



## Evolution of Print Media in Odisha

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It was only in the 1920s, according to the Oxford English Dictionary that people began to speak of ‘the media’, and a generation later, in the 1950s, of a ‘communication revolution’, but a concern with the means of communication is very much older than that. However, the study of the art of oral and written communication was taken very seriously in ancient Greece and Rome. It was studied in the Middle Ages and with greater enthusiasm in the Renaissance.

‘Public opinion’ as a concept appeared in the late eighteenth century, while a concern with the ‘masses’ is visible from the early nineteenth century onwards, at a time when newspapers were helping to fashion national consciousness by making people aware of their fellow readers.

Innovation and willingness to pursue technological developments later enabled the press to grow and diversify to the point where newspapers are now a smaller part of the news media. This business has flourished to become, at the end of the millennium, the most prevalent global industry. The eighteenth century claim that the press was entitled to its own independent standing in the political system, as the Fourth Estate, has become an ideal which continues to influence the attitudes of those working in the late twentieth century news media as well as politicians and citizens.

The original imperatives of the press – to deliver news and information and provide entertainment – have remained, but the methods and scale of the contemporary news media are vastly different. Its tentacles reach into the lives of almost every man, woman and child on earth: from the rich, media saturated societies of the west to the shanties of the developing countries, where television cables hang above rooftops and international news crews descend in voracious waves to capture images of flood, famine, war and genocide, before bouncing them back off international satellites, into millions of sitting rooms a world away.

Odisha with her history of over one hundred years of journalism occupies a place of pride and honour in the glorious chapters of the history of journalism in India. The first attempt for the publication of newspapers in India was made by William Bolts, an employee of the British East India Company in Calcutta in 1776. But he could not succeed due to official restrictions and obstructions. James Augustus Hickey another Englishman started the ‘Bengal Gazette’ in 1780. Also known as Hickey’s Bengal Gazette, it was the first major newspaper in India that was published for over two years. Odia journalism played a pivotal role in arousing socio-political consciousness as well as awakening the people’s awareness in particular. The great men who had



pioneered this noble profession in this part of the country were solely inspired with the spirit of social service and missionary zeal. Prior to the catastrophic famine that Odisha faced in 1866, the first Odia Magazine “Bodha Dayini” was published from Balasore in 1861. To spread Odia literature and to point out the administrative lapses were the primary objectives behind the publication of this magazine.

Then the most powerful and influential Odia paper ‘The Utkal Deepika’ made its appearance in early 1866 under the editorship of Gourisankar Ray with the patronizing help of Bichitrananda Das. ‘Utkal Deepika’ played a significant role in carrying out a vigorous campaign for bringing all the Odia-speaking areas under one administration, development of Odia language and literature and protection of Odia interests.

To propagate Brahmo faith, Bhagavati Charan Das started ‘Utkal Subhakari’ in 1869. Another weekly paper ‘Sambad Vahika’ was published from Balasore in 1868. The Utkal Society of Cuttack published ‘Utkal Hiteisini’ in 1869. In the last three and half decades of the 19th century, a number of newspapers were published in Odia, prominent among them were ‘Utkal Deepika’ ‘Utkal Patra’ ‘Utkal Hiteisini’ from Cuttack, ‘Utkal Darpan and Sambada Vahika’ from Balasore, ‘Sambalpur Hiteisini’ from Deogarh. In 1879 an Odia fortnightly newspaper called “Mayurbhanj Pakshika Patrika” was published from Baripada being edited by Haraprasad Das with the financial help of Maharaja Krushna Chandra Bhanja Deo, the erstwhile ruler of Mayurbhanj.

In April 1891 a literary magazine titled ‘Utkal Prabha’ was published from Baripada with the financial assistance of Maharaja Sri Ramachandra Bhanja Deo. After the 1866 famine, some English journals were also started publishing in Odisha. In 1868 “Cuttack Standard”,

Argos’ and an English Weekly ‘Orissa Patriot’ edited by Kalipada Banerji were published from Cuttack and another English weekly named ‘Orissa Students’ was published from Kendrapara during that period.

During the Swadeshi Movement another paper named ‘Nava Sambad’ also appeared from Balasore. Both ‘Nava Sambad’ of Balasore and ‘Utkal Deepika’ of Cuttack gave strong support to the ‘Swadeshi’ movement. Through their writings of 30th August 1905 and 2nd September 1905 respectively these two papers expressed the views that the Swadeshi movement would give impetus to the production of “Swadeshi” goods in Odisha.

