

ODISHA AS A MULTICULTURAL STATE: FROM MULTICULTURALISM TO POLITICS OF SUB-REGIONALISM

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ABSTRACT

The state of Odisha has been shaped by a unique geography, different cultural patterns from neighboring states, and a predominant Jagannath culture along with a number of castes, tribes, religions, languages and regional disparity which shows the multicultural nature of the state. But the regional disparities in terms of economic and political development pose a grave challenge to the state politics in Odisha. Thus, multiculturalism in Odisha can be defined as the territorial division of the state into different sub-regions and in terms of regionalism and sub-regional identity. The paper attempts to assess Odisha as a multicultural state by highlighting its cultural diversity and tries to establish the idea that multiculturalism is manifested in sub-regionalism. Bringing out the major areas of sub-regional disparity that lead to secessionist movement and the response of state government to it, the paper concludes with some suggestive measures.

INTRODUCTION

The concept of multiculturalism has attracted immense attention of the academicians as well as researchers in present times for the fact that it not only involves the question of citizenship, justice, recognition, identities and group differentiated rights of cultural disadvantaged minorities, it also offers solutions to the challenges arising from the diverse cultural groups. It endorses the idea of difference and heterogeneity which is manifested in the cultural diversity. It also solves the problems relating to regionalism and sub-regionalism arising out of socio-economic linkages and shared notions of belonging. Multiculturalism, thus, is closely associated with “identity politics”, “the politics of difference” and “the politics of recognition” all of which

share a commitment to revaluing disrespected identities and changing dominant patterns of representation and communication that marginalize certain groups. Multiculturalism is also a matter of economic interests and political power; it demands remedies to economic and political disadvantages that people suffer as a result of their minority status (Song 2014).

A few countries notably, Australia, Canada, and Sweden, have adopted multiculturalism as its response to cultural and ethnic diversity. Multiculturalism, in these three countries, acknowledges the existence of ethnic diversity and ensures the rights of individuals to retain their culture and enjoy all the rights and liberties of the constitution and commonly shared values prevailing in the society. So, multiculturalism has been seen as an ideology or public policy in several Western countries including the United Kingdom, the United States of America, France, and Germany since the 1970s as many of the great cities of the western world is increasingly made of a mosaic of cultures. Not only the Western nations are multicultural, but also many nation states in Asia, Africa and Latin America are culturally diverse and are considered as multicultural states.

India, however, is said to be one of the diverse and multicultural societies in the world giving shelter to all major religions of the world in the ancient period to embarking multicultural framework in its constitution after emerging as a nation-state in 1947. In ancient period, India was the cradle of different cultures and civilizations where several cultural values synthesized with each other to form a composite Indian culture. It is not only classic home to different religions, but also an abode of different cultural expressions and religious beliefs. Despite professing different faiths, speaking different languages and residing in different territories, people never abandon their Indianness. Post-colonial India, then, adopted the multicultural framework in its constitution accommodating the cultural diversity in terms of religion, language, caste, tribe and region. The ethos of multiculturalism is thus found in Indian constitution. So, diversity is its strength and the idea of unity in diversity, peaceful co-existence, reconciliation and cooperation among various religious and ethnic groups constitute its composite culture.

The present state of Odisha¹ shows its unique multicultural features within India. It is bounded by the Bay of Bengal in the east, Andhra Pradesh in the south, Chhattisgarh in the west,

Jharkhand in the north, and West Bengal in the north-east. Its culture has been shaped by this unique geography, resultant demographic diversity, and different cultural patterns from neighboring states. The four cultural sub-regions in the state show this multiculturalism, though they nevertheless possess a commonality, induced mainly by the cult of Jagannath. While the north-eastern areas bordering on West Bengal are influenced by Bengali culture and language, the southern parts of old Ganjam and Koraput districts, having a sizeable Telugu speaking population, are influenced by Andhra culture. The western districts of Sambalpur, Deogarh, Bargarh, Jharsuguda, Balangir, Sonepur, Kalahandi and Nuapada lie in a cultural and linguistic continuum with the regions of Chhattisgarh, just beyond the border, where many Odia-speaking castes live even at present; and the fourth region, regarded as the typical, or at least the tone-setting one, in cultural institutions, social customs and linguistic and literary sophistication, comprises roughly the coastal districts of Balasore, Bhadrak, Kendrapara, Jajpur, Jagatsinghpur, Cuttack, Puri, Khurda, Nayagarh, and portions of adjoining districts. The remaining areas of the state extending from northern (undivided) districts of Sundargarh, Keonjhar and Mayurbhanj to the southern tribal areas of Kandhamal-Phulbani, Boudh, Ganjam, Gajapati and Koraput, Rayagada, Nawarangpur and Malkangiri districts can hardly be pressed to the confines of more or less homogenous cultural regions, their only common feature being that these are inhabited by tribes with distinctive languages and tribal religions, assimilating to a larger or smaller degree the local cults of Hinduism, and accounting for more than fifty percent of the total population.

While these linguistic, religious, and communitarian differences assimilate within the dominant cult of Jagannath which represents the most developed coastal region, there is a simmering tension among tribal cultures (that constitute the western highland region) regarding their rights, equality, autonomy and identity. Multiculturalism in a sense is manifested within these diverse tribal cultures which are reflected in the form of sub-regionalism. Thus the resultant regional disparities between the two regions in terms of economic and political development pose a grave challenge to the state politics in Odisha. However, in this context, can the insights of the theoretical literature on multiculturalism, and the idea of accommodation and recognition, be applied to study socio-cultural regions and sub-regional consciousness in the context of state politics?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Looking at the above problems, the available literature in this context may be at best, one part being about recent literature on multiculturalism and cultural diversity prevailing in multicultural societies and another part about regionalism and sub-regional politics both in India and Odisha.

