Sulochana Pradhan (1895-1947) was a poet, novelist, storywriter, playwright and translator. She was born in a well-to do family in Deogarh, Odisha to Dinabandhu Gadnaya and Yasodha Gadnaya. Her father joined as the post master in Sundergarh before moving to Balangir and subsequently moved to Calcutta as a manager in a wood export business under the ownership of King of Bamanda. Sulochana moved to Calcutta with her family when she was six years old. She learned to read and write in Bengali in addition to her mother tongue Odia. Her father returned to Deogarh in 1909 to join as the editor of *Sambalpur Hiteisini*, one of the leading magazines in Odia during that time. *Sambalpur Hiteisini* was being published under the patronage of Sir Basudev Sulab Dev. Her father, a poet and essayist, was the inspiration for Sulochana's literary endeavours. Some of the literary contributions to Odia Literature by her father include *Sindhu Manthan*, *Sobha Sundari*, *Jeevan Tarang*, *Dharmakarma*, *Karma Patha*, *Parishrama*, *Nari Sikhya*, *Chinna Mandar Mala* and a book on ayurvedic medicine (20). Sulochana Devi was highly influenced by her father. She completed her lower primary and middle vernacular school from the then Bamanda state. She was the first girl child to complete her education from that state with second division. She was awarded a gold medal by the Queen of Bamanda Smt. Dambarudhara Priya Devi. She also stood first in general knowledge competition in a state-wide competition and was awarded another gold medal by the then King of Bamanda. At the age of 14, she got married to Kruthartha Pradhan in 1909 and had three sons but unfortunately, she lost her husband in 1919. Being a widow at such an early age, she was completely devastated and forced to take up a job as the headmistress of Mandakini Upper Primary School in 1922. She devoted her time to writing and emerged as one of the pillars of Odia drama and one of the first women playwrights in Odia.

Sitadevi Khadanga (1902-1983) was a novelist, poet, playwright and storywriter. She was born in a well-to-do Brahmin family in Ganjam and her father was the first advocate in the district court. She comes from a traditional Odia household. To bring out the differential treatment given to men and women, she observes in her autobiography that:

Our forefathers have breathed mantras into the ears of their sons, which enjoins them to achieve success in their creative endeavours. However, our mothers and aunts have trained us, women, only to cook. Our time- from leaving the bed in the morning till going to bed at night- is spent entirely in cooking, making pickles, giving a coat of cow-dung to the walls and verandas and even the cowsheds (57).

During her time, Odisha was still enslaved by its many deeply held religious dogmas and superstitions. The society was unconcerned about the existence of women; even the male world was unconcerned about women. Her father was popular in his community for promoting education, although he was very conservative about women's education. As a traditionalist, he never cared about women's education, empowerment, rights and widow remarriage. Despite being well-educated and wealthy, he did not consider remarrying his widowed sisters or educating his lone daughter.

She was always aware of the precarious position of women in the contemporary society from a young age. She paid great attention to the sufferings of all four of her aunties, who were widows, and the experience had a profound impact on her. She had little choice but to repress her feelings of aversion and distaste because she came from a family that held traditional values. She did not receive any assistance from her family, with the sole exception of her uncle, Sribacha Panda, who was her father's brother. Despite being a gifted and financially successful young woman, she lived a lonely life. Her restlessness was a direct

result of the stifling restrictions that were placed on women's lives, which were identical to her own. She tied the knot at the tender age of eight. Her wedding was delayed for a period of five to six months, and as a result, everyone in her family anticipated that she would have her first period while she was still living with her father. At that time, it was considered a serious breach of the family's dignity for an unmarried girl to have her first period without being married. After marriage, she received her husband's full support in her efforts to study Sanskrit and Bengali languages. After that, she read a wide variety of books and magazines, including Indian Epics, Scriptures, and various novels. These learnings served as a motivation for her to compose her first play. Even though she had no access to formal education, she was sufficiently intelligent, and more importantly, had the support from her husband and her in-laws. As a result, she was able to continue writing while successfully managing the responsibilities of her married life. She began writing drama in 1942, and her first play, *Sahadhora*, which is no longer in print but includes a biographical biography of the author, was her debut work. Dr. Harekrushna Mahatab gave her a lot of compliments for the play *Nari* that she not only wrote but also performed on stage. The assistance of her husband allowed her to produce her own productions of *Posyaputra*, *Naishhika*, *Nispati*, *Prachina Panthi*, *Kshydyara Pida*, and *Natya Mandira*, all of which were considered to be among her most notable works.

Sarala Devi (1904- 1986) was a poet, author, playwright, freedom fighter, and leader in Congress. She is from a traditionalist Karan family from the Cuttack District born to Shri Basudeva and Padmavati Devi. Her uncle Balamukunda Kanungo, a Deputy Collector, raised her. She was considered a defiant girl from her childhood as she opposed many conservative household customs and rituals. She was tutored through seventh grade and completed reading Bankim Chandra, Sarat Chandra, Swami Vivekananda, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagr, Dayananda Saaraswati, and others to learn Bengali. In 1918, she married Bhagirathi

Mohapatra of Jagatsingpur, Cuttack District. Her husband belonged to a zamindar family, and was a highly educated and liberal minded man. He was dedicated towards Nationalism and he also practiced law under Utkal Gaurav Madhusudan Das. Sarala Devi along with her husband joined Indian National Congress and followed Mahatma Gandhi's vision. She was a brave woman and took part in movements like Non-Co-Operation Movement, Quit India Movement and Salt Satyagraha. She was assisted by several women writers and activists such as Kuntala Kumari Sabat, Rama Devi, Sailabala Devi, Basanta Kumari Devi, Sarojini Choudhury, Kokila Devi and Jahnvi Devi. Sachidananda Mohanty notes that,

She wrote many plays and exhorted women to participate in freedom struggle in large numbers. As *Utkal Deepika* reported on 7 November 1931, "She desires to involve Oriya women in her plays. She believes that Oriya women are remaining in the background. They feel shy to come out. If they can be involved in acting plays, they will no longer feel different. That is why Sarala is going to many houses on her mission" (Mohanty 8).

She began her literary career as a poet but shifted to writing plays, novels, essays, translations, short stories for children. Her plays were influenced by Kalidasa's *Malavikagnimitra* and Bhasa's *Swapnabhasabaddutta*. She wrote plays on Puranic themes like *Purba Raga*, and social plays like *Pancha Pradipa*, *Bhima Bhyan* and *Jajabara* (last two were unpublished).

Bidyut Prava Devi (1926-1977) was a poet and playwright in Odia. She was born into a Karan Family in Cuttack. Her father was a very well-known writer and compiler. They belonged to a traditional and conservative family. Bijay kumar Nanda's *Bidyut Prava Devi* explores her life and times proclaiming that "They knew how the society becomes harsh and cruel towards parents having daughters. Hence the couple was careful in keeping their three

daughters under strict restriction and close watchfulness” (189). Though the family was conservative in bringing up the girl children, it also facilitated education for them and offered opportunity to express themselves. Bidyut Prava Devi’s father, Nimai, was very eager to provide education to children despite the financial constraints. Her father used to send her poems to the Odia Periodicals for publishing and this encouraged her to write more poems. During her time, patriarchy was at its peak. Her parents were also worried about having to pay more dowry if she was highly educated. But these things did not prevent Bidyut Prava from writing. She first wrote a poem with her sister and published in the year 1947. She expressed her emotions and feelings through beautiful poems. She was influenced by writers like Rabindranath Tagore, Dina Krushna Das, Upendra Bhanja and Radhanath Ray. Most of her important works appeared during 1947-1957. Her Poems “Utkal Saraswata Prativa” and “Marichika” were selected by Utkal University as a course in school syllabus. She has also written many story books for children. In the later phase of her life, she became a follower of Shri Aurobindo and decided to spend rest of her life at the Pondicherry Ashram. However, she was advised to leave the Ashram to spread Aurobindo’s philosophy in the society. After coming back to Odisha, she penned down three books on Sri Aurobindo Ashram. She also published her only one-act play *Bibaha* (Marriage) which was on creating awareness and spreading Aurobindo’s Philosophy. However, she is known as an eminent poet in Odia literature rather than as a playwright. (Ray 98)

Bina Devi (1932-1993) was a poet, novelist, essayist, storywriter, lyricist and playwright in Odia. She was born into a Brahmin Family in 1936 at Cuttack. Her paternal grandfather was a renowned writer and her maternal grandfather was Odisha’s first proprietor of a Theatre Group named Radhkrushna Theatre. They both had a significant influence on her literary career. In 1945 she started her career in Akashvani Calcutta Centre. By 1955 she was a well-known artist of Akashvani. She had a beautiful voice and sang Bhajans, Odissi and

Chandha. She also worked as a playback singer for many Odia movies and Doordarshan programmes. She started her literary career at a very early stage. When she was in school, her first book was published (Nanda141). Most of her writings were published in the leading journals of Odisha. She was not only a writer but also a social activist. She was very active in social groups like Odisha Nari Seva Sangha, Utkala Mahila Samiti and Kalyani Mahila Samiti. In 1957, she joined Akashvani Cuttack Centre as a programme executive. In 1960, she started many programmes for women. In 1978, she joined as the first woman director in Jeypore Akashvani Centre. In 1984, she joined Cuttack Doordarshan as a director. In 1987 she was awarded by the Odisha Sangeet Natak Akademi for her outstanding contribution in the field of music. To her credit she has published the novels *Mrutya ra jayajatra*, *Sesha Abhinay*, *Mrutyuduta*, *Soundariya ra Mrutyu*, *Ete Rakta* and *Nishidha Banani*, a children's story book *Bhuta Koti* and the plays *Bhibhajaka* and *Ananya* as plays. (Nanda 142)

Binapani Mohanty (1936-2022) was a renowned Odia poet, novelist, short story writer, translator and a playwright. She was born into a Karan family in 1936 in Chandol, Kendrapara. Her parents, Chaturbhuj Mohanty and Kumudini Mohanty, were a government servant and a homemaker respectively. Most of her childhood was spent in Chandol in the present district of Kendrapara. She was a good student throughout and by profession she was a Lecturer in Economics. She served in many colleges and finally retired in 1992. Her literary career started in 1955 with the publication of her first poem and went on to compose more than 200 poems in Odia. She was not interested in marriage or family life and dedicated her time to career and her interest in writing. Taking such a firm decision when Odisha was deeply steeped in orthodox beliefs and customs was a sign of her resolution and determination to have an identity of her own. She was also a very good story teller and composed several stories. Among the stories, *Pata Dei*, a collection of short stories that won her the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1990. The former was translated into English by Jayanta

Mahapatra in 1986 in Femina with title *Lata*. In 1987, a dramatised version of it was telecast in Doordarshan as *Kashmakash*. This brought her name and fame from all over the country. Subsequently, many of her stories have been translated into different languages such as English, Hindi, Marathi, Kannada, Malayalam, Bengali, Urdu and Russian. She has also penned three novels and one act play named *Kranti*. She has translated two Russian folk tales from English to Odia and few Bengali works to Odia. She was also the President of Lekhika Sansad, a State Level Organization for women writers. She is a recipient of Padma Shri in 2020.

Basant Kumari Pattnaik (1923-2013) was a novelist, short story writer, poet, essayist and playwright. She was born into a Karan Family in Bhanjanagar in the district of Ganjam. Srivastav Pattnaik and Sudarmani Pattnaik were her parents. She completed her M.A. in Economics from Ravenshaw University, Cuttack. She owned a Publishing House, along with her brother, called Shanti Nibas Bani Mandira from 1959 to 1962. She got the highest award of Atibadi Jagannath Das Award by Odisha Sahitya Akademi. She was the first and only woman till date to receive this award. In 1950, she published her first novel *Amada Bata*, considered to be a masterpiece which was later adapted into an Odia movie. Then she wrote the novels *Chorabali*, *Alibha Chita*, short story collections titled *Sabhyatara Saja*, *Patala Dheu* and *Jivanchinha*, poetry collections titled *Chintanala* and *Tarang* and the plays *Jaura Bhatta* and *Mruga Trushna*. Although she was an accomplished writer, she led a simple life detached from the numerous recognitions and awards bestowed upon her. She expressed her desire for a peaceful farewell and her death not to be reported in newspapers. In the article *Chronicle of a Death Untold: Basanta Kumari Pattnaik*, Animesh Mahapatra quotes her “my death should not be reported to the newspapers” (12).

These women contributed significantly to the enrichment of Odia drama and literary milieu in general. They had to fight the traditional beliefs, customs prevalent in the then

society to establish themselves in the field of Odia drama. Describing the social context during those times, Sachidananda Mohanty's *Gender and Cultural Identity in Colonial Orissa* notes:

During the early decades of the twentieth century, several factors including the movement for the preservation of the Oriya language, the rise of Oriya regional consciousness, the advent of Brahmo Samaj, the campaign for Widow-remarriage, the legal abolition of untouchability, and the struggle for national independence-brought women writers in Orissa into the hitherto closed public domain (90).

Additionally, there were many factors that influenced their presence in public sphere of Odisha, such as charismatic influence of Mahatma Gandhi, literary impact of Fakir Mohan Senapati, and the advent of women's magazines, etc. These factors are discussed in detail in subsequent sections in this chapter.

Although there have been attempts to explore the concept of New Woman in the literary genres like poetry and fiction, the contributions of Odia women in the field of drama have been largely ignored. Sachidananda Mohanty's book *Early Women's Writings in Orissa, 1898-1950* could not find any space for any woman playwright while analysing literary contributions of women during the pre-independence era. Similarly, Tutun Mukherjee's book *Staging Resistance: Plays by Women in Translation* overlooked the contribution of women playwrights to Odia theatre. The role of the Odia women playwrights has been grossly neglected by majority of the mainstream scholars undervaluing the importance of the themes as well as the contribution of such writers during that period of awakening. Niladribhushan Harichandan and Alok Baral's book *Odia Natakara Samikshyatmaka Itihas* (2018) claims that the Queen of Khadial, namely, Dolananda Priya Mahadei, wrote a drama titled *Nari Swadhinata* (Freedom of Woman) which was staged by the Bira Bikram Theatre in 1909. In

accordance with this observation, Dolananda Priya Mahadei can be considered as the first Odia woman dramatist. However, the content or analysis of the drama has found no place in the book, which implies her drama was only staged but not published. So, it is very difficult to consider the above-mentioned drama as the first Odia drama by a woman.

There has been a disagreement among the scholars on the claim of being the first drama by a woman playwright. Majority of the scholars credit Sitadevi Khadanga as the first woman playwright for her play *Mandira Prabesh* published in 1947. However, Sulochana Devi's *Savitri* which was published in 1928 from Deogarh, Bamanda and in 1930 by *The Utkal Sahitya Press*, Cuttack precedes all other women playwrights in Odisha. Her second Odia play *Sansara Chitra* (1945) projects the real social picture of the then Gadjat Mahala of Odisha.

In colonial Odisha, women's education was a challenging task. Girl children from the aristocratic families had the privilege to join the colonial education system. As Sachidananda Mohanty observes:

While public education in Orissa was pathetically dismal, education for women was more or less absent. Whatever education was traditionally given to women was private and confined to the home. Even this was restricted to as the editor of *Utkal Deepika* astutely observes, to female members of the royalty and the upper class/class literati (100).

Fakir Mohan Senapati (1843-1918), a famous novelist, wrote many stories on women's empowerment, upliftment, and education. His famous story "Rebati" is one such story that reflects the dogmas associated with women's education. Through the British education system, women, for the first time, had an access to formal education and thereby improve the quality of participation in various spheres of social life. Women were educated

through the British education system and participated in various spheres of social life. They preferred not only to join government services, but also to work as social activists and reformers. In Odia society the position of women has always been restricted to home and the domestic sphere but the concept of new woman allows women to go beyond the domestic sphere and establish their own identity. With the introduction of women's education, even though negligible, the educated elite women found an opportunity to showcase their talent and capabilities. There was a tremendous change in their behaviour, attitude, and thoughts. They followed the path of those men who brought changes through their literature by representing woman's ideas and ideologies, and soon established themselves as the advocates of women's rights in various spheres of the society.

On a related note, women's participation in the professional Odia theatres as artists also had a similar journey as that of women playwrights. Late nineteenth century saw for the first time the entry of women artists on stage with the starting of the *Magnetic Theatre* in 1894. Till then, female impersonators cast in Odia theatres. Female impersonation was common not only in Odisha but also in Indian theatres during this period. The acceptance of female artists on stage grew along with the advent of socio-cultural reforms in the wake of the nationalist movement. Karthyren Hansen comments, "The latter half of the nineteenth century and the early twentieth century was a period of transition when the public image of Indian womanhood was being crafted not only through literature and social experiments but also through the commercial media of the Parsi theatre and silent cinema" (2291). The patriarchal society extended its control on female body as well as its visual manifestation. In Odisha, the folk theatre forms like *Jatra* and *Chhau* used female impersonators at that time (Pani 42). As Sanghamitra Mishra's "Odisha ra Rangamancha re Nari Manankara Jogadana" (Women's Contribution to Odia Theatres) says, the traditional folk performances involved women artists as far as back in the sixteenth century. However, most of such performances

were restricted to celebrations of festivals in the temples or other such religious ceremonies. When we examine the history or read Bharatmuni's *Natya Sastra*, we can see that women had an important role in the development of the art form. In the sixteenth century Ray Ramanand brought devadasis from the South to perform in plays as the Mahari of the Jagannath Temple did not agree to perform the role of women characters. Padmavati, wife of Jaydev known for his *Geeta Gobinda*, was a skilled dancer of this Mahari community. The term Mahari is used interchangeably with devadasi (women in the service of God), though it mostly refers to female rituals specialists from Odisha (Banerjee 126). These women devoted their life to the service of God. They were trained in dance and song, while the other women were prohibited as it was considered a shame. Similarly, in Odia drama and Gotipua dance, female impersonators were used (Banerjee 127). In the traditional Odia plays, women were not allowed to perform on stage as the plots of the plays were religious and with the apprehension that women's participation might defy that sanctity. This is one reason why female impersonators were used. In the history of Odia drama, with the formation of the Magnetic Theatre, women found scope to perform women characters for the first time. With the interest of Satish Chandra Sarkar (Natu babu), this theatre group was formed near Biswnath Temple at Balubazar in Cuttack. They used to perform only on two days (Wednesday and Saturday) in a week (26). According to Sarada Prasad Dalabehera's *Odisha Rangamancha Itihas*, some famous prostitutes such as Chota Mohini from the Chaudhury Bazar, Bada Mohini from the Firingi Bazar, Rani from the Jama Masjid Lane, Vidhimukha and Krishna from the Ganesh Temple, performed the role of women characters (2). In 1913, Usha Theatre recommended women for women characters, but in the play *Nandika Keshari*, these women could not utter the dialogues of blank verse. In fact, Kali Charan Pattnaik, an energetic student from Ravenshaw College, performed the character, Nandika. Ramsundari (Tunga) and Reva Sundari (Reva) were also attached to the Magnetic Theatre. In 1912, to celebrate the

coronation of Edward VII, a theatre troupe in Balasore performed the play *Shiri Farhad*. A man enacted Shiri's character while many women from Motiganj performed the roles of her friends. In 1916 Budhabai, Chinibai, Sukhibai, and Ramabai (Tunga) from the Ganesh Mandir; Brunda from the Jama Masjid lane; Paki, Lalita, Chini, Bhudhi, Suli, and Sundari from the Telenga Bazar; Dhadi, Kalidhati, Naba, and Indubai from Ambheswar participated in acting in the Usha Theatre. In 1922, the Umakant Organisation of Cuttack organised its second stage show, *Sudama*, in which Sana Buddhi, Bada Buddhi, Mohan Sundari, Brunda, Harapriya, Tuku, Kumuda, Dhadi Bai etc. performed on stage. The significance of this event is that most of the actresses from this group were poor helpless prostitutes. So, they all agreed to work in the theatre with the permission of their mothers. In the play *Kinnari* (1923), Brunda, Mohan Sundari, and Sana Buddhi performed on stage and in *Sudhanya* (1924), Mohan Sundari played a significant role. In the drama *Sanjukta* (1926), Ashalata, Pravabati Parbati, and Appu Bai were remarkable in their roles. In 1933-34, the character of Fatima was enacted by a woman in the play *Ali Baba* by Halmukh Dramatic Club. In 1928, Civil Court and the Moharir Club brought many actresses from Jatra Troupes to perform in the play *Sanjukta*. Bina, Haripriya and Nisha also participated in the drama *Sethji* by Ashwini Kumar in 1939. Likewise, Chana, Haripriya, Binodini, and Musa were remarkable in their respective roles in the drama *Duniya Bhul* by the Mangalpur Dramatic Club in 1943-44. This shows that though women artists had started participating in the Odia plays, it was limited to a selected few who were usually from the marginalised sections of the society. These actresses presented their capability from supporting roles to the leading actresses. Women's participation in the Odia theatre on a larger scale materialised with the formation of the Orissa Theatres' in 1939 by Kabi Chandra Kalicharan Pattnaik. Initially women like Mina, Sara, and Saila started as singers and eventually bagged roles for acting. According to Kali Charan, the first woman who joined to be the actress was Mina followed by Laksmi, Sumati,

Saila, and Sara. Many helpless women and prostitutes joined the theatre, but, most of them were known only by their stage name. He had to groom them up by providing them training in singing and acting. The Annapurna Theatre was formed in 1933 with Kananbala Mani, Radharani, Pratima Bose, and Buddhimati as its initial actresses. Later, Bhanumati Devi, Manimala, Hara, Purnima, Basanti, Lakshmi, Nirmala followed by Kunjalata, Ranibala, Annapurna, Kamala Manjari, Sanjubala, Kabita Manjari, and Mandakini joined the theatre.

