



Role of Sanskrit & Oḍiā Literature for Shaping Odishan Knowledge System

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Abstract – The Odishan Knowledge System, a vibrant tapestry of indigenous wisdom encompassing philosophy, astronomy, ethics, and cultural practices, owes much to the intertwined legacies of Sanskrit and Oḍiā literatures. This paper delves into how these literary traditions, from Vedic roots to medieval bhakti expressions and colonial adaptations, have preserved and evolved knowledge in Odisha historically Kalinga, Utkala, and Odra. Sanskrit works like Viṣṇu Śarma's Pañcatantra and Satānanda's Bhāsvatī on astronomy provided structured frameworks for moral and scientific inquiry, while Oḍiā literature, emerging in the 12th century under Ganga patronage, localized these through epics like Sarala Dāsa's Mahābhārata and lyrical koyilī forms. Key figures such as Jayadeva, with his Gītagovinda, and Upendra Bhañja infused regional motifs temple rituals, nature poetry into pan-Indian themes, fostering a holistic worldview. Epigraphic records, palm-leaf manuscripts, and royal translations during the Gajapati era (1435–1568 CE) highlight this synergy, even as colonialism shifted patronage toward reformist themes. By analyzing historical phases, lexicographical bridges like Trikāṇḍaśeṣa, and performative traditions in dramas, the study reveals literature's role in sustaining Odishan's pluralistic epistemology. Amid threats to dialects, these traditions underscore resilience, urging contemporary integration for cultural vitality.

Keywords: Sanskrit literature, Oḍiā literature, Odishan Knowledge System, Gītagovinda, Bhāsvatī, Gajapati patronage, koyilī, bhakti movement, lexicography.

1. INTRODUCTION

Odisha, with its ancient names like Kalinga, Utkala, Oḍra, Kośala, and Kaṅgoda, has nurtured a knowledge system that blends spiritual depth, scientific curiosity, and communal harmony. The Odishan Knowledge System is not a static archive, but a living dialogue rooted in Vedic pluralism, enriched by regional folklore, and adapted through centuries of cultural exchange. Sanskrit and Oḍiā literatures serve as its primary conduits, transmitting wisdom from elite treatises to folk songs. Sanskrit, the "language of the gods," offered universal scaffolds in Veda, Vedāṅga, Itihāsa, Purāṇa, Dharmasāstra, Arthasāstra, Āyurveda, Darśana, and Kāvya, while Oḍiā, polished under Gaṅga kings post-1110 CE, made it intimate and accessible (Patra, n.d.; Rath, 2006; Sena, n.d.).

This system's historical geography reflects fluidity: medieval Muslim accounts birthed "Orissa" (pronounced Oḍiśā), echoing Tibetan Oḍiviśa, yet rooted in Bhauma divisions like Urśiṅ and Harkaṅḍa (Panigrahi, 1995; Tripathi, 1970; Mishra, n.d.; Sircar, 1967). Sanskrit epigraphs from the 7th century, blending prose and verse, document this evolution, unveiling scholars who enriched India's canon (Panda, n.d.). Oḍiā literature, starting in the 12th century with princely patrons, fused Indo-Aryan vigor with Dravidian echoes from "Oḍro," as noted by Bhārata Muni in Nāṭyaśāstra (Chatterji, 1943).

Jayadeva's Gītagovinda (12th century), a lyrical pinnacle, exemplifies this: its pastoral drama, praised by Goethe alongside Kālidāsa, wedded sound and sense in bhakti, influencing temple recitations and Oḍiā



koyilī conventions (Sabar, 2024; Chatterji, 1943). Medieval dramas under Gajapatis (1435–1568 CE) integrated Odishan rituals, while lexicons like Puruṣottama Deva's Trikāṇḍaśeṣa bridged tongues with regional terms (Dash & Majhi, 2024; Panda, n.d.). Colonialism (18th century) disrupted patronage, yet sparked adaptations in gītikāvya for social reform, preserving resilience (Sabar, 2024).

In Odia literature, Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) Vedānta, Tantra, Yoga, Āyurveda manifest holistically, framing narratives with indigenous epistemologies (Khutia, 2024). This paper traces these roles across eras, showing how literature shaped Odishan's ethical, astronomical, and devotional wisdom, countering dialect extinctions amid 6,912 global tongues at risk (Sena, n.d.; Chatterji, 1943). By connecting Sanskrit's rigor to Oḍiā's vibrancy, it argues for their enduring relevance in fostering regional identity within India's pluralistic heritage.

