Figuring Out the Classics: The Touchstone Method in Odia Literature

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Abstract:

This article looks at Matthew Arnold's Touchstone Method, which is used by literary scholars for analysing and comparing literature to another work, which could be used under the roof of Odia Literature. Particularly, individuals applied this method to pin down "greater seriousness'' in English Literature. They compare present-day texts with the classic masterpieces to evaluate their position in relation to the great works. This paper aims to examine Odia texts, particularly the Odia poetry tradition, which has a rich and significant contribution to Indian literary history through the lens of Arnold's Touchstone Method. This paper gives a significant overview of Odia literary tradition by highlighting from first literary master, Sarala Das's Odia *Mahabharat*, and the spiritual rhythm of Jagannath Das's Odia *Bhagabata*, extending towards the romantic and twisted style of Radhanath Ray and the intense ornamentation of Upendra Bhanja. This article tests whether Arnold's idea of impartial benchmarks can extend its wings above Western literature to examine the "grand style" in Odia literature by comparing historical achievements with contemporary Odia poetry and literature. This paper presents the findings and analysis of contrasting works and their position within the benchmark of Odia Classics.

Key words:

Odia Literature, Touchstone Method, Bhagavata, Mahabharat, Banja Sahitya, Grand Style, Greater seriousness.

Introduction:

Odia literature, among the regional Indian literature, plays as a custodian that, by its diverse and striking writing conserve the arena of literature with safeguard. As an old man who saw several civilizations, their growth, their decay, their joy, their sorrow, its war and peace. He saw the devotional appeal of the *Mahabharata* and the *Bhagabata*, the ideal manhood in *Baidehisa Bilasa*, the scenic beauty of *Chillika,* the heroic beauty of a young man in *Baji Rout,* and the vivid description of rural life in *Pallishri.* He saw them from a distance and wanted to preserve them in his treasure. What if another work comes in? How should he treat that? When the scaling of literary work comes in, there arises the method of Arnold "Touchstone method".

The Touchstone method, pioneered by Matthew Arnold, works as a comparative framework to calculate the "high seriousness" and poetic effectiveness in literature. This method is used to equitably judge the quality of poetry. The method gives a permanent mark to the piece of literature, which has been compared with another classic standard, as a touchstone gives the impression of purity to the gold. Arnold argued that individual readers, to evaluate literary works, have to surpass historical and personal biases to reach a real estimate. Historical estimate comes when we value a work just for the reason of its oldness. Personal estimate, as the name suggests, occurs when someone values the work based on personal bias. Lastly real estimate is the ultimate truth or judgment a poem deserves.

With its first appearance in Arnold's book *The Study of Poetry,* the Touchstone method aims to eradicate personal as well as historical bias to attain a personal estimate. In his seminal work, Arnold talks about specific touchstones as lines or passages from literary classics like those works of Homer, Dante, Shakespeare, and Milton. By comparing a new work of literature, a critic can understand if the work has the capability to possess the exact "high seriousness" and poetic genius.

Objective:

The main objective of this paper is to examine Arnold's Touchstone from a modern perspective and how it can be applied to non-European literary traditions. In the context of Odia literature, this paper aims to set classical standards that can be used as the ultimate purity checker. This paper nominates high standards of Odia texts that possess the greatness of classics like Homer, Dante, Milton, and Shakespeare.

Methodology:

This review endorses a comparative qualitative approach by applying Arnold's Touchstone method to examine Odia literature throughout the ages. It uses Arnold's Touchstone method as an analytical instrument to set several pillar stones. Various books and articles have been studied to compose this article. A comparative textual analysis has done to attain the grand style. By segregating particular masterworks from Odia literature and by using them as a diagnostic tool examines greater seriousness in contemporary Odia Poetry.

Beauty is truth, truth beauty:

Indian literature, especially Odia literature, follows the idiom "Satya Shiva Sundara" – the ultimate beauty of life. Odia literature, from its infant stage see life from a different angle. It is not a mere collection of bookshelves; it is a cadence pulsation of Odisha's socio-spiritual congregation. It is a way of life. Arnold, in his seminal work, talks about three estimates: historical estimate, personal estimate, and real estimate. He argued that the individual is always driven by personal and historical bias. He set the rhythmic genius of Homer (the great writer of the *Iliad*), Dante (the great writer of the *Divine Comedy*), Shakespeare (writer of *Macbeth*), and Milton (writer of *Paradise Lost*). To attain the ultimate gem, one has to compare its literary work with the above texts to test its quality.

These four texts of European sky possess a cluster of high seriousness within them. As Homer's *The Iliad* has grand pathos that shows human emotion at that stage, even modern writer lacks this quality. The instance when Archiles spoke to Lycaon before killing him is something that gave wisdom to truth. The line is: -"Come, friend, you too must die. Why moan about it so? Even Patroclus died, a far, far better man than you." (*The Iliad*, Book 21, Lines 106–107)
It snaps the last truth of life in a chivalric manner, where everyone has to face this truth. As compared to Odia literature, this truth shifts its face to a spiritual manner. The best example could be given by citing Sarala Das, the Odia Homer, who in His Mahabharat gave the life lesson given by Lord Krishna himself. One of the lines is: -

"ଅନାଦି ପୁରୁଷ ଯହୁ ପ୍ରସନ୍ନ ହୋଇଲା

ପୂଣୀହିଁ ହେଭାଟିଏ ବସ୍ତ୍ର ଯାଇ ଶରୀହର ଲାଗିଲା" (*Sarala Mahabharata*

, Sabha Parba ,verse 17)

The above line shows the love of God towards his followers. When Draupati got humiliated by Dushasana, she sought help from Lord Krishna. Lord Krishan marvellously gave her endless Sharee. In this way, he saves her dignity and proclaims his care for his followers.

