



Impact of Colonialism on Sanskrit Gītikāvya Traditions in Odisha

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Abstract – This research paper examines the impact of British colonial rule on the Sanskrit Gītikāvya traditions in Odisha. Sanskrit Gītikāvya, known for its lyrical poetry and devotional themes, has been a significant part of Odisha's literary and cultural landscape. The advent of colonialism brought profound changes to Odisha's social, political, and economic structures, influencing its cultural traditions, including Gītikāvya. This paper explores how colonial policies and ideologies affected the patronage, production, dissemination, and thematic focus of Sanskrit Gītikāvya in Odisha. Through an analysis of historical documents, literary works, and socio-political contexts, the study highlights the resilience and transformation of this poetic tradition in the face of colonial challenges.

Keywords: Gītikāvya, Colonialism, Cultural transformation, Literary adaptation, Social reform, Devotional poetry, Colonial education, Western influence, Linguistic shift.

1. INTRODUCTION

Numerous states in India have made substantial contributions to the Sanskrit tradition. The emphasis here is on the tradition of Sanskrit literature in Orissa, where the state has a significant impact on the development of this literary form. It is thought that the Sanskrit tradition in Orissa started during the Vedic era. Sanskrit poets and scholars in Orissa excelled in various fields of knowledge such as Veda, Vedāṅga, Jyotisha, Purana, and Dharma. They also made significant contributions to Sanskrit literature by producing works in Shastra, Arthaśāstra, Ayurveda, Dargana, and Kavya. Monuments, epigraphic records such as copper-plate grants, and inscriptions of Orissan rulers, all written in Sanskrit, along with numerous Sanskrit manuscripts by Orissan authors on palm leaves, provide sufficient proof of the Sanskrit heritage in Orissa. Here, an effort has been made to uncover the Sanskrit tradition of Orissa by examining existing records that offer valuable insights for further research.

Sanskrit Gītikāvya, a type of poetic song, has had a crucial impact on Odisha's cultural and literary heritage. These poetic works, typically centered on devotion, played a crucial role in religious rituals and conveying spiritual emotions. During the 18th century, when British colonial rule began, Odisha, similar to other parts of India, saw major changes in its traditional cultural customs. The policies of the British government had extensive effects on different facets of life in Odisha, including its literary practices. The goal of this study is to investigate the unique impacts of colonialism on the Sanskrit Gītikāvya traditions in Odisha, with a focus on alterations in patronage, creation, distribution, themes, and cultural conservation. Some Famous Gītikāvyas written in Odisha:

Table -1:

Sl.No.	Author	Time	Works
1	Jayadeva	1150 A.D.	Gitagovinda
2	Gajapatipurussottamadeva	1466–1497A.D.	Abhinnavitagovinda



3	Narayanabhanjadeva	1525A.D.	Rukmaniparinaya
4	Yatindra Raghuttama	1620A.D.	Mukundavilasa
5	Agnichit Nityananda	1630A.D.	Sivalilamruta & Shrikrishnalilamruta
6	ShantiKantha	1650A.D.	Gitasitavallabha
7	Kavichandra Kamalalochana Khadgaray	1775A.D.	Gitamukunda

2. COLONIAL IMPACT ON PATRONAGE AND PRODUCTION

Prior to the British coming, Sanskrit Gītikāvya in Odisha flourished thanks to support from local rulers, temples, and affluent sponsors. This tradition of patronage was a significant part of the cultural and religious customs in Odishan society, where poetry and music were viewed as gifts to the gods. Nevertheless, British colonial policies, especially those concerning land revenue and economic control, markedly undermined the financial stability of traditional figures like the zamindars and temples.

The British-introduced Permanent Settlement of 1793 changed the land revenue system, causing many traditional patrons to become impoverished. Due to decreased financial means, these benefactors were unable to continue backing poets and scholars as generously as they had previously. The decrease in support led to a drop in the creation of new Sanskrit Gītikāvya pieces. Numerous poets, who relied on support from royalty and temples, experienced financial difficulties and had to either give up their writing endeavours or find different sources of income.

The economic stresses brought about by colonialism also caused Sanskrit Gītikāvya to change its content and style. As old-fashioned support declined, poets started to concentrate on topics that could attract a wider, less religious audience. This change frequently involved shifting from solely religious subjects to incorporate topics related to societal problems, ethical lessons, and even indirect criticisms of the colonial government. Nevertheless, these adjustments did not prove sufficient to maintain the tradition at the same level as before colonial times, resulting in a gradual decrease in its importance.

