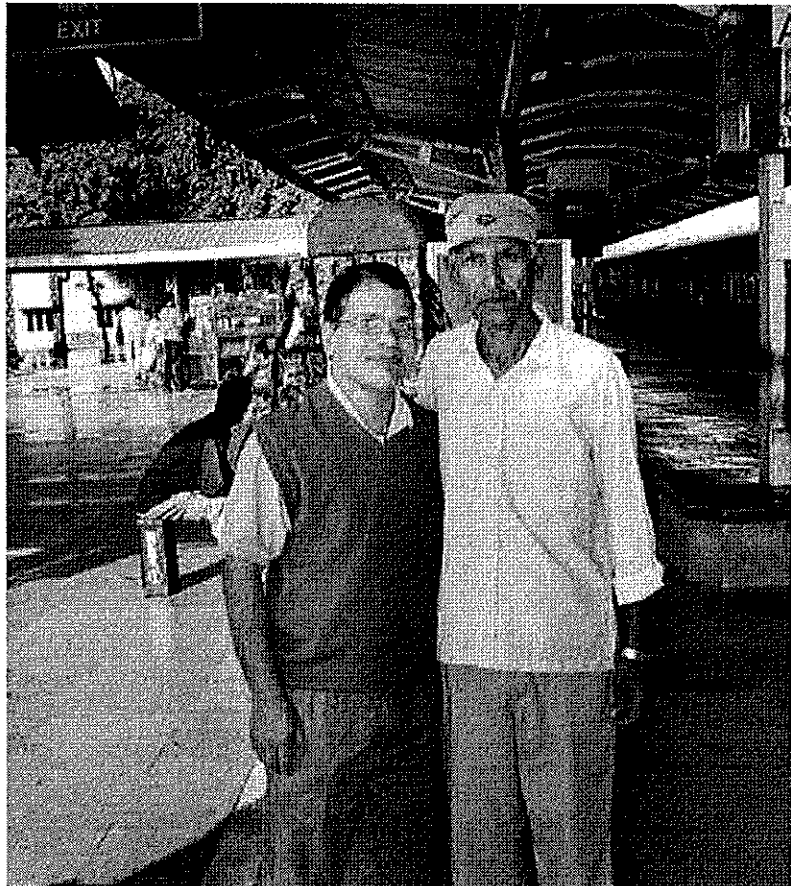


Regional Imbalance in Orissa: Media & Govt.'s Role

Regional imbalance was the natural corollary of colonial regime in India. Wherever and whatever little developmental activities were taken up during the British rule in India, they basically meant for colonial exploitation and surplus wealth creation to suffice the economic growth processes in England



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Regional Imbalance is a worldwide phenomenon. Region, however small may it be the imbalance/inequality is inherent to it. Region derived from the Latin word "regio" (from regere to rule) originating in 14th century is defined as an area of the world or of a country, especially one with a particular geographical, social etc. characteristics. In Scotland it is known as an administrative area. In Economic Geography and mainstream economics it is demarcated as an "area of Activity or interest".

Imbalance means a lack of balance or proportion, approximating to the English word inequality. Regional imbalance

is a logical conclusion of the basic premises of differences in natural resource endowment and disproportionate human resource development. Natural resources are not equitably distributed throughout the globe. Also different regions of the world are not blessed with equal level of human skills and endeavour i.e. equi-proportionate human resource skill and productivity. The first one i.e. natural resource endowment is a gift of nature which cannot be varied with best of human efforts but the differentiation in productivity and skill of human resources can be minimized with sincere human efforts.

In such a parlance we need

to engross ourselves in serious thinking about regional imbalance. Regional imbalance was the natural corollary of colonial regime in India. Wherever and whatever little developmental activities were taken up during the British rule in India, they basically meant for colonial exploitation and surplus wealth creation to suffice the economic growth processes in England. Accordingly we have inherited an economy with ample regional imbalance in 1947.

