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## Advent and progress of sonnet as a literary form in Odia literature

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### Abstract

Sonnet is a very popular literary form in many literatures. In English literature it rained for more than seven centuries. It has different significance and effect in different literatures. Here the focus is on sonnet in the context of Odia literature. A very brief account history of Modern Odia literature is provided for proper understanding of the context. This research paper deals with sonnet as a literary form and its advent in Odia literature along with a brief account of its development till now. It starts with origin of sonnet in English literature then talks about the history and evolution of modern Odia literature followed by the origin and development of sonnet in Odia literature. Various prominent poets who have used this literary form and different types of it are discussed. Aiming at a vaster audience this research paper brings out more of Odia typicality in relation to sonnet in modern context in Modern Odia literature. Further research can be done to examine the stylistic study of varieties of sonnets by various sonneteers.

**Keywords:** sonnet, literary forms, Odia literature, modern Odia literature, types of sonnet

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### Introduction

The sonnet was introduced to England, along with other Italian verse forms, by Sir Thomas Wyatt and Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey, in the 16th century. The new forms precipitated the great Elizabethan flowering of lyric poetry, and the period marks the peak of the sonnet's English popularity. In the course of adapting the Italian form to a language less rich in rhymes, the Elizabethans gradually arrived at the distinctive English sonnet, which is composed of three quatrains, each having an independent rhyme scheme, and is ended with a rhymed couplet. Modern Odia literature is a complex phenomenon. It coincided with many crucial events relating to the separate statehood of Odisha and their impact on the territorial, linguistic and literary aspects and aspirations of the state. The British occupation of Odisha in 1803 signified an important shift in its history, but the two hundred years that preceded this event, when Odisha was ruled successively by the Moguls, the Afghans and the Marathas, were more anarchical and corrosive. During the rule of the Moguls, Odisha's territorial identity was set with doubts and uncertainties and its geographical boundaries were redefined many times. Areas were attached and detached as different dispensations were interested in the extortion of its resources. We have imported literary forms like epic, poetic drama, short stories etc first, from translation of Sanskrit literary works into Odia. All most all the translations of early age are from Sanskrit to Odia like Mahabharata and Ramayana, the most popular epics. This continued for a long time period of some centuries. Later on other languages became the medium like Parsian, Hindi, Bangla etc. But English language played the most vital role in this context. The Odisha Mission Press was set up on 1st March 1838 with the aim of publishing mostly Christian texts. But gradually it started publishing Hindu scriptures and Odia primers as they became commercially viable. Translation became popular during this period. Reverend Sutton translated and published the New and Old Testaments in Odia between the years 1840 and 1844. He also translated Odia grammar into English in 1831. Sachidananda Mohanty mentions that " fifty reams of paper were given to the Odisha Missionaries for the translation of *Pilgrim's Progress*" (149). Odia literature, as a whole, was strongly affected by European literature particularly by English literature for its value and dignity in the world. The renowned writers in Odisha started the imitation in the last part of 19th century as they felt the necessity of European literary echoes in Odia literature. Hence many translators came forward to popularize this new trend. But the influence found in the works of early modernists like; Radhanath and Madhusudan Rao, needs to be discussed first. Madhusudan Rao was generally known as *Bhaktakavi*. He wrote songs, lyrics, sonnets, odes and essays. In fact he was the only sonneteer in his time. Radhanatah Ray's *Kedargouri* (1886) is based on the tragic story of "Pyramus and Thisbe. Mayadhar Mansinha comments that: "Both the characters have so naturally and artistically merged into Odishan society and landscape as to look as though they had actually happened here originally" (175). *Chandrabhaga* (1886) is based on the story of Apollo and Daphne, also Indianised and against the legendary context of the ruined temple of the Sun-god at Konark; *Nandikeshwari* (1887) has echoes of Ovid and Byron and *Usha* (1888) is based on Atalanta's race, as narrated by Venus in her address to Adonis in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. There are many similarities and significant differences between *Usha* and *Atalanta* as discovers the post-colonial critic Sachidananda Mohanty. What we find here is actually a process of transcreation. *Atalanta* consists of 227 lines, whereas Ray's poem runs to nearly 700 lines. Like every translator Ray makes use of culture-specific parallels