There are a good number of studies on the subject of multiculturalism, especially in political philosophy (see among others Gutman 1994; Goldberg 1994; Kymlicka 1995; Favell 1998a; Willett 1998 and Parekh 2000). Stephen Castles (2000:5) summarizes that much of what is encapsulated in the term multiculturalism concerns ‘abandoning the myth of homogenous and monocultural nation-states’ and ‘recognizing rights to cultural maintenance and community formation, and linking these to social equality and protecting from discrimination’. In these ways multiculturalism represents a kind of corrective to assimilationist approaches and policies surrounding the national incorporation of immigrants (see Grillo 1998, 2000; Faist 2000). In policy terms, multiculturalism frames procedures, representations, materials and resources in education, health, welfare, policing, the arts and leisure- indeed, in practically every public institutional sphere (especially on the level of local government).

Multiculturalism is not only a demographic issue (Harris 2001) as the way that cultural diversity is framed and addressed on a political level, but has a direct impact on intergroup relations and the very nature of political participation in contemporary democracies. Hall explains brilliantly the core of ‘multicultural question’: ‘How then can the particular and the universal, the claims of both difference and equality, [are] recognized? This is the dilemma, the conundrum- the multicultural question- at the heart of the multiculturalist transruptive and reconfigurative impact’ (Hall 2000:235). Following from Hall’s observation, it can be argued that the increasing diversity within national societies and the need to accommodate different sets of demands by various cultural groups pose challenging questions regarding the meaning of equality.

A key argument that has been put forward is that we need to progress from an equality of sameness to an equality of difference (Taylor 1992). The ‘liberal’ neutrality of the state, which conflates equality and sameness, has been criticized because it implies an ideal of assimilation and thereby oppresses historically excluded groups. Against that, Young advocates the politics of

difference whereby equality is conceptualized not as sameness, but as public respect of difference, as a type of democratic cultural pluralism (Young 1990). Similarly, Taylor (1992) argues in favour of the politics of recognition on the basis that identities are constructed intersubjectively and thus, misrecognition and non-recognition of people's identities are forms of oppression.

Kelly (2002) traces the origins of the circumstances of multiculturalism in liberal democracies and the tensions between culture and equality that they generate. Circumstances of multiculturalism, according to Kelly, seem to mean that societies have more than one culture in public realm and the claims of these cultures may conflict with each other and the holders of one culture may find themselves subordinate to another culture. This kind of difference is precisely the policy adopted during the process of state-building, where a single national language is enforced at the expenses of the local languages and dialectics, and thus these cultures challenge the traditional ideological forms in order to accommodate themselves into these circumstances. Kymlicka and He (2005) discuss the varied and contradictory ways in which issues of ethno cultural diversity are negotiated in the South and East Asia. According to them, in the first two decades following decolonization, talk of multiculturalism was often discouraged, as states attempted to consolidate themselves as unitary and homogenizing nation states. This pursuit of national homogenization has led later to a resistance amongst ethnic and religious minorities in the form of violence and secessionist movements in the countries like Philippines, New Guinea, China, Burma, Indonesia, India, Sri Lanka, and Pakistan.

In case of India, Rudolph and Rudolph (2002) show how modern India has provided a setting for the contest between legal pluralism and legal universalism. They argued that legal pluralism recognizes and legitimizes the personal law and group rights of India's religious and caste communities, and legal universalism recognizes and legitimizes unencumbered individuals, particularly of equal citizens. While legal pluralism plays an important part in identity politics, mainly those of cultural survival, legal universalism defends and protects individuals' rights and freedom from state, group injustice and oppression.

Mahajan (2002) once considered it paradoxical that in India one of the first few democracies to endorse the principle of equality, multiculturalism as a theory of democracy and citizenship has received little attention. But in a later work she tries to highlight a successful case of the reconciliation of democracy and minority rights in India, asking if it was a case of exceptionalism or provided a model (2005). Bhattacharya (2003) points out how multicultural concerns have long informed India's history and traditions, constitution and political arrangements. Das (2009) explains how in India various brands of identity politics have served since the colonial days to create the basis of exclusion of groups, resulting in various forms of rifts, often envisaged in binary terms: majority-minority, sons of the soil- immigrants, locals-outsiders, tribal-nontribal, and intra-tribal.

Dasgupta's (2001:49) view of India's bold experiment of combining democratic responsiveness to cultural differences with a federal conciliation of regional community, identity, and autonomy claims and a nationally concerted promotion of regional capability, has tended to ensure a novel mode of multicultural national development and Bagchi's (1999:219-220) idea that the Indian subcontinent has seen almost as much intermingling of different migrant streams and settled populations, with their assumed identities, life-styles and belief-systems as the whole continent of Europe which he termed as dense multiculturalism. Mayaram (1999:380) points out that in the Indian context, contemporary multiculturalist discussion invariably focuses on the Hindu majority and minorities such as Muslims, Christians, and Sikhs.

Multiculturalism in India, as per Sen's (2005) view, ensures that all citizens can keep their identities, can take pride in their ancestry and have a sense of belonging. Acceptance gives each Indian citizen a feeling of security and self-confidence, making them more open to, and accepting of, diverse cultures. He rediscovered India's unique tradition what according to him could be an instant model for the rest of the world experimenting with multicultural public policy and points out that India has a long tradition of what he calls the 'argumentative tradition'- an acceptance of plurality as the natural state of affairs, a long and robust tradition of heterodoxy, dissent, inquiry and analysis.