2. VEDIC AND EARLY FOUNDATIONS: SANSKRIT AS THE BEDROCK OF ODISHAN WISDOM

Odisha's literary dawn aligns with the Vedic age, where Sanskrit scholars excelled across disciplines, laying the Odishan Knowledge System's philosophical and scientific groundwork. Texts on grammar, politics, dharmasāstras, kāvyas, poetics, astrology, astronomy, tantra, dance, music, architecture, arithmetic, geography, trade routes, occult practices, war, and temple rituals were not isolated pursuits but integrated guides for harmonious living (Rath, 2006; Patra, n.d.). This pluralism echoing IKS's holistic ethos infused daily rituals with cosmic awareness, from eclipse predictions to ethical governance.

Viṣṇu Śarma (c. 450 CE), court poet–priest to Maṭhara king Ānanda Śakti Varman, authored Pañcatantra a five-part fable collection with 75 stories on societal and cultural dilemmas. Preceding Upaniṣads in Atharvaveda and Paippalāda Saṁhitā, it embedded moral nīti in animal allegories, drawing Odishan folklore to teach adaptability and justice, core to the Knowledge System (Rath, 2006). Bhaṭṭa Nārāyaṇa's Veṅṅsaṁhāra (8th century), under Śailodhabva's Madhavarāja, evoked Puruṣottama (Puri's Viṣṇu) and Kṛṣṇa's rāsālīlā on Yamunā banks, blending epic romance with local devotion Rādhā's playful flight symbolizing spiritual pursuit (Rath, 2006).

Murāri Miśra's Anargha Rāghava Nāṭaka (c. 850 CE), a seven-act Rāmāyaṇa adaptation staged at Puri's car festival, captured Odishan crowds at Tāmaliptodakeśvara (seaside Puruṣottama Kṣetra) the earliest epigraphic festival reference. Referred by Rājaśekhara in Kāvya Mīmāṃsā, it wove regional geography into heroic narrative, making drama a communal epistemology (Rath, 2006; Panda, n.d.). Puruṣottama Deva's Trikāṇḍaśeṣa (c. 850 CE), a lexicon on Odishan culture and Oḍiā words, cataloged flora, rituals, and ethics, bridging Sanskrit universality with vernacular specificity vital for Āyurveda and trade knowledge (Panda, n.d.; Dash & Majhi, 2024).

Kṛṣṇa Miśra's Prabodhacandrodaya Nāṭaka (c. 1050 CE), a six-act allegorical drama on Indian philosophy, explored darśana through debate, influencing Odishan's pluralistic worldview (Panda, n.d.). Satānanda's Bhāsvatī (1099 CE), by Puruṣottama's son of Śaṅkara-Sarasvatī, revolutionized astronomy: dated śaka 1021 (Śaśi-Pakṣa-Kha-Eka) and yugābda 4200, it devoted to Murāri (Viṣṇu) for students, spawning pan-Indian commentaries. Aligning celestial mechanics with temple calendars, it grounded Odishan's agrarian rituals in empirical observation (Rath, 2006).

These early Sanskrit works formed the Knowledge System's bedrock: epigraphs from 7th-century inscriptions, blending prose–verse, documented learning's breadth, countering obscurity (Panda, n.d.). Oḍiā's proto-forms, like "Oḍra" from Pāli-Dravidian blends post-Aśoka's Kaliṅga propagation, hinted at emerging localization (Chatterji, 1943).

3. MEDIEVAL EFFLORESCENCE: GAJAPATI PATRONAGE AND THE BHAKTI-LITERARY NEXUS



The medieval period (1100–1500 CE), culminating in Sūryavamaṁśi Gajapatis (1435–1568 CE), marked Sanskrit-Oḍiā synergy's peak, with royal and temple patronage transforming literature into performative wisdom. Inscriptions, primary sources, illuminated branches like jyotiṣa and nāṭya, reviving forgotten poets who enriched India's canon while embedding Odishan motifs (Panda, n.d.; Patra, n.d.).

Gajapati rule fostered intellectual hubs: Jagannātha Temple at Puri, beyond spirituality, hosted dramas fusing Nāṭyaśāstra with Odia rhythms and costumes, educating masses on dharma via rasa (Majhi, 2025). This era's pre-independence contributions, often overlooked, highlight adaptations of classics with local legends, reflecting socio-cultural milieu (Majhi, 2025). Oḍiā literature formalized under Gaṅgas (post-1110 CE), gaining modern shape in 15th-century Gajapati Kapilendra Deva's reign, where soldier-poet Sāralā Dāsa's Mahābhārata polished Prākṛt-Apabhraṁśa into epic narrative localizing paṇḍava tales for ethical guidance (Sena, n.d.).

