

Poetry as Performance

(The Origin and Development of *Pala* in Orissa)

Sitakant Mahapatra

Pala occupies a very special place in the complex mosaic of Orissa's performing arts. It shares certain elements with the other forms of folk performing arts such as *Jatra*, *Suanga* and *Leela*. Like them *Pala* uses literary themes, stories and anecdotes to entertain spectators. Like these forms, it, too, is a blend of story-telling through *kavya*, music and dramatic performance designed to grip the imagination of the audience. But, in addition, *Pala* is intimately linked, on the one hand, to a form of religious worship and ritual practised in medieval Orissa and, on the other, to the elitist culture of the pundits and scholars well-versed in the Sanskritic tradition of the *Purana*-s and other literary works.



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The worship of *Pancha devata* (the five deities) can be traced to a very old tradition in Orissa. The deities are Ganesha, Vishnu, Durga, Shiva and Bhaskara (the Sun-god). During the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, at the time of the Bhaumakara, Somavamsi and Ganga dynastic rule in Orissa, the relative importance of Shaiva, Shakta and Vaishnava cults and forms of worship kept on fluctuating on the basis of royal patronage. The Somavamsis were patrons of Shiva worship and the Bhaumakaras of Shakti worship. While they patronised Vaishnavite worship, the Gangas were not averse to Shaiva or Shakta cults. Later, during the period of the Gangas, to these three was added the worship of Bhaskara and Ganesha. In fact, particular *kshetra*-s or places of worship came to be associated with each of these presiding deities. Bhubaneswar came to be associated with Shiva worship, Jaipur or Birajakshetra with Shakti worship, Puri with Vishnu worship, Konarak with Sun-worship and Maha-binayaka with Ganesha worship. Such was the spirit of religious eclecticism current in the air and encouraged by the royal dynasty

that whenever any one of the five deities was worshipped, the other four were assigned places of honour and were, in fact, ritually invoked to come to the sanctified "ground of worship".

Pala as a performing art emerged from this worship of the five deities. In the early days of *Pala*, there used to be five singers (*Gayaka*-s) who would recite songs, *shloka*-s and *stuti*-s in praise of the five deities. These were taken from ancient or classical Sanskrit texts, *Purana*-s and some contemporaneous writings. The leader among the five gradually came to be known as *Gayaka*, while the other four were designated as *Palia*-s (literally meaning those who join in the refrain). They used to be dressed in the typical Orissi style of the time, which included an Orissi type of *pugree* on the head, a *dhoti* worn in the style of the Oriya Paikas and a long glittering and often colourful gown going down well below the knees. A costly *chadar* covered the neck and the shoulders and earrings, bracelets and armlets were also worn. The costume was thus almost royal in style. They would sing to the accompaniment of *ramtali* (two pieces of symmetrical and decorative wood which strike against each other and produce a rhythmic beat), *mridanga* and cymbals and they wore *nupur*-s round the ankles.



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It is important to note that, in this traditional pattern, a *Pala* presentation always began with an invocation to and worship of the five deities. On a low wooden table called *asthana* (seat), covered with a coloured piece of cloth, were placed (on betel leaves) five pairs of ripe bananas with the skin peeled off, each pair symbolising one deity. Invocations to each of the deities were recited by the *Gayaka*. The area where the *asthana* was placed was always purified by *Panchamruta*. The recitation was elaborate and ritualistic and the religious litany accompanying it was as important as the singing. The invocations were mostly from

Sanskrit texts including the Vedas and the Upanishads and the singer-priest was expected to have an intimate knowledge of the *shastra*-s.

This ritual worship was followed by the *Pala* proper, namely, the recitation of a story or a theme. Sometimes, when it was not meant as entertainment for an audience, the ritual worship alone could be conducted and the theme-story would be simply recited in the house of the patron by the local priest without the help of any *Palia* or *Palia*-s. In other words, the priest would be the lone *Gayaka* and he would merely recite the *Pala* theme. Such celebrations are conducted for various purposes in Orissa and Bengal even today. In Orissa, sometimes sixteen *Pala*-s are offered to the deities to appease the gods, to ward off some personal tragedy or in fulfilment of a vow. If a sick child lies dying, his mother or grandmother may pledge to have sixteen *Pala*-s or twelve *Pala*-s, spread over as many years as an offering, to ensure that the child is cured by the grace of God. If the wish is fulfilled, *Pala*-s are performed annually for the prescribed number of years on an appointed auspicious day.



