LOYALTY TO THE MONARCH: POETRY AND POLITICAL MODERNITY IN COLONIAL ODISHA

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Look at this our English-king,
The trumpet of their fame sounds all over the world;
Do remember constantly in your heart,
The comfort and ease in which they maintain us.

So many comforts and facilities they have arranged for us,
And thereby have rendered their royal title fruitful;
The printed word you read o children,
That is an invention of the English.

Since they brought the printing press to this country,
With ease so many books become available;
The library of literature is being gradually nourished,
Mother tongue gets to wear new necklaces.

Chintamani Mohanty, *Rajabhakti*, 1910.[1]

Chintamani Mohanty was a well-known Odia language poet in the first two decades of the twentieth-century.[2] He wrote prolifically. A collection of his entire oeuvre was published in three thousand one hundred and fifteen double crown pages.[3] He also won significant contemporary recognition. The colonial state conferred medals on him on the occasions of George V's silver jubilee as well as George VI's coronation. The Andhra University bestowed on him the title *kavishekhar*.[4] He was also the president of one of the prestigious annual conferences of the *Utkal Sahitya Samaj*.[5]

At the height of his fame, Chintamani composed a long lyric poem, a *giti-kavya*, titled *Rajabhakti*. It was published in 1910. In a hundred quatrains, it sought to teach school going children the value of appropriate devotion for the king. It is not possible to reconstruct the particular context in which the poem was composed. Neither is

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it possible reconstitute the specific setting in which it was first read or sung aloud. What is possible to argue is that the literary genre and the political sentiment, *kavya* and monarchical loyalty, were well matched. And, Chintamani mobilized the genre and the sentiment so as to offer a response to what scholars have described as the crisis of Indian liberalism in early twentieth-century.

Scholars have rightly argued that Indian liberals began to pose "the problem of empire as a problem of alien rule" in the closing years of the nineteenth-century.[6] They saw the alien nature of the imperial regime as the source of India's economic poverty and socio-political under development. They first sought for a remedy within the political framework of the empire and demanded more native representation in imperial government. However, the British government turned a deaf ear. It did not live up to its own liberal promises which had been offered on a number of previous occasions, most notably in Queen Victoria's Proclamation. Thus rebuffed, the Indian liberals began to develop an anti-imperial line of argument. They sought to imagine a liberal project for India that moved beyond the limits of imperial rule. The partition of Bengal and the attendant anti-colonial mass movements unfurled radical notions of self-rule. Premised on a "rejection of imperial cultural and political authority," the ideology of *swadeshi* "advocated a return to the indigenous and the vernacular."[7] Anti-colonial nationalists searched for "vernacular political forms."[8] In ancient Indian literary traditions they looked for "precedents for democratic practices and evidence of republican institutions, from elected kingships and aristocracies to forms of voting in religious orders."[9] They also turned to study native institutions of governance such as "caste bodies, [and] village societies."[10] The idea was to see if indigenous political forms could be revitalized and reformulated so as to imagine "a new popular, decentralised, post-imperial polity."[11]

Chintamani's *Rajabhakti* responds to this political moment. Our discussion of it hopes to contribute two specific considerations to the arguments described above. These concern those of "genre" and "location." I suggest that the genre in which the search for vernacular political forms was carried out helped shape the arguments formulated. Scholars have taken into account professional academic treatises, and have shown how the search for the vernacular and indigenous was tied to a search for pluralist visions of post imperial polity.[12] Engagement with the vernacular political form often went beyond the realm of academic treatises and found a home in the space of ephemeral literature. Produced in a range of non-academic

genres, ephemeral literature unfurled alternative engagements with the vernacular. *Rajabhakti* helps us to engage with ephemeral political visions of the vernacular and indigenous.

Closely related to the questions of genre are considerations of location. I suggest that the discursive and material location of an author shaped the nature of his engagement with the vernacular political forms. Scholars have taken into account authors who are situated in formal academic spaces.[13] Arguments about the nature of the modern state found purchase in these formal spaces. Engagement with the vernacular political forms often unfolded in more plebian spaces—for instance, in the realm of small journalism prevalent in provincial spaces away from the colonial centers of learning. Here discussions were often less philosophical and more experiential in nature. *Rajabhakti* offers a possibility to study the latter variety of political conversation in colonial India.

