CHAPTER VII

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Professor Nabin Kumar Sahu is regarded as a notable historian of Odisha. He has contributed a lot to the historiography of Odisha. As a true and dedicated researcher, he wanted to have first hand information of historical facts and their critical analysis to present them in the form of a standard book and research article in research journals for the academic world. He also wrote those things in a lighter vein for the benefit of common readers. He succeeded to a great extent in meeting both the objectives. He studied history, taught history, visited and excavated archaeological sites, acquired proficiency in English, Odia, Sanskrit and Pali. For around four decades (1949-1985), he engaged himself in study and research and acquired a high place among the historians of modern Odisha.

If historiography is to be taken into account, Prof. Sahu was a dispassionate researcher. He followed an objective and scientific approach while writing history. He strictly adhered to the critical and comparative method for discerning truth. Like a judge he weighed evidences and on that basis he gave his final verdict. He avoided sentiments, prejudices, sympathy and preconceived notion. He was free from bias and never allowed religious, academic of personal views to influence his historical
conviction. As a man, Prof. Sahu projected his independent, fearless and dispassionate attitude towards the writing of history of Odisha. His keen eyes helped him to find out the actual fact of our past what helped us to get a clear cut picture of political, geographical, cultural and religious history of Odisha in true sense of the term.

After going through his works, it is felt that he followed the modern style of writing history. His writing style is simple, easy, lucid, natural and appealing. He presented the facts accurately where his sources led. He appreciated the Western technique of shifting the historical data into writing and followed the style of Hunter, Sterling and Beams who wrote the history of Odisha. Prof. Sahu avoided the fictions and legends in his writings. Although, many times, he presented the events dramatically, he never forgot its historical value.

Prof. Sahu tried to have information from various sources. He had realized and recognized the importance of original sources and gave his attention to study them carefully. From his writings, it has been discerned that he mostly used the primary sources like vedic, epical, Buddhist, Jaina, other Sanskrit literature, accounts of foreign travelers, epigraphical, numismatic, official records and correspondences, contemporary documents, other archival materials for proper investigation of facts. He has decorated his works with the use of these sources profusely. He
has never tried to hide anything, sweet or sour, but presented the fact in its accurate from duly embedded with sources.

As an archaeologist of repute, Prof. Sahu contributed a lot for the growth of archaeological studies in Odisha. Having keen interest in the subject, he had visited the excavated site of Kausambi and participated in the Sisupalgarh excavation in 1948. He personally conducted excavations of Asurgarh, Ganiapali, Manamunda, Maraguda Valley and Trisul. Prof. Sahu personally collected artifacts from different sites and used them in his writings after proper investigation. He did not follow the materials blindly but examined and re-examined them with extreme care and objectivity. Thereafter he drew the conclusions in accordance with the canons of modern methodology.

A great hurdle came on his way when he attempted to identify the epical Lanka with modern Sonepur in the Bolangir district of Odisha. Although, historians largely accept Lanka of the *Ramayana* as Ceylone but there is no unanimity among them on this issue. Taking the inscriptional sources into account and the reference therein as ‘Paschima Lanka’, Prof. Sahu had invited Prof. H.D. Sankalia of the Deccan College of Pune to take part in the excavation. Although, it was an exercise in futility and it was a much talked affair among the intellectuals of the country, still then Prof. Sahu remained cool. He had to accept the popular verdict of the archaeologists and historians of the country that Sonepur was not the Lanka of the Epic Villain Ravana, still then
he never lamented for his deed. He had confessed before many that he had consulted the sources and accepted the fact where the result of the excavation led. However, his brilliance as an archaeologist has been reflected in many places. Since he was an archaeologist of repute and had a vast experience in the study of the antiquities, he could admirably handled the chapters on ancient Odishan history with rare distinction. While reconstructing the history of ancient Odisha, he almost utilized all the archaeological sources discovered from various excavations in Odisha as well as India. The way he has reconstructed the stone age culture in Odisha and cited the protohistoric metal celts and megaliths are simply marvelous. That became an eye-opener for other archaeologists to do more work in this direction.

