

Book Review

Chronicles of a monarch playwright

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Name: Natyakara Vikram Dev Barma

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Famous Odia literateur Shri Gopinath Mohanty was professionally posted at Koraput, the tribal dominated district of southern Odisha for a significant phase of his life and the place became the cradle of many of his creative pursuits. Apart from writing his own classics like *Paraja* and *Dadibudha*, Mohanty also tried to document the literary works of Vikram Dev Barma, a member of the royal family of Jeypore and the unsung playwright from the region. In 1946, Mohanty came out with a collection of Barma's work, a *rachanabali*. It consisted of two Odia plays written by Barma, the *Utkal Kundamala* and *Buddha Charit* composed in 1931 & 1932 respectively. However, it remains a question mark as to why the book didn't contain *Sangeeta Radhamadhav*, the first play written by Barma in 1894. It is a fact that the play was not available easily, probably not also to the playwright, who was alive when Mohanty's book was published. Years later, the play was discovered in the Central Library of the Andhra University at Visakhapatnam, the area where Barma had spent a significant period of his life. The editors of the present book in discussion included the play along with the other two plays and added a couple of things more-the drama theory by Barma and a critical discussion of his three plays. Thus, the book presents the readers with a wholistic picture of the royal playwright.

From the discussion on Barma's plays as reflected in the book, an observation which is extremely important to the understanding of the playwriting style of Barma is that he spent substantial time at Andhra, specially at Visakhapatnam and bordering areas of Ganjam. The influence of Ganjam's traditional theatre is pretty evident in his plays. But that no way

undermines his credit to author plays specially because he was one of the early pioneers. While 1877 is held as the starting year of Odia drama, Barma composed his *Sangeeta Radhamadhav* only years after and it has the record of being performed at Padmanava Rangalaya, the theatre space curated by the Parla King at Gajapati. It is a fact that in later years Barma could not evolve as a playwright with the changing times like his contemporaries, Aswini Kumar Ghosh or Kalicharan Pattanaik to name a few, but he will always be remembered for writing the first character-analytic or *charitadharmi* play, *Buddha Charit*, on the life and works of Goutam Buddha. Similarly, he also wrote an inspired play or *anusaranamulak nataka* in the form of *Utkala Kundamala* which was inspired from the Sanskrit Kundamala. His *natyatatwa*, a brief theoretical treatise, is also reminiscent of the Bharata's *Natyashastra* referring to elements like *mudra* and *abhinaya*. He had religiously followed the theory in his play writing and therefore one would get the structure of Sanskrit *natyashaili* or classical elements of *Nandi*, the introduction, *sutradhar*, the narrator and so on.

His prolonged stay in Andhra, which was under the Madras Presidency those days and composing seven plays in Telegu as compared to only three in Odia, has left Barma ignored in the history of Odia drama, but there is no denying the fact that he did a lot to promote Odia language and literature. This includes setting up Odia Sammilani at Visakhapatnam, active participation in Bhasha Surakhya Andolan and Swatantrata Andolan which involved demand for a separate state of Odisha.

The editors of the book, both academicians, have given a befitting tribute to the unsung hero of Odia drama and literature. The book is of immense historical value and a must for drama enthusiasts and researchers.

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