Now-a-days, participation of women in cinema and television is very common and women's participation in theatre is relatively less. The social stigma attached to acting has reduced to a great extent resulting in more women looking at cinema as a respectable occupation. Acting in cinema is more glamorous and profitable compared to theatre. Mostly, women from the marginalised sections of the society chose to participate in theatres in those days due to the social stigma attached to it. These uneducated, poverty-ridden, and unidentified women had enlivened the cultural life of Odisha with their artistry. Kali Charan's contribution to make these women frontline theatre actresses was praiseworthy, and it was not an easy task as he had to face a lot of criticism. At present, women's contribution to theatre has been accepted as a prestigious job. In Natabar Sen's *Manchashree Bauri Bandhu*, it has been mentioned that Master Kashinath Sahu and Lingraj Nanda took the charge of searching for women artist for which they had to travel to Puri. As mentioned earlier, during that period, women artists usually came from brothels. So, they thought of getting women from brothel but Somnath Das (who was the founder of Annapurna Theatre) could not keep them at his residence because they were staying with the Brahmin Sasan or Brahmin Community in a village. The Annapurna theatre was established at Puri and this place had a very orthodox mindset. There was a strong resistance from the local people as women stage artists were treated in a demeaning manner in the society. So, they took a rented house for those women artists in Balugaon. While searching for women artists, they came

across artists like Smt. Balamani, Sashikala Tripathy and Hiramani who came to Balugaon. These women were primarily chosen to act in the mythological plays. During those times, such plays were performed during festivals i.e., Dussehra, Shivratri and so on, at different places to create awareness as well as to raise money. Every theatre had its own troupe who travelled and performed the plays across the state. Among these three women, Hiramani did not like this field, so she left along with her husband. Kashinath Sahu found another woman named Laxmipriya from Cuttack in the place of Hiramani and she joined the troupe along with her husband. It may be noted that even though women had started participating in plays, they were accompanied by a male member from family. Women actors on stage were the main attraction during that period and the news spread like wild fire all through the state. Women enacting the characters in plays popularised the Annapurna Theatre and it received calls for staging plays from various parts of the state.

During the period from 1900 to 1920, a group of women, namely Kanchan Mali Dei, Kokila Dei, Chandramani Dei, Durga Dei, Debahuti Dei, Nihar Nilini Devi, Pramila Sundari Dei, Ratnamala Devi, Sarojini Dei, Hemanta Kumari Dei, Sarojini Dasi, and others published a literary magazine in Odia, namely *Paricharika* with Basanta Kumari Dei as the editor. Reba Ray edited a journal named *Pravat* in 1902. She explored the position of women in the contemporary Odia society. Sarala Devi also edited several journals, such as *Utkalika*, *Weekly*, and *Basanti* in which she discussed relevant social issues of that time. She wrote many articles on various themes and published those in these journals and in periodicals such as *Jugabina*, *Janasakti*, *Deshakatha*, *Sahakara*, *Utkal Sahitya*, etc. Annapurna Devi's impact was significant in understanding the contribution of women writers to Odia Literature. Through her writings, she strived to spread education and social consciousness among women. Her articles were published in the periodicals such as *Prajabandhu*, *Utkalabasi*, *Sambalpur Hiteishini*, and *Sahakara* (Rout 83).

This tradition was taken forward by Sulochana Pradhan, Sitadevi Khadenga, Sarala Devi, Bina Devi, Bidyut Prava Devi, Basant Kumari Patnaik, Binapani Mohanty, Sanghamitra Mishra, Archana Nayak, and Nibedita Jena in later days. Before the discussion of the women dramatists, it would be appropriate to discuss the characteristics of women reform movement that encouraged some women to follow unconventional trends such as playwrights and theatre artists for their profession.

Women reform in Odisha was influenced by the western culture in general and the reform movements in other parts of India in particular. Tutun Mukherjee writes in the prolegomenon to her anthology *Staging Resistance: Plays by Women in Translation*:

The denial of education to women, the male exclusivity in the print culture, the tendency to ‘vulgarise’ and ‘devalue’ oral culture (generally the female domain), the separation of the private and public spaces have all served to confine women to certain genres and restrict or erase their presences in others (4).

This book attempts to help us comprehend the possible factors that have been attributed to the distance and alienation of women from the theatre. She further writes, “Theatre seems to reflect, like other cultural activities, an institutional structure in which artistic and administrative control still remains largely in the hands of men” (4). This patriarchal idea of male theatrical realm resulted in work that could only be defined from the perspective of men. Theatre is still seen as a male-dominated institution. Women are relegated to the private domain of the family, where reproduction and childrearing are paramount.

The Brahmo Samaj and the Christian missionaries played an important role in the diffusion and spread of women’s education among the illiterate masses. Similarly, the National Congress, the Utkal Sammilani, the Freedom Movement of India brought political consciousness among women and thereby influenced the demand for women’s education in

Odisha. While the Christian missionaries focused on reform through education, the Brahmo Samaj advocated social reforms such as Brahmo Marriage, inter-caste marriage, widow-remarriage, removal of early marriage and abolition of polygamy along with establishment of girls' schools at Cuttack. Leaders like Madhusudan Das and Gopabandhu Das have worked for women's education and social liberation in Odisha. While Madhusudan Das focused on issues that hampered women entering legal system, Gopabandhu Das took a humanitarian approach to women's development. Mahatma Gandhi and his social reformatory actions brought about a new light of hope with the gradual awakening of women such as Reba Ray, Shailabala Das, Kuntala Kumari Sabat, Sarala Devi, Ramadevi, and Malati Choudhry among others who all started a forward march of service for women in society. Reba Ray was a strong social reformer who worked towards the spread of women's education in Odisha. Establishment of the Model Girls' School which was converted to Ravenshaw Girls' School later was her contribution apart from the establishment of a widow-remarriage association.

Shailabala Das was also another woman social reformer who advocated compulsory women's education and setting up of primary schools for girls during that time. She has contributed several articles in newspapers and magazines towards this cause. Kuntala Kumari Sabat, honoured as "Utkal Bharati", was a multifaceted personality. She was a physician, writer, social worker, and a renowned woman leader in the nationalist movement. She worked for eradication of social evils like caste discrimination, untouchability, child marriage, gender discrimination and the system of Purdah. She was one of the foremost names from Odisha during the freedom struggle. She founded the Bharati Tapovan Sangha, an organisation for the development of Odia language, in addition to her works on widow-remarriage and women's emancipation. Sarala Devi was a follower of Gandhi, a social reformer and activist who raised her voice against the patriarchal system. She engaged herself in fight for the eradication of untouchability, independence of women, women's education,

Swadeshi movement, Non-co-operation movement, Salt-Satyagraha movement, and awakening of women. She was the first Odia woman to join the national movement. Ramadevi Choudhury was a social reformer and Indian Freedom fighter, who gave her entire life to the service of nation and people. She also took part in the Bhoodan movement inspired by Acharya Vinoba Bhave after independence of India. Malati Choudhury was a Gandhian freedom fighter and social reformer who worked for the rights of the farmers thorough 'Krushaka Andolan' against zamindars and money-lenders.

All these women followed creative writing, focusing on the mainstream trends of writing such as poetry, novel, short story, etc. In this context, Tutun Mukherjee proclaims, "As playwrights, women scarcely figure on the literary map. They seem to have shied away from writing plays though they have excelled in all other genres" (5). These women restored the self-confidence and self-reliance along with the rightful position of women in the society by advocating education for women. Natabara Samantaray's *Odia Sahitya Itihas* (1803-1920) discusses that associations were established to spread women's education to address the social issues related to women, and to ensure upliftment of women. Some major associations were *Mutual Improvement Society* (1859) Cuttack, *Utkal Bhasa Unnati Vidhayini* (1866) Balasore, *Utkal Bhashoddipani Samaj* (1867) Cuttack, *Cuttack Debating Club* (1868), *Utkalollasini Sabha* (1868), *Ganjam Utkal Hitabadini Sabha* (1872) Berhampur, *Utkal Bhasoddipani Sabha* (1873) Cuttack, *Orissa Islam Association* (1875) Cuttack, *Utkal Sabha* (1877) Cuttack, *National Society* (1878) Balasore, *Unity Association* (1881) Balasore, *Utkal Hitesini Sabha* (1881) Paralakhemundi, *Dhenkanal Hiteishini Sabha* (1881), *Puri Students' Association* (1882), *Utkal Sahitya Sammilani* (1886) Cuttack, *Baripada Reading Club* (1889), *Cuttack Union Club* (1891), *Alochana Sabha* (1893) Cuttack, *Be De's Social Club* (1895) Balasore, *Observer Club* (1896) Cuttack, *Bama Lochani Sabha* (1895) Talcher, *Sikhabibardhini Sabha* (1897) Angul, *Fraser Club* (1905) Sambalpur, and

Utkal Youngmen's Association (1905) Cuttack (192). Some women influenced by these associations established their own associations. The aim of these associations was to dismantle the dominance of men, to spread women's education, and to participate in the freedom movement. Such women's associations included Utkal Women's Conference (1924) by Rasamani Dei and Swarnalata Dei of Berhampur, Ladies Association of Berhampur, Young Utkal Association of Cuttack (Published on 10th May 1924, *Utkal Deepika*). These associations brought out the political consciousness among women. They took part in nationalist movements such as the Swadeshi Movement, the Non-Cooperation Movement, the Civil Disobedience Movement, and the Quit India Movement showing their courage and patriotism (Panigrahi 40).

Women as playwrights entered the public sphere in 1920s. The period bears significance with the debut of a woman playwright in the Odia theatre world, named Sulochana Pradhan with the play *Savitri*. Several plays on various themes ranging from issues such as dowry, untouchability, women's education, gender consciousness, gender identity and crisis were enacted with women being involved in various capacities. Women as playwrights brought out significant changes in the portrayal of such social issues faced by women in their day-to-day lives. Myth and religion exert significant influence on the functioning of the society as well as on individual behaviour. Myths are irrational and fantastic concepts that are sacred and passed over generations. Plays reflect the realities of the society, help in maintaining social order and plead for change in society by highlighting the malpractices, spreading awareness, and engaging people in search for solution to such malpractices. Theatres and mythology depend on each other, mythology being the source of inspiration for theatres and theatres becoming the guardians of mythological values and norms. The playwrights, while dealing with the mythological themes, tend to adhere to the existing customs and traditions and use mythological plots to validate the rules and norms of

the society. Hence, the writers give special attention to glorification of the mythological characters in their writings.

A review of traditional Odia drama shows that the early plays were mostly written based on mythology and on historical themes. In this connection, Sulochana Devi and Sarala Devi's contributions are highly representative. The mythological characters were selected to glorify their social and moral values in the dramatic forms in Odia. This is found in the drama of Sulochana Devi, who is considered a pioneer of social and mythological drama writing in Odia. She started her writing at the beginning of the nineteenth century and introduced Odia readers to new dramatic thoughts with her imagination of the diverse cultures of Odisha. It has been noticed that Devi's literary works fall into the category of myth and religion. Her writings, and especially her drama *Savitri* (1928), portray a remarkable character for introduction of controversial themes like women's sexuality and chastity. Sulochana Devi was well versed in English, Sanskrit and Odia languages. Her multilingual skills facilitated her understanding of the cultural traits of the East and the West. This is clearly visible in the writings of Sulochana Devi and her literary imagination of position of women.

Sulochana Devi's *Savitri* (1928) presents the woman as a symbol of devotion, and sacrifice. The character of Savitri is an ideal woman and role model for all the women with her exemplary devotion and commitment to her husband. She fights and outwits the God of Death, *Yama* to rescue her husband's life. The character of Savitri is portrayed as a symbol of chastity and commitment that were instrumental for rescuing the life of her husband from death. The story and the character are already popular in Odia folklore with the celebration of Savitri Vrata by married women all over the state for the long-life of their husbands. The character of Savitri, in many ways, defines the duties, position, role, and character of an ideal woman to be emulated by all. This play emphasises the power of devotion and love of a woman. Through this play, Sulochana Devi highlights the position of worship that a woman

is accorded when she has such unquestionable devotion towards the husband. Sulochana Devi asserts through the character of Savitri, “The moon doesn't have its own brightness, but it collects brightness from the Sun and mesmerises the world. Like this a wife looks beautiful when she's with her husband” while further reiterating "Narinya Bhusano Pati" (husband is the ornament of wife) (Sc 7 pp 22). The author tries to portray women's identity dependent upon her husband's reputation in conformity with traditional values. The play or the story further brings forth the position of woman not only on par with man but establishes woman in the role of wife, as the saviour of husband. Savitri (known as Sati Savitri) through her chastity has shown to have attained the position of a Goddess, as is evident from the celebration of Savitri Vrata solemnised on a designated day associated with the mythology. This play by Sulochana Devi reinforces the importance of a woman and her devotion, and guides the audience towards a moral, ethical and religious path.

Sarala Devi's *Sura Sundari* (1959) is a mythological play based on the story of Tilottamma, a divine beauty created by Vishwakarma, who was instrumental in the killing of the demon brothers, Sanda and Upasanda. The defeat of the army of devas in the hands of the demons and the helplessness of all devas including Kartikeya and Indra have been elaborately depicted by the author. Creation of Tilottamma, an unrivaled beauty, an epitome of strength, the saviour, a source of power, self-respect, self-confidence, and inspiration has been described in detail. This short play is not only a fine literary specimen but also an interpretation of a myth that emphasises power of Shakti, a feminine entity considered as the source of all creation. Consequent upon the victory of devas and killing of the demons, Tilottamma has been praised by Indra “O! Tilottamma, you have been blessed by all devas today. You as the Mother Bhagabati have saved all devas from humiliation and suffering. O Sati! Your name will be remembered forever as the ‘Vanquisher of demons’ for it's you because of whom the demons are killed today. You are Goddess Durga, annihilator of

sufferings. I bow before you” (Sc 8 pp 125). The dialogues are written very lucidly and composed with frequent use of Sanskrit words by the playwright.

The fighting between the demon and deity shows the symbolic symbiosis of power. In the society, a woman has to be respected by man. Jung defines myth in his book, *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconsciousness* as, “the first and foremost psychic phenomena that reveal the nature of the soul” (Jung 6). In Jung's theory, archetypes are inborn quality of ideology which may consequently become associated in the interpretation of the observed real experience. It is a set of memories and interpretations closely related with the internal psyche of human beings. Jung has pointed out at the archetypes as a sort of psychological entity, directly related to our physical, bodily organs that are innate by them partially through the evolutionary processes. Jung conceptualized that all of mythology could be taken as a type of projection of the collective unconscious which are found in the characters like Savitri and Durga. The ideological formation of the characters stands for savior. The idea which we have conceived in our mind is that Savitri and Durga both represent the power of women in our society. This idea presents the rebellious and sacrificing nature of women for the sake of their dharma, family, and society. They never care about themselves and always put others' interests above theirs. At this juncture, woman in the society, as a wife, a daughter, a mother is encouraged to follow the examples of these myths. Here, the concept of ‘self’ can be addressed to inspire the common women for fighting against the social prejudices and injustices. The ‘self’ according to Jung is the most important archetype in his psychoanalytic theory. It is labelled as the “midpoint of the personality” (Jung 58).

In the larger context of the society, women have faced many obstacles and difficulties at multiple levels. It is very difficult to separate the cultural and social views in the plays, since both are entwined. Thus, the social entails the cultural and vice versa, with sometimes

explicit and sometimes subtle connections to the political and religious as well. The women playwrights' societal concerns have made their plays contentious, eliciting stern reactions and replies. They perfectly exemplify the increased awareness and efforts of the Indian playwrights in the last quarter of the twentieth century to portray the agonies, suffocations, and revolts of the female characters, with an emphasis on women of the middle class.

Sulochana Devi's *Sansar Chitra* (1945) is a play based on women's identity and their exploitation. The dramatist focuses on the changing definition of women and depicts the psychological and social costs that women pay while following the behavioural patterns that restrict their individuality. Further, any attempts to break the social barriers might incur slander, social vilification, and abuse against the women. The use of these two settings allows Sulochana Devi to expose the confusion and frustration that arise out of the division between the social role and the personal identity. The use of the settings shows the different experiences and how these places are able to change women's attitudes and even their personalities. Women's identity begins with their consciousness. Their roles, tradition, culture and values construct women's identity. Judith Butler in her book *Bodies That Matter* argues, "Whenever construction is considered not as activity, but as an act, one which happens once and whose effects are firmly fixed; the constructivism is reduced to determinism and implies the evacuation or displacement of human agency" (78). In this context, the three women characters are searching for their identity. Biswamoy Pati's *Situating Social History: Orissa, 1800-1997* states, "Patriarchal values dominate the characterisation of women. The women are either good wives or innocent victims, who remain peripheral to the dominant male identity or those who corrupt and undermine it" (23). The story narrates three women characters Sarala, Parvati and Shanti. Sarala is an ideal woman, who believes in the tradition and culture. The author tries to portray the perfect homemaker in the character of Sarala. Her marriage with Madan made Sarala's life

miserable, when she came to know that Madan is having an affair with Shanti. Sarala faces domestic violence from Madan. She silently tolerates everything because being an ideal woman she can't question her husband. In a conversation with Shanti she expresses her love for her husband despite the treatment she has been getting.

Sarala: My son died from starvation and lack of medical assistance which made my world dark. But I derived a way out of it. My moral duty as a wife is to take care of my husband for the rest of my life. Now it is my only aim (Act 3 Sc 6 pp 62).

The author tries to show how a woman is dependent on her husband or son. Madan took all the money and left her. On the other hand, Parvati also faced domestic violence from her husband, Duryodhan. But Parvati is not like Sarala, she always raises her voice and questions the patriarchal system. She always blames Duryodhan that this is because of him "I have been 10 years in mental hospital" (Act 4 Sc 2 pp 65). The conversation between Duryodhan and Parvati makes sure that the women have been subjugated and discriminated and have suffered a lot in the colonial Odisha. They do not have any right to speak before a landlord who is her husband. It shows the gravity of male domination against women in the pre-independent Odia society. Due to her straight forward behaviour, Parvati is killed by her husband in front of Shanti and other people. Shanti's character is very strong and rebellious. She tries to fix Madan and Sarala's relationship and she kills Duryodhan for killing Parvati. With the changing of time, women have realised their position in the society and also raised their voice against \ patriarchy. The author tries to portray the women characters of the pre independent Odia society who raise questions about their identity. The playwright tries to show how marriage teaches women the art of deception and suppression as a survival strategy but the women protagonists also believe that women should be aware of their rights and needs. As Beauvoir says, "The tragedy of marriage is not that it fails to assure woman the promised

happiness- there is no such thing as assurance in regard to happiness- but that it mutilates her; it dooms her to repetition and routine” (67). The author tries to portray the submissive and docile nature in the character of Sarala, who is considered to be an ideal woman. The character tries to depict the inferior position of the women in the patriarchal society.