2.1 Changes in Dissemination and Literary Practices

The arrival of the printing press in India during the colonial era greatly affected the distribution of literary works, including Sanskrit Gītikāvya. Prior to the development of printing technology, these materials were mainly spread through verbal storytelling and handwritten documents, frequently kept in temples and royal libraries. The printing press allowed for mass production of texts, potentially boosting the availability and dissemination of Sanskrit Gītikāvya.

Nevertheless, the emphasis on English education and literature by the British colonial administration resulted in a change in the literary environment. The colonial education system aimed to create English-educated Indians for administrative roles, prioritizing English literature over indigenous traditions like Sanskrit. The change in educational priorities led to a decline in the interest and understanding of Sanskrit literature among the younger educated population of India.

In addition, the British manipulated several printing presses and publishing businesses, focusing mainly on creating texts that reflected their colonial objectives. Consequently, there was a deficiency in institutional backing for the release of Sanskrit Gītikāvya manuscripts. Although some Sanskrit texts were printed, they



were usually only ones that British scholars deemed useful for their linguistic research or viewed as intriguing representations of Indian traditions. As a result, the traditional ways of creating and sharing Sanskrit Gītikāvya were interrupted, leading to its decrease in popularity.

2.2 Thematic Shifts and Literary Adaptation

During the colonial era, there were notable changes in the themes of Sanskrit Gītikāvya works. Traditional Gītikāvya mainly centered on themes of devotion, like worshipping gods and goddesses, performing religious ceremonies, and expressing spiritual dedication. On the other hand, the sociopolitical transformations caused by colonial domination led certain poets to delve into fresh topics and modify their art to address present-day concerns.

Western education and Enlightenment ideals brought about new ideas of individualism, nationalism, and social reform that started to influence Indian literature. Certain Sanskrit Gītikāvya writers in Odisha reacted to these changes by including social justice, moral philosophy, and opposition to colonial rule in their compositions. During this era, a new style of Gītikāvya emerged, combining traditional poetry with current issues, highlighting the intricate balance between tradition and modernity in colonial Odisha.

For example, poets such as Gopala Krushna Pattanaik and Jagannatha Dasa, who were mainly recognized for their writings in Odia language, also created Sanskrit Gītikāvya that analyzed societal inequalities and expressed cultural patriotism. These pieces frequently used symbolic language to subtly critique the colonial government and encourage a feeling of national pride in their audience.

3. CULTURAL PRESERVATION AND RESILIENCE

In spite of the difficulties brought about by colonial governance, the Sanskrit Gītikāvya tradition in Odisha showed impressive strength and flexibility. Translating and adapting Sanskrit Gītikāvya into the Odia language was an important strategy for preserving this tradition. In this way, poets and scholars made sure that these works could be accessible to a larger audience that was more knowledgeable in Odia than Sanskrit.

Furthermore, the verbal tradition was essential in maintaining Sanskrit Gītikāvya. Local performers continued the tradition of reciting and singing poems and songs in temples, festivals, and community gatherings, passing them down through generations. This spoken communication contributed to preserving the tradition, especially as written Sanskrit texts became harder to obtain.

Cultural groups and academic societies in the area were also essential in saving Sanskrit Gītikāvya during colonial times. These collectives, consisting mainly of old-fashioned scholars and local authorities, planned events like readings, contests, and talks focused on Sanskrit literature. Efforts were also made to gather, categorize, and safeguard manuscripts of Gītikāvya works due to their recognized cultural and historical significance.

4. CONCLUSION

Colonialism had a deep and varied effect on the Sanskrit Gītikāvya traditions in Odisha. The challenges of this literary tradition were influenced by the decline of traditional patronage, shifts in dissemination



practices, and the marginalization of Sanskrit literature in colonial education. Nevertheless, poets, scholars, and cultural organizations were able to prevent the complete disappearance of the Gītikāvya tradition by demonstrating resilience and adaptability.

The Sanskrit Gītikāvya tradition in Odisha survived and evolved by adjusting to new socio-political situations, addressing modern themes, and using creative preservation methods. This research emphasizes the significance of comprehending the intricate relationship between colonialism and indigenous cultural practices, which still impact the literary and cultural scene in India.

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