Chintamani espouses a two-fold poetic task in *Rajabhakti*. First, he sets out to represent and eulogize a vernacular political form, a just Indic monarch who follows *rajadharma*. The poem suggests that loyalty to the just monarch is a virtuous and desirable sentiment. In the same gesture it presents *rajabhakti* as a conditional sentiment. Second, he seeks to represent British imperial rule as an occasionally erring but nevertheless the best available version of this vernacular political form. The poem presents *rajabhakti* as a *swadeshi* sentiment that can transcend racial and religious boundaries, and encourages children to extend this sentiment to the "English king" since the latter follows *rajadharma*. At thesame time, it indirectly invites the colonial regime to reflect on its own errant conduct.

The narrator's imagination is not poised to move beyond the framework of the empire—he does not set out to imagine a post-imperial polity. Rather, he invokes a pre-imperial political ideal and subjects the empire to a judgment. In the process he seeks to vernacularize imperial rule itself, and make it available for the experience of its readers. In the process, he offers a critical commentary as it were on both the liberal critique of imperial rule as alien, and the popular anti-colonial agitation that the partition of Bengal unleashed. He articulates an ambivalent relationship with both.

A key element in Chintamani'spolitical-aesthetic is the figure of the *praja*. Literally, the term means progeny. In Odia political language, it conveyed the sense of a subject or a client who stood in relation to a patron king.[14] In the poem, the *praja* stands witness to the conduct of the monarch. He offers acclamation as well as

judgment. This vernacular *praja*—the one who acclaims as well as judges—is one among the other prominent figures who populated the political stage in India at the time, namely the liberal-critic and the anti-colonial *satyagrahi*. The poet constructs this figure of the *praja* and invites his intended reader, school-going children, to become ideal *praja*.

1. Locating Chintamani: Vernacular Printing Cultures of Ganjam

Chintamani's political-aesthetic emerged from and acquired particular relevance in the life world he inhabited. Two governing concerns animated this world, printing culture and Odia language-nationalism. For most parts of his career, he worked as a manager of printing presses established by princely states of colonial Odisha. He edited periodicals, tracts and books these royal presses published. In addition, he was fairly active in various urban civic patriotic societies that worked for the unification of Odia speaking territories under one administrative division. These regions were at the time governed separately under the Presidencies of Bengal and Madras and Central Provinces. Unsurprisingly, his imaginary revolved round print and mother tongue. And, patronage of Odia royal houses was vital to both.

We can borrow the term "Vernacular print capitalism" to delineate the printing culture that Chintamani was a part of.[15] He was geographically located in the Ganjam region of Madras Presidency, particularly in its urban centers of Berhampur and Ichhapuram. Both Odia and Telugu speaking people inhabited these towns. In this border and bilingual region, print referred to artisanal production on a limited scale that had a restricted commercial character, and was largely supported by patronage and philanthropy. It did not mean a large-scale mechanized industry that relied on an ever-expanding market. Chintamani began his work as an editor in the Sri Saraswati Press of Berhampur. R. Gunniah Sastri, an independent Telugu print entrepreneur earned a profit of five thousand rupees by printing an exegesis in Odia and Telugu on a government manual for police officers. He used the profit to buy a press and build a two-storied house for the printing establishment. The Sri Saraswati Press was thus born. The entrepreneur heavily relied on the patronage of the local Odia landed elite to run the press and finance the Odia periodical it brought out, *Hitabadini*. His most generous patron, the king of Badakhemandi sent six bullock-cart-loads of rice and three

hundred rupees each year to the press. Only a small number of the workers at the press were full time employees or "*karmachari.*" The larger section worked as "*ummedwars*" or apprentices. The latter did not receive regular salaries. On the completion of their training, they could expect to earn salaries between two and two and a half rupees. By local standards, the press made a respectable earning from printing text-books in Odia for colonial schools in the region. The Telugu print entrepreneur could speak but not write in Odia. He paid others to write Odia text-books for him. At the higher end, his client-authors included famous Odia novelists and poets of the time such as Fakir Mohan Senapati. At the lower end, he regularly paid a local native Christian author one rupee for drinks for one school text-book. The text-books were printed under the entrepreneur's name. After joining the press, Chintamani often collaborated on these text-book projects for one-fourth share in the profit. Under his editorship, the circulation of the periodical *Hitabadini* went up from a hundred and fifty printed copies to five hundred.[16]