Rao (2011) argues that India's tradition of diversity or unity in diversity is basically rooted in the caste system. For him, Indian traditional situation of sociological and cultural diversity and now emerging situation of multiculturalism elsewhere in the world face a common problem in negotiating modern liberal democratic values and universal individual freedom, and in this regard, he says, India's successful account, as it is trying to overcome this problem, could be an instant model for the rest of the world.

While discussing regionalism and sub-regional disparity, we can find some of the works highlighting on these issues especially in Indian context. The available literature on regionalism in Indian context defines this concept in different ways. Scholars like Paul R.Brass² and Rasheeduddin Khan³ have viewed regionalism in terms of federalism and centre-state relations. But regionalism is a complex phenomenon and to look at it either as a movement for greater autonomy or as a reaction against federal administrative imbalances is inadequate. Another perspective emerges from the writings of Duncan B. Forrester, who draws a distinction between regionalism and sub-regionalism purely in terms of the size of the area covered by the two. This position cannot be accepted because size of a region cannot be the criterion for regionalism and regional movements (Forrester 1970).

A very significant approach towards regionalism has been developed by Michael Hechter and has come to be known as the 'Internal Colonial Model'. Hechter's contention is that regionalism is the outcome of real or perceived sense of 'Internal Colonialism' (Hechter 1975). The essence of the internal colonial model is that the relationship between members of core communities and the peripheral communities in a state are characterized by exploitation (Birch 1978). It is this real or perceived sense of exploitation that seems to lie at the core of regionalism.

A number of studies deal on the issues of regionalism and regional movements in the context of the federal democracy in India. These studies seek to unravel the process whereby the regions emerge with geographical, cultural and political spaces getting sharpened and defined in terms of collective identities as democracy gets rooted in a decentralizing India (Majeed 1984; Kumar 2000a and 2000b; Prakash 2001; Jenkins 2004). There are also other studies which are related to

different issues in different regions: these include the emergence of new social movements in different states (Brass 1997), and emergence of caste and ethnic identity (Jaffrelot 2003).

In order to understand the impact of sub-regional politics on the state politics in Odisha, we need to go through the available studies done in this area. While Mishra (1984) has outlined a theoretical framework on regionalism in different states of India, and Haan and Dubey (2005) try to explore the extent and nature of disparities within Odisha, particularly regional, social and gender disparities, Dwivedy (1988) explains that in the recorded history of Odisha, there are very few instances of open fight amongst different groups or communities struggling for power and supremacy. Since simmering multicultural tensions have found repercussions in state politics, Mishra's (1989) study of political defection as an endemic feature of coalition politics and ministry making, as also that Hazary (1985) about the trends of party system, the role of regional parties and defection politics in Odisha, and Baral's study (1985) of oppositional politics would provide enabling insights.

Jena's study (1988) of the history of Odisha from 1936- 1948, the formative period of the province created on the basis of language, Behera's (2010) effort to study Odia identity from a cultural perspective in the backdrop of concern with identity in academic studies in the post-modern globalized world, and Mahapatra's (2005) attempt to portray the changing culture and society in Odisha as an interdependent region of India, in the context of long-standing interactions with the neighboring societies and cultures, will provide ways of linking Odian reality to the literature on multiculturalism. Asthana (1988) shows how high level concentration of tribal and backward population in Western Odisha followed by uneven economic development between the regions in spite of the introduction of several developmental programmes till today, still accounts for the economic backwardness of Sambalpur among other areas.

The paucity of works on the relationship between multiculturalism and uneven regional development in Odisha and its impact on state politics points to the need of further study in this field. Thus, the paper tries to draw a link between multiculturalism and sub-regionalism and their effects on state politics in Odisha.

The present paper thus tries to consider Odisha as a multicultural state, points out how sub-regionalism poses a grave challenge to the state politics despite the existence of other multicultural components and finds out its root causes, and how the state government on its part fails to address this challenge. The paper basically sees multiculturalism in terms of broader territorial division of the state into different sub-regions and sub-regional identity. Looking at this problem the paper outlines some recommendations along with a brief conclusion.

ODISHA AS A MULTICULTURAL STATE

When we think of Odisha as a state or province, we generally notice deep entrenchment of cultural diversity within it: diversity in terms of religion, language, sub-regions, castes and tribes. “Odisha, referred to as a ‘holy land’ is a region where Jainism, Buddhism, Shaivism, Vaishnavism, Tantrism and Shaktism were influential during different periods of history. Thus, Hinduism in Odisha, rather than being a monolithic discourse and practice, represents a confluence of diverse faiths and sects, making it a marvelous mosaic” (Kanungo 2014:48-49). Diversity among the sub-regions is also evident in the state. While coastal Odisha represents brahmanical traditions, ceremonial purity, religious superstitions, and caste prejudices for centuries, a large adivasi population living in the forests and highlands worship their own gods and goddesses and follow their customs and traditions. But quite astonishingly, this diversity and plurality of Odishan society is homogenised under the cult of Jagannath which is the core of all religious, cultural and political traditions of Odisha.

The demography and topography, religion, language, caste, tribe, gender disparity and regional disparity form the root of cultural diversity in Odisha.