There is considerable evidence to show that till about the seventeenth century *Pala* recitation was confined to royal courts as a form of aesthetic literary enjoyment mixed with religious worship or to individual households for the exclusive purpose of religious worship. In the former case, the *Pala Gayaka* or singer exhibited his knowledge of the Vedas and the Upanishads, the Sanskrit classics and the Oriya *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* in the presentation of the theme or the story. Generally the story element in a *Pala* recitation was thin and the padding was provided by diversions into ancillary themes, related episodes or literary cross-references. This is the pattern in *Pala* recitation that is followed to this day.

The priest who recited the *Pala* as a form of religious worship in the household of his *jajamana* (patron) was very rarely a scholar. This is why in later centuries, more often than not, he used to recite on the basis of a printed text rather than from memory. His capacity for improvisation and forays into literary cross-references was severely limited. For example, if the recitation included a description of a morning, or a season, or the face of a *nayika*, he never displayed his erudition by introducing material about how such a beautiful face or season had been delineated by Kalidasa, Bhavabhuti, Magha or even well-known Oriya poets, including the authors of the Oriya *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*. He generally read out the text from a palm-leaf manuscript. This, too, was called *Pala* to which only relations and friends in the village were invited.

Over the centuries the repertoire of an erudite *Pala Gayaka* kept on expanding. First it was the Vedas and the Upanishads, the religious texts and the *Purana*-s; later, the Sanskrit classics were added; still later, the works of Upendra Bhanja, the master of Oriya *Riti-Kavya*; of Radhanath Ray, the first great poet of the modern age; the works of that great craftsman of language, Gangadhar Meher, or of Kavisurya Baladeva Ratha and other poets both from the medieval and modern poetic tradition. Among the medieval authors particular mention may be made of Balaram Das's *Laxmipurana* and Jasobanta Das's *Govinda Chandra*. Upendra Bhanja's *Vaidehisha Bilasha* and *Subhadra Parinaya* and Gangadhar Meher's *Tapaswini*, *Pranaya Ballari*, *Indumati* and *Kichaka Baddha* were also extremely popular.

Around the seventeenth century the poet Kabi Karna composed a number of *Pala*-s specifically meant for recitation in a religious context. Kabi Karna's life and times have not been discussed fully but it is generally agreed that he lived in the later part of the seventeenth and the early part of eighteenth century. This was a time when politics and society in Orissa and Bengal were undergoing swift changes. The Muslim invasion of Bengal and Orissa prompted some popular authors to compose what they thought was a literature for bringing together the Muslim and Hindu cultures and forms of worship. It was, for example, maintained by some that Satyanarayana, Narayana or Vishnu, the presiding deity of *Pala* as a form of worship, was indistinguishable from Satyapira who was an incarnation, a devout Muslim saint or Fakir. This belief was particularly strong in Bengal where Satyanarayana Panchali came to be identified with *Pala* and also incorporated in it themes relating to the apotheosis of Satyapira. *Panchamruta* was expanded to include *Sirini*, a preparation made out of ripe banana mixed with flour, milk, molasses etc. In 1568 A.D., Orissa came under the Muslim rule of the Goud Sultans. Only certain areas of Puri and the Ganjam districts continued to be inde-

pendent and the King of Orissa, Gajapati Ramachandra Deva, was designated as *Thakur Raja* or the King of the God. Mansingh, the able general of Akbar, attacked Orissa and the Moghul armies established their camps in various parts of what is modern Orissa. It was during these troubled times that Kabi Karna (who seems to have known both the Oriya and Bengali languages equally well) composed his sixteen *Pala*-s. Each of these *Pala*-s describes the *mahima* (power or glory) of Satyapira through a story. For example, in one of these *Pala*-s, Satyapira himself appears in disguise as an old man before a rich merchant and advises him to offer worship to Satyapira. The merchant laughs at the old man and his apotheosis of Satyapira. He earns the wrath of Satyapira and is reduced to beggary. Then he realises his guilt and atones for his sin by arranging the performance of Satyapira *Pala*. He is, thereafter, freed from the consequences of the curse. This is identical with the theme of the *mahima* of Satyanarayana, the incarnation of Vishnu. Even the *Skanda Purana* has four cantos devoted to the worship of Satyanarayana. The stories are supposed to have been narrated by the sage Narada to Shuka and by the latter to sage Shaunaka in the forest of Naimishya. In one of the stories Satyanarayana speaks to an old Brahmin (in Kashipur) about the virtue of worshipping him. The poor Brahmin follows his advice and his poverty vanishes, winning him unasked-for riches. The other chapters similarly delineate themes of good fortune, including the birth of a son to an issueless king worried about the continuity of his dynastic line.