in the target text. He employs fitting analogies from the world of Hindu mythology, legend, folklore and oral traditions. To lend richness and authenticity to his rendering he uses local colour, imagery and metaphor. Throughout this transmuted rendering, the Odia landscape, its rivers, its mountains, its hills, its temples, its forests, its people, its gods and goddesses, its flora and fauna and so forth find a finely nuanced textured expression. Apart from their aesthetic quality, the narrative poems of Radhanath have a historical significance and a contextual value in terms of cultural politics which are often overlooked. Radhanath was one of the pioneers of the Odia literary renaissance, which was much more than merely literary. At a time when Odia language was being threatened with extinction, Radhanath's literary mapping of Odisha's geo-cultural terrain helped in shaping the contours of the nascent Odia identity which was struggling to survive.

The modern phase of Odia literature is a product of western education that exposed the prominent Odia writers to the concept and specimens of western literature, with a different worldview and a different philosophy of life. The influence of Romantic and Victorian literature on writers like; Radhanath Ray, Fakirmohan Senapati, Madhusudan Rao and Gangadhar Mehere can be judged from their deviation from classical literary models prevalent up to their time. Radhanath Ray had read Odia, Sanskrit, Hindi, Bengali and English literature and could make use of both Indian and western literary traditions to great advantages. The influence of western literature can be felt in the writings of Radhanath Ray initially that he used a lot of western themes and ideas in his works. He adopts Ovid's stories to the Odia background as in "*Kedar Gouri*", "*Chandrabhaga*" and "*Usha*". The themes he handled in "*Kedar Gouri*", "*Nandikeswari*", "*Parvati*" are notable for their boldness when placed against the conservative mores of Odia Society at that time. Most of them deal with tragic love and as such depart from the convention of ultimate romantic union that the Indian literary tradition and conformed to so long and this innovation enlarges the scope of Odia literature. In "*Parvati*" he takes up an iconoclastic theme like incest and exhibits his capacity to fathom the depth of this complex and powerful passion almost anticipating the theories of Freudian psychology. In almost all of his creations, an echo of English literature can be felt easily that gave him an unique place in the history of Odia literature. His boldness and bravery to introduce western literary themes that sometimes criticized severely for its mismatch with the temperament of the Odias, is worth praising. Nandakishore Bal, Madhusudan Rao, Gangadhar Meher etc. also display the European Romantic features in their works to prove the strongest influence of western literature in Odisha.

The influence and reception of western literature took its concrete shape in 1897 with the publication of the historical monthly Odia literary magazine "*Utkal Sahitya*" edited by Biswanath Kar. This magazine gave immense opportunity to the translation of English poetry in its every issue that introduced the Odias a new era and a completely new literary tradition. Both major and minor poets started to translate poems from the western literary world, particularly from English literature to popularize the trend and themes. Mostly they favoured 19th century English poetry, both Romantic and Victorian to translate poems of the prominent writers. Romantic poetry was accepted and adored by the Odia people during the beginning of modernity because all the features of Odia modernity resembled with the principles of Romanticism. Romantic poets like Shelley, Byron, Southy, Moore, Wordsworth, Scott and Victorian poets like Tennyson, Arnold, Rossetti etc. were translated profusely. In 40 years of continuous publication of "*Utkal Sahitya*", more than seventy poems have been translated and forty to fifty poems out of that have been from Romantic period. The influence became stronger due to this magazine that stimulated the Odias to accept the new convention and practice it for the development of their own literature. In that sense "*Utkal Sahitya*" is a perfect historical document that helped a new literary genre establish in Odisha through its valuable pages. History of Odia translation means "*Utkal Sahitya*" no doubt as it gives every minute details about the new art and its expansion. Its constant effort of popularizing the art through the uninterrupted publication of translated works in its different issues is undoubtedly the reason that resulted in consolidating a new and distinguished literary era in Odisha.