Demographic and Topographic Features

The state of Odisha with a geographical area of 1, 55,707 sq.kms., comprising 4.7% of country's landmass lies in the east coast of the country between 81° 27' and 87° 29' East longitudes and 17° 49' and 22° 34' North latitudes, with a coastline of 480 kms.⁴ Having a population of 41, 947, 358⁵, it is bounded by the Bay of Bengal in the east, Andhra Pradesh in the south, Chhattisgarh in the west, Jharkhand in the north and West Bengal in the north- east. As per 2011 census, out of the total population, 21,201,678 (50.54%) are male and 20,745, 680 (49.46%) are female or 978

females per 1000 males. This represents a 13.97% increase over the population in 2001. The dominant ethnic group in the state is Odia people and Odia is the official language. Odia is spoken as native language by 81.8% of the total population. Other linguistic minorities in the state are Bengali, Hindi, Telugu, and Santali. Scheduled castes and scheduled tribes form 16.53% and 22.13% of the state population, constituting 38.66% of the total population of the state. Some of the important tribes are Santal, Bonda, Oraon, Kandha, Mahali and Kora. The literacy rate in the state is 73%, with 82% of males and 64% of females being literate as per 2011 census. The major religious groups living in Odisha are Hinduism (94.35%), Christianity (2.44%), Islam (2.07%), and others (1.14%). This demographic picture of Odisha marks its multicultural nature.

Religion

Odisha is the melting pot of all religions. It has a unique distinction of acting as a confluence of many diverse faiths like Brahmanism, Jainism, Shaivism, Vaishnavism, Islam, Christianity and Buddhism. One can vividly witness how religion in Odisha has evolved from animism, nature worship, and ancestor worship to the highly evolved forms of religion like Brahmanism, Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism. The synthesis and harmony of the different forms of Brahmanic worship Vaishnavite, Shaivite, Shakta, Ganapateya are all to be formed in the great and grand temple of Lord Jagannath. Around Him, revolves the entire cultural milieu of Odisha. Religion and culture cannot be separated in a land like Odisha, which claims to celebrate thirteen festivals in twelve months.⁶ The present state of Odisha comprising different religions are: Hinduism-94.35%, Christianity-2.24%, Islam-2.07%, and others-1.14%.⁷

All these religious people live in great harmony in Odisha accepting the dominant role of Hinduism or the so called “Jagannath Culture”. In this regard, Kanungo argues that ‘Jagannath culture’ being the common culture in Odisha signifies unity in diversity in the state (Kanungo 2008:57). But sometimes conflict occurs between the majority Hindus and the religious minorities (Samantaray 2008). The killing of the Australian Missionary Graham Staines and his two children in Odisha in 2003 would remain a shock to humanity. In 2008, Odisha witnessed the worse spate of ‘communal violence’ ever faced by Christian community in post-independence India, including brutal murders and rapes, widespread destruction of churches and

property, and forcible conversions to Hinduism.⁸ This invites multiculturalism in order to establish peaceful coexistence among the various religious communities living in the state.

Language

Language is another essential component of Odishan culture. Language is a powerful instrument of cultural identity since it is the window through which individuals interface with the world. Odisha is a multilingual state. Among the various languages of Odisha, Odia, Hindi, English, Bengali are the main languages that are spoken in the state. Odisha is inhabited by people from diverse cultures and traditions who speak various languages. Also some linguistic variations within the Odia language has been seen like Ganjami (Ganjam and Koraput), Baleswari (Balasore), Laria (Sambalpur), Bhatri (Koraput), Chhattisgarhi (Chhattisgarh and neighboring areas of Odisha), Medinipuri (Midnapur district of West Bengal) and Sambalpuri (Sambalpur and other western districts). In Odisha, 82.23 percent of people speak Odia, 2.31 percent Telugu, 2.28 per cent Hindi, 1.4 per cent Bengali, and 1.42 per cent Urdu. The other 8 languages, spoken by more than 100,000 in each case, were all languages of the scheduled tribes: Santali (2.01), Kui (1.94), Ho (1.00), Munda (0.98), Kondh/Khond (0.74) Savara (0.71), Kisan (0.59), and Mundari (0.41).⁹ Though these language groups accept Odia as a dominant language, an intention is always there to include their language in national language or in educational curricula.

Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes

The Scheduled castes (SCs) and scheduled tribes (STs) constitute 17.13% and 22.85% of the total population of Odisha respectively as per 2011 census and there are 93 Scheduled Castes and 62 Scheduled Tribes constitute the more vulnerable weaker sections in Odisha.¹⁰ The Scheduled Castes or Dalits are the targets of victim by the upper castes and they continued to face discrimination and other human rights violation¹¹.

The scheduled tribes constituting 62 communities with distinct cultures are mostly concentrated in northern belt (comprises the districts of Mayurbhanj, Keonjhar, and Sundargarh) and southern belt southern, western and northern parts of the state. The livelihood system of tribal people has been based on shifting cultivation and collection of edible forest produce. Such a system started

declining by the worst kind of atrocities of the state violence which is coupled with corporate violence resulting in large scale displacement and destitution. They are the worst sufferer by the development projects constructed in areas dominated by the tribal [people] leading to displacement from their homeland (Mohanty 2011; Mishra 2002).

Gender Disparity

Gender disparity has been continuing in Odisha though a number of policies are there for their development. Assignment of individual use of land has resulted in discrimination against women. The traditional economic role and freedom of women hinder to participate in the new forms of decision making even though substantial space is created for them in Panchayats. Similarly, gender bias has also developed in the more traditional or mainstream educational system. Odisha represents a patriarchal society where women have no voice and thus continue to be the victims of atrocities, exploitation, discrimination and torture in all walk of their life because of lack of strong feminist movement.

These components constitute the core of cultural diversity in Odisha and these components are in some way assimilated within the dominant culture of the state. What stands a great problem for the state politics is the sub-regional movement led by the western highlanders. With myriads of distinct cultural patterns, varied life styles, this region represents a multicultural setting. Thus, the multicultural roots are primarily grounded in sub-regionalism. They challenge the homogeneous character of the state. This necessitates the Jagannath culture to go against multiculturalism that is rooted in sub-regionalism. The primordial identity and the relative socio-economic deprivation gave rise to sub-regionalism in Odisha.