With the adoption of sovereign, socialist, democratic republic ideology as the fundamental principles in the constitution and launching of the planned developmental economic era in 1951, we had tried our best to minimize regional imbalance and with very little success. Whatever the policy planning be, the five decades of democratically elected governments gave us a launching pad for jumping into an era of 5% plus economic growth, living behind the historical past of the Hindu rate of growth (i.e. a growth rate of 3.5%).

All said and done we are no more a food importing country. Nor are we an exporter of primary goods (forest, mining and agri-products). We have achieved the self-sufficiency in food grains and have already become an exporting country of items which were hitherto reserved by the first world. To add to this dimension, the success of democracy (in terms of conducting free and fair elections at regular intervals) in four decades has put us in commanding heights of good track records of human rights and made us a Voice to reckon with in the global arena.

Coming to the context of imbalance, the wheels of change has taken a completely different direction after the introduction of New Economic Policy that is propelled by L.P.G. (liberalization, privatization, and globalization). After more than one and a half decade of the introduction of this policy, we are at a cross road to put forth before the masses the role of media in eradicating regional imbalance as we visualize



Photos: Pradip Kumar Nath & Hemprabha Chauthan

it today. In this write-up the text is confined to Orissa. Regional Imbalance and the Role of Media in the last one decade i.e. 1997-2007. Here emphasis has been laid to the role of media particularly the vernacular media in eradicating the regional imbalance.

Here media means particularly print media (i.e. the vernacular media, be it daily, weekly, monthly or an yearly that gives news, views and analysis and other language print media published from Orissa) and the electronic media

Thanks to the new Marketing Gurus' advice to segregate the readers/audience and capture the \s have started publishing their regional editions in places other than Cuttack and Bhubaneswar since a decade

(i.e. radio, Doordarshan and other news channels).

The Ghadai Committee Report:

The Ghadai Committee under the provision of "Article 371 of Constitution of India" for constitution of a Separate Development Board for selected areas in the state of Orissa submitted its report on 20th September, 1994 which gives a clear picture about the level of regional imbalance by taking the Composite Development Index with 11 indicators and serializing the Blocks from one to 314 in the ascending order development.

(i) Out of the 75 Blocks which were categorized as developed, 68 are in the Coastal Districts and five only in the Western part of Orissa, i.e. in the Koshalanchal.

(ii) Out of the total 82 Very Backward Blocks 32 lie in Koshalanchal and 4 only in the Coastal Districts of Orissa.

(iii) Out of a total 70 Developing Blocks 32 lie in Coastal Districts and 24 lie in Koshalanchal.

In summing up out of the 169 Very Backward and Backward Blocks of Orissa 56 (out of a total of 85 Blocks) lie in Koshalanchal

and 26 (out of a total of 126) only lie in Coastal districts of Orissa. In this context way back in 1994 only 26 Blocks are to be taken care of in the Coastal districts whereas 56 are to be taken care of out of 85.

When Regional Imbalance was prominently put forth in black and white, till date no vernacular media (particularly the mainstream Oriya dailies whose proprietors basically hail from Eastern Orissa) ever tried to make it public to the people. On 20th November, 2007 when the Regional Imbalance Enquiry Commission had come to Sambalpur and had the discussion and public hearing, the members of the commission were astonished to find the awareness about Ghadai Committee Report amongst the citizens of Sambalpur. As if it is assumed that people need not/should not know the committee findings. It is a fact that the print out of the committee's report were never duly circulated and when there was clamor about taking action in consonance with the committee's report the copies of the report were very secretly destroyed by the administrative system. Herein the media in Orissa could have taken up a proactive role in disseminating the information to the people about whose backwardness and the panacea for backwardness was written so prominently in this report. Of course small newspapers published from western Orissa viz "Koshala Prabaha", "Agnishikha" and the alternative journals like "Anvesha", "Bikalpa Bichara" have played a laudable role in disseminating the information of Ghadai Committee Report, but that too after so many years. The spatial incidence of migration of labourers, child labour exploitation, non-remunerative prices for agricultural and forest produce, incidence of lack of medical facilities and primary education, payment of lower wages as per the provision of law in informal sectors (viz. bidi makers, construction workers, collectors of non-timber forest produces from forest, house hold and domestic workers, rickshaw pullers, fruit vendors, shoe-shine boys etc.)