The later part of 19th century and the early part of 20th century marked the time period of "*Utkal Sahitya*" that came under the age of modernity in Odisha. The modern writers were primarily focused on the nature and its beauty that resembled the age of Romanticism in England. And this resemblance was the only reason that caused so many translations in Odisha. More than 65 poems had been translated from English to Odia in "*Utkal Sahitya*" out of which 45 poems or more had been from Romantic poetry, a few from Elizabethan poetry, some from Victorian and modern poetry. Shelley, Byron, Scott, Wordsworth, Southy, Blake, Thomas Hood etc. were the poets who were translated the most. The notable translators were Ajay Chandra Das, Narayan Mohan Dey, Padma Charan Pattanaik, Chandra Sekhar Mishra, Nilakantha Das, Radhamohan Gadnayak etc. who introduced and popularized western literature to Odisha by the help of "*Utkal Sahitya*". They preferred the most beautiful texts of the west to persuade the Odias to take interest in western literature and follow the footsteps of the British writers. Sonnet in Odia, as a literary form, evolved in Odia literature in the last decade of the 19th century, Madhusudan Rao being its first exponent. He followed both the Petrarchan and the Shakespearean forms and wrote as many as forty sonnets compiled in a book named *Basantagatha*. The sonnets of Madhusudan are heterogeneous by nature and speak of his religious and philosophic views of life. Though they contain lofty thoughts, they lack the grace and grandeur of his other poems. Among his contemporaries Gangadhar Meher and Nanda Kishore Bal also wrote sonnets with equal competence. His "*Safala Swapna*" and "*Manasi Pratima*" are some of the examples of his sonnet writing. Madhusudan Rao's *The Basanta Gatha* was published in 1902, and contained poems written between 1895 and 1902, all sonnets and sequence of sonnets, the first-ever such a book in Odia in that particular form. The poet pointed out that as most of the sonnets were written during the spring-time he called them „Songs of Spring“, and dedicated the book to

Sri Sachidananda Dev, the Crown-Prince of Bamanda, an important the then feudatory State in Western Odisha. But interestingly the poems did not have spring or celebration of spring as their theme. Only one poem in total 27 poems that the book contained, directly referred to the spring in as much it was entitled „A Spring Full-Moon Midnight“ and expressed the poet’s happiness and excitement on the occasion. The poems, as in earlier volumes, showed different moods of the poet. Thus there were eulogical portraits of persons he knew and respected, such as Radhanath Ray, Fakirmohan Senapati, Gaurisankar Ray, and Sri Sudhal Dev, the King of Bamanda, an obituary for his friend Pyarimohan Acharya. Then there were poems that expressed the poet’s strong personal emotions related to love, happiness and remorse. Some such poems were *Atita* (The Past), *Hrudaya Sangita* (The Song of The Heart), *Kaunasi Paralokabāsini Prati* (For a Lady who is no more), *Jaubanar Swapna* and *Jarā Ākramana* (The Attack of Old Age). Then there was an interesting poem, entitled *Patitā Ramani* (The Fallen Woman) which showed the poet’s social motivation. In addition, there were a number of poems, devotional and reflective in nature, such as *Sankhadhwani* (The Sound of Conch), *Satya* (The Truth), and *Parama Pramana* etc. which exhibited a delicate, mystical perception on the part of the poet. There were other feelings too. In one poem, entitled *Nababarsha* (The New Year) the poet welcomed the year (1898), and in at least two other poems, *Sri Panchami* and *Ekāmra Kānan* (Bhubaneswar) one could sense the poet’s strong nationalistic feelings related to the distressing socio-political conditions of the time. On the whole, apart from the range and variety, the poems continued the image of Madhusudan as a poet of power and newness.