MULTICULTURALISM MANIFESTED IN SUB-REGIONALISM

As already mentioned in the earlier part of the paper that the state has been broadly divided into different sub-regions and these sub-regions again differ in their cultural life pattern. While the coastal region forms the dominant Jagannath cult, the other regions lying in the western and northern part of the state constitute the tribal cultures and these cultures mostly inhabited by tribals that assimilate themselves into the dominant culture. The tribal cultures again are not

homogeneous and they differ in their pattern of dress, food habits, drinks, house, architecture, village organization and other social and economic characteristics.

The undivided districts of Kalahandi, Balangir and Koraput (popularly known as KBK districts) form another sub-region of western Odisha where incidence of poverty is the highest in the state. In fact, this region is perhaps the poorest region in the country where majority of the population are tribes. These ethnic people are mostly excluded from the developmental schemes of the state though a large number of developmental schemes and projects have been coming in their name from the central government of India as well as international agencies.

The local-outsider conflict is also another issue in Odisha. Strumpell (2011) in this regard, explaining citizen's rights in the public sector steel plant at Rourkela in Odisha, shows that how in Rourkela steel plant, policies designed to accommodate ethnic differences (giving employment to various communities from other parts of India) created differences and hampered the access of large sections of local population to these enhanced social and economic citizenship rights.

The culture of Sambalpur (being one of the western sub-regions) has its own unique identity. Several traits of the culture like Sambalpuri language, Sambalpuri dance, Sambalpuri songs or Sambalpuri sarees have held a national identity and it is now being admired by the people outside this region.

Sambalpur may rightly be called the most pluralistic society. Besides being the seat of Buddhism and Hinduism it is also home to other religions and communities such as Muslims, Christians and innumerable indigenous tribal communities. With this multi-racial, multi-cultural, multi-religious, multi-lingual and multi-communal composition Sambalpur has always chosen the path of social accommodation and social integration (Pasayat, 2004:83). It is this ambivalence of Sambalpur, which in the pre-colonial days led to resistance to Hindi as official language of Courts and Government Offices in Sambalpur, but in post-merger and post-colonial years led to awareness of the distinctiveness of the local dialect called 'sambalpuri' which is greatly different

from Odia, and of a regional culture different from that of the rest of the state, has given the people of western Odisha a feeling of having special status and heritage, and widespread feelings of deprivation in political and economic development.

SUB-REGIONALISM- COASTAL ODISHA VS WESTERN ODISHA

Geographically, the state of Odisha may be divided into two main regions viz. the coastal plains and the highland. These are the two distinct areas homogenous in certain defining criteria may be easily distinguished from each other. Under all India demarcation, these two regions come under the Eastern Coastal Plains and the Coastal Hills and Plateau regions respectively. The plains which stretch over about one fourth of the total geographical area of the state are the densely populated part and contain almost half of the total population of the state. It is a relatively developed part of the state as regards communication, literacy, education, urbanization and industrialization. Early spread of education in coastal plain during British rule has given rise to a middle class which dominated the administration in Government jobs so far as their overwhelming majority is concerned. The Congress leadership as well as that of left parties also comes from this region (Mishra 1985:424).

On the other hand, the highland which is about seventy five percent of the total geographical area of the state constitutes the backward areas. The percentage of literate and educated persons, urbanization and industrialization is low [as] compared with that of coastal plains. What is more significant in the politics is that the backward classes particularly the Scheduled Tribes are in overwhelming majority in the region and are concentrated in certain pockets. All the areas of this region formerly comprised the native states and the zamindaris [land lordship]. Further the northern districts of Sundargarh, Mayurbhanj and Keonjhar which are close to the Chota Nagpur plateau form a distinctive part of the highland. Apart from geographical feature there are some other characteristics of the region such as tribal and backward character of the population, mineral resources, spread of Christianity and rapid growth of industrialization and urbanization etc which distinguish this part from other parts of the state (Mishra 1984:219). The western highland having thickly populated by tribal population shows lower rate of literacy and thus supplies very less number of people to the state level. This low literacy along with urban-rural

and tribal-general disparity helped widening regional imbalances in the state as the educated and politically conscious coastal plains enjoy all benefits available in the state. We can also find visible disparity between the two regions in case of politics, administration, education, health, agriculture, communication, and industrial growth. In all these cases, the highland region remains the most underdeveloped part of the state.

The highland region on the whole is not politically dominant in the state. The leadership of the government of Odisha has been mostly enjoyed by the people belonging to the plains. Out of the ten persons who have acted as the Chief Minister of Odisha from 1952-1977, only two of them belong to the highland. Moreover, this region has very poor representation in the council of ministers of the state excepting in a few ministries formed during this period. In a competitive system all these conditions are very much favorable for the growth of regional rivalry in the state (Mishra1984:220).

Hence, the friction between the two regions has given rise to a series of unfortunate clashes and controversies mainly following the demands for constitutional safeguards to the highland, to bifurcate the state into Koshal and Utkal and the mobilization of student and non-student youths for pressing regional demands in the highland. The creation of Ganatantra Parishad (a regional political party in western Odisha) in the 1950s increased the spirit of regionalism in Odisha. The formation of *Paschim Orissa Sammukshya* (Western Odisha Popular Front) in 1973 consisting of all the non-Congress parties of the region was a major attempt in this direction. All non-Congress opposition parties supported this Front and they were all very critical of the political leadership of the coastal plain which resulted in uneven economic growth in the state.