are reported only in a sensational manner by the vernacular media with the particular purpose of selling the newspapers. Herein the business motives are more prominent. A pinch of commitment for the development of the people to whom they are selling the newspapers and by whose money they are doing the business is lacking significantly in the work culture of the Media Baron Western part of the State.

The proprietors of vernacular media in Orissa have hardly envisaged that they have any significant role to play in eradication of regional imbalance. Due to many historical reasons the vernacular print media is owned and dominated by the people of Eastern Orissa particularly the Coastal Orissa. In such a milieu the people of Western Orissa and their miseries have never found its rightful place in vernacular Oriya dailies. The attempts by vernacular Oriya dailies published from Western Orissa have been noteworthy. But the reportage, views and analysis remain only as writings on the wall and people of Eastern Orissa pay a lip service to the same.

Culture and Media:

The negative reports about the folk culture of Western Orissa have dire consequences on the Life Genres (Geners die vie) of the people of this region of Orissa. The Sambalpur Lok Mahotsava may be taken as a case in point. The negative reportage of a newspaper owned by the family members of erstwhile Chief Minister (at present the Governor of Assam), in the first decade of Lok Mahotsava was very shocking. The negative reports of fault finding in every silly things of Lok Mahotsava went to such a great hype that the organisation of Lok Mahotsava at Sambalpur was portrayed as a sin committed by the Folk-culture loving people of Western Orissa. It propagated the idea that the end result of Lok Mahotsava is a big naught.

However the fact remains that the Sambalpur Lok Mahotsava took the lead and Organisers of

the initial years discovered the exact path and guided others for the Grand task of resurrection and preservation of the dying folk art forms of Western Orissa.

This is the pan - Indian conclusion as reported in other language newspapers. There was a feeling amongst the so called intellectuals of Eastern Orissa that Sambalpur Lok Mahotsava is uniting the entire intellegensia of Western Orissa and that unity must be dismembered. This body of knowledge that was coming out of a successful organization of Lok Mahotsava started becoming a challenge to the so called intellectual pursuits of the people of Eastern Orissa. The sinister device through which the organization of Lok Mahotsava was ruptured was witnessed in the last four years (2007-2010) by one and all. Herein the negative reports in the initial days of organization of Lok Mahotsava played a very crucial role which is quoted by the policy planners about the incapability of the people to organize even an affair of a few lakhs of rupees.

If media do not have an eye for appreciating something good, something cordial, something which encourages fraternity, brotherhood and peace, then it should not sow the seeds of jealousy, disbelief, anger, sorrow or morass amongst the masses. Some of the newspapers have made enough negative reporting, finding faults and lacunas in the organization of the Lok Mahotsava, like mismanagement in food supply, some minor defects in light or sound, some minor mistakes in anchoring, lack of parking facilities etc. These are petty issues before the grand aspiration and efforts to preserve the dying folk arts. However they were highlighted in bold to discourage the organizers giving slaps on their chicks and creating rifts amongst themselves. Some newspapers had the single point agenda of fault finding of all the cultural events organized in Western Orissa- be it the folklore of Nuakhai, Gundikhai, Karma, Puspuni, Sithal Sasthi,

Dhanu Yatra. The same applies to Veer Surendra Sai Sambalpuri Natak Pratijogita (One hour Drama competition) organized by Yuba Udayana. Can the same newspapers afford such negative reporting about Konark Festival or about Bali Yatra of Cuttack? If not why in such reporting about the cultural events of the Western part of Orissa, be it Dhanu Yatra or Sithal Sasthi or Nuakhai.