Sitadevi Khadanga’s *Nispati* (1971) depicts the helplessness of women, and their dependence on the male members of their family. The play is a realistic representation of the village life of Odisha reflecting the societal pressure on girls to get married at a young age, accepting the burden of the family as a daughter, wife, and mother. The writer elaborately highlights the peer pressure from neighbourhood women, deliberate attempts by them to humiliate others, and quarrels among women on trivial issues. Along with the qualities of tolerance, perseverance, and dedication shown by Sumabou and Sumana, the qualities of jealousy, selfishness, and manipulative nature of neighbourhood women are reflected in the characters of Nandabou, Sebatibou, Kanchanbou, etc. While the play centres on the generosity of the old man, Braja and his nobility to help others, silence of Sumana, struggle of Sumabou, and loose-talks among women are given appropriate attention. Betty Freidan says, “The feminine mystique permits and even encourage women to ignore question of their identity. The mystique says they can answer the question “who am I?” by saying “Tom’s wife ...Mary’s mother” so a woman should possess their independent identity” (90). Betty Freidan tries to explain that their identity should be availed by women in every situation and the question ‘Who I am’? is worrying them in their mind. In the same context in this play the way the women are called as the mother of someone (Sumabou, Nandabou, Kanchanbou, etc.), and not by their own name, shows a lack of self-identity. A marriageable daughter is such a huge burden for the parents of Sumana that they wish to get her married somehow, even if it is to an old widower like Braja who is of her grand-father’s age. Character assassination of a woman by other women is a common occurrence in this society. Even a

girl speaking to a neighbour as old as her father or grandfather attracts prying eyes of neighbours, and it is the girl who gets the entire blame for no fault of hers.

Bidyut Prava Devi's *Vivah* (1989) deals with gender discrimination, illiteracy and women's education. The play's setting is in a typical village area of Odisha where women are not given freedom. Bohu (Daughter-in-law) and Neti both are disciples of Sri Aurobindo and they are preaching his ideology from door to door in awareness campaigns. It is not easily acceptable by the other women. In the villages of Odisha, it is not acceptable to the people if the women (especially daughters-in-law) of the house venture out even for spreading spiritual and religious values. On the other hand, Haribou and Netibou represent the orthodox ideology and think that women should remain confined to the four walls of the house and invest their time in household chores. When Bohu comes from the campaign, her husband and mother-in-law start scolding her. She retaliates and tries to make them understand the value of education. Throughout the play we can see gender discrimination towards Bohu. Her mother-in-law and husband try to subjugate her by narrating the traditional role of a daughter-in-law in the Odia society. Haribou represents the orthodox mentality present in the Odia society reflected in the customs and the traditions of the times. Mothers-in-law of the old generation wished to impose the life that they lived as daughters-in-law, continuing the vicious cycle. Any deviation from the prescribed rules was a forbidden taboo and was considered a threat against society. Bohu's character signifies the modern women of her time, questioning and challenging the established traditions and values. Among the other women characters, she was the one advocating change and leading by example. She along with Neti went out of her designated role in the society and preached Sri Aurobindo's ideology among the common masses, went door to door, faced challenges from their male counterparts and played the role that was exactly expected from a man at that time. Bohu tries to make her husband understand her work but Hari tries to shut her mouth, when he says, "Shut up, and

don't talk too much. If you open your mouth. I will beat you severely" (Sc 8 pp 89). The writer tries to show the social evils existing in the society. But the character Bohu revolts against her husband and tries to educate him regarding the freedom of women. She teaches him that without women's independence the country cannot reach great heights. Even Neti's character expresses the beliefs of the modern women. The author tries to show the male hegemony and social discrepancies faced by the women in the Odia society.

Basant Kumari Pattnaik's *Marichika* (1956) deals with women's education, domestic violence, marriage and gender discrimination. It is a story of a remote village girl named Champa and how she was deprived of education. Hailing from a village, Champa always dreams of having a good life. She always admires the city people and their lifestyle. She knew that education will give her freedom. Champa wishes to study further but her mother is not in favour of her studies. Though during the colonial period, the government took several steps for encouraging women education; their presence in the educational institutions was abysmal. It is observed that the benefits of education were vastly imbalanced in favour of male children. As education has always been associated with the need for employment and income, the domestic sphere of activity that the women were restricted to hardly called for modern education. Therefore, while the sons in the family were being sent to schools, the daughters were being trained for household works. They thought of the girl child as a burden and tried their best to complete her marriage early. In an instance her mother says, "What is the use of studies, at the end you have to sit in the kitchen" (Sc 10 pp 120). Champa's mother belongs to the old tradition and culture, where they believe that if a woman is educated, she will lose the traditional values. So, Champa thought that marriage would be a great decision for leading a modern life. The author portrays Champa as a rebellious character who can go to any extent for her future. She tries to break all the rules of the traditional society. On the other hand, the women of the village Subhi, Gunjari and Sara instigate Champa's mother to

get her married before she does something that would bring ill reputation to the family as well as the village. The play was written in the post-independence era where villages were not developed, women were deprived of education, and modern thoughts had not reached the village. For them modern education was a threat to their culture and values. Champa tries to behave like a modern girl because she visits her uncle's house in Cuttack. She compares herself to her cousin Milu. Here the two girls are portrayed from different cultures. Milu leads a city life, is well-educated, she is traditional and shy in nature while Champa leads her life in the rural area, not educated but has a modern mindset. To set herself free from the rural life, Champa elopes with Madan, a boy from her village, to get a better life. Her happiness turns into grief when she finds him to be a drunkard. He beats her and sells all her ornaments to meet the expenses for his drinks. Champa's own decision creates problems for her. In her attempt to set herself free from the conservative society, she lands herself in hell. Love marriage during the early or the colonial period or even after Independence was never accepted by the society. Only arranged marriages were allowed with the approval of the kith and kin. So, the family members could not extend their support to Champa. They were afraid of social rejection and of being outcasted. Champa's mother Neti, after listening to her misfortune, visits town, but is unable to take her back, and finally Champa leaves Madan.

The playwright has reflected the ethos of the contemporary time and society. To give a touch of the rural reality she has used colloquial language and proverbial idioms used by the rural folks. She seems to be quite different from her contemporary playwrights as mentioned at the outset. As a woman playwright, she gives weightage to women characters and on an experimental basis she ventures to follow such a technique and the entire play along with the climax is built on women's sentiments, feelings and with a positive message to the society against the male dominance and their marginalised status in family.

The play *Besura*, deals with superstitions and middle-class consciousness. This story is about Chinumaa, mother of Chinu, the eldest daughter of the family, the central character of the play. Her husband is a government officer and earns enough for maintenance for a lavish life style. They live in a small town and she is blessed with two kids, Minaketan who practices law and her daughter Chinu is married and lives with her in-laws. Minaketan's wife Rita is highly educated and as a modern lady, she spends her time mostly in meetings and high society get-togethers. Chinumaa taunts Rita and shows repressive attitude toward her. Chinumaa wants her dominance over her home but it is not possible owing to the independent attitude of her son and daughter-in-law. Chinumaa and her friends are regularly found engaged in gossiping and criticising. She might not have any ill thoughts towards her daughter-in-law but her friends fill her ears. Most of the time they talk of family discipline, role of daughter-in-law in Hindu family, her duty and devotion towards parents-in-laws, and particularly respect for mother-in-law which Rita did not bother much about. They praise and flatter Chinumaa with all sweet-coated words, as a consequence of which she is misguided to misunderstand her daughter-in-law.

Thus, Chinumaa and her friends spoil the amicable and pleasant relations of the family. On the other hand, Rita also gradually develops a tendency to disregard her mother-in-law and argues with the other women. Minaketan also suffers from this and cannot concentrate on his law practice. He is psychologically disturbed due to this conflict. The entire burden of the house was on Minaketan and the situation worsens when Minaketan's father dies. The source of income is curtailed and Chinumaa is not in a position to spend money on her selfish friends. When their demands are not fulfilled, they do not turn up and absolute loneliness leads to physical disorders and gradually she falls ill. Her daughter-in-law Rita is also not prepared to serve the requirements of the old age sufferings of her mother-in-law. Finally, Chinu comes forward and takes her mother to her own place. Days pass by and

Chinumaa's condition deteriorates. The more she suffers, the more she thinks of her son and daughter-in-law. Sometimes she raves calling names of her son and daughter-in-law. Chinu takes note of her condition and informs her brother to come. Receiving a message from his sister, Minaketan rushes to see his mother.

Chinumaa is happy seeing her son, but expresses her displeasure as Rita did not come. She asks Minaketan why she did not come. Actually, she is not interested to come but Minaketan lied that he did not allow her to accompany him. Chinumaa realises the truth.

She murmured: My daughter –in-law will not come to see me in my last stage. She will not give me last drop or water before I die- history repeated itself. I did not attend my mother-in-law when she died. I did not give her a single drop of water before her death as per the Hindu rites. She frantically wanted me, but I was so adamant I did not care about her last wish, of course finally I went to her but everything was finished, it was too late. (Sobbed) I realized everything. I did not attend her; then how do I expect her to come and attend me?

Minaketan consoles her and assures her of the arrival of his wife. But Chinumaa's last response is, *God knows that!* The play ends with a tune of pathos. Her realisation indicates consequence of karma (Karmaphala) or the proverbial ending 'as you sow, so you reap'. Therefore, it is an established belief in Hinduism to be aware of the *phala* or result of the Karma or work and accordingly to perform the karma. It controls the human action and makes society disciplined. Thus the play deals with women-centred issues like their belief and behaviour, role in the family and the society intending to establish universal human and religious values.

Binapani Mohanty's *Kranti* (1999) deals with domestic violence and gender discrimination. This play is about Bimla who is facing domestic violence at her in-law's house, as she has delivered a girl child. Both her husband and mother-in-law think that girl is a burden and brings bad luck to the whole family. Her husband states that he lost his job and was a prisoner in a false case but good luck happened the day the girl child died. They are happy that the bad omen has gone; if she is alive their expenses would have gone up. They verbally abuse and threaten Bimla to deliver a baby boy next year, or else her husband will not come home and her mother in law will kill Bimla. Helene Cixous in her book *The Laugh of Medusa* proclaims:

Everywhere within the discourses, the ordering by binary hierarchy persists...the coupling is always a relationship of violence...intention, desire, authority examine them and you are led back to the father. It is even possible not to notice that there is no place, whatsoever, for a woman in the calculations (80).

The domestic space has evolved into a vulnerable space for women in society, and this vulnerability has manifested itself in the form of domestic violence. Power politics is systematically diminishing women's identities on a day-to-day basis to retain the honour of their families. Women are increasingly becoming objects in the hands of a male-dominated culture, as a result, domestic violence is also increasing. In this play, Bimla is not safe in her domestic space about which she sends a message to her home but unfortunately Bimla's mother does not support her. She says "A girl is born for the other home, she should manage everything quietly, and even if she dies there, then it's her salvation (moksha). If she comes here then she will bring bad reputation to both the families" (Sc 4 pp 45). On the other hand, her father-in-law asks the astrologer to predict about the next delivery but unfortunately, there is no such prediction. After this, her in-laws start subjecting her to verbal abuse and physical

torture. Such practices of torture of daughters-in-law for dowry and in search of a male heir still persist even now. The search for a male heir has led to breaking of many families and even deaths in cases of inability to produce a son. In the case of Bimla, she gets to know of the evil plans and finally decides to put an end to all the suffering. At the end of the play, the example is taken from Goddess Durga the way she kills her enemy and a message is delivered, woman is not always weak.

Michel Foucault is the one who first articulated the idea of power by giving it a contemporary interpretation rather than the conventional one. The conventional conception of power is seen as something that is oppressive and destructive. Power according to Foucault is a good thing. It is pervasive, productive, and produces beneficial results. Additionally, it is present everywhere. It exerts an impact that cannot be divorced from a person's personal, as well as their social and political lives on earth. It produces subject, fact, identity, knowledge, and even reality. Power is a strategy that can be implemented in a social setting. It has direct networks with the scholarly discourses as well as the social discourses of the particular society. According to Foucault, "Where there is power, there is resistance." (95). There is something inherently human about the desire for power and dominance. The power that Foucault wields is circulatory. It maintains a consistent and methodical routine of operation. Nobody is ever going to be the absolute dictator in charge of power. A chain is a useful metaphor for analysing power relationships. It is not uncommon to be able to see how power is passed around. It amalgamates from person to person or from groups to groups. Foucault's power is not a policy to oppress directly. Quite often, the strategy applied for subservience is hidden. This is the victory of strategic administration of power. Foucault's concepts on power, subject, identity, discourse, and knowledge have great impact on the present milieu. One can find similar traits in Bimla's character, where her resistance and resilience sustain the power to fight against patriarchy.

The short-play *Adwitiya* by Binapani Mohanty deals with the issue of widow remarriage and the conflict between tradition and modernity. This play is about Minu, who is a widow and belongs to a Brahmin family. Her husband dies in a car accident. Minu is staying with her in-law's house but Surendra (brother-in-law) and Manju (sister-in-law) are not in favour of keeping her because she does not help them in the household chores. On the other hand, Sumati (mother-in-law) supports her and wants her to get married again. Sumati being a widow herself knows the difficulties she faced in the society and does not want it all to repeat with Minu. Meantime, there is a proposal for Minu and Sumati is very happy that they want to accept Minu. The play is also about juxtaposition between tradition and modernity, Sumati whose age is around 65, is of a liberal and modern mindset and Surendra, aged around 35 is a rigid and orthodox Brahmin. Uma Chakravarti and Preeti Gill in their book *Shadow Lives: Writings on Widowhood* observe, "She should be long suffering until death, self-restrained, and chaste, striving (to fulfil) the unsurpassed duty of women who have one husband" (Sc 12 pp 129). Being a Brahmin widow Minu was deprived of jewellery, good food, colourful sarees, etc. She is labelled as inauspicious and is expected to stay away from festivals or functions lest she casts her evil eye and ruins the celebrations for others. She is considered ill-fated and is actively avoided especially during religious rituals. She is expected to become more devout and to devote more time to the service of God, which is ironic given the fact that her worldly engagements have been deemed to have come to an end with the death of her spouse. She is no longer regarded a member of her natal family after her marriage, so she hardly receives any assistance from her natal family. As a result, she has no social support to help her cope with the situation (Priyadarshini 5). As per the views of Uma Chakravarti's *Gendering the Caste through Feminist Lens*, widow re-marriage has provided a significant answer as well as emancipation from the shackles of this tradition. A significant transformation and social change took place in Indian society because of this decision. She

would be able to walk around and attend functions like any other ordinary women after her marriage. Sumati's attempt was to bring back Minu to life.

Sitadevi Khandanga's *Mandira Prabesh* (1947) is based on the temple-entry movement. Being a woman playwright, she was not biased towards women characters; rather she gave more importance to the social issues and brought these issues to the milieu. At that time, it was one of the major movements in India, which started first in Kerala. Like other states, Odisha is still witnessing temple-entry movement from pre-colonial times to the present day. Suratha Kumar Mallik's *Dalit Protest and Temple Entry Movements in Odisha* states:

After sixty-four years of India's independence and constitutional guarantees, 'Democracy and Citizenship' remain a dream for the Dalits of Odisha. Despite positive constitutional provisions and related laws on paper, in practice a large majority of Dalits in Odisha are unable to access these laws, or get these laws implemented in their favour. Even in the twenty-first century, Dalits in Odisha are being treated as inferior by the upper castes, State, and the law enforcing agencies (4).

In this play, only three women characters are found and the story revolves around two political parties led by Indranath and Apurna. Apurna's sister, Amita is a young modern girl who tries to come out of her traditional values and her belief is that all the political parties, whether communist or congress or independent are trying their best to win the election not to serve the country but to serve themselves, thus it reflects prominently her democratic values.

Being a true follower of Gandhian ideology, she rejects Chandranath's narrow belief that supports only Sanathan Ideology. She is of the view that without the demolition of untouchability, it is impossible to protect Hindu religion as most of the people would follow

other liberal religions. She talks about equality between men and women and leading a single life while serving the country. During that time women were treated as the property of man. So Amita's view of not to marry is a kind of revolution against rigid traditional practices.

A woman always needs courage when she speaks against the dominant forces in the society. Education and modern values have made them aware of the impositions of the traditional beliefs. Her argument with Chandranath depicts that women have better thoughts about their country but their beliefs, thoughts and views are always undervalued. Amita wants to create a harmonious society for all but her idea is not accepted by men. According to them, women are meant to take care of home and family affairs, and they have no right to speak in issues related to the country. Women are considered less intellectual, weak and submissive compared to men. Chandranath: "Aah, women have saved the country alone, it's a policy of bringing destruction to the society" (Act 4 Sc 5 pp 124). Through this we can understand how men of that time were not ready to accept modern women. Sitadevi projects her women as the pioneers of the society who want to serve their country. On the other hand, Saradi who belongs to a Brahmin family, possesses a very conservative and orthodox attitude. In many of her conversations she expresses her strong desire against the untouchables to enter the temple. She is a round character who represents the conservative bent of mind throughout the play and has accepted it as the ultimatum the deviation of which will lead to the doors of the hell.

The Odia society has traditionally been controlled by Brahmins and other upper castes who enjoy a variety of advantages. A lot of fundamental rights are inaccessible to Dalits even now. Exploitation and oppression by upper-caste privileged groups have become a standard practice. Dalits in the state face caste discrimination and untouchability, but the biggest challenge is that upper caste Hindus don't let them worship at several temples. In 1934, Mahatma Gandhi's journey of Odisha was unsuccessful in addressing the issue of temple

entry of Dalits as he along with the accompanying Dalits were denied access to Jagannath Temple in Puri. Mohan Nayak, a leader of the Dalit Congress who attempted to bring a group of Dalits into the temple in 1948, was attacked by Brahmin pandas and was expelled from the temple as a result of his actions (Malik 89). During the colonial period, Bhima Bhoi and his followers' entry into Puri Jagannath temple was prevented by officials and temple administration under the influence of the upper caste Brahmins. According to *Utkal Deepika*, a report published by the Superintendent of Police, Puri describes the temple entry movement on 1 March 1881 as an attack on Jagannath temple (Malik 88). In connection with this Raj Kumar's "*Dalit Assertion in Society, Literature and History*" states that since Dalits were denied access to education, they were unable to find the motivation and inspiration to organise a literary movement to protest the hegemony of the established literature. As a result, the Dalits were unable to write their own history and could not lead a revolution of their own. In this background, the play by Sitadevi is of great significance in unveiling the social realities of that time.

Basanta Kumari Pattnaik's *Juar Bhata* is a compilation of three short plays. *Parinati* (1956) deals with social issues like caste system, social customs and problems of a joint family system. As indicated earlier, the play deals with several social problems prevailing in the colonial period and even after the Independence era. The most important part of the drama deals with casteism. Surendra, the youngest son of Urmila, wants to marry Sagarika, who is a non-Brahmin. When Urmila comes to know about this, she firmly reacts and rejects the proposal. The instances of caste discriminations and voices against such practice started figuring more often with the reform movements in the society. The resistance from the society towards social transformation is evident in Urmila's protest:

Urmila: You cannot marry a non-Brahmin girl

Surendra: why?

Urmila: Our Brahmin community will not accept her; we will not accept her; we will be an outcaste.

The reformist in Surendra reiterates the fact that religion has been corrupted and with more and more people raising voices against caste prejudices, the society is moving towards a caste-free one. The resistances from his mother and younger brother depict the rigid adherence to caste practices even at the cost of death.

Surendra: Now our Brahmins have lost their sanctity. They have lost their religion. Now those who wear paita (sacred thread) are called Brahmin.

Urmila: I cannot tolerate such anti-Brahmin behaviour. It will not be acceptable for me; rather I will prefer your death. I will console myself that I have lost my son.

(Act 4 Sc 8 Pp 95).

The concept of joint family system prevailed in Hindu Society for centuries now. It is patriarchal in nature, and elder brother's wife exerts control over the household, considerable influence in domestic matters, religious practices, and even financial issues. Though the ancient Indian society particularly the Hindu society, like others was mostly male-dominated, matriarchal lineage also existed in some parts of India. K.M. Panikkar has rightly observed that the caste system, the village community, and the joint family system continued as the basic pillars of the Indian social system. Such tradition was in practice from the time of Manu. But gradually the status of women in the patrilineal system deteriorated. The women's entire life was spent in maintaining and sustaining the family. In the present case, Urmila had no control over her children. Her elder son neglected her; the second son was not employed, so he remained at home, and the third one was not ready to follow her directions. On the other hand, there was no cordial relation among the three brothers.