Pandit Nilamani Vidyaratna a veteran journalist, social reformer and a political leader started an Odia weekly paper ‘Praja Bandhu’ from Ganjam to espouse the cause of the Odias and the amalgamation movement. He also joined the ‘Sambalpur Hiteisini’ in the last decade of 19<sup>th</sup> century and gave a new fillip to the cause of amalgamation movement and development of Odia literature with the help of the Raja of Bamra, the great lover of culture and literature. Pandit Vidyaratna had encouraged the great poet Gangadhar Meher and Radhanath Ray by publishing their literary works through the columns of the paper which he edited.

In 1905 Babu Khirod Ray Choudhury published an English newspaper named “Star of Utkal” from Cuttack. An English weekly named “Ganjam News” was published from Parlakhemidi, the great seat of Odia culture, literature and music to support the cause of Odisha. The other papers of Ganjam of that period were Odia Weekly, “Oriya Hitavadini” from Berhampur, “Ganjam Guna Darpan” from Digapahandi and ‘Utkal Vasi’ from Ichhapur (now in Andhra Pradesh) which were published to fight for the formation of a separate Odisha province



based on language, culture and literature and also to advance the cause of freedom movement.

Journalism in Odisha entered a new phase in 1913 with the publication of the weekly “Asha” by Sashibhusan Rath. Though, Rath started his weekly without any capital money, he was able to attract the support of the stalwarts of that period like Pandit Gopabandhu Das, Pandit Nilakantha Das, Pandit Godavarish Mishra, the great freedom fighters and scholars, who later became editors of powerful newspapers.

Pandit Gopabandhu Das, the founder of Odisha’s most influential newspaper, the Samaj published his first monthly magazine “Satyavadi” from Asha Press of Berhampur. During this period the publication of ‘Asha’ by Sashi Bhusan had kindled new hopes in the minds of the people of Odisha. ‘Asha’ soon attracted many leading writers and leaders of public opinion of that time and became the powerful vehicle of public opinion.

In 1917 another Odia weekly paper ‘Samaj Mitra’ was published from Cuttack. During the same period Gopal Chandra Praharaj edited “Satya Samachar”, Utkal Gourab MadhuSudan Das edited ‘The Oriya’. Another weekly ‘Swaraj’ which became a daily in 1932 was also published in 1921-22 from Cuttack.

In 1928, Sashi Bhusan Rath took another bold step and started the Odia Daily ‘Dainik Asha’ from Berhampur. This was really a great day for the people of Odisha and for the press of Odisha. With the publication of Dainik Asha many public spirited youngmen got the opportunity to receive the practical training in daily newspaper work and journalism. After the publication of ‘Dainik Asha’ Sashi Bhusan also published an English weekly, ‘The East Coast’. In 1930 an Odia newspaper “Prabhat” was also published from Cuttack.

On 5th May, 1933 the first English daily of the Province ‘The New Orissa’ made its

appearance from the Asha Press of Berhampur under the Editorship of Sashi Bhusan. It may not be out of place to mention here that for the proper growth and development of Odia journalism and development of language and literature, necessity for the invention of Odia type-writer was greatly felt and a brother of Sashi Bhusan Ranganath Mahapatra of Surada, Ganjam invented the first Odia type-writer in early forties. The Odia type-writers were manufactured in Germany and were put to use in some of the offices soon after the formation of the separate Odisha Province on 1st April, 1936.

During the Second World War in 1942, Daily Asha changed hands with its sister publication the English daily ‘New Orissa’ which was purchased by a businessman of Calcutta, who later settled down at Cuttack. These two papers gave effective support to war efforts of the British Government and were also recipients of Government’s aid. Both were closed down in 1951 marking the end of a great chapter of the pre-independence era journalism in Odisha. However, the “Dainik Asha” resumed publication from Berhampur being controlled by a “Trust” set up by Brindavan Nayak in the Seventies.

“Samaj”, the Odia Daily of Cuttack was established by Pandit Gopabandhu Das as a weekly in 1919 to support the cause of freedom struggle of the country. Das continued his relentless struggle against the British rulers through the columns of the paper and never yielded to any pressure and temptations of the British Government.

In the early pre-independence period two English weeklies, ‘The Orissa First’ edited by K.N. Acharya and ‘Observer’ by Mr. M.S. Mahanty, and an Odia Weekly named Janata by Surendra Mohanty published from Cuttack had influenced public opinions in their own respective ways. Acharya’s ‘Orissa First’ commanded



respect and prestige in official and enlightened circles of the State. Another Odia monthly magazine which commanded great influence throughout the State for its critical writings was 'Niankhunta'. This was first started in 1938 from Berhampur by Godavarish Mahapatra and later shifted to Cuttack. 'Krusak', another Odia weekly also started its publication in 1938 from Cuttack under the editorship of Sarangdhar Das.