Which Indian can forget the kind of politicking that the entire government machinery of Orissa was engaged in for destroying the issues of Illustrated weekly (1986) wherein the personal life of the then Chief Minister was reported.

News, Views and Analysis:

It is a fact that the media (print, audio and visual) has been irrationally biased and tilted in favour of publishing/broadcasting/telecasting news, views and analysis of a particular region in Orissa (i.e. the region of high development, literacy and consciousness amongst the people about their rights). Specifically this is the region of Eastern Orissa comprising the districts of undivided Cuttack, Puri, Balasore and the Ganjam portion of the District of undivided Ganjam. This is the reason which is unduly and irrationally propagated as the Real Orissa at the cost of belittling the rest of the Regions in Orissa (constituting 20 districts at present). Out of this the Western part of Orissa comprising the undivided districts of Sambalpur, Kalahandi, Balangir, Sundergarh, Koraput and Phulbani get least importance in media (particularly the audio and visual).

Thanks to the new Marketing Gurus' advice to segregate the readers/audience and capture the market that the vernacular Oriya newspapers have started publishing their regional editions in places other than Cuttack and Bhubaneswar since a decade. But the most dangerous thing that they have done is segregating the readers of Orissa into different pockets and insulating them from knowing each other. For example - any news reporting on any specific

issue in Sambalpur (e.g Farmer's Suicide) is not known to readers in Rourkela. The audience/reader is fully satisfied in seeing the news of his locality in print, but is befooled in the worst manner since his news is not known to the rest of the world that too in his own state.

Propagation of Positive/ Development Related News:

It is a fact that achievements, excellence in any field/activity are unduly exaggerated if the occurrence of the activity is nearer to the capital. The child sale, any gang rape or cold blooded murder, ultra activities or any literary or cultural programmes get unduly highlighted if the place of occurrence is either Bhubaneswar or Cuttack. The Bhubaneswar and Cuttack centric media have played havoc in the development pursuit of the state.

Indigenous Knowledge System and Intellectual Property Rights:

When we live in a WTO (World Trade Organisation) regime one needs to understand the concept of TRIPS (Trade Related Intellectual Property Rights) and TRIMS (Trade Related Investment Measures). In the context of Indigenous Knowledge System, be it on any medical and therapeutic practices, or manufacturing of specific artifacts, or specific patterns of folk lore (folk dance, folk song, folk music instruments) or specific practices of the Socio-facts, these bear special relevance for patenting and their related economic benefits. For this the media has well defined and precise role in bringing these concepts into lime light and making the people aware to win in the international bargain for Intellectual Property Rights and gain over the specific benefits i.e. expected to emanate from acquiring the Patent Rights of specific items.

The Western Orissa Folk Music Instruments are a case in point. "When will we apply, if needed bargain for the Patent Rights of DHUNKEL (a musical instrument well entrenched in the folk dance form of Dalkhai and the cultural heritage of Dalkhai Kuthi) ponders

an eminent scholar and organizer of folk culture - Dr. Dileep Padhi.

Media and Role of Local Language:

Irrespective of the undue hype made over the Bhasha Andolan in the first decade of last century, it is a fact that Oriya has never been the medium of expression and the medium of literature in the Western part of Orissa. It is only after 1850 when the Oriya medium schools were established by the British and the very entry of Abadhana (teachers) into this part of Orissa that Oriya started gaining ground as the medium of expression of the so called elite and the formally educated. The absence of any standard Oriya literary work in this part of Orissa before 1850 amply proves that Oriya was never in vogue as a medium of expression of either the masses or the so called elites of the then region with its cultural affinity with "Maithili"/ "Chattisgadi"/ "Hindi" or the "Marathi" speaking people of the rest of India. The systematic process of Oriyanisation (imposition of Oriya language) could not make an average person after 150 years even to have a clear comprehension in Standard Oriya diction. In a 1972 paper in Economic & Political Weekly Dr. Neelakantha Rath has elaborated how "Shankar Kisam" paddy is understood as Mahadev Dhan or paddy for/of Lord Shiva. Another word Mayee Deba is understood as the month of May. Mayee Deba means the flattening of the mud in the paddy fields.