Chintamani worked much longer for presses which were fully owned by royal houses. As scholars have noted, progressive native princes in colonial India often extended their patronage to a range of constituencies. As patrons, they often helped create "cultural idioms that shaped regional and national identities" and "public arenas for popular imagination of a national community."[17] Print helped in both and served as "modern means of legitimating their authority and demonstrating princely dharma…."[18] The king of Surangi in Ganjam was one such progressive ruler. He owned the Chandrachudamni press and financed an Odia language weekly, the *Utkalvasi.* Chintamani edited the periodical, and managed the press. Located at Ichhapuram, another market town in present day Andhra Pradesh, the press had a small-scale operation. It employed a clerk and a compositor for a salary of eight and seven rupees respectively. Besides, it employed two more menial workers at the rate of three and two and a half rupees. The press could print in Odia, Telugu and English. It was housed in a building that had three rooms, one for the king when he visited the town and two for the press and equipment. It printed Odia verse compositions by the king and the queen. Various legal forms for the state were brought out. It also did some outsourced printing such as advertisements for a local Hindi theatre troupe. The king also founded a society, "UtkalvasiSamaj," whose public meetings were held in the press building, and which argued for the unification of the Odia speaking territories. In his capacity as the editor of the periodical as well as

the secretary of the society, Chintamani helped the king cultivate a progressive intellectual circle in the court. The king himself learned to write poetry in a modern style. He established schools for girls. He became the first among the Odia royals to travel to Britain. On his return, he commissioned a tract "SamudraJatra" which argued in favor of travel across the seas as a means to enhance knowledge. The tract countered the conservative position which denounced travel abroad. Some of the king's own prose work found approval from the education department of the colonial state and were nominated as prize library works.[19]

As an editor of these periodicals, Chintamani often relied on what has been termed "an imperial commons," that is, a common collection of textual resources, which inhabitants of the British empire could draw upon.[20] Usually, "the right to the resource" was "not contingent on obtaining the permission of anyone…."[21] Often access to the commons was "uneven and dependent on wealth, location, levels of literacy" as well as contingent colonial practices of censorship.[22] For Chintamani, this imperial commons had a territorial boundary in the sense that the resources he had access to were in circulation mostly in colonial Bengal and Madras presidencies. In addition, he had a very limited English and often relied on translation from Indian languages other than Odia. Consider for instance how he describes his role as an editor of the *Hitabadini*: "I procured copies of all Odia periodicals on a principle of mutual exchange. Also procured some of the famous Bengali periodicals by paying money. Sastri visited the [town] club and copied necessary materials from Telugu and English periodicals"[23] Or for instance how he edited the monthly *SwadeshaLaxmi*, a periodical on modern agriculture and commerce, "There are many Telugu periodicals on technical subjects. Sashtri read them all and became the Vyasadeva, and I assumed the role of Ganesha…"[24] (Insert Fig. 3 here) Thus, as an editor and journalist Chintamani relied on an imperial commons and his access to this common pool of resources was characterized by regional and linguistic constraints. The political language of *rajabhakti* which his poetry formulates, took shape in this world of vernacular print capitalism that was marked by royal patronage and limited access to the imperial commons.