Jayadeva's Gītagovinda (1150 CE), Odisha's global gift, a "lyric drama" or "refined yātrā," innovated sravya-kāvya with narrative, recitative, description, and song recited in temples for immersive bhakti. Praised by Goethe, Jones, Lassen, and von Schroeder, its metrical perfection wedded sound-sense, untranslatable per Keith, evoking Aristotle's beauty from magnitude-arrangement (Chatterji, 1943; Sabar, 2024). Legend credits Kṛṣṇa for aiding Rādhā's depiction, blending human-divine creativity; its pastoral form influenced Oḍiā koyilī, like Mārkaṇḍa Dāsa's Kesabā Koyilī, where Yaśodā's karuṇarasa grief at Kṛṣṇa's Mathurā departure used varga-progression (ka-kṣa), borrowed from Sanskrit Megha-Dūta yet uniquely Odishan (Chatterji, 1943).

Gajapatipuṇrottamadeva's Abhinna Gītagovinda (1466–1497 CE) adapted it, infusing dynasty motifs for ritual continuity (Sabar, 2024). Vaṁśāvalīs like Kaṭaka Rājavamśāvalī and Oḍradeśa Rājavamśāvalī chronicled kings in early Oḍiā, preserving geographical lore Urśiṅ-Myāsa-Harkaṇḍa-Audras from Bhauma era (Tripathi, 1970; Mishra, n.d.; Panigrahi, 1995). Seventeenth-century translations (Mahābhārata, Rāmāyaṇa, Bhāgavata, eighteen Purāṇas) under "Translation Age" localized Sanskrit, spurred by Caitanya's bhakti and Buddhism's Aśokan legacy (Chatterji, 1943; Sena, n.d.).

Upendra Bhaṅja (18th century, Upendra Age or Kāvya Age), prolific prince of Bhoṅja family, authored 20+ published works (20+ unpublished), blending śāstras, alaṁkāras, and Sanskrit phrases in Kālapānik Kāvya full of figures, showcasing scholarly dexterity (Chatterji, 1943). Literary gymnastics like aboṇā (short a-only volumes), antarlipi, bahirlipi, and śṛṅghalā sharpened wits, linking chain-alliteration across lines princely leisure's gift, as brāhmaṇas favored Sanskrit (Chatterji, 1943).

Bṛndāvatī Dāsī (17th century), influenced by Caitanya, penned Pūṇottama Candrodaya with devotional fervor; her son Bhīma Dāsa and grandson Kṛpāsindhu Dāsa extended this (Chatterji, 1943). Nīśāṅkorayā Rāṇī's Padmāvatī Abhilāṣa evoked spring as a bride trees' toraṇa branches welcoming unique in pathos, akin to Aurangzeb's daughter (Chatterji, 1943). Blind Sāvāra Bhīma Bhoī (19th century), an Alekha preacher, dictated inspired verse on universal harmony and "Life Force," planning (abortive) Jagannātha critique, blending tribal-folk with contemplation (Chatterji, 1943).

This nexus fortified the Knowledge System: Sanskrit dramas and lexicons provided depth, Oḍiā epics and lyrics vitality, turning temples into epistemological spaces.

4. LEXICOGRAPHICAL BRIDGES: ENRICHING VOCABULARY FOR CULTURAL CONTINUITY

Odisha's Sanskrit lexicons, from Yāska's kośas, compiled profession-specific terms, preserving etymologies central to the Odishan Knowledge System's linguistic pluralism (Dash & Majhi, 2024). Trikāṇḍaśeṣa, housing Oḍiā words on culture, bridged elite Sanskrit to vernacular, aiding



IKS domains like Āyurveda (flora glosses) and arthaśāstra (trade routes) (Panda, n.d.; Dash & Majhi, 2024).

Originating Greek “lexikon” (lexis–legein: word–speak), kośas evolved as wordbooks, contextual inventories (Dash & Majhi, 2024). Kalinga’s scholarly heritage—copper–plates, palm–leaf manuscripts cataloged unique phrases, influencing pan–Indian Sanskrit while rooting in Odishan vibrancy (Dash & Majhi, 2024; Patra, n.d.). Oḍiā’s Indo–Aryan–Dravidian blend, via Pāli post–Kalinga War, enriched this: “Odro” (Bharata Muni) birthed modern Oḍiā, allying Bengali yet “masculine” in tone (Chatterji, 1943; Sena, n.d.).

Colonial shifts risked dilution English education eroding patronage—but lexicons inspired Oḍiā dictionaries, sustaining heritage (Sabar, 2024; Dash & Majhi, 2024). In the Knowledge System, they democratized wisdom: terms for rituals or astronomy became shared, preventing silos.

5. COLONIAL TRANSFORMATIONS: RESILIENCE IN GĪTIKĀVYA AND MODERN PROSE

Eighteenth–century British rule reshaped Odisha’s literatures, impacting patronage, production, dissemination, and themes, yet the Odishan Knowledge System adapted through gītikāvya’s devotional resilience (Sabar, 2024). Sanskrit traditions, Vedic–era strong, faced Western education’s sway, diminishing temple funding; gītikāvyas shifted to social reform, subtly critiquing via bhakti metaphors (Sabar, 2024; Chatterji, 1943).

