

Chapter 22

The Odyssey of Odia Cinema: A Transition of Culture and Language

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ABSTRACT

There was a time in India when education was confined to a privileged class. At that period, Sanskrit was the only language in which most of the epics and other religious texts were written. A majority of the population had no access to these texts. Later, when regional languages and kinds of literature were developed, all these Sanskrit texts were translated for the common people. The immense popularity of The Ramayan influenced Mr. Mohansundar Devgoswami of Puri (actor, director) to make a feature film based on the Ramayan. Based on a mythological theme with elements of Rasa integrated into the structure of the talkie film, Sita Bibaha became the first Odia film, and though its work began in 1934, this film was eventually released in 1936. Keeping all these things in mind, this chapter intends to give a bird's eye view of the unknown legacy and odyssey of Odia cinema.

INTRODUCTION

There was a time in India when education confined to a privileged class. At that period Sanskrit was the only language in which most of the epics and other religious texts written. Majority of the population had no access to these texts. Later, when regional languages and literature developed, all these Sanskrit texts were translated for the ordinary people. They were written in verse for recitation or narration so that a large number of people could listen and understand. In this process, the language received a great impetus under the patronage of the Gajapati Kings of Odisha in 15th century A.D. It is during this period of their reign, The Mahabharata, The Ramayana and The Bhagavata were written in verse on the model of the Sanskrit texts. The immense popularity of The Ramayan influenced Mr Mohansundar Devgoswami of Puri (actor, director) to make a feature film based on The Ramayan. Based on a mythological theme with elements of Rasa integrated into the structure of the talkie film, Sita Bibaha became the first Odia film. Through its work began in 1934, this film got released in 1936 (Chatterjee, 2012).

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It is remarkable to note that while in the Country the first talkie film was made in 1931, Late Mohan Goswami with the spirit of adventure produced this Odia Film in 1936. The production of this first Odia film *Sita Bibaha* is a landmark in the history not only in the Odia film industry but also in the Indian film industry as this brought into focus the germination of cinema culture in Odisha. In 1936, when Odisha attained its political identity, the first Odia film *Sita Bibaha* released on April 28th. It based on a drama written by Kamapal Mishra which published in 1899 and this film was a brainchild of Mohan Sundar Dev Goswami. Mohan Sundar with his profound comprehension in 'Rasa Nritya' derived the story from the epic Ramayan; about the marriage of Lord Rama and Sita. That time, Odisha did not have the necessary infrastructural facilities for film production. There was neither studio nor a good director. However, still, Mohan himself wrote the script and with the help of Priyanath Ganguli of Kolkata and finally, *Sita Bibaha* got released at Laxmi Talkies in Puri on the auspicious day of Madhusudhan Das Jayanti.

Dada Saheb Phalke of Cinema: Mohan Sundar Dev Goswami

Legends are not born, they made, and they live and die with their passions. Mohan Sundar Dev Goswami was such a legend who had a constant desire for creativity. He dared to dream of making the first film even before Odisha carved out as the first linguistic state in the Country. Born on 8th August 1892, Mohan was the pioneering filmmaker.

Mohan Sundar was a director, screenwriter, musician, singer and actor par excellence. He also produced some of the most beautiful cinemas, and the film fraternity rightly considers him as the father and doyen of Odia film. He had formed a Rasa troupe that toured all over the state and outside to spread the cultural extravaganza of Odissi music and dance. His troupe had a unique mix of culture and spiritualism. The troupe used to tour for six to seven months a year, and the stage shows were a mix of song and performance on the theme of 'Krushna Leela' based on Jayadev's *Gitagovinda*. *Gitagovinda* composed for a dance performance during the night worship of Lord Jagannatha. The poem became so popular that within a century, it spread to all corners of India, from east to south, west and north and was adapted to dance, music, painting and temple worship (Hindustan Times, 2020).

During those days, leading scriptwriters like Jagamohan Lala, Ramsankar Ray, Aswini Kumar Ghosh and Kampal Mishra used to play for the stage which was based on a decent story while Jaganath Pani, Baishnab Pani and Balakrishna Mohanty used to perform dance drama. On the other hand, at that time, Jatra was based on a sex-based story and slang language, which perhaps influenced Mohan to form Rasadal in Puri. He had a melodious voice. Besides, he had the expertise to play 27 musical instruments like Harmonium, pakhouz, tabla mrudangam, nal, jodi nagra, sitar, flute and others.

After 28 years old Mohan's marriage to 13 years old Mukulmala, Mohan formed a Rasadal (Rasa Troup) named Sree Radha Kunjabehari Rasadala. He had written more than 25 dance drama. Kabichandra Kalicharan Pattnaik, Babaji Baishnab Charan Das, Famous patachitra artist Jaganath Moha Patra and celebrated Odissi dancer Guru Kelucharan Mohapatra along with several other trainees learned the art of *abhinaya*, percussion playing, singing and stagecraft from Mohan.

For a creative genius like Mohan, life was not rosy all the way. Once he got busy with film making, his Rasadal suffered a lot. Mohan suffered from leprosy towards the last leg of his life, forcing him to live an isolated life. His life was miserable with no financial source, and he pushed to appeal to the people of the state for monetary help. A fighter against many odds from his young days, Mohan breathed his last on 11, January 1948. Kabiraj Deb Goswami, a grandson of producer and director Mohan who

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