HISTORICAL ROOTS OF SUB-REGIONALISM IN ODISHA

The articulation of regional consciousness in western Odisha originated from times of merger of princely states in Odisha. On the eve of the merger, the rulers of Patna, Kalahandi and Sonepur launched counter-mobilization to resist merger and to form a separate political identity of their own. However, the then premier H.K. Mahtab made frantic political efforts to amalgamate the states on linguistic basis. Meanwhile the Kalahandi State Legislative Assembly in its first sitting

on 12 August 1946 passed a resolution disapproving the amalgamation of Odisha states. At the conference of 14 December 1947 the Patna rulers pressed for joining of Odisha states with Eastern States Union. The Government of India, however, strongly opted for merging Odia-speaking states with Odisha. At a last resort then, the rulers of Patna, Kalahandi and Sonapur insisted on some form of local autonomy. They alleged that in the absence of local autonomy, power would be totally concentrated in the politically more advanced coastal people, i.e. the 'Katakias' and the Sambalpur states would be completely deprived (Chhada et al. 2011).

The conflict between Katakias (the people of coastal region) and Sambalpuris (the people of western region) led for the widespread of Mahakoshal movement during colonial rule. Later, Angul and Kandhmal were added to demand a Mahakoshal (i.e. greater Koshal) province. It may be noted here that the idea of Koshal province at this stage was based on Odia regional Identity and not on separate linguistic identity. However, with the merger of Odisha states, the hopes for Koshal province were buried. Immediately, anti-merger agitation broke out in some key areas of Sambalpur states. Pro-union and anti-corruption slogans were raised at the behest of the ruling chiefs. The Government of Odisha took precautionary measures to prevent any untoward happenings. It follows that the anti-merger resistance marked the beginning of regionalism in Odisha.

Close on the heels of the anti-merger resistance came from the agitation against the construction of the Hirakud dam. Local chiefs and land owning class of the western region played a vital role in the agitation. Foundation stone was laid at Hirakud in Sambalpur district. But at the same time it led to the submerging of land inhabited by poor persons of the western region. It also involves large-scale displacement and evacuation of people (Supakar, 1988).

Another significant factor for the origin of regionalism was the emergence of a political party called Ganatantra Parishad. The loss of power after integration of states motivated them to launch a regional political party. A few Congress dissidents and disgruntled Prajamandal activists joined hands with the rulers. Within a very short period of time, the party spread through the ex-states areas. Its rise further accentuated regional animosity. It filled the minds of the people with

the impression that Congress leadership was biased towards coastal Odisha. Displacement of people at the time of Rourkela Steel Plant construction in the district of Sundargarh (a district of Odisha) also contributed to the rise of regionalism in Western Odisha.

Along with these factors, there were also other factors responsible for the rise of regionalism. The rise in the price of rice in the western region by the coastal administrators during the period of merger caused acute economic hardship to western Odisha people. The sudden transformation of administrative machinery from the princely states to Odisha province also created considerable stress and strain among the local people of western region. The administrators who were sent by the provincial government, descended in the western region looked like conquerors in the region and instead of providing good administration to the people, each one of them seemed to feel that he was a little ‘Maharaja’ [or Emperor] there (Rao, 1965).

JUSTIFICATION FOR THE GROWTH OF SUB-REGIONALISM IN ODISHA

Post-merger Odisha reveals striking regional cleavages particularly between western Odisha and coastal Odisha. However, there is seemingly a natural difference between the two regions in terms of history, culture, and linguistic/dialectal affiliation. A number of factors may be attributed for the growth of sub-regionalism in Odisha.

Historically, coastal Odisha is associated with the Utkal-Kalinga empires and western Odisha is identified with the Koshal kingdom. The historical record which these empires/kingdoms left behind and the nostalgic sentiment they created in recent times contributed to the growth of sharp regional divide between these two regions (Chhada et al. 2011). In comparison to western Odisha, the history of coastal Odisha is well recognized. The glories of Utkal-Kalinga empires of the ancient and medieval times are fairly well-known. The kingdom of Kalinga existed as famous independent state even during the powerful Nanda and Maurya dynasties of the Magadh Empire. The historical cleavages between the two regions became more pronounced during the Mughal, Maratha and finally the British rule over Odisha (Chhada et al. 2011:21).

In case of irrigation, communication and education, the coastal plain was far developed than the other parts of the state. This was a remarkable contribution of the British rule to the coastal plains because this region first came under British rule in 1803. (Mishra 1984:61).

The culture of western Odisha differs significantly from that of the coastal plains. The western Odisha is said to be the home of tribal communities and their cultural tradition is quite different from that of coastal Odisha. The famous Sambalpuri dance and songs are different from the dance style of coastal Odisha. Some typical festivals like Nuakhai, Juntia, Puspuni, Dhanu Jatra, and Sital Sasthi are popularly celebrated in western Odisha but not celebrated in coastal Odisha. Similarly, Karama, Dalkhai, Rasarkeli, Jaiphula, Halia, Rangabati songs and dances are famous in western region. The form of worship is also different in these two regions. While Odisha government is continuously promoting Odissi dance in Odisha as well as outside the state, the Koshali dance (dance of western region) is confined only within western region without getting any priority from the state government. Hence, the distinct cultural identity of this region and state-led discrimination against its dance, music and arts are major factors of sub-regionalism in Odisha.

The people of western Odisha speak Sambalpuri as their mother tongue which is regarded as regional or colloquial variation of Odia language. Sambalpuri-Odia speech can be easily distinguished from coastal Odia speech. The difference is noticed at the lexical and phonological levels. The Odia language spoken by the coastal people is referred to as 'Kataki speech' by the western Odisha people and that of Sambalpuri speech as 'adivasi language' (tribal language) by coastal people (Chhada et al. 2011). The state government has discriminated Sambalpuri language and literature. For instance, the Odisha Sahitya Academy (apex literary organization of the state) promoted Odia language and literature of coastal dialect by various promotional schemes like providing cheap financing, publishing and instituting literary awards. But not a single book in Sambalpuri dialect has been financed by it. The important Sambalpuri literature like Sambalpuri Ramayana, Mahabharata, drama and story books has been published by the local publishers of this region.