Industrialisation and urbanisation strongly affected the backbone of family system in India, particularly in the colonial period. As Natabar Samantray's *History of Odia Literature* states, from the very beginning of the introduction of Modern English education by the English, such consequence was experienced. In the early nineteenth century that is on 3rd February 1835 the education policy was introduced and implemented. The primary objective of such education was to create supporting personnel to help English administration for smooth governance. In this play, the same practice was followed, when Urmila's son left home for his job (300).

Odisha experienced a language conflict in the middle of the nineteenth century. Bengalis, who naturally wished to maintain their hegemony with the help of their language, largely manned the echelons of Orissa's educational and administrative system (Mohanty 7). Similarly, in Fakir Mohan Senapati's poem "Mun Halabahuda" (I am returning from the market) maintains that he makes business with Odia Literature gets no gain but with English Language, he gains profit. He indicated two things in the poem i.e., status of English in the later part of the nineteenth century and those who were engaged in writing. Odia Literature publications were not sumptuously paid. This practice continued for decades till the post-independence era. *Atmahatya* (Suicide) was staged at the Bhanja Kala Mandap on 2nd Dec 2014. This play was about the plight of the struggling writers. The play portrays the plight of the struggling writers who fail to get recognition. On the other hand, it shows that a few lucky writers got recognition through paid articles and plagiarism. Similarly, in *Parinati* Ravindra was no exception to this.

Bina Devi's *Aloka Sandhani* (1988) is a collection of short plays. Among them *Dahani* (Witch) deals with subjugation of women, superstitions and beliefs systems of rural life. In this play, women have been projected as the soul enemies of women and it shows the zenith of superstitions. Allegation, Proclamation and Persecution are the stages of witch-

hunting. Accusation includes accusing women for anything that happens in the community or to an individual i.e., death of any person, child or animal, any natural disaster, any disease in the village or loss of crop. Declaration means to brand a woman as a witch using witch crafts and Persecution means to torture the victim, socially outcaste them and force them to die (Mallick 118). In this play, Manika is branded as a witch by other women characters of the play and even being an innocent girl, she is treated as the murderer whose bad luck has brought death to her husband. Manika's parents get a proposal of a rich, old man for their daughter. They think that their daughter will have a luxurious life but unfortunately, after the marriage, the old man dies and everyone curses Manika for her bad fate. Everyone makes her life so miserable that one day she disappears from the village. The irony is that she herself left the village but people believe that the Goddess threw her out of the village for the well-being of the villagers.

The playwright depicts the devastating effects of the superstitions of the rural people on themselves and others. They cling to their old superstitions and ignorance. Though humanity has passed the pre-modern era and entered the postmodern era, some still believe in witchcraft or magic. Witchcraft superstitions include women being possessed by bad spirits. Witch-hunting is common in some parts of Odisha. Witch-hunting is a social evil that has taken hold in many parts of India, and it is used against innocent people to grab their property but here they have used Manika's character as a bad omen for the entire village.

Men are not alone to be blamed for the demeaning of women's identity; the feudal system is equally to blame for the oppression of women. In some societies, these differences are very much pronounced while in others, they are given less importance. Even the Odia society is not an exception to this.

Binapani Mohanty's play *Patha Koili* deals with women's education, gender discrimination, child marriage and domestic violence. This play is about Koili, a poor girl who wants to study but due to her family problems, she is unable to pursue her studies. Her mother, a poor illiterate woman, does not support her. Rather she is against her education and she thinks Koili should work as a maid and earn. Throughout the play one can observe gender discrimination towards Koili. She is not allowed education and she is beaten badly by her mother. At the same time, her mother thinks if her son had lived, she would have thought of education. There is an instance in the play where Koili's mother and her neighbour converse about gender discrimination:

Devika: "girls should be given protection from everybody because once their character is lost, everything is lost but boys are as strong as iron, even if they are thrown away, no one is going to question us" (93).

On the other hand, Saswati, a doctor by profession, is a woman liberal and modern mindset. She helps Koili to study in her house, but Koili's mother does not allow her and bashes her up badly. We can see domestic violence in the play, Koili's mother is a victim of domestic violence as her husband was a drunkard and he used to beat her every day. Koili's mother lost her son and her husband also left her, and she was the only earning member in the family. That is why her behaviour towards Koili is aggressive. She thought her daughter as a burden, so she tries to get her married to an older person who is already married twice and a drunkard. We can also see the issue of child marriage in the play, as Koili is married to an aged person for the sake of money. On the other hand, Saswati tries to warn her that it is a crime and she will face many problems. But Koili's mother does not listen to her and sells her daughter. At the end of the play Koili is dead and her mother cannot bear the pain and loses her mental balance.

The author tries to present the patriarchal system as multifaceted and profoundly embedded in the society. Economically they are very poor and no one is there to help Koili and her mother. Koili's mother is psychologically affected as she has lost her son. He was supposed to be the one to propagate the family lineage, the bread earner of the family, the old age support and so on. These are major factors to have preference between a boy and a girl. Her psychological condition leads to a social problem too. K. M. Pandey states, "In fact, male oriented societies structure females in such a way that they work against even those of their own gender" (112). Pandey further states, "Suppression, subjugation and exploitation are not confined to the male-female relationship, but exist between female-female relationships as well" (115). Beauvoir observes that "She is defined and differentiated with references to her. She is incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential. He is the subject, he is absolute, she is the other" (49). Men are very possessive about their powers. In the context of Odisha, male dominance has been a major issue for controlling the powers and lives of women in all possible ways.

The twentieth century women's writings in Odia literature changed the role of women in society. There were certain stereotypical roles, traditional virtues that had been fixed by the supreme authority of the society. These stereotypical perspectives about women often prove true but most of the times they hide the actual truth (89). Women have been compelled to match the expectations of the society for their inferior status in the patriarchal society. From this point of view the twentieth century Odia literature can be taken into consideration. The different roles that had been played by men and women writers impacted the traditional Odia society. It can be maintained that the male writers ruled the cosmos of literature. The women writers who took to the field of literature found their different versions portrayed by the male writers. Literature was partial and the actual women were far different from the literary characters. As Toril Moi states, literature is already political before we learn to speak:

Literature is already ideological before we read. But when women wrote their own literature, described their own problems, their works struggled against the cultural and historical forces that banished women's experience to the second rank. They suffered to create a space among the writers (171). In the twentieth century colonial India or Odisha women did not have any financial independence or identity. Their family beliefs and traditional thinking did not create a suitable environment to write. The extract from Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* can be considered here, and it goes like this, "A woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction" (23). Women tried to come out of their domestic lives and take part in the development in the society which was the monopoly of men. And this attitude of women was not acceptable to the conservative, orthodox society. With the gradual growth in industrialisation, economy and modernity, women started seeing themselves in a different light. Odisha, where most of the population live in the village, is in trouble to accept modern thoughts. Odisha's culture, tradition, religious and superficial beliefs created a barrier in women's struggle to acquire an individual identity. Most of the playwrights did not directly revolt against male dominance but they tried to project the way women were treated in terms of culture, custom and traditions. They wanted to show women's inner turmoil and suffering.

Anti-colonial movements and other reformist struggles gave birth to women's movements. Christian missionaries and other colonial institutions compelled women to change their views. Odisha's declaration of a language-based state in 1936 created a new spark for the Odia women. They tried to recognise their spaces and that shaped their social and cultural lives. It became difficult to define the roles of women in the private domain due to the growth of modern policies and their definition of equality and liberation. Nationalists put women in the front because they believed that without women's equal participation, freedom would be meaningless. Women needed a change in their cultural and community identity. No help towards the reconstruction of their identity would be possible without

changes in the field of marriage and sexuality. Many nationalist writers depicted Odia women in vivid ways, which reconstituted their relation with the society. It was the middle class who held the flag of reformation for the women in Odisha. A strong middle class is always credited as the path-breaker in any society. With its involvement in various trades and interactions with outside world, they are open to change compared to the other sections in the society. The middle-class perspective of immaculate womanhood dominated the culture and the nationalist movement. This impacted reformists and the Odia writers who depicted women in their literary works. They twisted the role of women as per the social pattern of the then society. Partha Chatterjee argues, “In the entire phase of the national struggle, the crucial need was to protect, preserve and strengthen the inner core of the national culture, its spiritual essence” (70) and, women are always at the centre of every culture with codes of conduct being applicable to mostly women. The new culture aimed at assigning new responsibility liberating them from the confinement of traditions and customs.

The Odia mainstream writers projected women in a trivial manner. It is obvious that women writers could depict themselves better because it was the expression of their own experience, knowledge and struggle that they faced as women. Gender discrimination shaped women writers’ entry into public sphere and their self-consciousness. Dominant playwrights often presented the unwanted effects of education in the form of recklessness and immoral behaviours of educated women which portrayed women education in a degraded and harmful practice in the society. The woman character in Basant Kumari Pattnaik’s *Marichika* falls a prey to her ambition. Champa, the protagonist of the play, due to her wish to live a modern life, creates problems for herself. The characters who want to break the traditional and cultural shield of society, lose their identity in the process of being modern. They do unapproachable and unconventional things to enjoy their freedom but also threaten the ancient social order. Access to education gives them strength to enter the public sphere and

break the chains of male domination. But they still represent the Odia society, and Odianess is clearly visible in their behaviour. As Partha Chatterjee says, “The woman standing as a sign for the nation, the spiritual qualities of self-sacrifice, benevolence, devotion, religiosity....the spirituality facilitated her moving out of the physical confines of her house....in fact her image as a goddess or mother served her to erase her sexuality in the world outside the home” (126). One thing that massively impacted the conduct, attitude and ideology of women was the growth of education. Not only urban women but also rural women tried to reconstruct themselves and the growth of nationalism and reformation created positive environment for them. Sitadevi Khandanga’s *Mandira Prabesh* and Bidyut Prava Devi’s *Vivah* discuss the positive impact of modern education on women. There were also women writers who emphasised the traditional and mythological image of ideal women which did not project women as inferior or other, but presented them as images of worship.

These mythological characters glorified the social and moral values of Odisha and focused on the chastity and controlled sexuality of women. This is clearly visible in the writings of Sulochana Devi’s *Savitri* and Sarala Devi’s *Sura Sundari*. The then social structures and caste system were the barriers in the growth of the women. Binapani Mohanty, in her *Patha Koili*, raises the question of women’s education and how the social position creates obstacles in Koili’s wish to get education. Basant Kumari Pattnaik’s *Parinati* outlines the issue of casteism.

Women playwrights have faced numerous obstacles placed in their way, like gender differences, family obligations, or lack of financial assistance. These women have made significant strides in Odia drama, challenging the male dominance. Tutun Mukherjee comments in *Staging Resistance: Plays by Women in Translation*, “Playwriting as a more public art demands more from the writer; for women the demands may be doubled because they also have to deal with the assumption that they’re less capable of public artistic

responsibility” (11). In the light of all the new women playwrights emerging in Odia, this presumption needs to be reconsidered. With a new perspective, these women have approached new challenges. The women dramatists are constantly under attack by male critics and opinions as they struggle to make a place for themselves in the literary world. The researcher has taken a few interviews of the women playwrights of the twenty-first century Odia. Sanghamitra Mishra, a well-known playwright, novelist, short story writer, poet and critic states how she faced the challenges of being a woman playwright. She describes how the women need to take up the challenges in a positive way and see them as part and parcel of theatre life. In her words:

In place of challenge, I would prefer to call it discomfort or inconvenience that women have to face in various aspects of theatre life.” Articulating the problems in contemporary drama industry, she narrates the gender-specific obstacles that a woman playwright has to face, such as coordinating with the director of the play, undermining of the role of playwrights, and difficulty in making herself available throughout staging as well as the rehearsals in order to avoid incompatibility in the characters from the text and on stage. The aspects of drama that playwrights have to give special attention to are (Interview pp 4)

Another writer of the twenty-first century, Ms. Archana Nayak explains her passion behind writing as:

As a woman writer, I have not written novels, stories, poems, essays or lyrics. The common expression through day to day characters is satisfying enough for a creative writer. In the same way, drama is the medium of expression of my creativity. For that, I have never faced any challenges within family or outside that could deter me from expressing my ideas. (Interview pp 3)

Nibedita Jena also states, “I have not faced any challenges that are insurmountable as I consider it my responsibility towards society and family”. But at the same time Nibedita Jena articulated her views on the status of contemporary Odia drama in an interview where she argues that the role of playwrights is often undermined by the directors on stage. Lack of respect for playwrights in general and women playwrights in particular has made many women writers to shift to genres like novel, short-stories, poems which are independent and individualistic endeavours. The drama has become, now-a-days, superficial devoid of the emotional attachment with the plot and the characters. The status of Odia drama as a result has gone down in comparison to other regional dramas like Bengali, Marathi, and Hindi. (Interview pp 4)

Tutun Mukherjee further states in *Staging Resistance: Plays by women in Translation* that “Theatre seems to reflect, like other cultural activities, an institutional structure in which artistic and administrative control still remains largely in the hands of men” (4). This patriarchal idea of male theatrical realm resulted in work that could only be defined as such. Theatre is still seen as a male-dominated institution. It shows the importance of both sexes in the public sphere. Women are confined to the private arena of the family, where reproduction and childrearing are paramount. It seems that male playwrights have performed well in every field, yet women playwrights have produced notable works despite their number being small.

The analysis of the chapter is based on the social issues in the Odia plays by selected women playwrights. The major themes reflect the social identity of women, their defined roles within the family and society imposed by mythological and religious norms, existence of social realities such as caste discrimination, gender discrimination, inter-caste marriage against the backdrop of the emergence of ‘new woman’. The select plays also present women characters challenging the societal restrictions and thereby call for women’s empowerment through various means, such as education, occupational freedom, political participation, and

decision-making in the family. They represent the silence and subjugation of women throughout cultures and times.

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Chapter 5

Conclusion

The concluding chapter sums up the arguments in the thesis and briefly discusses the historical evolution of gender consciousness and assertion in Odia drama. Cultural traditions are presented through Odia drama and performances along with the experiences and opinions of selected women playwrights from Odia drama. Before delving into the origin, evolution of the theatre and contributions of women in highlighting the gender issues through the plays, which is the core focus of the study, an attempt has been made to understand the various theories associated with the subject. Feminist approach, one of the major approaches in literature and social sciences, has been used to understand the societal conditions of women as a class and their representation in various fields including drama. The rise of women playwrights in Odia is found to be a gradual progress influenced by various factors, both internal and external. While women's education and reform brought awareness among women about their rights and responsibilities, nationalist movement and spread of western values of individualism and equality also had an important role in the rise of women in Indian society and Odia society in particular.

The period of Indian and Odisha history that is taken for this study has been a tumultuous one with several national, regional, and technological factors influencing the everyday aspects of Indian life. Social reforms intertwined with nationalist movement had a bearing on individual consciousness. In Odisha, the language movement had a crucial role in the origin and development of Odia theatre, while the nationalist movement had encouraged many women leaders in general and women playwrights in particular to express their voices through plays. As discussed earlier, the reform movements in India are intrinsically different from that of Western movements. The foundations of Indian values and adherence to the

traditional norms have never been challenged in the Indian reform movements, but only targeted the discriminatory practices which are claimed to have been mere corruption of the sacrosanct texts. Ram Manohar Ray's reforms and Dayanand Saraswati's call for going back to the roots remain witness to the fact that there was never a complete rejection of the core religious value system but only of the dilapidations. Theatres and drama have played a crucial role in reformation of practices by initiating debates and projecting the current imbalance in gender relations. Odia theatre in this regard has presented an interesting pattern through the eyes of playwrights from different genders. Theatre in Odisha holds a unique place with Odia language being one of the six classic Indian languages. Odia drama has developed over a period of time reflecting various themes such as mythological, socio-cultural and reformative, etc. A playwright, in this regard, wields a powerful weapon to present, persuade, mobilise, and convince the audience through presentation of issues and characters. The modern dramatists depict men and women in conflict with destiny or the inexorable forces of the social system. The major social issues like women's empowerment, struggle for women's identity, social consciousness for women's education, evil practices such as untouchability and the influence of mythology have been presented by the women dramatists. The women dramatists have portrayed the feelings and appraisals of the women characters as they feel that they are involved in their writings as insiders.

The Odia drama mainly represents social life of the people. The sociological aspects such as gender equality, caste discrimination, and importance of women education, consequence of inter-caste marriage, love and devotion, dowry system, suicide of bride, and life and livelihood of peasants have been demonstrated in the Odia drama. A group of educated women have attempted to sensitise the insider feelings such as spirituality, and dedication for the construction of women's conduct. The need for women empowerment and gender equality have been expressed in their writings. The historical development of Odia

drama marks the distinctive features of the social class formed during the colonial period in Odisha.

Theatre has played various roles in Indian society and its value has varied during different phases of history. Beginning from the days of *Natyashastra* up to the modern plays and drama, the nature, role and objectives of theatre have changed according to the social conditions of the society. Similarly, Odisha society under different regimes and cultural domination has seen many highs and lows in the evolution of Odia theatre. To illustrate the role of women in domestic life and different forms of women oppression like sexual exploitation, harassment, sexual offenses prevalent in this the male-dominated society, major Odia dramatists have used plots with conflicts between traditional and modern value system.

Throughout the ancient and mediaeval periods in Odisha, the traditional education system was the dominant form of instruction. The British introduced modern education, which challenged Odisha's traditional value system. Christian missionaries printed the Old and New Testaments in Odia under the East India Company. Missionaries founded the first primary school in 1822. English education was introduced during British control in Odisha. This British endeavours modernised Odisha through spread of modern education, and English education in particular.

In India, the rise of an organised nationalist movement occurred mostly during the second half of the nineteenth century. It came as a response to the oppression and dominance by the outside forces. The direct and indirect repercussions of British rule in India created material, moral, and intellectual circumstances that were necessary for the growth of the nationalist movement in India. In this context, Odisha also experienced the first-hand effects of it. There were two distinct nationalist undercurrents that emerged in Odisha. The people of Odisha joined the rest of the country in the mainstream of the national movement after two

major events: (1) the unification of all Odia-speaking regions and (2) the emergence of national consciousness. The nationalist movement in Odisha can be divided into two periods: (1) the Indian National Congress era (1885-1920) and (2) the Gandhian era (1920-1947). The ruling class of Odisha, which was heavily impacted by the nationalist movement in India, was the driving force behind the state's rise to political prominence. A variety of early socio-political organisations in Odisha, including the National Society in Balasore, the Odisha Association in Cuttack also known as the Utkal Sabha, and the Utkal Hiteisini Samaj in Paralakhemundi, were established by the Odia intellectuals with the purpose of spreading political ideas among the Odia people (Samantaray 89).

These prestigious organisations received direction and support from influential people such as Madhusudan Das, Baikunthanath De, and Shyamsundar Raiguru, among others. After the foundation of the Indian National Congress in the year 1885, these prominent figures acted as a connection between Odisha and the national forum. These organisations participated in the annual meetings of Indian National Congress through their delegates. An open meeting was conducted on March 3, 1886, in the building of the Cuttack Printing Company. At this meeting, the resolutions that were passed during the first session of the Indian National Congress held in Bombay in 1885 were unanimously adopted.

Due to the high status that was held by the great nationalist leaders from Bengal, many leaders from Odisha were unable to participate in the annual proceedings of the Congress. As a result, they were unable to make their voices heard. Therefore, the issues faced by Odisha could not be placed on the agenda of the Congress for discussion. Because of this, there were only a total of fourteen delegates from Odisha between the years 1885 and 1900 who had attended the annual sessions of the Congress on only six occasions.

The Swadeshi Movement, which began in Bengal in 1905 as a protest against the partition of Bengal, had a significant impact on the intellectuals of Odisha. Protest meetings were organised in Cuttack, Puri, Balasore, and Sambalpur, amongst other locations, to express solidarity with the movement that was taking place in Bengal. At this point, Madhusudan Das issued a clarion call to the people of Odisha, urging them to utilise the local items rather than purchasing any goods imported from other countries, particularly textile from Manchester and salt from Liverpool. The news of Swadeshi spread all the way to Balasore and Puri as well. In September, Abdus Sobhan Khan and Fakir Mohan Senapati convened massive public meetings in Balasore for the purpose of bringing attention to the issue. At Puri, Haris Chandra Ghose and Dhanpati Banerjee led the students in a procession through the town, during which they convinced the local business community to sell only Swadeshi items and to boycott the foreign goods that were available in their stores. It was reported by Pandit Godabarish Mishra that in the town of Puri, a bonfire was built up of garments from other countries. Many people of Balasore and Cuttack stopped using foreign-made clothing, salt, and sugar (Panigrahi 88).