Like other eminent historians of the country during his time, Prof. Sahu had analysed the immense influence of physical features in shaping the history of a land. His pioneering research on historical geography enabled him to give vivid description on Kalinga, Odra, Utkala, Kongoda, Tosali and other geographical divisions of ancient Odisha. He had vividly analysed the influence of historical geography in the growth of these Kingdoms including the Mandala states in ancient Odisha. It was a rare contribution of Prof. Sahu in the direction of the reconstruction of the history of ancient Odisha what he has reflected in his *Utkal University History of Odisha*, Vol.1.
The other volumes of the Utkal University assigned to Prof. Sahu did not see the light of the day. Although Kalinga under Asoka and Kharavela got ample coverage in that book but after the Matharas, the rule of their contemporaries became sketchy. Similarly, the non-availability of his book titled *New Aspects of History of Orissa* prevented scholars to know more about the cultural history of Odisha. In fact, it is very unfortunate because, the Sambalpur University, which had published this book of Prof. Sahu is not found now in the University Library.

Through his book *Odia Jatira Itihasa*, Prof. Sahu has tried to give the socio-politico-economic and religious history of ancient Odisha in ancient period. Although, it was largely meant for the common readers, Prof. Sahu had taken care to reflect some sources here and there. A chapter in that concerning Odisha's maritime trade with outside world consumes more pages but description on that particular aspect is very sketchy.

Prof. N.K. Sahu's contribution to the religious history in noteworthy so far as his monumental work *Buddhism in Orissa* is concerned. For this work he had to depend chiefly upon the literary evidence like Jaina and Buddhist literature which consist of the genealogies of the dynasties, traditions, myths and legends. He also used the old Buddhist monuments in Odisha and the accounts of the foreign travelers like Hiuen-Tsang, Taranath and other religious pilgrims. Although Prof. Sahu was a great scholar on Buddhism yet he lacked knowledge on other
religious faiths which flourished in Odisha. It becomes apparent when one goes through his book *Odia Jatira Itihasa* so far as description on religion is concerned. Similarly, he has failed to give a proper description on different dynasties of ancient Odisha on that book. Of course, that problem has been overcome because in the publication of the text book titled *History of Orissa* authored by N.K.Sahu, P.K.Mishra and J.K.Sahu.

The daring nature of Prof.Sahu was admitted when he contributed to the history of modern Odisha. His *Veer Surendra Sai* is a master piece in depicting the protracted struggle of this unchallangable hero with the British authorities of Odisha, in general and Sambalpur, in particular. Prof. Sahu has left no stone unturned in depicting the life and struggle of this great son of Odishan soil. Till to-day, no second book on *Veer Surendra Sai* has met the height what Prof.Sahu had prepared by that time.

Another landmark in the history of modern Odisha was *Police Administration in Orissa* which sprang up from the prolific pen of Prof. Sahu. It gave a vivid picture of the police system of the entire country in ancient, medieval and modern period. He has perfectly pointed out the evolution of police administration in Odisha in the pre-independence and post-independence era. This book is even today referred to the Police trainees as the first book they should refer. In fact, the contribution of Prof. Sahu to the modern history of Odisha is praise worthy.
Prof. Sahu was also in charge of the preparation of Orissa State Gazetteer and he contributed two well-knit chapters to it titled 'Origin of the name of Orissa' and 'History of Orissa from Early Period to 1568'. He was also in charge of the preparation of District Gazetteers of Orissa concerning Koraput, Mayurbhanj, Bolangir, Sambalpur, Puri and Kalahandi where he gave the history of those districts and for the Bolangir, he wrote places of interest in that district. Till to-day no revision to the statements of Prof. Sahu is made.

This reflects his rare objectivity. Prof. Sahu was a brilliant scholar whose studies in depth astounded his colleagues and students. He has a pragmatic and liberal outlook which could appreciate new viewpoints. He paid special attention to the emergence of a generation of scholars to take up the study and research of Odisha history particularly of western Odisha.

Prof. Sahu has left a number of students as his successor. He not only supervised scholars on history but also guided students of other subjects who proved their ability in different fields. He was an inspiration for his students and scholars and always encouraged them to undertake research on new horizons of history and culture. His style of writing inspired his students, scholars and to many historians. The students of Prof. Sahu who established themselves in the field of history are:

Sarat Chandra Behera, who was the first Ph.D. scholar of Prof. Sahu and by his able and efficient supervision, Sri Behera
became the author of "Rise and Fall of the Sailodbhavas" published from Calcutta in 1982. When Prof. Sahu became the Vice-Chancellor of Sambalpur University, Sri Behera became the Professor and Head of the Department of History in 1989. He had a love for the study of inscriptions and religious history. Some of his articles were published in *Indian Historical Quarterly, Orissa Historical Research Journal* and *New Aspects of History of Orissa*. He propounded new theory on the homeland of Vishnu Sharma, the author of Panchatantra. In the *New Aspects of History of Orissa* he presented a coherent picture of the growth of Vaisnavism in South Kosala.