An influential line of argument about vernacular cultures of literary production in Madras Presidency suggests that traditional forms of patronage provided by royal houses and *zamindar*s came to be replaced by new forms of collective patronage—vernacular public and consumer market—in the course of the long nineteenth-

century. In the case of Telugu, a "crisis of patronage" as regards literary production took place with the advent of colonial rule.[25] Pre-colonial small dynastic Indian courts were no longer available to patronize literary production. The colonial state did not provide patronage like the older rulers. In the absence of old style patrons, literary production looked for new forms of patronage. Printing press provided an opportunity to appeal to "multiple potential patrons and readers."[26] The new patrons required a new "organizational foundation."[27] Language as mother tongue began to play this role and a vernacular language-speaking people came to be imagined as a collective form of patronage.[28] In the case of Tamil, "the age of patronage was effectively over" by the close of the nineteenth-century.[29] A middle-class consumer public formed around the bourgeois genre of novel slowly displaced it.[30]

The history of modern literary production in Odisha is not necessarily a story of gradual replacement of the traditional forms of elite patronage by a middle-class literary public, market and taste. It is more a story of a coalition between the two and mutual evolution. Royal patronage was essential for the foundation of the *Utkal Sahitya Samaj*, the most influential Odia literary society in the first half of the twentieth-century.[31] The most canonical names in modern Odia poetry received patronage of the royal houses. Radhanath Ray acknowledged time and again the vital support he received from the royal house of Bamanda.[32] Madhusudan Rao wrote a verse eulogy for Bamanda.[33] The most ambitious publication project in Odia in the first half of the century was Gopal Praharaj'squadrilingual lexicon of the Odia language that ran up to nine thousand two hundred and fifty royal quarto pages in seven volumes. The royal houses and the colonial government defrayed a lion's share of the expenses which were totaled at one lakh and fifty thousand rupees.[34] The kings of Patna and Kalahandi funded SurendraMohanty's weekly *Janata*, which disseminated M. N. Roy's Radical Humanist political opinion in Odia.[35] By and large, the coalition between the landed elite and segments of middle-class intelligentsia remained in place till the middle-decades of the twentieth-century. In this sense, Chintamani's literary career was representative of the times.

2. Chintamani and Modern Odia *Kavya*

Chintamani's reputation as a poet rests on the *kavya*s he produced largely between 1901 and 1920. Some of these were descriptions of the beauty of nature. Others were based on stories from the *purana*s. Yet others were historical in their orientation. Three specific features

of his engagement with the genre are particularly relevant to our present discussion. First, as a literary genre, *kavya*went out of fashion in Odia literary circles in the Interwar years, and Chintamani keenly felt the loss.He worked on his autobiography between 1924 and 1940. In one of its passages, the poet reflected on the declining fortunes of *kavya* and the changing tastes of the times: "From the trends in modern literature, it seems that Oriya literature will now be formed in a different mould and will loose its originality. *Kavya*is our national ideal. However composition of *kavya* is now gradually coming to a close. After a few years, our Oriya descendants will look up the meaning of *kavya* in lexicons. Only short poems and short stories run the literary market now."[36]Second, Chintamani's reputation as a poet declined sharply.Literary historians treat himas a weak imitator of other more prominent practitioners of the *kavya* genre in modern Odia. His lack of higher education, they argue, accounts for his inclination for imitation.Noted literary criticNatabarSamantaray, for instance, passes a sweepingly unflattering judgment: "In terms of its sheer volume, ChintamaniMohanty's collected works is a veritable wonder in modern Odia literature; the poverty of his themes is more worthy of pity and the poverty of his creativity is even more painful."[37]By and large, the poet is now a forgotten figure. Third, the poem *Rajadharma* occupies a "minor" position within Chintamani's oeuvre. The poem seeks to tie the genre of *kavya* to a "popular" pedagogical project. As mentioned earlier, school going children are the implied readers—the poem directly addresses itself to "*shishu*" and "*balake.*" Having said that, the reach of the pedagogical project went beyond children. Priced at "2 *anna*s," the poem was published in a tract-form that aimed at a widercirculation. Chintamani's mobilization of the "high" genre of *kavya* towards a "popular" project of political pedagogy accounts for the minor status of *Rajabhakti.*So what did this weak but prolific emulator of more elevated artists of the time sought to accomplish in a genre that soon suffered a decline in its fortunes? What did he aim to achieve by mobilizing the *kavya*genre for the political education of children and the people at large? Is it possible to locate in his poetry—precisely because it is weak in its creative genius, because it is in a declining genre, and because it aims at popular circulation—a political language that was fairly active in the background in the early decades of the century?