After the First World War, there was a significant shift in India's political landscape that came about as a result of this transition. Indians had responded to Gandhiji's call to fight for the British in the First World War. They did so with the assumption that, as a token of gratitude for their efforts during the war, the British would grant the Indians a significant amount of autonomy after the war. A group of students from Ravenshaw College led by Jadumani Mangaraj enlisted in the British army for the purpose of helping the British in their war efforts (Panda 116).

It was in September of 1920 that Gopabandhu attended the special session of the Congress and brought back with him a renewed sense of national pride and purpose. Despite the fact that Madhusudan Das had affiliated himself with the Congress in the early phase of

its existence, he eventually distanced himself from the organisation since he was unable to obtain support from the Congress leaders for the merger of Odia tracts. He maintained his interest in the Odia movement throughout his life. When Gandhi launched the Non-cooperation movement in 1920, almost no Congress organisations were active in Odisha at the time. This was because of the non-participation of Congress leaders in Odisha. (Samal 290).

Another important turning point in the history of the nationalist struggle in Odisha was the formation of the Civil Disobedience Movement. In December of 1929, a session of the INC was convened in Lahore, where it was proclaimed that the purpose of the organisation would be to win complete independence by civil disobedience. On March 12, 1930, Gandhiji led 78 supporters on a march from the Sabarmati Ashram in the direction of Dandi. The purpose of the march was to protest the manufacturing of salt in contravention of salt restrictions enacted by the British. Gopabandhu Choudhury and Harekrushna Mahatab, both prominent members of the Odisha Congress, planned a plot to organise a protest in Odisha against the British government's salt law. A number of women took part in the Salt Satyagraha at Inchudi on the 20th of April. They were headed by Ramadevi and Malati Devi. The Salt Satyagraha at Inchudi was quite successful. The Satyagraha that Gandhi led at Dandi was thought to be the most significant event of its kind. The Civil Disobedience Movement had begun to become active, and the women who led this movement helped to make it more popular. From 1934 until 1940, the Utkal Pradesh Congress Committee and Congress activists in Odisha focused on implementing many of Gandhiji's positive social reform initiatives, such as the Charakha programme, the removal of untouchability, the Kisan and Harijan campaigns, and many more. In May 1934, Gandhi undertook a Harijan tour to Odisha. He travelled all the way to Puri from Jharsuguda. However, he did not go inside the

temple of Lord Jagannath since Harijans in Odisha were not permitted to visit the temple (Panda 305).

For modern Odisha, the establishment of a new province marks a watershed moment in the state's history. After 1568, Odisha broke up into smaller kingdoms scattered throughout the surrounding area. There was a gradual rise to power for the Bhois of Khurdha, the Bhanjas of Ghumsur and Mayurbhanj, and the Chauhans of Sambalpur. Both the Mughals and the Marathas were unable to provide political stability to Odisha while under their influence. The East India Company took control of Odisha in stages, beginning with the southern portion, moving on to the coastal region, and finishing with Sambalpur and the surrounding tracts of land. Due to the fact that Odisha was conquered on a piecemeal basis, it was impossible for the British to establish their rule over a unified Odisha. For the purposes of administration, the southern portion of the country was assigned to the Madras Presidency, the territory along the coast was assigned to Bengal, and the western portion was assigned to the Central Provinces. People who spoke Odia were classified as a neglected, insignificant, and minority population, and they were placed under the jurisdiction of three distinct governments. On the other hand, Odisha was officially established as a separate state on April 1, 1936.

There was a lack of attention paid to the Odia language as a result of the arbitrary division of Odisha. In each of the three provinces, it was regarded as the language of a population that was considered a minority. The chauvinism displayed by the three main groups, namely Bengali, Telugu, and Hindi, posed a threat to the existence of the Odia people. Eminent Bengali scholars like Rajendralal Mitra and Kantilal Bandopadhyaya refused to identify Odia as a distinct language. They exerted a great deal of pressure on the government, urging it to “make Bengali the medium of instruction and introduce Bengali textbooks in schools throughout Odisha” (Mahtab 72). Telugu was mandated to be taught in

schools for students who spoke Odia in the Ganjam region, whereas in the Sambalpur tract of the Central Province, students were required to study Hindi (Mahtab 78). However, this did not result in any conflict between those who advocated for the protection of the Odia language and those who advocated for greater Indian nationalism. The Odia intellectuals fought against interventionist claims from neighbouring Indian languages and for regional, linguistic, and cultural autonomy. At the same time, both of them had the same all-India perspective on the greater Indian nationalist movement.

Although there was a growth of left politics in Odisha beginning in the forties, particularly in the shape of political parties and organisations. It was not successful in having a wider influence on the cultural lives of people, and very few people were affected due to this growth. Following the end of British colonial rule in Odisha, Odia intellectuals of the middle class looked to their Bengali contemporaries as a source of inspiration, particularly in the field of literature. However, the two states adhered to quite distinct sorts of politics, and the primary reason for this is because the character of political history in the two states was very different from one another. It would not be an exaggeration to claim that ideology of the left first sparked off a few successful movements in Orissa. However, these movements ultimately failed, especially after independence, because leftists were unable to garner widespread support on the basis of their philosophy. However, when it came to literature, authors associated with the left enjoyed a significant amount of recognition among the educated Odias.

The movements for women rights have been embodied in the movements for freedom, separate state and language and the fight for Odia identity. Odisha did not witness any concrete revolution for women's rights and empowerment but the struggle has been gradual and continuous in the literary, social and political fields of the state.

It is significant to note that in the early years of the twentieth century, an Odia identity is pitted against the Bengali identity within the historical context of Odia nationalism. The contrasting depictions of Odia and Bengali women as Lakshmi and Kali respectively shows the status, behaviour and outlook of women as a group in their respective societies. As several Odia writers of the early twentieth century point out, an Odia woman, as the Lakshmi of the domestic space, must serve without expectations and be the embodiment of modesty and sacrifice. The role of mythological texts in bolstering these images is interesting to note and call for further research. In the lines of Sita, Lakshmi, and Draupadi, keeping together a joint family was considered a noble duty of all women. Even now, the battles of Ramayana and Mahabharat are attributed to the women, i.e. Sita and Draupadi respectively.

The history of the concept of 'ideal Odia womanhood' has influenced the psyche of upper caste women more than any other caste groups. The analysis of the plays and drama in previous chapters would point out that the responsibility to remain chaste, committed, and therefore as an ideal wife remains with the women who are considered as Lakshmi. The women from lower castes, sex workers, and modern educated girls are seen as lost causes and therefore not worthy of the status of 'ideal woman'. Books like *Gruhalakshmi* pronounced that modern education has influenced the women negatively by endowing them with independence, autonomy and therefore freedom from the family and societal relations. The deterioration of family values and collapse of joint family system are the results of women realising their individuality and therefore neglecting the family responsibility.

Generally, women as playwrights have rarely figured in Odia literary history. This space has always been dominated by men like that of women artists where male members were considered fit to play the female characters symbolising the lack of value attached to the characters as well as the artists. Similarly, the women playwrights' contributions have been largely ignored with the assumption that male playwrights are sufficiently able to present the

emotions, feelings, and aspirations of the other gender and the female playwrights have hardly anything special to contribute. The treatments to women artists and playwrights in Odia drama industry assert this notion as narrated by women playwrights during personal interviews with the researcher. Women playwrights in Odia have fought against this very notion and created a niche for themselves by projecting the struggle of women to survive in constraining circumstances, facing various issues under oppressive patriarchy within and outside the family. These plays help in increasing one's self-awareness about the potential and responsibility in the society. These playwrights not only address the issues but also provide a hope to bring changes in society in terms of actions and attitudes deserving the tag of 'New Women'.

The major social issues like women empowerment and struggle for women identity and social consciousness for women education, religious and mythological values, temple movement and untouchability have been dealt in the third chapter. In this venture, Sulochana Devi's *Savitri* (The Savitri) and *Sansara Chitra* (Picture of Society), Sarala Devi's anthology of Odia drama, *Sura Sundari* (1959), and Sitadevi Khadanga's drama *Mandira Prabesha* (1947) (Temple Entry) can be considered for awakening of Odia women drama writings in Odisha. In the growth of Odia drama, Bina Devi, Bidyut Prava Devi, Basant Kumari Pattnaik, Binapani Mohnaty, Archana Nayak, Sanghamitra Mishra, and Nibedita Jena's Odia drama also have significant contributions to represent the role of women in the Odia society. The western feminism has fuelled the feminist struggle in India and we can't deny its impact on Odisha. Choosing theatre as a profession has never been so popular among women but in opportunity to write plays, women found a new perspective as passive actors to highlight their own feelings and ambitions through the female characters. With the growth of feminist organizations women playwrights in general and women characters in particular emerged in the world of Odia Theatre. The fourth chapter discussed the emergence of social

consciousness in writings of women dramatists. It encompasses the features of newly educated people and their way of living. It depicts the different roles that women play in domestic work; it also points out the significance of women in a male dominated society which are reflected in their writings.

The issues of caste and marginalisation have been effectively addressed by Sitadevi Khadanga as one of her plays is based on the temple entry movement which has been an untouched issue due to its political and religious sensitivity. Being a woman playwright, she is not biased towards women characters; rather she gives more importance to the social issues and brings these issues to the discussions and social contestations. At that time, it was one of the major movements in India, which started first in Kerala. Like other states, Odisha is still witnessing temple entry movement from pre-colonial times to the present day. In this play, we can observe many issues like caste discrimination, women exploitation, zamindari system, women's struggle, etc. The present study shows the way to establish a critical analysis of women in Odia Drama and gender role in conceptualizing in Odia plays and theatre. It has also widened the scope to connect the thoughts and ideas of Odia women playwrights with their characters under the broader environment of Odia society.

As discussed in the earlier chapters, reforms in society in general started during the later part of the nineteenth century. Social and religious reforms against practices of child marriage, idolatry, caste oppression, as well as in favour of widow re-marriage, women's education, etc. gathered momentum with the spread of modern education as well as national movements and across the country. The voices of reforms were not restricted to intellectual debates and newspaper articles but reflected in mediums of mass entertainment like theatre and drama. As a genre of popular literature and performance, drama addressed social and political issues concerned with contemporary Odia society. While the first Odia play *Babaji* (1877) by Jagan mohan Lala targeted the religious superstitions and blind faith in *tantriks* and

monks, his second play, *Sati* (1886), depicts the suffering of the main character in the hands of the Zamindar and finally committing suicide instead of submitting herself to the sexual exploitation of the latter. Similarly, the play *Kanchanmali* (1904) by Ramshankar Ray introduces the main character Kanchanmali as a confident, brave, and educated girl from fisherman community. She is confident in her dealings with men and goes on to establish a school with the support from the king. She is presented as the protagonist who breaks the gender and caste barrier by promoting education for women and is a vocal supporter of inter-caste marriage. The play *Draupadi ra Bastraharana* (1908) by Gopinath Nandasharma and *Sati Pariksha* (1928) by Baishnav Charan Dash depicts the characters of Draupadi and Sriradha from Indian epics of *Mahabharat* and *Shrimad Bhagavat* respectively. These plays reinforced the positions of *Devis* in the popular consciousness and illustrates the centrality of women in the society. On the other hand, two of the prominent Odia women playwrights, Sulochana Devi and Sitadevi Khadanga, have contributed plays like *Savitri* (1928), *Sansar Chitra* (1945), *Mandira Prabesh* (1947), and *Nispati* (1971). While *Savitri* is based on the story of Savitri from Indian mythology, *Sansar Chitra* portrays different shades of women characters such as- Sarala, an ‘ideal’ wife who suffers silently at the hands of her promiscuous husband; Parvati, a rebellious woman who rebels against the ill-treatment of her husband and subsequently kills him; and Shanti, a degraded woman who has affair with Madan. These three characters represent the variety of women characters in the society and depicts the differences in their struggle and behaviour in the face of difficulties. The play *Mandira Prabesh* is a significant contribution by Sitadevi Khadanga as it deals with the sensitive issue of temple entry for Harijans and attacks the caste discrimination rampant in the then Odia society. The play *Nispati* is again a popular play that shows the imposition of marriage and treatment of daughters as burdens on the parents that they are eager to be relieved of. The parents of Sumana, Sumabou in particular, are ready to get Sumana married

somehow, even to the old neighbour Brajababu. The plays and characters by women playwrights portray a very realistic picture of common women members in the family and the then society along with day-to-day struggles of and harassments within the family. Whereas, the plays by male playwrights depict women with ideal characteristics envisioned through mythological Draupadi and Sriradha or imaginary ideals like Kanchanmali. The difference in presentation of women characters emanate from the societal experiences of women playwrights and imagination of an ideal woman by male playwrights respectively.

Theatres and plays in Odisha, in different forms and styles, have been associated with socio-cultural lives of Odia people since centuries. However, the theatre in its modern form implied to an organised group of artists who performed at different places within and outside the state under a common banner. In 1930s, Odia theatre groups emerged as small and local groups performing Geetinatya, translated plays from Sanskrit and Bengali. These small groups were usually known as *Natyamandali*. One such *Natyamandali* named Jaya Durga *Natyamandali* was formed in 1933 by Somnath Dash in Khandualkote village of Puri district. This opera group was converted to Annapurna Theatre with inclusion of artists from Banamali Art Theatre, another small opera group. Shri Bauri Bandhu Mohanty, the manager of Annapurna Theatre, is credited to have given a proper shape and popularising throughout the state. The performances of these groups slowly moved from open theatres to proscenium theatres with permanent and professional artists engaged in tours all through the year. One of the major developments in theatre movement was inclusion of women artists in the field. Kali Charan Pattnaik, was the pioneer in Odia theatre movement who was able to convince the women, mostly the outcast prostitutes, to perform on stage. Kali Charan's *Orissa Theatre* gained wide publicity influencing other theatre groups to look for women artists. *Annapurna theatre* also followed the track by getting prostitutes from brothels and had to accommodate in Balugaon due to the social restrictions in Brahmin Villages of Puri. Gradually, women

from Odia families showed interest to take part in this field of art, accompanied by their husbands or male family members. After the success of *Annapurna Theatre* from Puri, another theatre named by *Annapurna Theatre-B* started with its base at Cuttack. Use of technology and modern light and sound techniques further popularised these theatre groups among the masses and resulted in creation of a number of theatre groups like *Janata Theatre*, *Radhakant Theatre*, *Rupasri Theatre*, etc. In addition to the number and structural changes in theatres, developments in nature of theatres were visible with introduction of different styles of plays. Manoranjan Das led the *Naba Natya Andolan* (New Drama Movement) by introducing experimental plays, problematic plays, absurd plays, epic theatre, etc. The types of plays being performed by the theatre groups also evolved with changing times. The influence of Sanskrit and Bengali plays was replaced by rise of nationalist plays and subsequently social plays with Odia socio-economic background. Contemporary Odia theatres are considered to have evolved from *Jatra* with significant contributions from theatre personalities like Baishnav Pani and Balakrushna Mohanty. The present theatre groups have been highly commercialised entities with the audience bases moved from mass audience to a selected art-loving audience. Odia theatre has transformed with inclusion of cinema-like audio-visual, hiring of professional artists and dramatists, use of multi-stage system and modern theatre techniques. The development of theatres in Odisha can be seen in the context of changing socio-political conditions of the state. Acceptance of women artists on stage has led to a significant increase in the number of artists as well as quality of the plays.

Women playwrights in Odia are a small group of women who have represented the voices of half of the Odia society. They have created a special place in this field with their distinct writing style and plots. Writing plays as a profession has never been lucrative for Odia women at least until the 1950s. Their passion for writing combined with family inspirations have made them enter the field of drama. Writers like Sulochana Devi, Sitadevi

Khadanga, Binapani Mohanty, and Bidyut Prava Devi have joined this field by overcoming several challenges in the society while the twenty-first century women writers like Sanghamitra Mishra, Archana Nayak, and Nibedita Jena expressed a relatively favourable societal approach towards this profession. Nevertheless, all women playwrights irrespective of their social background and time period have faced resistances within and outside the theatre industry. One of the major concerns for twenty-first century women playwrights is lack of opportunity for their involvement in the staging of the plays. The plays after publications have been appropriated by directors with little or no scope for participation of the playwrights. The interviews with selected women playwrights reveal their concern over changing nature of the plays and the audiences. Sitadevi Khadanga, Binapani Mohanty, Sulochana Devi have narrated the social challenges faced by them in their writing careers. While both Sitadevi Khadanga and Sulochana Devi became widows at a very early age and chose to follow their passion of writing, Binapani Mohanty remained unmarried to contribute to the field of Odia literature. It may be understood that the social responsibilities and social restrictions of the community have restrained many women writers from pursuing their writing and the early women playwrights were free from the family commitments in order to devote time for writing of the plays. However, modern women playwrights have expressed support from the family members and are able to balance the personal and professional lives. Ironically, many women playwrights are shifting to independent genres like novels, poems, short-stories, etc. due to the lack of coordination at the staging phase as well as the lack of recognitions from the audiences.

The contribution of women playwrights to Odia drama has been significant in terms of the portrayal of the characters as well as the style of presentation. As discussed above in this chapter, women playwrights have been able to extract a realistic depiction of women

characters whereas their male counterparts have been, largely, prescriptive and idealistic. Another major contribution of women playwrights is the presentation of women with their inherent natural expressions unlike the male playwrights. Certain expressions and emotions that are innate to women can hardly be expressed in an effective manner by the other gender. As one of the women playwrights expressed during interview that the colloquial expressions of a woman character such as ‘Ilo Maa Lo’ or the rustic slangs ‘Sabakhai or Podamunhi’ can be more effectively and appropriately used by a woman playwright than a male. Binapani Mohanty’s dialogue “Lo Koili...Koili Lo, A Nian...A Chuli... A Paunsa ta... Sabakhai...kuade galu lo” in the play *Pata Koili* is a point in this direction (91). Sitadevi Khadanga’s *Nispati* beautifully captures the gossips of village women that wouldn’t be natural expression for a male playwright. Of course, there are exceptions to this as Fakir Mohan Senapati famously expresses in *Rebati* “Lo Rebati...Lo Rebi...Lo Niaan...Lo Chuli” remain an unparalleled expression of village language even today. Interestingly, one of the woman playwrights articulates this issue of naturality in language and expression pointing out, “A woman always lives in a societal boundary. From the very childhood, she is forced to live in that boundary, of which she gets acquainted with the flow of time. So, the conviction that should be there in the language that is found in the language of a man is missing in case of a women playwright”.

Women playwrights in Odia have been instrumental in presenting the issues and challenges faced by women in contemporary Odia society. The perspective of women towards the functioning of the family, society, and its various institutions may significantly differ from the common assumption of the male-dominated society. The age-old inequality between the two genders has given rise to compartmentalisation of activities, roles and behaviours. The feminist approach has been useful in aligning the role and position of Odia women with that of global values that recognises individual identity and self. The present

thesis explored the impact of women playwrights on Odia drama and reflected on the status of women in Odia society as presented by different playwrights. An analysis of selected plays and interviews of selected women playwrights offer an insight into the contribution of women playwrights to Odia drama. Though many of the Odia plays, especially those published in late nineteenth and early twentieth century, are not available in major libraries and archives in Odisha, the impact of those publications in shaping the contemporary Odia literature is vital.

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Appendix

In Conversation with Women Playwrights

An Interview with Binapani Mohanty, 23 May 2016

Binapani Mohanty (1936-2022) poet, novelist, short story writer translator and a playwright. She is born into a Karan family in 1936 in Chandol, Kendrapara. Her father Chaturbhuja Mohanty, a government servant and mother Kumudini was a home maker. Most of her childhood was spent in Chandol in the district Kendrapara. She was a very bright student and by profession she is a Lecturer in Economics. She served her duty in many colleges and finally retired in 1992. Her literary career started in 1955 when she published her first poem and she has composed above 200 poems. She didn't get any pressure from her family regarding conjugal life. Her main aim was teaching and writing. That's why she didn't get married at all. Taking such a firm decision at that period of time, when Odisha was in its peak for orthodox is also a sign of making her identity very unique. She is a very good story teller and she composed several stories. Among the stories '*Pata Dei*' collection of short stories that won Sahitya Akademi Award in 1968 and '*Kasturi Mruga O Sabuja Aranya*' in 1990. Later it was translated into English by Jayanta Mahapatra in 1986 in Femina with title 'Lata'. In 1987, it was telecast in Doordarshan in Hindi dramatization in the name of 'Kashmakas'. This brought many name and fame from all over the world. Many of her stories are translated into different languages such as English, Hindi, Marathi, Kannada, Malayalam, Bengali, Urdu and Russian. She is a great story writer in Odia Literature. She has also penned three novels and one act play named 'Kranti'. She has translated tow Russian folk tales from English to Odia, few Bengali works to Odia. She was also the President of Lekhika Sansad, a State Level Organization for women writers. She attended and presented a paper in All India Women Writers' Conference in 1976 in Nainital and in International Womens' Year under the chairmanship of Late Indira Gandhi in New Delhi.