Kabi Karna composed sixteen *Pala*-s. The Orissa State Museum has, however, a total number of twenty-nine *Pala*-s in palm-leaf manuscript. Some of these *Pala*-s are assigned to more than one poet. For example, *Satyanarayana Janma Pala* has three different versions and these are by Kabi Karna, Dwija Bishwanatha and Shankara Acharya respectively. Kabi Karna's language is a peculiar mixture of Oriya and Bengali as the following extracts (first in Oriya script, then with a transliteration in Roman script and lastly an English rendering) would indicate.

ଆମି ସେହି ଦେବତା ଅଲକ୍ଷ ନିରୁକାର୍
 ସ୍ୱର୍ଗମାର୍ତ୍ତ୍ୟ ରମାଚଳେ କରଣୀ ଆମାର ।
 କରନ୍ତାଏ ରୂପେ ଆମି ଓଡ଼ିଶାରେ ଆର
 ହିନ୍ଦୁ ମୁସଲମାନ ସବୁ କରି ଖଳାକାର ।
 ରାମ ରାହିମାନ ଜାନ କୋରାନା ପୁରାଣ
 ଦେଖିବ କେମନ ରୂପେ ମାନେ କି ନିମାଣେ ।
 ଦରିଆରେ ଦାରୁବ୍ରହ୍ମ ରୂପେତ ରୂପେତ
 ପଦ୍ମପୁଲ ରୂପେ ହିକାଆ ସତ୍ୟନାରାୟନ ।
 ବାଉଁଶ ରୂପେତ ମାଳାଚଳେ ବିକେକରି
 ପତିତ ପାବନ ରୂପେ ପତିତ ଭକ୍ତାରି ।
 ଶାଚୀଗର୍ଭେ ଜନମିଲ ନଦୀଆ ନଗର
 ସେହି ମହାବୀହୁ ଧରଣ କଲିତେ ପକ୍ଷୀର ॥

Ami Séhi devatā alékha
 nirākāra
 Swargamartya rasātālē karani
 amāra.
 Jagannāth rupē āmi Odisātē era
 Hindu Musalmān sabu kari
 ekākāra.
 Rama Rahimana jana Korāna Puranē
 Dekhiba kémana rupa māne ki
 nā mane.
 Dariātē Dārubrahma rupētē
 bhāsenā
 Padmaphulā rupa haiyā
 Satyanārāyana.
 Baudha rupētē nilāchale bijekari
 Patita pābana rupē patita
 uddhari.
 Sachi garbhē janamila nadiā
 nagara
 Séhi Mahābāhu ebē kalitē Fakira.

I am that God, unmanifest and without shape.
 My deeds extend to all the three worlds.
 In my incarnation as Jagannath in Orissa,
 I welded the Hindus and Muslims into one group.
 Know me as Rama and Rahiman Described in the Koran and the *Purana*-s.
 See my vision and realise me, Whether you recognise it or not.
 In the ocean I floated
 As the log of wood in which the Brahman inhered.
 And I, too, floated as the lotus, the Satyanarayan.
 As the incarnation of Buddha. I appeared at the Blue Mountain¹ And became the saviour of all the fallen.
 In the city of Nadia I took birth in Sachi's womb²
 And I am the same Lord
 Now only a Fakir in this Kaliyuga.