The incidence of chronic poverty in western Odisha coupled with government failures in addressing its rising trends has been the most important factor for regional disparity in Odisha. Majority of the people in this region lacked minimum purchasing power to meet even square meals per day. In the backward districts of this region (Boudh, Sonepur, Nuapada and Kalahandi) more than 60% of the persons live below the poverty line. Recurrent droughts, inadequate irrigation, skewed land distribution, stringent forest laws denying forest rights to villagers, made this region a hunger belt in Odisha. The results have been a human-disaster including large-scale starvation deaths, child selling, out-migration and malnourishment serialized by various Indians as well as Indian newspapers (Pradhan et al. 2004:7).

Educational deprivation and less access to higher educational institutions stand as the major factor of sub-regionalism in Odisha. Educationally, western Odisha represents the most backward region not only in Odisha but also in India. In terms of literacy and formal educational levels, the western region is lagging far behind than that of coastal region. The poor performance of this region in primary and higher education lies basically at the low level of policy implementation for education particularly for this region as compared to the coastal region. Out of 11 major universities in the state, western Odisha has only one university (Sambalpur University, Sambalpur) where as ten universities are in coastal Odisha. Similar difference is also observed in technical and professional institutions between the two regions. As a result, people of this region experienced a strong sense of educational deprivation.

Deprivation in access to health services constitutes another factor for the growth of sub-regionalism in Odisha. In an underdeveloped region like western Odisha where majority of people live below the poverty line, public healthcare institutions play a crucial role for them. But it is very unfortunate part for the people of this region that they deprived from the basic health facilities. While the entire western region has only one Government medical college (Vir Surendra Sai Medical College), a number of hospitals with modern facilities are available in coastal Odisha. The Government of Odisha is adding more and more government medical colleges in coastal belt. This step-motherly attitude of the state government brought resentment to the people of highlanders.

Industrialization and environmental degradation stand as a major problem for the people of western Odisha. Most of the farmers in this region are marginal and uneducated having small land holdings. It is thus very easy for the industrialists to grab lands from the poor farmers showing the temptation of money. The highland region therefore has been undergoing rapid industrialization and this industrialization causes tribal displacement and environmental degradation. As for example, mining, tribal displacement and environmental degradation are caused by Vedanta industrial group in Kalahandi district but world class Vedanta University is being established in Puri rather than in Kalahandi.

We can also find visible disparity in infrastructural developments between the two regions. The western region is marked by poor infrastructures in case of road, rail, telecommunication service, banking, postal service, and the basic amenities like electricity and water whereas one can easily notice the well developed infrastructural facilities in coastal region. Similarly, the coastal region is far developed in irrigation facilities whereas the western highland being the drought prone region is less irrigated. This makes the life of the farmers of this region more deplorable and farmers' suicide thus frequently happened in this area.

The state politics in Odisha since the merger of princely states in 1948 to the present period stands perhaps as a major factor for the growth of sub-regionalism in the state. The representation of the western region in the successive council of ministers since 1952 has hardly been proportional to the population of the region. The administrative posts and leadership of the government is rarely availed of by the leaders of the highlands and thus making the region politically less influential in the state. The coastal region, on the other hand, dominates the politics as well as the administration of the state and has consistently enjoyed the office of the chief minister. It is well evident that out of 17 chief ministers Odisha has had since independence till its last election in 2014, only two persons (Rajendra Narayan Singh Deo from Balangir district and Hemananda Biswal from Sambalpur district) hold the post of chief ministers from western region.

FAILURE OF STATE GOVERNMENT AND EMERGENCE OF KOSHAL MOVEMENT

Despite various welfare schemes, projects and initiatives taken by the state government in its successive plans and policies, the western region continues to be a backward and underdeveloped region in the state. So, where does the problem really lie? It is, in fact, the narrow attitude of the politicians of the coastal plains and the governmental officials who never interested for the development of the highlands. The situation of underdevelopment along with the state-led discrimination made the people of western Odisha to demand a separate Koshal state for them.

Therefore, people of highland have selected the secessionist movement for a separate Koshal state on the basis of historical, social, cultural and economic considerations. From the very beginning of the formation of the province of Odisha during colonial rule, the Gadajarat states or princely states were not interested to join the Odisha province and the sub regional movement primarily started after the merger of princely states with Odisha. The states of Sambalpur region lead this movement and demanded for separate 'Koshal' or 'Hirakhand' kingdom. During this period, the emergence of Ganatantra Parishad- a regional political party fuelled the Koshal movement under the leadership of R. N. Singh Deo.

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, the regional movement in western Odisha took a significant turn for demanding a Koshal state under the new leadership of Balgopal Mishra, the former Member of Legislative Assembly. His "Koshal Mukti Rath"- highlighted the deplorable situation of Western Odisha. The tension and conflict again took its serious form after the formation of Koshal Kranti Dal (KKD) a regional political party in western Odisha in 2007 under the leadership of Pramod Mishra to fight against the internal colonialism of coastal region. Western Odisha, now, including the districts of Balangir, Bargarh, Boudh, Deogarh, Jharsuguda, Kalahandi, Nuapada, Sambalpur, Sonepur, Sundargarh, and Athamallik sub-division of Angul district, demanded a politically separate Koshal state from the existing state of Odisha.