Q. What/ Who inspired you to become a playwright?

A. I was inspired by the students of Madhusudan hostel of S.B.Women's College, Cuttack to write plays which will attract the audience.

Q. Which are your favourite works and why?

A. I don't have any favourite work. Everything itself is a milestone.

Q. What has been the most touching or memorable moment for you as a playwright?

A. During that time many people were writing plays and staged, even I wanted to stage few dramas. So, to view you plays being staged is a different experience and a cherish able memory.

Q. Any writers who have inspired you?

A. Nilamani Sahoo, Sachidanada Routray, Anant Pattnaik among many other writers inspired me.

Q. How did your life change after becoming a writer?

A. Nothing has changed or affected my life after becoming writer. As a woman, I have to balance my interest with my professional and personal commitments.

Q. Did you face any challenge as a woman playwright?

A. I have found support in my career as a playwright. Challenges are there everywhere but I haven't faced any special challenge as such.

Q. What do you think is the role of theatre in the society?

A. Theatre plays its role as a guide to the society. We all read novels but at the same time we forget. We never forget drama. It has its own impact.

Q. How do you see the status of the contemporary Odia Theatre?

A. Odia drama is now in a very problematic state. There is no value in the script. The projection and colour on stage has resulted in neglecting of the content and value.

Q. What are the problems that Odia theatre is facing now?

A. Mobile and television have taken place. New technologies have left the audience looking for short-term and readymade entertainment. Theatres are difficult to sustain like this.

Q. How do you view the future of Odia theatre?

A. I can't say. Theatre has to adopt to the contemporary demands of the society.

Q. Talking about theatre, how do you bridge theatre and cinema? Theatre generally attract a certain

Group of audience and the cinema attracts a wider mass, so how do you think theatre (which has a social message) can attract the audience? How do you bridge the gap?

A. I feel both are different mediums with their own significance.

Q. As a woman playwright how does society receive you? Any challenges as an individual?

A. No, that time very few people were writing and staged drama. So, everyone praised us. I didn't find any difference of reception among the audiences because of my gender. As an individual, the challenges are everywhere.

Q. How do you balance different aspects of your life?

A. Yes, there were difficulties but I enjoyed it. By Profession I was a Lecturer. I used to get ready by morning 8 and come back at night 11 pm. It is important to manage different aspects of your life.

Q. What is your comment on the changing audience?

A. Sorry, I have no idea of it.

Q. How did the contemporary contexts influence the theatre then and now?

A. That time drama attracted many people but now disco dance, television and other absurd things are attracting people. There were many western influence upon us.

Q. How are the theatre practices at present? (Theatre groups, independent artists, associations)?

A. Yes, there is a noticeable change in the drama industry and audiences. We have to accept it. There are many groups and others associations coming up with new ideas.

Q. What is the influence of technology on theatre?

A. As said before, technology and new methods are being experimented in theatre nowadays.

Q. How do you adopt to genre mobility? (Plays to novels, poem, short story, etc.)

A. According to the taste of the readers I change my genre.

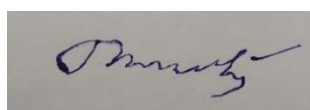
Q. Language – How does your way of writing differ from male playwright?

A. I don't think I would be able to comment on that.

Declaration by the Interviewee

I hereby declare that the above information furnished about me is correct and hence approved by me for using in the Ph.D. dissertation of Purbasha Priyadarshini.

Signature of the Interviewee:



(Binapani Mohanty)

An Interview with Dr. Sanghamitra Mishra, 23 May 2016

Sanghamitra Mishra (1953-) a well-known playwright, novelist, short story writer, poet and a critic. She is a former Professor in Odia, in the department of P.G. Department of Odia at Utkal University. She is born into a Brahmin family. She is born to the legendary freedom fighter Shri Bansidhara Mishra and Smt. Devi Mishra in 1953 in Khandasahi, Cuttack. She is born after 25 years from her elder sister Krishna Ballavi. This gap was there as her father had gone underground during the British Raj period. As a freedom fighter he raised his voice against the Britishers and was handed over an arrest warrant. He left behind his wife and two-month year old daughter Krishna and went underground fighting against the British. After the Independence he returned to his home in 1951. Sanghamitra started her schooling career in her village. Her literary career began at a very young age as she was inspired by her elder sister Krishna who was an accomplished writer in AIR (All India Radio). Her father also influenced her to read books. She developed a habit of reading and writing. After her schooling, she headed to Khurda for further studies. She got married to a doctor, Jagannath Mohapatra, at the age of 17 years. At a very young age she had to manage the joint family but her husband supported her for further studies. She went ahead with graduation and simultaneously she was blessed with two kids. Then their family moved to Bhubaneswar and she joined Utkal University for her Post Graduation. By the time she joined for the programme she had written many poems. After completion of her education, she first joined as a Lecturer at BJB College and later she joined Utkal University as an Assistant Professor. To her credits she has written forty books and published many stories and poems in various magazines. She has received many awards, felicitations and accolades for her literary contributions. She is the recipient of Odisha Sahitya Akademi Award in 2009 for her play *Basudha Ra Pratibada*. Though she loves writing poems, she has also managed her hands in drama. Many of her dramas are staged and broadcasted in AIR. (Mishra 11)

Q. What/ Who inspired you to become a playwright?

A. I had the opportunity of imparting teaching on Odia Theatre for a quite a long period as a part of professional assignment. I have witnessed many plays. I have written essays on theatre. Even my Ph.D. thesis deals with theatre and plays. I had to go through a good number of Hindi and Odia plays in order to strike a comparative study as a part of requirement for my D.Litt. Probably this is why I got fascinated towards writing plays quite late.

Q. Which are your favourite works and why?

A. So, to say, there are only 23 number of small plays in print to my credit. one of them was actually staged, and most of them were adapted as radio plays. About five of my plays were staged on the occasion of Red Cross Day of the Indian Red Cross Society. All these plays bore messages for the society, because of which I did not feel it proper to get them printed. The plays that are close to my heart include Basudhara Pratibad, Adha Dekha Swapnara Naksha, Smruti O Swapnara Sahara, Ashwasanara Antima Parba, etc. Well, seven of my printed plays for children are in wait for printing.

Q. What has been the most touching or memorable moment for you as a playwright?

A. I cannot exactly locate it. However, it really thrills to hear the characters of my creation speak on radio-all alone or with others.

Q. Any writers who have inspired you?

A. It would be unfair to name a few as I am indebted to the tradition of Odia plays. Still if you insist, I have been considerably inspired by the writers, such as Ramachandra Mishra, Pranabandhu Kar, Bhubaneswar Mahapatra, Manoranjan Das, Biswajit Das- in fact, these are the people I have been in good touch with. Of course, all the writers of the day are my own – some as elders, some as friends or some as affectionate.

Q. How did your life change after becoming a writer?

A. Even if I put my hands on writing plays, I had this knack of writing since childhood. Let others speak how they have observed the changes in me. I can only say that a medium of expression is in my hand. It is also a channel for expression of my discomforts. Somehow, I happen to realise that it is more essential to be a good reader than a good writer.

Q. Did you face any challenge as a woman playwright?

A. In place of challenge, I would prefer to call it discomfort or inconvenience.

1. To contact the directors,
2. To make your presence felt with your regular presence during the rehearsals,
3. To experience the compatibility between your mentality and the dialogues uttered by the characters, or repent it profoundly if given otherwise,
4. To feel the characters of your creation, grow out of their proportions,
5. Inadequate transmission /delivery of your intended messages at the end of the play.

Q. What do you think is the role of theatre in the society?

A. It is a matter of survey. Plays always speak of the society. Sometimes it becomes a guide to society and sometimes a friend. Well, today a good number of sources of entertainment are easily available to us, weakening the monopoly of the theatre. I believe that today's theatre is committed to all the values of contemporary society through entertainment, education and rumination.

Q. How do you see the status of the contemporary Odia Theatre?

A. Today's theatre is quite aristocratic and committed to economic constraints and at the same time committed to the art and expressions of theatres. Almost all of the Odia playwrights take note of the novel innovations and experiments taking place in the scenario of the world and Indian theatres. They try their hands at playwrighting only after making a comprehensive study of their own scriptures, history and traditions, even geography and polity. Unfortunately, the number of such committed plays is miserable, hence its contribution is insignificant.

Q. What are the problems that Odia theatre is facing now?

A. Many obstacles do exist on the path of staging plays, such as (a) scripts of choice (b) stage (c) place for rehearsals (d) the mentality of the directors and actors (e) lack of

sponsorship (f) time consciousness or punctuality (g) absence of professionalism (h) lack of the spirit of team work (i) less time for rehearsals.

Q. How do you view the future of Odia theatre?

A. I am not an astrologer. However, out of the experience of the last decade it can be maintained that the future of our theatre is bright. Gradually more number of educated and thoughtful persons or intellectuals are taking interest in watching plays. People are prone to buying tickets. New directors are observed to be paying proper attention to the craft of direction, and the highly educated as well as sincere artists are devoting time to their jobs.

Q. Talking about theatre, how do you bridge theatre and cinema? Theatre generally attract a certain group of audience and the cinema attracts a wider mass, so how do you think theatre (which has a social message) can attract the audience? How do you bridge the gap?

A. Look, cinema offers us a finished product. The spectator enjoys no scope of speaking or doing anything there. Now it manages to reach the audience through different mode before it is released in cinema halls. Hence in this respect it is not wise to make cinema and theatre stand face to face. In fact, this is why the director honours the taste of the audience. In the scenario of the theatre, it gives us immense pleasure to see the facial expression of our own people or when they repeat our dialogues, something that is rare in cinema. Cinema engages a huge amount of money, resources and advanced technology whereas theatre just strives to somehow manage its job. Further, cinema depends on cut-take-retake but in theatre the problem comes out straight on to the audience. Out of my personal observation I can say that the tastes of cinema and theatre audiences do differ. Folk plays, if accompanied with song and music, would be able to fascinate and bind its audience to a larger scale, and thus the message can be more comfortably conveyed.

Q. As a woman playwright how does society receive you? Any challenges as an individual?

A. I don't really have any special experience in this connection. As a human being, it is imperative to remain associated with another environment, but it doesn't make any significant difference for me. The fact is – it really pleases when someone introduces me as a playwright or dramatist. To speak it in a sentence, at this age I am quite conscious of my limits. Not individual but group activity adds more meaning to theatre. I have dissolved myself with my family, society and my work place as does sugar dissolve with milk. Here the cooperation counts more than individuality.

Q. How do you balance different aspects of your life?

A. Age is the best teacher but habitually I do balance myself. I learn out of my mistakes. I have also learnt perpetually out of the advice and request made by my husband. Now my children teach me the skills of survival -in fact, they are the capital of my creation or my investment. I know it is impossible to please all. Still, I keep my ears open for all.

Q. What is your comment on the changing audience?

A. Sorry, I have no idea of it. I view plays as an accomplishment in itself bereft from the praises and criticisms.

Q. How did the contemporary contexts influence the theatre then and now?

A. I always view theatre as the mirror of the society and every event in the society reflects in the theatre.

Q. How are the theatre practices at present? (Theatre groups, independent artists, associations)?

A. Many kinds of theatre practices are in vogue. Theatre, backed by 'Associations', do enjoy pomp and grandeur. There are also Theatre Groups staging plays out of their own. Well, the

formation of the 'Odisha Natya Sangha' is found to be ensure some sort of co-ordination among these groups as a result of which a favourable atmosphere is evolving for stage acting.

R. What is the influence of technology on theatre?

A. From 1970 technology is being exploited in Odisha with the staging of "Mrugaya" by Biswajit Das. I reckon that all the initial works of the writers are placed in the written form. My opinion is that a director can bring about several technical novelties on the stage through a concerned amalgamation of his views, wisdom, intelligence and acquired experience.

Q. How do you adopt to genre mobility? (Plays to novels, poem, short story, etc.)

A. I believe it is up to the interest of the playwright to deal with different genres of art. In my case, I have always drawn satisfaction in expressing myself in whatever way possible.

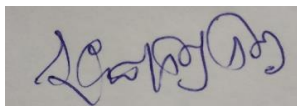
R. Language – How does your way of writing differ from male playwrights?

A. I should not have my opinion on this. I have already mentioned that my experience in the field of stage is inadequate. Well, let me put it in this way- if I say "Ilo ma" or "Mo rani ta", it will do. But what if a male says this? The thing is, in a play the character decides the language, and without any gender discrimination. Of course, the so-called vulgarity creeps in while using the language accordingly with the character. It is not a sin from the point of view of arts. Controversary arises only when someone intentionally tries to inject discomfort into his language.

Declaration by the Interviewee

I hereby declare that the above information furnished about me is correct and hence approved by me for using in the Ph.D. dissertation of Purbasha Priyadarshini.

Signature of the Interviewee:



(Dr. Sanghamitra Mishra)

An Interview with Dr. Archana Nayak, 24 May 2016

Archana Nayak (1947-) poet, novelist, short story writer, essayist, critic, lyricist and a playwright. She is born into a Kandhayat family at Balugaon near Chilika Lake. Her father Kshetra Mohan Nayak was a government servant and posted in Cuttack. She spent all her life at Cuttack and later phase in Bhubaneswar. She has done her Masters in Odia from Utkal University, Bhubaneswar. By profession she is a Lecturer and posted in different colleges in Odisha. She has done her Ph.D. on '*Shiva in Odia Kavya*' in the year 1984 from Utkal University, Bhubaneswar. She started writing at the age of 8 but her literary career began in 1980 with poems and later she wrote novels, drama, short stories. She has written many plays for Radio. She started her dramas when she was in Berhampur, when she wrote for college function and later on the plays were staged in Kala Bikash Kendra, Cuttack. She is born into a well-educated family and her father encouraged to participate in many competitions. She is great devotee of Sri Aurobinda and she has written many stories on Sir Aurobinda's teachings and principles. She also joined Akashvani Cuttack Center as a lyricist. She even given live commentary for Car Festival in Odia televisions. To her credit she has published many stories, novels, plays, essays, criticism and poems. She has received many awards for her contribution to Odia Literature.

Q. What/ Who inspired you to become a playwright?

A. When I was a student of Ravenshaw Girls High School, Cuttack. I participated in drama staged in the annual function of the school for four years. I was given a lead role. Similarly, during my college days, I was very much active in dramatic activity of the college even after being appointed as a lecturer in Sailabala women's college, I also participated in plays, staged in college functions. When I joined in Govt Women's college, Berhampur. I was given the responsibility of the dramatic association of the college. As a tradition, dramatic association of the colleges stages

some dance, drama and short play written by local writers. But I could not be satisfied with available scripts, so I had no alternative but to write the script myself. During my stay in that college, I wrote short plays for my students, everywhere. Those are published in different magazines. They were also staged in different colleges of the state. On the other hand, such publications also widely appreciated my readers throughout the state. So, largely I was encouraged to write short plays for one hour duration or little more for different college students during my service career.

Q. Which are your favourite works and why?

A. I am highly satisfied with two of my creations such as *Ambapali* and *Jakyani Sambad*. Both the plays are based on ancient scriptures of Buddhism and Jainism respectively and both the main characters are treated as the classic ones. So, the language characterization and treatment make both the plays classical plays. Another short play *Nilapari* is also widely appreciated as one of the important creations in Odia Literature of its story, characters and stage techniques. It was based on folk elements and fantasy.

Q. What has been the most touching or memorable moment for you as a playwright?

A. On 12th September 1988, a memorable moment for me as my full-fledged play *Ambapali* was staged Kala Bikash Auditorium under the direction of the renowned film director Himanshu Parija (Chandi) by well-known artist of Odia stage and film. I would not forget acceptance and appreciation of viewers of my play. No doubt that was a rare and touching moment for me.

Q. Any writers who have inspired you?

A. Nobody in particular. Everyone has their own style and it is upto you to learn the way you like.

Q. How did your life change after becoming a writer?

A. One can never be a writer in a day. Gradually, the attempt to express own experience, understanding and thoughts is activated within writers' creativity. In that sense, creativity becomes a prominent part of the creator's life.

Q. Did you face any challenge as a woman playwright?

A. As a woman writer, I have not written novels, stories, poems, essays or lyrics. The common expression of a creative writers becomes my masterpiece. In the same way, drama is also another expression of my creativity. For that I have never faced any challenges.

Q. What do you think is the role of theatre in the society?

A. Theatre plays an important role in the society. It not only entertains the people but also teach them lessons on life.

Q. How do you see the status of the contemporary Odia Theatre?

A. Now-a-days, the regular theatre practice is no more found in Odisha. But a few dramatic organization is staging. These days regular theatre activity is not in vogue in Odisha. Of course, there are a handful of amateur theatre clubs that maintained high quality theatrical performance of regular intervals. This is responsible for keeping the people enthusiastically bound to this art form.

Q. What are the problems that Odia theatre is facing now?

A. The theatre culture as a whole is passing through a poor state owing to paucity of funds, loss of attraction on payment considerations to the artists and the other people involved, absence of moral and financial support by the state, and powerful influence of the other social platforms.

Q. How do you view the future of Odia theatre?

A. Of late, there has been a healthy sign of improvement especially in the form, content and presentation under the influence of the global scenario. Short play competitions held in the places such as Bhubaneswar, Rourkela, Sambalpur, Deogarh and Berhampur are found to be working as catalyst. It may safely be concluded that the future of Odia theatre undoubtedly bears bright prospects.

Q. Talking about theatre, how do you bridge theatre and cinema? Theatre generally attract a certain group of audience and the cinema attracts a wider mass, so how do you think theatre (which has a social message) can attract the audience? How do you bridge the gap?

A. It is not appropriate to draw comparisons between theatre and cinema. In a span of two three hours cinema can turn us into cosmos-travelers. It can also make us experience all the six seasons. It can travel through space as well as places. On the other hand, theatre is confined to the stage, also to place and time. Since a huge amount of money is involved with cinema, it strives towards commercial success rather than artistic excellence whereas theatre lays stress on artistic prowess. Of course, the success of both cinema and theatre primarily relies on the personal choice and temperament of the spectators. However, in order to earn wide acceptance, both cinema and theatre have to maintain a high standard.

Q. As a woman playwright how does society receive you? Any challenges as an individual?

A. The challenges as a woman remains for all, whether she is a playwright or a housewife. The restrictions within and outside the family have to be overcome in order to work in this field.

Q. How do you balance different aspects of your life?

A. As said before, the responsibilities of a woman is immense and one has to do justice to family, children, and career and also to herself as an individual.

Q. What is your comment on the changing audience?

A. No Comments.

Q. How did the contemporary contexts influence the theatre then and now?

A. There have been changes in society, the audiences, and theatre groups. Funding and lack of interests from the audience have influenced the number of plays as well as their quality.

Q. How are the theatre practices at present? (Theatre groups, independent artists, associations)?

A. It has become either money-centric or has moved to a separate category of audience. Theatres are no more for general public.

S. What is the influence of technology on theatre?

A. Technology has made people to look for alternatives than theatre.

Q. How do you adopt to genre mobility? (Plays to novels, poem, short story, etc.)

A. I write to express myself and it can be in different forms. I don't see any challenge in writing in different genres.

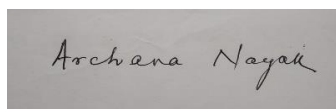
S. Language – How does your way of writing differ from male playwright?

B. I think that is for you to make a comparison (On a lighter note). Everyone has their own style of writing and their own perspectives of looking at things.

Declaration by the Interviewee

I hereby declare that the above information furnished about me is correct and hence approved by me for use in the Ph.D. dissertation by Purbasha Priyadarshini.

Signature of the Interviewee:

A rectangular box containing a handwritten signature in black ink. The signature is written in a cursive style and reads "Archana Nayak".