— କବିକର୍ଣ

Some of the contemporaries of Kabi Karna composed in the Oriya language. Among them particular mention should be made of Dwija Bishwanatha, Bhrugurama and Shankara Acharya. Below is a complete list of the twenty-nine *Pala*-s along with the names of the poets to whom each of these is ascribed. When one *Pala* has several identical or near identical versions, all the relevant authors have been mentioned against it.

<i>Name of Pala</i>	<i>Author or Authors</i>
1. <i>Satyanarayana</i>	Kabi Karna, Dwija Bishwanatha, Shankara Acharya.
2. <i>Abhinna Madan</i>	Kabi Karna.
3. <i>Ugratara</i>	Kabi Karna, Dwija Kashinatha, Shankara Acharya.
4. <i>Kathuria</i>	Kabi Karna, Huduram Das.
5. <i>Kishorechandra</i>	Kabi Karna, Kishorechandra Patadeb.
6. <i>Gudiasankar</i>	Kabi Karna, Dwija Bishwanatha, Jayakrushna.
7. <i>Dashabatara</i>	Kabi Karna.
8. <i>Durjan Rajan</i>	Kabi Karna.
9. <i>Padmalochana</i>	Kabi Karna, Dwija Bishwanatha.
10. <i>Bhramarbara</i>	Kabi Karna, Dwija Bishwambhara.
11. <i>Manohar Phasiar</i>	Kabi Karna, Dwija Kashinatha.
12. <i>Mardagaji Janma</i>	Kabi Karna, Dwija Bishwanatha.
13. <i>Mardagaji Bibha</i>	Kabi Karna, Dwija Bishwanatha.
14. <i>Rangalata</i>	Kabi Karna.
15. <i>Laxmankumar</i>	Kabi Karna.
16. <i>Ratnakara</i>	Bhrugurama.
17. <i>Sadananda Saudagar</i>	Kabi Karna, Bhrugurama.
18. <i>Bidyadhara</i>	Kabi Karna, Dwija Bishwanatha, Shankara Acharya, Bipra Jagannatha.
19. <i>Nilasundara</i>	Kabi Karna.
20. <i>Madansundara</i>	Kabi Karna, Dwija Bishwambhara.
21. <i>Hari Arjuna</i>	Kabi Karna.
22. <i>Swetabasanta</i>	Kabi Karna, Dwija Bishwanatha.
23. <i>Herachanda</i>	Kabi Karna, Dwija Bishwanatha.
24. <i>Dayananda</i>	Kabi Karna, Dwija Raghurama.
25. <i>Dwarika</i>	Sitalacharana.
26. <i>Hemaghata</i>	Nityananda.
27. <i>Satyanarayana</i>	Kabi Karna, Shankara Acharya, Kinkar Das, Rameshwara.
28. <i>Vandana</i>	Kabi Karna.
29. <i>Swargarohana</i>	Kabi Karna.

Generally speaking, these *Pala*-s do not exhibit any great imagination in the treatment of the themes. They are mostly stereotyped and repetitive and almost all of them are designed to illustrate the power and glory of either Satyanarayana or Satyapira. They are narrative and descriptive in character and have hardly any use for symbol or metaphor. The language is simple, unvarnished and colloquial. All except the *Vandana Pala* of Kabi Karna have a story to tell. This one has only invocatory lines for Ganesha, Saraswati, Shiva, Durga and a host of gods and goddesses of Orissa inhabiting its different regions. Special mention may also be made of Dwija Kashinatha's *Ugratara Pala* in which each line of all the verses starts with the fifth vowel of the Oriya alphabet.

Pala thus incorporated in its fold an extensive repertoire drawn from Sanskrit plays and classics and also Puranic and contemporary *Kavya* literature. One has to assume that the *Gayaka* was a scholar for he had to remember all the references, improvise and introduce a number of relevant texts to describe scenes, situations, events etc. and establish parallel similes and metaphors through the technique of association.

Over the years *Pala* also incorporated in its fold a vast body of local and rural legends, proverbs and popular sayings. These were no doubt used more by the *Palia*-s as interludes or as a counterpoint to the thread of the recited story of the *Gayaka*. Generally a *Gayaka* has one *Palia*. But occasionally there could be four *Palia*-s, the five together symbolising a representative of each of the five deities.

