

# Gopal Bulhub Das's Odiya Novel *Bhima Bhuiyan* (1908): An Abstract-cum-Review

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## **Abstract**

*Bhima Bhuiyan* (1908) is a very early novel written in Odia by Gopal Bulhub Das. It is based on a tribal lifestyle. Published in the year 1908, this novel deals with the tribal people, their customs, traditions, and styles of living. The novel basically gives an account of the Bhuiyan tribe in the district of Keonjhar, Odisha. This is, perhaps, the earliest novel on tribal people in any modern Indian language.

The story of *Bhima Bhuiyan* (1908) is very simple but the art of fiction is complex. The characterization of Bhima, Jema, Sadhu, and the King is simply superb. Bhima, the tribal

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hero, plays the central role in this novel. The total setting is in a tribal locality surrounded by forest and hills. The novel opens with a tribal folk song and dance where the young, unmarried Bhuiyan men and women are supposed to choose their life-partners. There are nine chapters in the novel which consists of about one hundred and five pages in total.

The story opens with Chinamali, the only daughter of Tila Sardar. She is the heroine of the novel whom Banasur and Bhima covet. The novel has a vivid, scenic description of the natural phenomena. Here, we are introduced to two *sardars*; Tila *sardar* and Sadhu *sardar* who are enjoying the *changu* song and dance sitting at the *mandua*. Sadhu *sardar* has two sons; Banashura and Bhima. Tila has one daughter Chinamali, the heroine of the novel. *Maghapoda* festival is being celebrated with *changu* song and dance. There is a jovial atmosphere everywhere. Towards the end of the first chapter, the marriage proposal for Chinamali with one of the two sons of Sadhu *sardar* is presented before us.

Then the *Bebarta* Trilochan Mahapatra and his wife are introduced with their intense desire to make money by evil means in the name of the king. *Bebarta's* house, with its architectural designs, gives a clear picture of *Bebarta's* household and belongings. The couple is trying to put dust into the king's eye thereby urging him to prepare for a war with the nearby kingdom where King Harichandan Mardaraj reigns.

Then is the description of Bhima, the hero of the novel and son to sadhu *sardar*, who joins the king's army after getting frustrated with his love for Chinamali. He becomes

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indecisive whether to live or to die after watching Chinamali marrying his elder brother Banashur. The *Bebarta*'s personality is revealed with his ability to solve the problems and settling the disputes among the subjects thereby punishing or rewarding them just as a king does. The whole chapter shows how important a person the *Bebarta* is; side by side projecting his past and how he acquired the post of *Bebarta*.

The next chapter is all about the defeat of *Bebarta* Trilochan Mahapatra and king Jagaddev in the hands of King Harichandan Mardaraj. There are a hustle and bustle everywhere among the subjects with the defeat and detention of the *Bebarta*. Bhima owns the credit of war. *Bebarta* Trilochan is put to trial and sentenced to death. On the other hand, Bhima is entitled as *Ranajeet*.

The sixth chapter is all about the execution of King Harichandan Mardaraj's order to decapitate the war prisoners; among who are Bhima's elder brother Banashur and his father old Sadhu *sardar*. He musters all his courage and mind to save them and succeeds in doing that too. The chapter ends with a family reunion and rejoice.

The seventh chapter shows us about King Harichandan Mardaraj's intense suffering due to some unknown disease. Bhima, with the help of his father, cures the King. In the meanwhile, Bhima is emotionally bent towards Rajajema, King Harichandan Mardaraj's only daughter. Rajajema has also inclinations towards Bhima. But both are

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reluctant in sharing their feelings to each other; Bhima suffering from inferiority complex and the princess for her social status and prestige.

The eighth chapter deals with the disclosure of Bhima's deception to the King by disobeying his command in order to save his father and brother. The King extends the order to behead Bhima for the irregularity in his work and setting his father old Sadhu *sardar* free as a sort of gratitude for saving his life. But with the personal request of Jema, he forgives them all and rewards them. Here in this chapter, we are a little bit clear about the likeness of the princess towards Bhima.

The final chapter is all about the declaration of Jema's love for Bhima in front of the King. The King is also a silent party to Rajajema's decision. The chapter closes with the departure of Bhima from the palace to prove his purity in love towards the princess and the princess, equally, decides to practice yoga at *Brindaban* as a celibate till Bhima's return.

The issue of intimacy between the tribal and non-tribal or the subject and king is of great importance in this regard. The author is against such intimacy, that is why he has made the ending in a timeless zone. The last paragraph of the original text gives proper justification to this where Jema goes to *Brindaban* and Bhima leaves the palace. The attitude of the upper-class people remains the same as before. It is a continuing process where the tribal stick to the earth and the

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non-tribal see them through a different perspective from an advantageous position. And that is why perhaps he has not talked anything about the marriage of Bhima and Jema.

Broadly, the novel is a masterpiece of practicality and romanticism. The best part about this novel is that it has the language of archaic taste with the mark of 19<sup>th</sup> century Odisha in a picturesque form. And that, perhaps, makes it extraordinarily presentable. Another remarkable feature of this text is that this is the only book which bears an English introduction by the author himself.

In the process of going through the text, I could see that there are certain situations and cases which are untranslatable and inexplicable. In this regard, the only thing possible is to draw the most suitable and equivalent sense out of that. The original text is replete with complex words and phrases. The whole text in original does not follow a specific tense pattern. There are a grammatical and tense fluctuation and deviation from time to time.

The original text was authored during a period when Odia novel was in a nascent stage. This novel has not received the critical attention which it so richly deserves. The author very cunningly shows the loyalty of the tribal to the king. In that order, the loyalty of the author to the Britishers can also be seen. The author presents himself as a subordinate to the English men. The English introduction by the author to the Odia novel is the bright example in this context.

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Here in this regard, we may see that the author does not want to disturb the tribal identity. Nobody wants the actual social change. And that is why the condition of the tribal is the same after a century. They were and still are the “Children of nature”.

Another noteworthy thing is that the author is not critical of the war in the novel. About the violence of the war, he is silent throughout. War is a destructive agency. But the author has taken it in a normal way.

This novel is truly a gem of a kind, neglected and hidden from the concern of a wide audience. More work like this will definitely enrich the canvass and enhance the beauty of Odia Literature.