(Dr. Archana Nayak)

An Interview with Dr. Nibedita Jena, 29 May 2016

Nibedita Jena (1974-) is a playwright, poet, novelist, essayist, director and an actress who has been actively contributing in the creative fields of Odia literature and drama. Her father Chintamani Jena was a renowned playwright and her mother Smt. Pratima Jena was a novelist and lyricist. Though, Mrs Jena is a banker by profession, she is an artist by passion and heritage. She is married to Shri Prafulla Chandra Sethi, an actor himself, has been supportive of her creative endeavours and helps her in organizing the plays. As she belongs to a family of playwrights, she is acquainted with drama and performance since her childhood. She wrote her first drama “*Puni Ek Arambha*” in 1999. In 1995, she was awarded as the best actress for the play *Pratirupa* by Odisha Sangeeta Akademi. To her credit, she has written 26 plays of which four plays have been published. She writes in both Hindi and Odia languages with majority of the plays being in Hindi. She is the recipient of Odisha Sahitya Akademi Award as a playwright for the year 2011 for her play *Chaitu*. She has also received Fakir Mohan Natak Saman in 2017 for her Hindi play *Pukar*. While being successful in the creative fields, she has also been able to balance her professional and family responsibilities well.

Q. What/ Who inspired you to become a playwright?

A. My father, Chintamani Jena, a renowned playwright of Odisha, was the main source of inspiration for me. In fact, my whole family was into theatre in different capacities. We had our own theatre group named Titlagarh Kalaparishad, Titlagarh. My mother was also a lyricist and used to write songs for my father’s plays. Drama has always been a part of our family. Though both my parents have passed away, their influence on my works will always get reflected.

Q. Which are your favourite works and why?

A. One of my most favourite works is *Huruda* (Chase Away). This is a play based on superstitions existing in the society and deals with the exploitation of women. It is a simple and realistic representation of day-to-day lives of Odia women.

Q. What has been the most touching or memorable moment for you as a playwright?

A. Receiving Odisha Sahitya Akademi Award for the year 2011-12 in the same platform as my father Chintamani Jena has been the most memorable moment for me.

Q. Any writers who have inspired you?

A. Many writers from diverse language and cultural backgrounds have inspired me. Among others, Bijay Mishra, Paulo Coelho, Orhan Pamuk, Khalil Gibran, Sidney Sheldon and Mahesh Dattani are to name a few.

Q. How did your life change after becoming a writer?

A. By profession, I am a banker. In spite of being in a busy profession, I love to write plays and stage them. I had always wanted to pursue higher studies, due to the job responsibilities, I completed higher studies through distance mode. As I said earlier, drama is a part of my family and the passion for writing was always there. I have written 26 plays and enacted in more than 80 plays. I have my own theatre group named *Prayas* which was established in 2004. It's been 12 years and every year we stage plays in various places. I have completed my Ph.D. on "1980 Parabarti Odia Sishu Nataka ra Digbalaya" in 2021 from Utkal University, Bhubaneswar. So, becoming a writer was not a sudden development for me, and has always been a part of myself.

Q. Did you face any challenge as a woman playwright?

A. I have not faced any challenges. Rather, I consider, it is my responsibility towards society and family. Theatre offered me an opportunity to express myself through various characters.

Q. What do you think is the role of theatre in the society?

A. Theatre plays a very important role in our society by creating awareness among the people. It is like a mirror; through theatre we can express our feelings and one can bring

reformation. But in my opinion theatre has to evolve further and there is always scope to go beyond its present form and character.

Q. How do you see the status of the contemporary Odia Theatre?

A. I don't think that Odia Theatre is as developed as it is claimed. First of all, we don't respect or value our playwrights. Directors are mostly responsible for this as they continuously undermine the writing aspect of a play. In my opinion, a playwright should be considered as a mother, or a creator producing ideas, scenarios, and characters which have to be unique, interesting, and valuable to the audience, critics and herself. However, at present, a play once staged is seen as the sole creation of the director ignoring the contributions of the playwright, especially when it is a woman playwright. That is why many women playwrights change their genre to write novels, short stories, poems, etc. Many a times, people point out lack of interest among the writers to contribute to Drama without understanding the reasons for this disinterest. That is why, status of Odia theatre is now below the levels of other regional theatres like Bengali, Marathi and Hindi Theatre.

Q. What are the problems that Odia theatre is facing now?

A. The Odia theatre is facing several problems. Now- a-days, the theatre groups are adopting the plays from different languages. The same pattern can be seen in movies too. We don't have our own flavour and the 'Oodianess' is missing from our dramas. Another problem is that, there are hardly any workshops, seminars, conferences being conducted. If the ideas are not shared or discussed with each other, I don't think, in future, we can improve the quality of plays. Another issue is lack of women artists in the Drama industry. Again, I would say that the society is responsible for this because they don't know how to respect a woman artist. Due to exploitations, objectification, disrespect, women are not interested to come to this field.

Q. How do you view the future of Odia theatre?

A. If the present trend does not change then I will say that there is no future for Odia Theatre. We are just repeating ourselves. We are not promoting new artists, playwrights, directors, etc. Dirty politics is going on for awards. Favours are needed to do Govt. cultural programs. We have to prepare ourselves for changes, for experiments with new ideas, presentation styles, artists, director, playwrights, etc. We have to arrange seminars, workshops and conference to develop our status. The harsh truth is that, in the absence of reforms and innovations, the future of Odia theatre is doomed.

Q. Talking about theatre, how do you bridge the gap between theatre and cinema? Theatre generally attracts a certain group of audiences and the cinema attracts a wider mass, so how do you think theatre (which has a social message) can attract more audience? How do you bridge the gap?

A. I think cinema is nothing but theatre with improved technical facilities. Theatre is an economical way of entertainment. To attract a wider mass is not theatre's aim. Its aim is to spread social message, to create awareness, and to bring social reforms. We offer drama to common people to entertain and sensitize them with our limited resources. The gap cannot be bridged because there is no sponsorship to invest in Odia theatre. We do plays only with ten thousand rupees, whereas, a budget for an average cinema is at least fifteen lakhs. Then, how can we bridge the gap between theatre and cinema?

Q. As a woman playwright how does society receive you? Any challenges as an individual?

A. Yes, the society has accepted me. They give importance and respect because I am a writer, but as an actress, I have never felt that acceptance. Frankly speaking, people have not received me as an actress. I have done more than seventy plays, yet hardly have I seen more than 200-300 audiences for plays. Our society has made certain norms and restrictions with regard to the actions, behavior and personality of a woman. It cannot accept a rebellious

woman. I think I am little different from others. I cannot be silent, if anything goes wrong. The women in theatre are called many names including demeaning words like 'Natakballi'.

Q. How do you balance different aspects of your life?

A. The credit goes to my family, my husband, my children and my niece. They have been very supportive, especially my husband, without his support, I won't be able to do such multiple things.

Q. What is your comment on the changing audience?

A. There is a mention of 'Sahrdaya' in Bharata's *Natyashastra* which means an audience should be crystal clear and could reflect a thing on the stage as it is without having any illusion or bias. Earlier the audience used to like melodramatic stuff and were not able to relate to international idioms and concepts. There used to be a significant difference between the elite class and the audience of common strata. Now-a-days, education and awareness through mass media has levelled up the common audience. So, today's audience is like Bharata's 'Sahrdaya' to a great extent. They are accepting the ideas of the dramatists without any illusion and the gap in between the elite and common audience has been diminished. Therefore, the dramatists have no problems in experimenting the projection of different idioms on stage. There was a time, when the audience didn't accept the experimental plays and chose jatra and cinema instead of theatre. But now-a-days situation have changed as art films are also commercialised and theatres are also gradually getting acceptance.

Q. How did the contemporary contexts influence the theatre then and now?

A. Whatever happens in our society, everything is not coming to theatre. Earlier, the social contexts used to have great influence on theatres, and the way the plays were written and staged. Now, the influences of such factors have reduced enabling the writer to have freedom to experiment and express.

Q. How are the theatres practised at present? (Theatre groups, independent artists, associations)?

A. There are theatre groups like Prayas, Natya Chetna, Satabdira Kalakar, etc which consistently write and stage plays. We have annual theatre fests carried out by different theatre groups, where not only Odia plays but also different regional language plays are also staged. The scope has greatly expanded for theatre groups.

T. What is the influence of technology on theatre?

A. Yes, new technologies like movable lights, stage techniques, stage craft, etc. have been introduced. Financial constraints are also there with new techniques as these are a costly affair. Sadly, there is no sponsorship for Odia theatre.

Q. How do you adopt to genre mobility? (Plays to novels, poem, short story, etc.)

A. I started with writing stories and poems but later, I shifted to writing plays. I stick with plays because I have my own style of writing. I try to give twists in order to capture the attention and interest of audience. I draw satisfaction from the audience reactions to my plays.

T. In terms of language and style, how does your way of writing differ from the male playwrights?

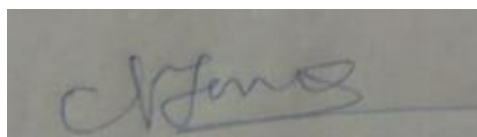
C. A woman always lives in a societal boundary. From the very childhood, she is forced to live in that boundary of which she gets acquainted with the flow of time. So, the conviction that should be there in the language, that is found in the language of a man is missing in case of a female playwright. Even after being educated acquainted with new theories of feminism, she expresses herself being within the limits because she is aware of her retreat to the boundary. In contrast to the men writers, she remains within the limits even while projecting the subaltern characters. As she is taught from the childhood to be in the societal restrictions, her language always remains a barrier for her expression. I have tried my best

to overcome such restrictions and bring genuine expressions in the language and actions of my characters.

Declaration by the Interviewee

I hereby declare that the above information furnished about me is correct and hence approved by me for use in the Ph.D. dissertation by Purbasha Priyadarshini.

Signature of the Interviewee:

A rectangular box containing a handwritten signature in blue ink. The signature is cursive and appears to read 'Nibedita Jena'.

(Dr. Nibedita Jena)



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CELEBRATION OF DIVERSITIES: LUBRICATING THE INSTRUMENTAL CONTRIBUTION OF ODIA THEATRES TO *DALIT* IDENTITY AND CONSCIOUSNESS

□ Purbasha Priyadarshini*

Abstract

Both fiction and creative non-fiction in Indian literature is often a vehicle for public understanding of political, social, and cultural contexts. Theatre, as an institution, is ideally suited to lubricating some reforms by addressing the very social issues that so often constrain the acceptance of the often-unfamiliar activities that we named as development. This grievance was unlocked and aired by the performance, making it easier to share the problems and discuss plans of action. Participation in the theatre event had opened up the issue and the conflicts depicted had moved towards resolution and reformation. The theatre work with the understanding of issues stemming from their dramatic explorations of current topics has brought conventional development work and conscientisation into the cultural arena. Broadly speaking theatre basically in India had a great contribution towards a development of subaltern.

The present paper deals with the Theatres of Odisha had great contributions towards exploring different techniques of theatre to dramatize the *Dalit* issues. The major focus of the discussion is on the question how the theatre movement at Odisha contributed to the shaping up of *Dalit* cultural symbols and social behaviour with new meanings of *Dalit* assertion formation. An attempt has been made here to analyze the question of Odia identity and to contextualize the link between Odia theatre and the generation of *Dalit* vision towards casteless society.

Key Words : Lubricating, Contribution, Consciousness, Performance, Problems.

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Introduction

Ethnic origins, religions, and languages are the major sources of cultural diversity. India is a country incredible for its diversity; biological and cultural. However, the process of synthesis and integration has been extensively at work in most parts of India. Indeed ethnic identities and even the culture traits of Indian people have never been frozen in time or space, they have been in a state of flux. Though each group or community has a distinctive identity and ethos of its own, it does not exist in a social vacuum. Rather, it forms part of an extended and dynamic network. The sharing of space, regional ethos and cultural traits cut across ethnic and sectarian differences and bind the people together. Thus, we witness a firm balancing between cultural diversity and syncretism pervading the foundation of Indian civilization. Indeed by extension, such cultural phenomena are observable, to lesser or greater degree, in the entire sub-continental civilization arena.

Culture today is firmly established as a subject of scrutiny and discussion in the public domain on a global scale: in media, academia, policy debates, development plans and programmes, social and political movements, etc. It is in imminent danger of being used as a catch-all for explaining a variety of trends. The emerging theorisations have not completely replaced earlier notions.

What we are often confronted with is a jostling of some competing ideas in the same space. Recent changes worldwide that can be encompassed under the broad rubric of globalisation have brought about a simple or singular model.

The anti-colonial project of self-recovery through reinterpretation and reconstruction of tradition was integral to the consolidation of pan-Indian cultural identity. Such identity building was a vital constituent of the national movement. The majority of cultural disciplines today continue to reflect the outcome of this interaction, despite new elements having entered their scope which facilitates the process of cultural imperialism.¹

A feature of colonial rule that was to have far-reaching consequences for the post-colonial world was a 'cultural project of control', one that 'objectified' the colonized and reconstructed and transformed their cultural forms through the development of a colonial system of knowledge that outlived decolonization. It was an approach that reified social, cultural, and linguistic differences, causing the colonial state to be described as an 'ethnographic state'. On the other hand, internalizing the colonial representation of them as the 'other' caused Asians, basically Indians to stress their 'dedicated' non-Western identities, ironically making the identities shaped under colonialism the force for decolonization. Anti-colonial nationalists sought to

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distinguish between a material 'outer' domain of economy, statecraft, science and technology in which they acknowledged the superiority of Western modernity, and a spiritual and cultural 'inner' domain of language, religion, and family-the 'private essences of identity'- the distinctness of which had to be preserved.²

The culture and tradition of *Dalit* possess many elements of the history and historical facts. On the other hand, some of the historical facts have also converted into their culture in the due course of time, which can be well marked if it can be viewed in historical perception. From the Manusmriti period, the caste system in the society has been codified. This is historical evidence but the so called upper caste people convert this historical evidence into their culture and since then the caste system got strengthened in the society where untouchability has become a central force in it. Socio-economic disparity leading to unemployment, poverty, malnutrition and such other indicators of a falling society come to occupy our mindset whenever we come forward to tackle a problem of this kind. The idea of emancipation of *Dalits* is an offshoot of this burning issue. In a global sphere, problems covering international issues may not generate that much heat equalising this.

Theatre and Identity

The theatre life in the world in general and Asian countries, in particular, shows a great variety of examples of the significance of performing culture including a theatre for a public at large in everyday life. A considerable number of events keep the tradition of the theatre alive, and the many different kinds of performances are of undeniable importance for the general public, especially in the countryside.³In the historical development of the Nation-State, various forms of cultural expression have been instrumental in helping to construct notions of national identity. Recent works on cultural nationalism have analyzed the role of theatre.

When we look at theatre and identity, it will be found that theatre is an art form appropriate to a civilization that is aware of change occasioned by forces within society or the environment or unexpected change brought about through the will and activity of individuals. The idea of a living culture refers to that point where a community's history of events and beliefs, and ways of behaving formed by those beliefs, meets the changing face of contemporary reality. The Cultural or artistic expression is the outward reflection of that community's evolution in the face of changing social and physical realities.

As a literary form, the theatre is designed because characters are assigned roles and they act out their roles as the action is enacted on stage. These characters can be human beings, dead or spiritual beings animals, or abstract qualities. Theatre is an

adaptation, recreation, and reflection of the society in reality on stage. Theatre is different from other genres of literature. It has unique characteristics that have come about in response to its peculiar nature. It is difficult to separate theatre from performance because, during the stage performance of play, theatre brings life experiences realistically to the audience. It is the most concrete of all genres of literature. We can see that as a genre of literature, theatre occupies a unique position. It is also the most active of other genres of literature because of the immediate impact it has on the audience. It is used to inform, to educate to entertain and in some cases to mobilize the audience.

Theatre and Class Consciousness: The Case of Odisha

As argued by many experts and intellectuals the caste system and untouchability as prescribed by Brahminical Hinduism are a dominant cause of inequality and therefore poverty in India. Many *Dalits* continue to live in extremely substandard conditions. International pressure on India's elite is only a recent phenomenon. However, those most negatively affected by the caste system have tried many ways to break out of this system of oppressive and inhumane subordination. Increased access to education and the leadership of Dr. Ambedkar were major breakthroughs in the formation of *Dalit* movements and progress towards emancipation. A customary presentation of Indian culture relates it mainly to a study of arts within the tradition-bound parameters of styles, chronology or schools. In consequence, the creativity inherent in the culture and the throb of life as its central metaphor tend to get into the background. The living culture is essentially this creativity. It manifests itself in myriad patterns-all related to a tradition that lives on.

Odia Literature is having a history of more than thousand years and for which Govt. of India has decided to give it a Classical status. At the outset we can say that in 'Siddha Sahitya or 'Charjya' Sahitya or Buddhist Literature, there is a couple – a Brahmin man and a Chandal woman trying hard to achieve their moksha or salvation. This has no practicality but used just as a metaphor. In Sanskrit literature created in Odisha, *Dalit* or Tribal characters are there as minor characters just fulfil the requirement of the storyline. But one remarkable attempt we experience some folk tales and kabya to establish a social harmony keeping Lord Jagannath as the principle deity of Odisha at centre. Lord Jagannath himself is known as a tribal God. Two important points like the deities are made of wood the practice of which still continuing in present tribal society and some folk tales depicting how a tribal God has been transformed into an Aryan God.

As per the folk legendry the Lord was worshiped by Biswabasu a tribal chief in a dense forest. Indradyumna the founder of Lord's temple at Puri sent one of his Minister Vidyapati to find out the God. He had an extensive search but no fruit. Finally, he went to the dense forest, met Lalita, a beautiful tribal girl to whom he got married and remained there. Lalita is Viswabasu's daughter. He got the clue from Lalita about the whereabouts of God. Neela Madhab, the prior incarnation of Lord Jagannath and succeeded to meet the God and tried to bring him physically. But he failed, and God ordered him about his next appearance as Daru or a log of wood at the mouth of the river Banki at the sea shore. From that Daru, the log or wood, the deities were prepared and worshipped in Srimandir as Lord Jagannath, Balabhadra, Subhadra, and Sudarshan. The sevaks called as Daitapati are the outcome of Brahmin-tribal-couple Vidyapati-Lalita legacy. Basing on such legendries some poems, shortstories, novels, dances, dramas, and plays have been written in Odia literature. Three features films like Lalita, Neelamadhab and Sri Jagannath and two Tele serials have been created at different times. But practically it has no impact on casteism or caste system in the state. Despite all compositions of devotional songs, it has less impact or no impact in the practical life of *Dalits* in Odisha. But in the colonial period, some plays have been written on such stories and characters and staged throughout the state.

In the 16th century, there were some literary forms on *Dalit* culture and it was very famous all over the region. Balaram Dasa, who was the eldest one of Panchasakhas, means the five epitome of Odia literature, in the 16th century penned down the Laxmi Purana, which has been treated as a great literary piece in Odia. In Odisha, Lord Jagannath is respected as the Principal deity of the state since the time of the Suryavanshi King Gajpati Kapilendra Deva. Goddess Laxmi is the wife of Lord Jagannath. In the Odia month of Margasira, people worship Goddess Laxmi as she symbolizes the presence of wealth.⁴

In Hindu calendar, masanam Margashira Shresthah means Margashir is the holiest month of the year and known as harvesting time. During all four or five Thursdays fall in the month of Margashira, Odia people worship Goddess Laxmi with utmost devotion and sanctity for wealth and richness. In Laxmi Purana there is a good narration on Casteism. As per the author of Laxmi Purana Balarama Dasa, Lakshmi goes to the house of a Chandaliika, a low caste woman named as Shriya to receive worship, which her family considers untouchable and at his brother's instance, her husband, Jagannath asks her to leave the temple. Hurt and humiliated, she leaves the temple, but pronounces a curse on the brothers, namely that for twelve years they

would suffer hunger and thirst, and their agony would end only when they take food cooked by her, whom they have called low caste. This is what eventually happens.

She had to work for it, and she got help from others: vetals and gods and goddesses – Saraswati, Agni, Pawana, etc. – and other celestials. She persuaded them that if Jagannath and Balabhadra did not suffer, men would treat their women as disposable. The brothers undergo hunger and thirst and humiliation. They realize that Lakshmi's curse had materialized. In the guise of Brahmins they beg for food and are sometimes given food too, but they cannot eat it because something or the other happens, like the wind blowing away the food. So people conclude that Lakshmi rejects them and drive them away fearing that associating with them would displease the goddess and bring them misery. Finally, they reach Lakshmi's palace, not knowing it was her and beg food and are told by her attendants that it was the house of a Chandalika, a low caste woman.