There has been considerable debate among scholars and historians of literature as to whether *Pala* is folk literature or a folk performing art. In the cultural heritage of Orissa, the folk and classical elements are often combined. Besides there was also an admixture of tribal elements. In the Chhau dance of Mayurbhanj, for example, one can see elements of all these and it is truly a fine example of a folk-classical-tribal continuum. Secondly, poetry and song were closely linked and quite often poetry, for example, the medieval love lyrics and portions of Upendra Bhanja's *kavya*-s, could be set to music and sung. As a matter of fact, the compositions of Gopalkrushna, Kavisurya and Banamali continue to provide a large part of the repertoire of the music accompanying Odissi dance.

Pala thus incorporated not only a vast body of classical and modern, popular and elitist literature but through its audio-visual presentation helped in their spread and popularisation. The oral tradition of "listening in" to the classics of literature—the Oriya *Bhagabata*, the *Mahabharata*, the *Ramayana* and also other *Purana*-s—was, and continues to be, quite strong. Literature reached the formal illiterates through this process. Being a classical-folk continuum, *Pala* combined the literary contexts, the cognitive elements, the stylisations of important *Kavya*-s, their *alamkara*-s, organisation and other formal qualities with vignettes and sequences from everyday life, including its rural humour, sometimes bordering on crudity and earthy sayings, legends and proverbs.

Pala thus became a unique form of entertainment which held the attention of the rural folk, charmed and entertained them even as it educated them in the basic traditions of both Sanskrit *Kavya* and ancient, medieval and, to an extent, even of modern Oriya poetic creations.

The relationship between the *Gayaka* and the *Palia* helped the combination of folk and elitist traditions. The *Gayaka* and the *Palia* were in a sense in binary opposition:

serious	: non-serious
religious	: profane
Sanskritic	: folk
decorum	: crudity

In certain cases, for example, after the *Gayaka* has completed the recitation of some important Sanskrit *shloka*-s, the *Palia* would humbly beg permission to contradict the interpretation given by the *Gayaka* and give an alternative version of the text. This would no doubt be a distorted meaning but he would make it credible sometimes by the use of a pun or alternative meanings of words. But often he would beg to present a slightly different version. The objective behind such a move would be parody and satire. It is necessary to mention here that *Pala* has demonstrated a great capacity to hold up to ridicule and satirise social evils. The miserly and ignorant king, the *vaidya*, who knows nothing of diagnosis but is addicted to drink, the mischievous minister with sinister motives, the corrupt official, the pompous pundit showing off his knowledge, tyrant rulers, selfish leaders who hardly care for the people but accumulate fortunes at the cost of ordinary folk—all of them come in for effective, hilarious and trenchant criticism. To cite an example, Pandit Gopabandhu Das has four celebrated lines which are given below in Oriya script, its transliteration in Roman script and its English rendering:

ମିଶୁ ମୋର ଦେହୁ ଏ ଦେଶ ମାଟିରେ	<i>Misu mora déha é desha mātiré</i>	Let my body mingle with the country's soil.
ଦେଶବାସୀ ଚାଲିଯାଆନ୍ତୁ ପିଠିରେ	<i>Deshabāsi chāli jaantu pithiré</i>	Let my countrymen walk On my back.
ଦେଶର ସ୍ତର୍କମୟ ପଥେ ଯେତେ ଗାଡ଼	<i>gāda</i> <i>Puru tahin padi mora mansa</i>	Let my bones and flesh Fill the crevices in the path of
ସୁରୁ ଚନ୍ଦିଏ ପଡ଼ି ମୋର ମାଂସହାଡ଼ ॥	<i>hāda.</i>	<i>Swaraja.</i>

After these lines are recited by the *Gayaka*, the *Palia* would say that all this is right but what our leaders have learnt from Gopabandhu is something slightly different. And then he would recite the lines, slightly, but significantly, altering the words, so that the meaning becomes completely different as will be seen from the following excerpt.