Fakirmohan’s sonnets dealing with his personal love and loss, his agony and family life resemble the sonnets of Sidney and Rossetti. The sad demise of his second wife, Krishna Kumari, whom he loved dearly, brought deep pathos to his sonnets. He sang of his own personal loss and hoped for a reunion with his beloved in the next world. Another versatile genius of the period, Gangadhar Meher, wrote about life and death, worldly objects and infinity. His sonnets do not deal with his personal life. He has written “*Pradhanpat*” and some untitled sonnets where he expressed his philosophy and thoroughly depicted nature in its purest form. He has written many elegies which are again an import from the English literature. The sonnets of Nanda Kishore deal with both nature and personal sufferings, and reveal high poetic sensibility. He has written about a hundred sonnets which are scattered throughout his collections. These sonnets are best known for their restrained thought and versification. Poet Padmacharan Patnaik of the Satyabadi school of thought has also written sonnets which have a direct appeal for the reader. Many of them express patriotic feelings, while some others are deeply emotional. Just like Wordsworth, Padmacharan writes on personal and impersonal aspects of life with strong faith in the Almighty. This faith sometimes gives his sonnets a metaphysical flavour which tends towards mysticism.

The Satyabadi group of poets mostly wrote descriptive poetry and did not encourage sonnets which primarily project the poet’s own intimate feelings. Kuntala Kumari (1900-1938) has also made significant contribution to the genre of sonnets. Her sonnets in *Anjali* (1922) are both personal and impersonal, dealing with her love for her lover, Dr. Kailash Chandra Rao as well as for God, the Supreme Lover. She is considered to be the Jhon Keats of Odia literature. She has written many odes like *Ode to Star*, *Ode to Night-Jasmine* etc.

Among the Sabuja group of poets, Baikunthanath Patnaik has composed a number of sonnets, offering prayers to the Omniscient. His *Mrutika darsan* is a collection of thirty-eight sonnets replete with personal despair, hope and bereavement. His contemporary Mayadhar Mansinha, best known for sensuous love in his poems, switched over to sonnets in the later phase of his life. His sonnets are compiled in an anthology entitled *Krush*. Here all his physical love and longings have been sublimated to a metaphysical and mystic yearning for the unknown. The famous poet Sachi Rautray has tried his hand at sonnets. Patheya (1931), his earliest volume poems, however, has not attained the poetic skill of Manasinha though the poems deal with the same theme and have been largely influenced by Rabindranath Tagore so far as their metaphysical thought is concerned.

The love sonnets of Manasinha are perhaps by far the best in Odia poetry and are remarkable for their grace and emotion. They are, indeed, pure gems of poetry. In most of the sonnets he sounds desperate for love and his voice is a melancholic one. His sonnets like *Ekaanta Ekaaki*, *Biswa Aakarshna*, *Nutana Pranaya*, *Jeebana Taraka*, *Cheera Anweshana* etc are the best examples of his sonnets.

Another poet, Kunja Bihari Das, a contemporary of Rautray, has written seventy-four sonnets compiled in *Prabhati* (1944) most of which are based on personal experiences and some others on nature and patriotic feelings. Guruprasad Mohanty is another sonneteer of modern era whose *Three Sonnets* is the most important as they are in a sequence but individually untitled. Here the flow is though detailed but argumentative and the style is metaphysical. He has compared the body as a veil to the soul. He is focused on the ultimate pleasure and satisfaction and denies body and all bodily desires.

In the post-Independence era sonnet as a poetic form has lost its charm. Yet a few poets like Guruprasad Mohanty, Bibhudutta Mishra, Saubhagya Kumar Mishra and Pabitra Satapathy have tried this form with success. Mohanty’s sonnets dealing with the realities of life are sharp and satirical in tone, whereas Bibhudutta deals with his own love affairs. Both Saubhagya and Pratibha handled the sonnet at “gave up this form in pursuit of free verse and their own diction. Praharaj Satyanarayan Nanda, Promod Mohanty, Nrusingha Kumar Rath also wrote sonnets in the early part of their career.

## Conclusion

Though a few poets also tried the Petrarchan or Italian style of sonnet, but the mostly and popularly followed style is English or Shakespearian. Though imported from English literature through translation still it has become a stabilized form soon. Sonnet became an established form in Odia literature like other literary forms i.e.

Elegy, Blank Verse etc. Sonnet as a literary form is, however, fast vanishing from the contemporary Odia literary scene.

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