This is the kind of understanding the poor farmers have after listening the Krushi Khabar from All India Radio Sambalpur. It is only in 1985, thanks to the tiring efforts of Sri Abhay Kumar Padhee the All India Radio Sambalpur started broadcasting "Chasar hal" in Sambalpuri Kaushali language. Even today the programme meant for women "Ghar Sansar" is broadcast in chaste Oriya language with typical Oriya diction and pronunciation which is hardly understood by rural folk of this region. The

language-culture, literature, folk lores of Western and Southern Orissa are least reflected in the media. Till date, in the backdrop of a flourishing literary past in Sambalpuri/Kaushali language, no mainstream Oriya newspaper viz has ever taken care or interest in publishing something worthwhile in Sambalpuri Koshali language. Thanks to the efforts of local newspapers like "Agnishikha", "Koshala", "Koshala Prabaha", "Bidroha", "Paschimanchal Istahara", "Dakua", "Arji", "Ganabarta", "Heeraprastha" etc. and the journals like "Nisan", "Kahar", "Leti", "Bharni", "Sailta", "Nua Sakal", "Nuajharan", "Batua Bas" that the cultural ethos of this region get reflected in Sambalpuri Koshali language.

Language plays a very critical role in the process of development of a particular region. Language is only and the only way through which any individual has the gateway to the rest of the world. It is not only the most viable means to transact with the rest of the world but also the only medium through which any one can receive any information. And we are living in an era called "The Information Age" where information is every thing. Even Information is Wealth.

Herein the print media and its brethren- audio and visual have played a negative role in belittling the identity of the Indigenous People of this region. Prejudice runs very high in Orissa that the media can sustain itself and make profits if it goes in regional and local languages.

It is high time to hope that the print, audio and visual media will play a commendable role in the process of development and eradication of poverty.

Regional Imbalance – Government's Role:

Owing to the neglect of Western Orissa and reported agitation in the context of 1995 elections, the then Prime Minister committed in an election meeting that a Western Orissa Development Council (WODC) would be constituted to look after the problems of regional imbalance. In March 1995 election the Congress came to power and in November 1998 the WODC Bill became an Act. The body proved ineffective. In March 2000 BJD-BJP coalition formed the government. In accordance with their election manifesto the government replaced the old 1998 law by a new Act. But the new law passed hurriedly on 31st August,

also proved ineffective and did nothing for the progress of the western region.

Situation got worse as the office of WODC is situated in Bhubaneswar and is fully under the control of Eastern people. WODC became ineffective. The council does not possess any financial powers. As per the reports in Media, the WODC received a grant-in-aid of Rs. 30 crores during the financial year 2001-2002. With this meager amount how can regional imbalances be removed. Owing to the continuing neglect and regional imbalance in the western region the demand for a separate state is already going on in Western Orissa. Political observers have also attributed the recent poor show of the BJD in the Western Orissan region due to the regional imbalance which haunts the area till date.



NHRC - on KBK and Western Orissa:

National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) on Koraput, Bolangir and Kalahandi (KBK) and western Orissa is extremely concerned due to violation of human rights in this area always. The reports of NHRC in respect of Western Orissa have categorically suggested that a separate status to this region may be given to alleviate the standard of living of the people who are living below the poverty line and dieing for food. Starvation in this region is such that people are forced to sell their children. Due to starvation and malnutrition inhabitants of this region are suffering from many fatal diseases. For these reasons the infant and maternal mortality rate is highest in this area. Due to lack of food and hunger tribals are eating roots, leaves and branches of trees which cause a disease called Volvulus in the intestine. After getting numerous reports about this disease from the area, Government of Orissa tried to suppress it and issued instructions to the authorities that the disease should be called stomach disease and not Volvulus, as the word defined in the dictionary as an intestinal disease that is caused due to excessive intake of roots and leaves.

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