ଦେଶବାସୀ ସବୁ ମିଶାନ୍ତୁ ମାଟିରେ	<i>Deshabasi sabu mishantu matiré</i>	Let all my countrymen mingle with the soil,
ଆମକୁ ଚାଲିଯିବୁ ତାଙ୍କର ପିଠିରେ	<i>Ambhé chālijibu tānkari pithiré</i>	I will walk on their backs.
ଆମ୍ଭ ସ୍ୱାର୍ଥ ପଥେ ଅଛି ଯେତେ ଗାଡ଼	<i>gada</i> <i>Puru tahin padi tānka mansa</i>	Let all the crevices on the path of my interest.
ସୁରୁ ଚନ୍ଦିଏ ପଡ଼ି ତାଙ୍କ ମାଂସହାଡ଼ ॥	<i>hāda.</i>	Be filled with their flesh and bones.

Sometimes the *Palia* may just recite these lines even without the *Gayaka* reciting the lines from the poet Gopabandhu. The audience (which generally knows Gopabandhu's lines) notices this and responds to the parody.

To cite another example, Jagannath Das's Oriya *Bhagabat* is perhaps the one literary work which is universally known, read and listened to in rural Orissa. It is composed in rhymed verse with nine letters in each line. Sometimes, using the same metre and line-scheme and the form of the sage Shuka narrating the story to King Parikshita, the *Palia* would improvise lines severely critical of the rapacity of a modern Brahmin priest, his ridiculous actions and his total ignorance.

ଶୁଣ ପରୀକ୍ଷ ନରନାଥ ।
 ଦାମ୍ପତ୍ୟ ଶୁଖୁଥା ପକାଳଭୂତ ॥
 ଶ୍ରୀ ଅକ୍ଷର ବିବର୍ଜିତ ।
 ବିଚା ପଇତା ସୁଖୋଦ୍ଭିତ ॥
 ବିଲ ବାଛୁବୀକୁ ଆଗ ।
 ଦହି ବୁଣାକୁ ସଠେ ଦାସ ॥
 ସନ୍ଧ୍ୟା ଗାୟତ୍ରୀ ମନୁହୀନ ।
 ବିଲରୁ ବାଛୁବୀ ସେ ମାନ ॥
 ପୋଥିରୁ ନ ଫିଟଇ ଡୋରି
 ସଜମାନ ଚାଉଳ ଚୋରୀ ॥

*Suna Pariksha Naranātha
 Tampadā Sukhuā Pakhālbhāta.
 Shree akshara bibarjita
 Chitā paritā sushobhita.
 Bila bachhibāku āāga
 Dahi chudāku bagha.
 Sandhyā Gāyatri hina
 Bilaru bāchhanti mina.
 Pothiru naphitai dori
 Jajamāna chāula chori.*

Listen, O King Pariksha:
 (He takes) salted dry fish
 and soaked rice. He does
 not even know the alphabet
 but is well-decorated with the
 sacred thread and sandalwood
 paste. Always ready to go
 for deweeding operations
 in the field, he jumps up at
 the prospect of a feast in
 a funeral ceremony. He does
 not even know the evening
Gayatri mantra and he rushes
 out to catch small fish in the
 paddy fields. He never even
 opens the palm-leaf manuscripts
 but is great in stealing the
 rice of his *jajamana*.

In the *Gayaka's* recitation, the recurring literary themes are: the different segments of the day such as morning, noon, evening and night; the six seasons, nature, the landscape and the human emotions associated with the seasons; the beauty of nature embodied in rivers, the sky, the hills and clouds, bird songs and forests; and woman, that eternal theme of poetry, her beauty and grace, her face, her body, her eyes, her coiffure, her dress etc. While he describes any of these, the *Gayaka* brings in the various ways in which different poets have dealt with these subjects and shows his brilliance by comparing and contrasting them.

Pala, however, is not merely literature. It is poetry that is sung and acted. The *Gayaka*, therefore, is expected to be quite conversant with *raga-s* and *ragini-s*, *tala* and *laya*. Most of the *raga-s* are of course Orissi *raga-s* and about twelve are usually employed. Kavisurya Baladev Rath's celebrated *Champu-s* and Upendra Bhanja's *Kavya-s* are well-suited for musical rendering, as also the works of Gangadhar Meher.