To cut a long story short, they finally convey to her that they are totally famished and have no compunctions about accepting cooked food from her. She serves them not only the food they like but also in the manner in which items are served to them in the temple. The brothers realize that it has to be the food cooked by Lakshmi. Directed to do so by his brother Balaram, Jagannath requests her to return to the temple, now that her curse has materialized and her greatness established. She seeks assurance from her Lord on two counts before she returns to the temple: she would not be constrained from visiting her devotees, and mahaprasad must be partaken of in the way mentioned above. He gives her his word, and she happily returns to the temple. This is considered as one of the earliest major attempts against casteism. This purana has been accepted as a drama growth, and laxmipuja has become a beautiful part of Odia culture. Laxmipuja is observed as worshiped by Sriya, the *dalit* woman described by Balaram Dasa⁵. Sriya has become an icon of the system. But unfortunately, it has no impact on the eradication of caste system in Hindu religion.

Similarly "Dadhyata Bhakti" was written in the 17th century which is poetical narratives on the cult of Lord Jagannath and his devotees. One of the lord's devotees was Dasia Bauri, an untouchable. Dasia was a historical character. He could impress Lord Jagannath with his selfless devotion to such an extent that Lord accepted his offer physically in his absence, which was simply unbelievable. Now his samadhisthala and birth place has become a place of worship and his village a tourist spot respectively. But such literary creation has hardly any impacts on eradication of caste system from Hindu society.

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It may be mentioned here that when Odisha came under the Mughals, there was a decline in the Sanskrit dramatic traditions. The development of the dramatic culture in Odisha has been handicapped from the seventeenth century till the first half of the 19th century. There was little encouragement for acting and dramatic creation even under the Maratha and British rule. When there was a rise of the new civilization during the British rule, the educated Odias have attempted to create a modern literature in Odia. In the second half of the 19th century, there is a rise in dramatic literature along with the development of modern poetry and fiction.

Theatre at Odisha: An Analysis and conclusion

In the second half of the nineteenth century, attempts were made to create a modern literature in Odia. As a result, many modern poems, novels, dramas and essays were written. In this phase of a new literary awakening, Jaganmohan Lala wrote his first play "Babaji" (1877). He accepted drama as an effective medium for rejuvenating the people of Odisha. At a time when society was preparing to accept a new culture, this attempt of Odia theatres for social upliftment through drama created a stir not only in society but literature and especially in drama.

So far plays were concerned in 1908, Ramshankar Ray wrote a social play named as "Kanchan Mali." Kanchan Mali was the daughter of a fisherman who was treated as an outcaste or *dalit*. She happens to be a friend of Princess Kanaka Lata, daughter of the Suryavanshi Gajapati King Pratap Rudra Deva. Kanchan Mali being a *dalit* woman was highly educated with the help of the king. She has tried her best to reform society as per the teachings of 15th century saint Sri Chaitanya Deva, where there will be no caste. There is a famous saying "bara jati tera gola- vaishnav hele sabu gala" means there may be numbers of castes or Kulas but when they embrace Vaishnav Dharma they do not have any caste.

In 1934, Ashwini Ghosh wrote a play titled as "Dasia Bauri"- 'Dasia the *Dalit* based on the story of Dadhyata Bhatkti a *kavya* of 17th century. Dasia was a *dalit* man and very famous for his selfless devotion to Lord Jagannath. He is considered as one of the best devotees of God. His devotional attachment was so strong with God; the Lord Jagannath accepted his offer physically in his absence. But such plays had no impact on the caste system of Hinduism. The same playwright, Ashwini Ghosh wrote another play in 1947 titled as "Sriya Chandaluni" based on Balaram Das's Laxmi Purana, which mentioned earlier with Sriya the Chandalika as its heroine.

In the aftermath of 1940 problematic plays became a feature of Odia drama. Problems like the inequality of classes, social injustice, poverty, exploitation; political, hypocrisy, unemployment, communalism, and corruptions, etc. were

depicted in the plays. In respect of form too, these plays showed considerable novelty. The plots are brief and well constructed. In order to make the problems effective no subsidiary interests are added to the main plot. Emphasis is laid upon creation of the dramatic atmosphere and the building up of conflict and suspense. In the case of dialogue, much attention is paid to sharpness, satire, and verbal wit. To make the plays as much realistic as possible unnecessary characters, songs and cheap humour have been rejected.

The mid 19th century was the period of Odia Renaissance when through the emergence and development of Odia literature, Odisha got its new separate identity. Odia theatre is basically developed in the northern part of Odisha rather than the Western and Southern. These developments had their counterparts in the field of theatre and other performing arts. During this period, the playwrights were creating the paradox of hybrid Sanskritic revivalism and Westernization in the play. Further, it is important to mention that there was a parallel growth of a theatre of reaction in both the state namely Bengal and Odisha's that differed in the sense of its power structure. While colonial Bengal in mid 19th century began to have its political theatre through IPTA against the British rule, colonial Odisha's began with a creation of Puranic tales which was probably a strategy to assert the native tradition against the onslaught of the indirect colonial cultural invasion. Unlike Bengali and Tamil theatre, Odia counterpart did not become a rallying point for people's resistance soon as it was felt in Bengal against British rule. It rather focused on the regional Odia identity while responding to the new English education introduced by missionaries.⁶

After Independence, a new era in Odia theatre was opened called Age of Experiment. But unfortunately, no playwright adopted *dalit* issues in their play. Very few socially committed writers give priorities to these issues.

In 1951, Golak Mohanty wrote a play: Achhab" - The Untouchables in which oppression on Bauris the major *dalits* of the state, is the main plot. A so called higher caste Brahmin Zamindar oppressed *dalits* and his son Kishore helped them as a savior. He made *dalits* united and taught them how to fight against such characters and social order. He got married to a *dalit* woman, and finally the Zamindar bowed down his head before *dalits*.

In 1958, a political leader of Odisha, Gobind Seth, wrote a play "Mandakini" to show the oppression of higher caste people on *dalits* and how they could change their fate through their efforts.

After 1960 another modernist style appeared in opposition to the traditional style. Instead of becoming more realistic the plays have become more and have more abstract. We notice instructions of western ideas in these anti-plays. First of all, under

the influence of the absurdist and existentialist ideas the form and the content of the Odia plays underwent a complete change. The unfriended helplessness of man, his alienation, non-existence, and constant frustrations have been expressed in a new style of presentation. In the case of Odia drama, these plays have been, as a whole, called absurd plays. The new type of anti plays initially surprised the audience. But as the western ideas were alien the social life of Odisha, they have not been able to touch the depth of minds. So after even 1960 some playwrights explode the same technique of traditional format in the theatre. A parallel commercial moving theatre group also were working throughout the state. One of such leader of commercial group theatre, Kamal Lochan Mohanty, wrote a play in 1968, titled as "Miss Mallick", in which a *dalit* woman was heroine, but unfortunately he depicted the character how she owned the love of a so called higher caste officer and both were involved in different crimes and finally were arrested. This play speaks to the negative side of *dalits*.

The innovative movements in Odia proscenium theatre that became conspicuous by the end of the 1960s were an excellent activity, but the plays generated by such an experimental watershed did not bear any fruitful results except some abstract satisfaction to the playwrights and directors. There was neither any regular spectator nor was there any permanent stage for these experiments in the amateur sectors. These experiments were as evanescent as roaming clouds. Here is again a very crucial point as the ability of the fiction writers and powers of the dramatists were found either depleting or failing to hold the common man. Literature was also instantiating itself while searching for aesthetic qualities that were European avant gradeist as well as irrelevant. These experiments of the peak point of avant gardeism that infected the entire Western world also failed by the beginning of the 1970s and the experimental literary freaks faded down into forgetfulness.

In postmodern era in 1982, Purna Chandra Mallick, an educationist, and a well-known *Dalit* playwright wrote his play "Astagami Suryara Sandesh" which was first staged at Cultural Akademi, Rourkela and subsequently by Odisha Sangeeta Nataka Akademi on oppressions on *dalits*. The hero, Omkarnath has revolted against the system and subservience and finally killed some oppressors. This was a play with a positive message to inspire *dalits* to find out their way to solve their problems.

But in 1997 a play was written by Rati Mishra titled as "Saramkhita"- The Reservation, which is a challenge to the Reservation scheme of Govt. He has squirrely blamed the reservation policy and shown how such provision is responsible for the downfall of so-called higher caste Hindus.⁷ As the playwright was a Brahmin, he has shown his intolerance, jealousy, and vengeance towards *dalits*.

Conclusion

Although there was no literary genre distinctively known as “*Dalit* literature” during the pre-independence in Odisha, an examination of some literary works written by the *Dalit* intellectuals as well as the upper caste progressive writers indicates that the oppression, agony, and anger of the *Dalit* masses is reflected in their writings. Given the distinct socio-political background of Odisha, it seems appropriate as well as befitting to compare and contrast the sensibilities articulated in Odia *Dalit* literature with that contained in other protest literature available in India and abroad.

However, a secular socio-literary movement can be stressed out in the middle of the fifteenth century when a strong movement against social inequalities raged in Odisha. Panchasakha, the five poets, carried out the movement, which was started by Sudra Muni Sarala Das for another century. The Bhima Bhoi movement of the nineteenth century made the on-going resistance stronger and more open. The culmination of post-independence period of a series of social protest movements is the political movement. It aims at securing for *Dalits* the right to live with dignity and self-respect. Odia *Dalit* Literature, although, still lacks firm roots, it is slowly but unmistakably taking shape. As such, it is imperative to give the phenomenon a close look.

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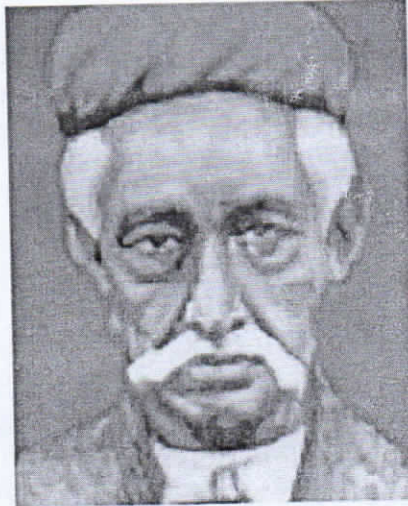
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Modern Odia Drama and Social Class

Purbasha Priyadarshini



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Modern Odia drama is a byproduct of the colonial encounter that brought in Western/ European influences on local dramatic traditions. During these periods, a good number of plays were written and staged in different theaters at varied places of Odisha.

Introduction

From the 19th century onwards, Indian literatures and cultural discourses have undergone radical changes due to several socio-political and educational factors. Though these show conventional themes and forms borrowed from Sanskrit, Prakrit, Pali, and Persian literatures, these lost their vitality and relevance and gave away to a pattern in Indian literature. In this context, Das (1991:49) points out, "It would be wrong to expect a uniformity in the pattern of change throughout the country as each linguistic area had its own distinctiveness and each of them responded independently either to the past literary tradition or to the new". As Sen views, the introduction of English was primarily for the benefit and consolidation of British power (05). However, it also afforded distinct opportunities for certain sections of the Indian population. In this context, Viswanathan suggests that "'consent' was created before political conquest, that the British preferred voluntary cultural

assimilation as the most effective form of political control. English education was specifically designed to build a certain class who would have to assist in the British administration". (01). By the beginning of the nineteenth century, a professional middle class began to emerge in Odisha through adopting English education.

The system of English education and importance of English brought out a radical change over the linguistic discourses in Odisha. The modern Odia literature and its cultural identity became a challenge among the English educated people. The reformation of Odia literary genres and the principles of literary canon formation were actually patronized by the conquest of British. Basically, the functions of multilingualism facilitated borrowing of themes and perspectives of European literature into Odia through literary manipulation.

Few research works have been published on the Odia drama and a systematic study on it has not been carried out by scholars. Of note among the published studies are Gilbert and Tompkins's *Post-colonial Drama: Theory, Practice, Politics* (1996), and J. Ellen Gainor's *Imperialism and Theatre: Essays on World Theatre, Drama and Performance* (1995). Gilbert and Tompkins themselves point out that Indian drama and theatre's history is extremely complex, it is impossible to do justice to Indian drama in a broadly comparative study. Similarly, Kartik Ghosh's *Odisha Rangamancha o mora Nata Jibana* (1977), Hemant Kumar Das's *Odia Natya Sahitya Bikasha Dhara* (1981/ 1994/2012) offers ideas about history of Odia drama and theatre in a simple manner wherein critical discourse is missing. Sarbeswar Dash's book *Odia Natya Sahitya* (1981) (Odia Dramatic Literature) interrogates the trends and development of colonial and post-colonial Odia drama. I wish to provide a sociological interpretation of Odia drama published during the colonial period.

The study of Odia drama demonstrates the social class which emerged during the colonial period. The social stratification was gradually seen at various levels of human psychology and the socio-psychological attitudes were also reflected in Odia drama. Modernism in Odia drama found expression in Jaganmohan Lala, Ramasankar Ray, Bhikari Charan Patnaik, Aswini Kumar Ghosh, Bhanjakishore Pattanaik, and Kalicharan Patnaik among other dramatists. They brought out massive changes in Odia drama tradition. The new era of Odia drama not only sought to challenge the establishment in dramatic forms but also made changes in choosing the themes and contents of drama. The primary focus of these writers was to represent the social issues in the dramatic forms so that the common people would have access to realize the social value and norms of every human being.

One of the major themes for Odia dramatists was the portrayal of the conduct of women in Odia domestic life and the gender discrimination in Odia society. The present paper seeks to highlight the way in which modernity entered into Odia drama and the way male playwrights dealt with social realism through Odia drama. To understand the role of women in domestic life and different forms of social oppression like rape, sexual exploitation, harassment, brutality and conspiracy by women against women, and death for dowry, the present paper discusses select plays of Odia trendsetter dramatists which were staged and popularized in those days.

Odia Drama and Reflection of Social Class

In 1877, the first modern Odia play *Babaji* by Jaganmohan Lala (1838-1913) was staged and that changed the whole scenario of the Odia theatre. His second drama, *Sati* (The Chaste Woman) projects a woman as an exploitative element explored in the modern Odia society. Lal is a dramatist who not only brought about social change in understanding gender and different relations but also tried to dismantle the process of women's harassment. The story of *Sati* deals with the social history of Odisha, especially the monarchy of the landlords and the extra-marital affairs of

them with the beautiful wives of the peasants. In this scenario, women were being treated as commodity and they were called for entertainment and sexual exploitation. Similarly, many professional and amateur theatres such as Radhakanta Theatre (1875), Kothapoda Theatre (1875), Padmanav Theatre (1898), Bikram Theatre (1910), Usha Theatre (1913), and Basanti Theatre (1910) were established and gained popularity in Odisha. Many historical, mythological, biographical, and social plays were staged in those theatres.

A large number of plays emphasized on social issues and gender discrimination through modern Odia drama. Ramsankar Ray (1858-1931)'s *Kanchanamali* (1904) reveals the perception of gender reality and the hierarchical power structure between male and female of colonial Odisha. Through this play, he introduces female education and inter-caste marriage which were prohibited during this period. He basically deals with the social position of women in the colonial society of Odisha. In one way, he projects the wife as a companion of the husband and his moral support like the king *Prataparudra* and his wife *Swarnalata* in the play. *Prataparudra* offers love and affection towards his wife *Swarnalata*, and he also takes her advice to make any decision in his royal court. Here, Ray tries to break the ideology of gender discrimination. For him, *Kanchanamali*, the young girl from the fishing community, is always revolutionary, independent, educated, and protests against the robbery and other social stigmas. The dramatist induces her to catch the thieves and send them to imprisonment with the help of a young man, *Suryamani*, in the court of the king, *Prataparudra*. Looking at the bravery of *Kanchanamali*, the king anoints her and urges her to establish a girl's school in the village under the auspicious guidance of *Kanchanamali*. Ray presents a girl of considerable physical strength and intellect, having knowledge on Odia, Bengali, and Sanskrit who is ready to use her talent not only in reading newspaper but also in convincing untouchable children and women for going to school. In this play, Ray also projects the essence of inter-caste marriage vis-à-vis Odia nationalism and integration. For example, the young man *Suryamani*, who belongs to upper-caste family, gets married to *Kanchanamali*, who belongs to lower *strata*. The conduct of women and consciousness about social responsibilities are represented in the plays written by Bhikaricharan Pattnaik. The *Sansara Chitra* (Picture of Family) (1915), his popular drama, shows how the cruelty of dowry system took the life of a bride in colonial Odisha. The village landlord, Govinda Chandra Pattnaik, faces intolerable difficulties for marrying his only daughter, *Ahalya*. The father of the bridegroom, Dattahari Kanungo, asks for heavy dowry in wedding his qualified son, *Rasananda*. In order to perform marriage of his daughter, Pattanayak sells all his properties for paying the due dowry to the father of the bridegroom. Later, this is discovered by *Ahalya* and she commits suicide for teaching a lesson to educated bridegrooms. Inviting social issues like peasant life and livelihood, torture, and conspiracy, Aswini Kumar Ghosh contributed a few plays in Odia. His play *Chasha Jhia* (Daughter of Peasant), can be taken into consideration to show the domestic life of peasants and the difficulties they face in colonial Odisha.

In 1936, a pioneering Odia theatre company named Annapurna Theatre was established, and within a short span of time, it became a touring troupe in Odisha. During this period, a number of artists came forward to show their talent, and this was the time to divide the company into two groups, such as the A group which was stationed in Puri and the B-group in Cuttack. There were a few pioneering theatres established during this period: Orissa Theatres, Rupashri Theatres, and Janata Theatres. As Mansinha points out, "many professional theatrical parties had been started. Although they were all short-lived, their mushroom rise indicates the growing enthusiasm of the people for the new type of intellectual entertainment". (201). Kalicharan Pattnaik, who had earlier formed a Rasa-party, had in the meantime distinguished himself both by writing plays and founding the Orissa Theatres (1940) which lasted till 1950. There was a news published in the *Hindustan Standard* on August 17 of 1958 that "Kalicharan fought against heavy

odds and brought about a great revolution in the history of stage, by introducing social dramas and educated girls on the state" (Das 1987). His socio-political drama, such as *Bhata* (Rice), is a progressive play which concludes that the rich get richer through exploitation. The problems of untouchability and hunger among Odia peasants are projected. A cruel landlord's only son turns against him and joins the rebellious peasants. In an ensuing conflict, the son is fatally shot. Rather unconvincingly, the penitent father vows to become a servant of the people. Pattanaik makes it very clear that women cannot be confined within the domestic worlds, and they shall move out from the household activities. The social equality and social justice have been reflected in *Girl School* (1942). The Odia plays which were written in this era were all introduced with the objectives of social emancipation, eradication of poverty, dowry, feudal order, caste discrimination and educational deprivation. The scenes from rural life as well as life in the towns and cities were reflected in their writings.

The modern dramatists depict men and women in conflict with destiny or the inexorable forces of the social system. The major social issues like women's empowerment, struggle for female identity and the growth of social consciousness for women have been presented by the women dramatists. In this venture, Sarala Devi's drama anthology *Pancha Pradipa* (1959) (Five Lamps), and Sitadevi Khadanga's play *Mandira Prabesha* (1947) (Temple Entry) were meant to promote an awakening of Odia women drama writings in Odisha. As Sachidananda Mohanty (2016: xlvii) rightly points out, "Sarala Devi advocated the need for a separate system of women's education in the universities of India. Arguing that a system of learning common to men and women, as practiced in India under the influence of the west, would destroy 'Indian values' and 'way life', she invoked a set of Western thinkers and educationists such as Stanley Hall, Havelock Ellis, Jastrow J, Otto Lipman and G. Heymans who, she claimed, stood for a system of education appropriate to the needs of women" for encountering the social emancipations.

Conclusion

The colonial Odia drama chiefly represents the social life of the people. The sociological aspects such as gender equality, caste discrimination, importance of women's education, consequence of inter-caste marriage, love and devotion, dowry system, suicide of brides, and life and livelihood of peasants were depicted in the Odia drama in general, while women's empowerment and gender equality have been shown more prominently in the plays by women.

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