The growth of press and journalism during British period brought many changes in the life of the people of Odisha. The development of press and growth of journals and newspapers in Odisha made the people aware of different aspects of life like social, political, economic and cultural etc. It created awareness about the evil rules of British Government in Odisha. It also developed the sense of nationalism in the minds of the people of Odisha.

In the post-independence era, journalism in Odisha assumed new orientation and direction. It attracted many ambitious young men who opted for journalism as a venue for employment. Dr. H.K. Mahatab's "Prajatantra" offered this opportunity to employment seekers in journalism and also to the young aspirants for building political careers. Published as a weekly from Balasore in 1923, 'Prajatantra' re-appeared in 1947 as an Odia Daily with renewed vigour and strength under the fostering care of Dr. Mahatab who was the first premier of the State on the eve of the transfer of power and also became Chief Minister after independence. As a matter of fact, "Prajatantra" became the training ground for many budding journalists who later occupied important positions in political and public life. Another sister paper of the Prajatantra, English Daily, "The Eastern Times" was also published on the 1st of April 1948. The 'Amrit Bazar Patrika' of Calcutta published an edition from Cuttack from the Tulasipur residence

of Biju Patnaik. But it later discontinued its publication after two years.

'Matrubhumi' which started as a weekly in 1947 was made a Daily by its founder Editor Balakrushna Kar in 1951 on the eve of First General Elections in 1952 with the financial help received from Maharaja of Balangir Patna, R.N. Singh Deo. In 1956, another Odia Daily called 'Ganatantra' owing its political allegiance to the opposition Ganatantra Parishad" of the ex-Garhjat rulers of Odisha was published by the Gana Prakasani Trust Board. This paper continued for about five years. In 1960 another important Odia Daily "Kalinga" was published by Biju Patnaik, the then Congress leader of Odisha. It was controlled through a trust. This paper went out of existence after 1967 General Elections during the time of "Swatantra-Jana Congress" Coalition Ministry. On 1st April 1966 another Odia Daily "The Janasakti" made its appearance and continued for about four years. This paper owed its existence to Biren Mitra, ex-Chief Minister of Odisha. During its short span of existence it had been able to gain popular support and good will of the people. After the Fourth General Election, another Odia daily the "Swarajya" owing its full allegiance to the Swatantra Party was published from Bhubaneswar under the working editorship of Rama Prasad Sinha, a well-known freedom fighter, writer and a veteran journalist. This paper was controlled by the ex-Maharaja of Balangir Patna, R.N. Singh Deo as the Chairman of a new Trust Board.

In 1974 a new Odia Daily "Dharitri" was added to the family of the daily newspapers of Odisha published and owned by Nandini Satapathy, the then Chief Minister of Odisha. Her son and MP Tathagata Satapathy is its present editor.

Although, the Eastern Media Ltd., Bhubaneswar started the trend of weekly-



magazines for its daily newspaper 'The Sambad', it was followed by other dailies who started such features to attract more readers and to gain revenue.

The circulation of Odia publications was increased from 1,24,84,899 copies in 2013-14 to 1,34,71,260 copies per publishing day in 2014-15. Dailies and tri/bi-weekly claimed a circulation of 80,45,411 copies while remaining 54,25,849 copies were claimed by periodicals. Out of the 350 publications, 33 were 'big', 133 were 'medium' and rest 184 were 'small' category publications. 19 dailies / tri/biweeklies had a circulation of more than 1,00,000 copies per publishing day in 2014-15.

The actual growth of Odia newspapers, however, can be attributed to strong political affiliations of the respective editors concerned. Due to some reasons, politicians took the patronage of newspapers and started one such media under their patronage and control apparently for a say on bureaucracy and the government. As per the estimate nearly eight prominent Odia newspapers have been started or promoted by politicians.

The post-liberalisation era can be described as the best period for the development of press in Odisha, as many English press and electronic media started their venture in Odisha. During this period, English dailies like The New Indian Express, The Times of India, The Statesman, The Pioneer, The Telegraph, The Hindustan Times and The Asian Age have opened their publications in Odisha. Print-media industry in Odisha has undergone through a lot of changes particularly on the front of technological innovations. Starting from ultra-modern colour printing to multi-editions (in same day) printing by the local print-media, Odia-print-media has come up well in the recent past, to compete, at

least in terms of national standard, both in quality and coverage.

The emergence of various news channels not only transformed the socio-cultural makeover of the State but also changed the culture of media in Odisha. However, the development of newspapers as a mass media in Odisha could not be improved both in terms of quality and quantity to an extent expected. It is due to certain factors, which can be attributed to poverty, illiteracy, rural-based society and absence of reading habits and less political awareness among the people in the State.

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