The more well-known and frequently used Orissi *raga-s* in *Pala* recitation are: Chokhi, Kamodi, Baradi, Bangala-sri, Ramakeri, Kalahansa-kedara, Ashadha-shukla, Rasakulya, Kannada, Ahari, Mangala-gujjari and Pahadia-kedara. From the point of view of *raga-base*, one can broadly divide the epics and poetic works of Oriya poets (used in *Pala* recitation) into two groups. In the first group are the works of Radhanath Ray, Gangadhar Meher, and Nandakishore Bala. These three poets mainly employ Bangala-sri, Ramakeri, Rasakulya and Mangala-gujjari *raga-s*. For example, almost the whole of *Pranayaballari* by Gangadhar Meher is in Bangala-sri *raga*. Nandakishore's *Sharmistha* and Radhanath Ray's *Chandrabhaga* mainly use Ramakeri and Rasakulya *raga-s*. These are simple and sweet-sounding *raga-s*. Compared to them, the second group of poets use the more difficult *raga-s* like Chokhi, Kamodi, Kalahansa-kedara, etc. Upendra Bhanja may be regarded as the

leader in this group and most of his works are used in *Pala* recitation. *Bidagdha Chintamani* of Abhimanyu Samanta Singhar and Dinakrushna Das's *Rasakallola* belong to the same group. Sri Golakh Pradhan, a modern epic writer, who is considered in the line of Upendra Bhanja, has written three epics (*Satyabhama*, *Indurekha* and *Dakshina*) and most of them are in the pattern of *raga*-s used by Upendra Bhanja. These three epics are also very liberally used in *Pala* recitation.

These Orissi *raga*-s do not have much in common with classical Hindustani *raga*-s. They are generally not related to a specific emotion or *rasa*. For example, one may render a song in Chokhi *raga* both in *hasya rasa* or *karuna rasa*. Secondly, the *raga*-s are also not time-specific: particular *raga*-s are not supposed to be sung at a particular time of the day or night.

The *tala*-s, too, do not fall within the framework of t'ie *tala*-s used in Hindustani classical music. The singer varies the *tala* according to the convenience of his recitation.

The voice of the *Gayaka* has to be attractive since an unmusical rendering will hardly make an impact on the audience. When the *Gayaka* has just one *Palia*, the former assumes a number of roles in succession and has thus to express himself adequately and effectively in each role. The celebrated *Gayaka* Harinatha (of recent times) would act the role of Harishchandra, Shaivya, Rohitaswa and the keeper of the funeral-ground with equal ease and grace. As Shaivya, he would make the audience weep with his wailing for the dead son and then assume the calm and collected voice of King Harishchandra. In the presentation of the theme and in its enactment, there is emphasis on *rasa* and all the traditional nine *rasa*-s are delineated. A degree of histrionic talent is thus very necessary for the *Gayaka* and very often he delineates a theme through the single actor assuming many roles with the *Palia* merely acting as a counter-point facilitating the role-change.

Among the distinguished *Gayaka*-s of modern times are Niranjana Kara and Harekrishna Nath, who were honoured with the titles of *Gayaka Mani* and *Gayaka Ratna* respectively.

More recently some *Gayaka*-s have tried to introduce contemporary themes in *Pala* but, by and large, they have not succeeded in this effort. The *Pala* form has to be a verse form, suitable for recitation, set to music or at least sung as music. Some of the social or political themes of our times do not lend themselves to such a presentation. It is, however, possible that at a future date such *Pala*-s may be composed and presented. One hopeful sign is that a few educated individuals have begun to present *Pala* as a part-time profession. Perhaps they will be able to add significantly to the themes or manner of presentation of *Pala*. The best among the *Pala Gayaka*-s of former times did not have much formal schooling; even though they were versed in Sanskrit and regional literatures. It is also heartening to note that emphasis is placed by the educated *Gayaka*-s on the traditional qualities of *Pala*, including its religious aspects, *Puja* with peace invocation, and that traditional costume and jewellery is worn. This augurs well for the future growth of a traditional literary-performing art-form combining tradition and change.

References:

1. The traditional name for the hillock on which the Puri Jagannatha temple stands.
2. A reference to Sri Chaitanya.

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Pictures:

1. One of the *Palia*-s with his *ramtali*.
 2. The *Gayaka* with his *chamar* in the right hand.
 3. The *Palia* with his large-sized metallic cymbals.
 4. Another *Palia* with his *mrudangam*.
 5. The priest reading out the text of the *Pala*.
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