

Kabibar Radhanath Ray

Radhanath Ray (Odia: ରାଧାନାଥ ରାୟ) (1848–1908) is the principal architect of the era of initial modernity in Odia poetry during the later part of nineteenth century and is honoured in Odia literature with the title “Kabibara”. In his early life, he composed in both Bengali and Odia languages, but later he shifted his writings in Odia only. He was born on 28 September 1848, at Kedarpur village in Balasore district. In the gradual development of Odia literature Radhanath Ray occupies an important position. His creations have enriched Odia literature and it can be undoubtedly told that through his unique literacy creations Odia poetry in the nineteenth century has got new life, asset & appeal.

Role in Language Movement

At Radhanath's time period, in Odisha, the Odia Language Movement, which was active. Though the medieval Odia literature was richer in comparison to that of Bengali literature, but some of Bengali educationalist wanted to abolish Oriya language as the medium of teaching from schools. As Bengal was gripped by British Colonialism much before to Orissa, the Bengalis had privilege to motivate the Anglicist scholars to prove Odia as a branch of Bengali language. John Beams first tried to prove that Odia is more ancient language than Bengali and it had a richer literature which Bengali had not. In the Orissa division, there were only seven Odia schoolteachers; Bengalis formed the majority of teachers, even in remote areas. Consequently, Bengali books were prescribed textbooks for Odia children. At that time, Radhanath was one of prime figure with Fakir Mohan Senapati, who fought against the expansionism of Bengali educationalist to eradicate Odia language from Odisha. He was the Inspector of Odisha Schools Association and along with Fakir Mohan Senapati and Bhakta Kabi Madhusudan Rao, he tried to promote text book writings

Major works

Radhanath Ray's first major work was 'Kabitabali', a collection of poems in Bengali written at the age of 18. It featured in most of the major newspapers and journals in Kolkatta during that time. His other Bengali poem was 'Lekhabali.' He later switched over to Oriya language and wrote famous Kavyas like Kedar Gouri, Nandikeshwari, Chilika, Mahajatra – Jajatikeshari, Tulasistabaka, Urbashi, Darabara, Dasaratha Biyoga, Savitri Charita & Mahendra Giri. Besides he has written more than fifteen essays. Apart from his original works, he is also known for his translations and adaptations from the Latin literature. They include 'Usha', 'Chandrabhaga' and 'Parbati.

Father of Modernism

He believed in Keat's words that 'A thing of beauty is a joy forever. He is a panegyrist of nature. He enriched Odia poetry by introducing into it new forms, new topics, a new approach and greater freedom. Among the many new things which he brought into Odia poetry, there were blank-verse, pictorial, musical but direct and unambiguous language following Scott and Wordsworth, satire in the manner of Dryden and Alexander Pope, denunciation of despots, tyrants and oppressors, concern with social problems, a spirit of protest against conventional morality, a disbelief in the power of gods and goddesses, and patriotic sentiments, which last brought him trouble from his employers. He was viewed as a national poet of the first order in Odisha.

Controversy

Though Radhanath contributed a lot to Odia Literature, but he was not accepted by the contemporary conservative readers of his time. Sooner, he was dragged into a controversy. Sudhala Dev, the then king of Bamanda awarded the poet as a title Kabibar and it made some of the critiques and poets jealous. Some critiques wrote that Kabi Samrat Upendra Bhanja is more powerful than Radhanath and these silly arguments turned into a serious topic of controversy like modernity versus tradition. Two of the literary journals "The Indradhanu" and The Bijali" engaged in this controversy and later all the intellectuals entangled in this discussion. However, this literary controversy ended with a letter of Radhanath .

Confession of own love affairs

At the age of 53, when Radhanath had been transferred to Burdwan in his service, he came into the contact of a Bengali poetess Ms. Nagendra Bala Ray, with whom a passionate love affairs developed As Radhanath was very orthodox and had God-fearing personality, this affair made him disturbed and in 1907, he could not resist himself and confessed his 'sin' publicly through press. He begged his readers to forgive him for his such behaviour. However, this 'confession' made him to build his image of saint among his readers of that period