Jajna Kumar Sahu, his own brother, was the second Ph.D. scholar of Prof. Sahu and he completed his thesis titled *Chauhan Rule in Orissa*. He was a celebrated historian of modern Odisha and a proficient writer both in English and Odia. His work *History of Orissa* (in Odia) became very popular among the students of Odisha. He was also the co-author of the book titled *History of Orissa*. His *Historical Geography of Orissa* is a great scholarly work which was published in 1997.

Another student of Prof. Sahu was Chitta Ranjan Mishra, who completed his education in Patna University and joined the History Department of Sambalpur University as a Lecturer in 1976 A.D. Under the supervision of Prof. Sahu he has done his Ph.D. on "Freedom Movement in Sambalpur" which was published by B.R.Publications, New Delhi in 1989. For his dissertation he
collected source materials from Orissa State Archives, Bhubaneswar and the University Library but the work is the outcome of secondary sources. C.R.Mishra became Professor of Archaeology in 1988.

Sadhu Charan Panda was also a student and a scholar of Prof.Sahu, who has now established himself as an archaeologist and a historian. He was an associate of Prof.Sahu in the archaeological excavation of Maraguda Valley. He was the Professor and Head of the P.G.Department of History of Sambalpur University. Then he retired as Vice-Chancellor of Utkal University of Culture, Bhubaneswar.

Similarly, P.K.Mishra was another student and scholar of Prof.Sahu who retired from Sambalpur University as Professor and Head, Department of History and then he was the Vice-Chancellor of North Odisha University. He is a great scholar and an author of many research books. Examples can be multiplied.

The present research work suffers from the following limitations.

1. All the research articles of Prof.N.K.Sahu are not available now. This has created a great hindrance on the path of research preventing the scholar to be more objective on Prof.Sahu. Similarly, his manuscripts on other volumes of the *Utkal University History of Orissa, New Aspects of History of Orissa, Odis Jatira Itihasa* (other volumes) etc. are not available. That is why his idea regarding the
political-social-economical religious and cultural history of Odisha remain unknown.

2. The palm-leaf manuscripts collected by Prof. Sahu and preserved in the N.K. Sahu Museum in the P.G. Department of History are difficult to access because of the limited knowledge of the researcher to have an access to these sources. That is why the theme of those manuscripts and their relevance for historical study have not been reflected by the scholar.

3. Although, the reports of Prof. Sahu on different archaeological sites are available, but the artifacts are not available. It would have given a comprehensive knowledge to the scholar about different materials collected by the learned Professor from different archaeological sites.

4. It is unfortunate that one of the servicing only brothers of Prof. Sahu named Gobinda Sahu could not be contacted because he is remaining outside Odisha. His another brother K.C. Sahu who is staying at Mumbai, outside Odisha could not be contacted. Had they been contacted some more information would have gathered from them. No diary or article or even photographs was available in his home.

The present study is relevant in every sense of the term. It will go a long way in contributing a lot to the historiography of Odisha. Other research scholars will be inspired by this work and they will be inspired to undertake research on other historians of
Odisha. Besides, whatever little work has been done on Prof. Sahu, it will expand the horizon of scholars on the scholastic achievement of a great historian of Odisha. That is why the present research work retains its importance.

Prof. N.K. Sahu has impressed the whole scholarly world with his erudition, richness of experience, comprehensiveness of outlook and by his free and frank expression of views. Among the historians of Post-independent Odisha, Prof. Sahu ranks high. All his works are scholarly and have been appreciated by others. His analysis of topics in association with sources has impressed the scholars. If adherence to truth, true judgement, and firmness in expression be the hallmark of a historian, then Prof. N.K. Sahu was a historian par excellence. He has left his indelible marks as a historian through his writings which still illumines his name in the domain of Odishan historiography.

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