Gītagovinda’s legacy endured: its untranslatable harmony inspired Oḍiā adaptations, countering linguistic coalescence with Bengali (Chatterji, 1943). Dramas persisted covertly in temples, preserving dramaturgy against Western theater (Majhi, 2025). Oḍiā surged in nationalism: post–1850 Rādhānātha Age introduced prose, with Rādhānātha Rāy’s nature poetry Chilika lagoons, misty hills worshipping Utkal’s beauty, earning complete works edition (Chatterji, 1943; Sena, n.d.).

Maharashtrian Madhusūdana Rāo, guided by Rādhānātha, crafted literary textbooks exceptions to Shaw’s quip as did Phakīra Mohana Senāpati, journalism’s “highest form” via essays–poems (Chatterji, 1943). Fakīra Mohana, Rādhānātha, Madhusūdana formed modern trinity, providing school texts blending genius with utility (Chatterji, 1943). Women like Niśānikorayā Rāṇī echoed reformist pathos; tribal voices like Bhīma Bhoī preached harmony (Chatterji, 1943).

Sahitya Akademi’s 2013 classical status (sixth after Sanskrit; first Indo–Aryan) affirmed Oḍiā’s progress amid 1,652 Indian dialects at risk UNICEF warns 6,000 global losses by 2100 (Sena, n.d.). Young writers like Sacī Rautarāya (translated as Boatman Boy) voiced “divine discontent,” echoing Forster (Chatterji, 1943). Colonialism honed the system: Sanskrit depth met Oḍiā agility, birthing reformist literature resilient to erosion.

6. PERFORMATIVE AND PHILOSOPHICAL DIMENSIONS: DRAMAS AND IKS IN OḌIĀ NARRATIVES

Sanskrit drama’s pre–independence Odishan arc, underexplored, enriched nāṭya via Gajapati patronage and temple stagings (Majhi, 2025). Early medieval trajectory made Odisha an artistic center: original works fused local ethos Jagannātha rituals with pan–Indian traditions, staged in Puri for philosophical immersion (Majhi, 2025).

Anargha Raghava’s car festival depiction prefigured this; Prabodhacandrodaya allegorized darśana, debating schools for holistic IKS (Panda, n.d.; Khutia, 2024). Oḍiā narratives localized: Sarala Dāsa’s Mahābhārata framed characters with Vedānta–Tantra, cultivating regional identity (Khutia, 2024; Sena, n.d.). Koyilī’s varga–convention, in Kesaba Koyilī, wove karuṇarasa with everyday motifs “Uncle Moon” calls sharpening emotional epistemologies (Chatterji, 1943).

Bhakti’s Caitanya cult spurred translations, blending Vaishṇavism–Buddhism for spiritual–scientific



synthesis (Chatterji, 1943; Khutia, 2024). Bhāsvatī's astronomy informed rituals, linking stars to ethics (Rath, 2006). These performatives made Knowledge System communal: dramas educated via rasa, Oḍiā lyrics via heart.

7. CONTEMPORARY RELEVANCE: PRESERVING PLURALISM AMID GLOBAL DIALECT THREATS

Oḍiā literature's IKS role persists classical status counters perish threats, evolving ancient wisdom for modern narratives (Khutia, 2024; Sena, n.d.). Abhimanyu Sāmanta Simharāy's Bidagdha Cintāmaṇi, satiating via layered with "kāvyare triptira abasāda nahi"—draws learners (Chatterji, 1943). Palm-leaves, monuments, grants preserve this, offering research insights (Patra, n.d.; Sabar, 2024).

The system values regional epistemologies within Indian holism Āyurveda in fables, jyotiṣa in dramas fostering diversity (Khutia, 2024). Literature's verbal dexterity śṛṅkhalā chains mirrors life's interconnections, urging revival against coalescence (Chatterji, 1943).

8. CONCLUSION

Sanskrit and Oḍiā literatures have sculpted the Odishan Knowledge System into a resilient mosaic, from Vedic astronomy in Bhāsvatī to bhakti lyrics in Gītagovinda, and ethical epics like Sarala's Mahābhārata (Rath, 2006; Chatterji, 1943; Sena, n.d.). Gajapati patronage amplified this, with dramas and lexicons bridging elite-folk wisdom (Majhi, 2025; Dash & Majhi, 2024). Colonial shifts birthed reformist prose, yet bhakti's core endured (Sabar, 2024).

Amid dialect crises, these traditions rooted in Kaliṅga's pluralism demand digitization and curricula integration, honoring Odisha's gift to India's intellectual soul (Khutia, 2024; Panigrahi, 1995).

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