The movement for Koshal state in western Odisha takes the violent form following the recent creation of Telangana as the 29th state of Indian Union. This separatist attitude of western Odisha stands as a severe challenge for the state politics in Odisha.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Taking into consideration the above problems, the present paper thus outlines some suggestive measures in order to make a balance in the continuing regional disparity between the two regions mainly arising out of socio-economic, political and cultural grounds.

- Poverty and unemployment stand as a major problem of western Odisha. The anti-poverty measures taken by the state government should be improved to address the rising poverty in the highland region.
- Due to lack of employment facilities in the highland region, most of the people migrated to other states in search of their daily lives. Hence, immediate steps should be taken to identify the migrant families and provide them with appropriate support measures.
- Public educational services need to be upgraded in the highland region. A large number of posts at primary, secondary and tertiary levels of education are lying vacant. So, these vacant posts need to be fulfilled first in order to provide the basic educational facilities to the people in the region. Other areas that need urgent attention are opening of new schools in the remote rural areas, constructing school building, improving library and laboratory facilities. The region is in dire need of additional universities. The government should also push the proposal for making Sambalpur University a central university. The state should also take steps to set up research institutes for developmental studies, physics, mathematics etc in the Koshal region which would definitely encourage research on Koshal problems.
- The available infrastructural facilities in the western region require immediate improvement. With full minerals and forest resources the region lacks from proper infrastructural facilities like roads, railways, postal, telecommunication, banking, irrigation, and power sector. Without improving such basic facilities, the state government cannot utilize the natural resources of the region and also cannot attract the private investment including foreign investment flows as they are related with the availability of infrastructures.
- There is the need of promoting Koshali language, literature and culture in the state. The overall cultural heritage of the state will enrich by promoting Koshali literature, dance, drama, festivals, ethnic food and clothes.

- The Western Odisha Development Council (WODC) is created basically for the development of ethnic communities living in the region. So, more autonomy should be provided to the Council to tackle the problems of different ethnic communities as well as the problems relating to regional disparity.
- The NGOs (Non-Governmental Organizations) and media sometimes highlight the issue of sub-regional disparity creating antagonistic feelings between the two regions. Thus, the NGOS and media should play a very positive and impartial role in promoting the essence of unity in diversity in the state.

CONCLUSION

However, what follows from the above discussion, it can be concluded that Odisha is a multicultural state in the sense of its cultural diversity defined in terms of religion, language, caste and tribe and perhaps the broader territorial division of the state into different sub-regions. Multiculturalism in Odisha has its roots in sub-regionalism and sub regional identity. The question of relative deprivation in socio-economic and political development gave rise to sub-regional consciousness and sub-regional identity among the people in western Odisha. Concentration of political power and socio-economic development in coastal plain leads to protest and separatism in the western part of the state. The idea of homogeneous state in terms of one nation, one language, and one religion no longer remained as a decisive phenomenon in a land like Odisha. The assimilation of diverse tribal cultures in the dominant coastal culture is now at stake with the challenge of politics of accommodation and recognition from the highland. The state government's repeated efforts through its policy measures have not been much effective in any significant extent in reducing the regional disparity between the two regions. This is because the coastal region has highly dominated the state politics in Odisha and thus sub-regionalism is directed against them. Sub-regionalism is, in fact, an offshoot of the politics of amalgamation, merger of princely states and dominance of alien business interests and commerce in non-coastal areas. As a whole, western Odisha has been neglected culturally, economically and in terms of political recruitment ever since its merger. This gave birth to the emergence of secessionist movement in western Odisha to form a separate Koshal state. Political leaders and social activists acting in the name of sub-nationalism and sub-regionalism draw on both

nationalist sentiments and material interests to generate a movement for a separate homeland. They mobilize the ‘imagined community’ in search of a homeland so far as their distinct Koshali language, Koshali culture and heritage are concerned which are quite different from that of coastal Odisha.. This movement in the name of sub-nationalism and sub-regionalism pose a grave challenge to the state politics in Odisha. Hence, an inclusive approach of accommodation and recognition to cultural diversity prevalent in western Odisha can only ensure the present state of Odisha to remain unified and to maintain its unity in diversity.

NOTES:

1. On 4 November 2011, the name Odisha was officially changed from Orissa to ‘Odisha’, and the Oriya language was changed to ‘Odia’ by the 113th Constitution Amendment Bill, 2011. Odisha, formerly known as Orissa, is an Indian state. It is the modern name of the ancient Kalinga, which was invaded by Mauryan Emperor Ashok in 261 BCE and the state of Orissa was established on 1 April, 1936, as a province in British India and consisted predominantly of Oriya speakers. It is also known as Utkal.
2. Paul R. Brass (1982), “Pluralism, Regionalism and Decentralizing tendencies in Contemporary Politics” in Wilson and D. Dalton (eds.), *The States of South Asia: Problems of National Integration*, London, C. Hurst; Reports of the States Reorganization Commission, New Delhi, Government of India, p.260.
3. Rasheeduddin Khan (1992), *Federal India- A Design for Change*, New Delhi, Vikas Publishing House, p.44.
4. See *Orissa Reference Annual, 2005*, Government of Orissa.
5. See *Census of India, 2011*.
6. Available from: http://orissadiary.com/orissa_profile/orissareligion.asp
7. See *Census of India, 2011*.
8. See *Christian Solidarity Worldwide: Voice for the Voiceless*, 2005.
9. L.K. Mohapatra (2005) tries to show how the different language groups living peacefully in Odisha.
10. *Census of India, 2011*.
11. See the reports of *Asian Centre for Human Rights*, New Delhi, 2009.

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