Practice of a common language:

The greatest similarity between Jagannath Das and Dante is their use of everyday language. Back then, reading and memorising a text was nearly impossible because it was written in the state's official language. Before Dante, there was a strict and rigid law in Latin that created a literary gap between the elite and the common man. Dante rejected those laws and wrote in colloquial language. In Italy, even a beggar could quote Dante's line.

In the case of the *Bhagabata*, which is written in Sanskrit. These two poets abandon the then official language to create something that will be beneficial to every last person who uses common language and has no idea about rhetoric and complex ornaments. They wrote them simply and memorably. Nowadays, *Bhagabata* is not a mere text in Odisha; rather, it has become the pride and symbol of Odia life. Jagannatha Das adopted the naba- akshari chhanda (9-syllable meter), a rythematic patterns that turns complex life lessonsinto simple song-like memories. In Odisha, every village has a Bhagavat tungi where

Bhagabat purana was kept. One of the best examples is:

"ମାହାନ୍ତେ ମନୁଷ୍ୟ ହଦହ ବହି ହଦଟବୋ ହହାଇହଲ ମରଇ" (*Odia Bhagabata* , canto 21, Chapter 23,Verse 135)

The above line means whoever takes the human form has to tackle all things in a calm and blessed way. These line not only allows the reader to feel the devotion but also make him a good human being.

Puns and Alankaras :

Using alankaras and puns in poetry needs textual mastery. To gain this kind of mastery, many poets failed during the process. But there are some exceptions where some poets surpass that limit in mere attempts. Among them, Shakespeare and Bhanja treat those technicalities in such a way that their works have been counted as the apex of the creation of literature. Though centuries have passed, their name and fame remain the same.

Using puns with perfection is not child's play. Pun shows the human emotion and complexities in his mind. Shakespeare used this technique mostly in all his work, as in *Macbeth* and *Othello*.

Bhanja used frequent ornaments in his poems. His use of ornaments like anuprasa (alliteration), yamaka (using a word having two different meanings in the same stanza), upama(simile),rupaka(metaphor), and many others could be seen in his writings. One of the examples is where he uses alliteration at its peak in his *Baidehisa Bilasa*. In this work, he used "Ba" in all 52 cantos in a rhythmic pattern.

"ବିଭୁ ଅନନ୍ତ ଅଙ୍କ ବିହାରୀ ଓର ଟପ୍ରାପ ଜର ସଂଶରି " (Baidehisa Bilasa

,Canto 1,Chapter 1,Verse 1-2)

The Great Epics:

Though from different centuries, Milton and Radhanath Ray have a number of similarities where both use grand style to write great epics. Milton's Paradise Lost deals with serious tone, the clash between good and evil, the fall of angels, religion, strong socio-political themes, etc. Written in blank verse, the epic consists of twelve books with rich vocabulary. The epic gives glimpses of the biblical story –the fall of man; Satan's rebellion, his banishment from heaven, Adam and Eve in Eden Garden. Deals with the theme of sin, disobedience, redemption, lust, the poem is full of grand narratives, and it became one of the greatest poems in literature.

In the Odia context, Radhanath Ray, also known as the Odia Milton, was very much influenced by Milton. His most famous poem, *Chilika*, describes the scenic beauty, birds, human emotions, and the deep water of the lake. Unlike Milton, Radhanatha use simple musical style to show human emotions. His poems reflect nature, society, rhythmic smoothness, intellect, and culture. One of the most famous lines is :

"ଉତ୍କଳ -ଓମଳା -ବିଳାସ - ଦୀର୍ଘିଷ୍ଠୀ।। , ମରାଳ -ମାଳିନୀ -ନୀହରାଲମ୍ବ -ଚିଲିଟୋ।ୀ। , ଉତ୍କଳର ଟୋ୍ହି ଚାରୁ ଅଳଙ୍କାର ଉତ୍କଳ -

ଭୁବଦହନ ହଂଶାଭାରା ଭଣ୍ଡାର |" (*Chillika* , line 1-4)

Conclusion

These four gems of Odia literature act as four pillars or touchstones where, by their works set a value to literature. The Touchstone method by Arnold sets perfectly with these four legends. These four Writers represent four different aspects of literature, namely: Devotion, generality, perfection, and simplicity. Any new or old work of Odia literature can be compared with these four works of the above writers to gain the purity of excellence. If Matthew Arnold were there, the four writers for the great seriousness in Odia perspective, he would choose the four writers who cope perfectly with the other four European writers. Lastly, Touchstone does not mean that all writings are inferior; rather, it is a tool to preserve literary excellence.

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