3. Monarchical loyalty: a conditional sentiment

The poem *Rajabhakti* can broadly be divided into three segments. The first offers a generic description of an ideal Indic king who is

"*dharmavatara*" or righteousness incarnate, who is committed to "*janakalyana*" or the welfare of the subject people. The description broadly follows conventional features of *rajadharma*.[38] The king owns wealth. And, unlike an ordinary individual who hoards money for his own self, the king accumulates so as to spend for the subject people and country. He establishes schools and hospitals, temples and shelters. He constructs roads, builds bridges and facilitates commerce. He digs water tanks and provides irrigation for agriculture. He dispenses fair justice—punishes the wicked and promotes the good. He looks after all, and does not discriminate between the lowly and the high.[39] The mundane conduct of this ideal king, this "*nara-deva*" or the divine being in a human form, is the subject of poetic elaboration.

The narrator positions *rajabhakti* as a conditional sentiment. He submits that it is eminently desirable to be devoted towards to this ideal king who is committed to the welfare of the people. It earns one merit and a pure, elevated position. And if a mean and wicked individual does not entertain such a desirable sentiment, it earns him opprobrium in human society.

> "For such a well-wisher king,
> If a mean and wicked man carries no devotion,
> He is but an unworthy son of his family,
> And goes to hell after death for sure.
> …
> Only because of devotion to the king,
> People get to sit in pure [and elevated] seats
> The pure scriptures of the *arya*s do not lack
> Such beautiful examples, O Children." [40]

In other words, *rajabhakti* is dependent on the right conduct of the king. In the process, the *kavya* ascribes a degree of moral agency to the subject people. The *praja* can expect good governance. In its absence, he can withhold the expression of the sentiment of *rajabhakti*. We will return to the significance that vernacular political-aesthetics attributed to the expression of the sentiment.

Before we proceed further, it needs to be noted that *rajabhakti* as a conditional sentiment also found articulation in the larger corpus of Odia ephemeral literature on politics at the turn of the century. Consider, for instance, Govinda Chandra Mahapatra's prose essay *Prajaniti*.[41] Published in 1898, it draws upon classical sources in Sanskrit to delineate a model code of conduct for the subject people. The tract concludes with the following passage: "In conclusion, it is worth speaking that if the king is under the control of lust, anger and other such enemies, and dwells in the domain of all kinds of

bad conduct, then there will never be any peace in that kingdom. And, the *praja* will never agree ("*sammata*") to follow strict rules. Hence, it becomes the king that he shows affection and compassion towards the *praja*, nurtures them well and earns imperishable fame in the world."[42] The tract was published under the patronage of Satchitananda Dev, the progressive crown prince of the princely state of Bamanda. The discursive value the passage attaches to the consent or agreement of the *praja* need not be understated.

4. The English king: a "republican" idiom?

The second section of the poem moves from this generic description of an ideal Indic king to the present historical time, to the British imperial rule. The narrator does not mention any particular English queen or king. Rather, he seems to rework a specific strand of the "republican" language and directs the sentiment of *rajabhakti* not towards the person of a particular English monarch but towards the "*ingrejjati*" or the English race, towards the "*britonvasi*" or the people of Britain at large.[43] Scholars have pointed out that not all forms of republicanism in the nineteenth-century Britain were anti-monarchical. Some strands of it sought to reconcile their philosophical emphasis on people as the final source of sovereignty with the notion of an ideal monarch with limited powers who is committed to serve for public good.[44] Though Chintamani did not espouse the cause of electoral representative politics, he did go on to formulate a more "republican" political language in his later poetry.[45] For instance, in a verse *prashasti* or eulogy addressed in 1938 to Sir Rajendra Narayan Singh Deo KCIE, the king of the princely state of Patana, he argued that "*raja kshamata*" or monarchical sovereignty is "*praja-samabeta-shakti*" or the sovereignty of the collective body of the subject people. The eulogy delineates Rajendra Narayan as a model king who is committed to progress—he has made education compulsory in his realms and has abolished oppressive customs of forced labor and offering of gifts. This ideal king, the poet says, "considers royal sovereignty to be the power of the collective body of the *praja*s." [46]*Rajabhakti* seems to anticipate this later political argument. Thus, the English in general are represented as the presently reigning king. The poet elaborates on their accomplishments. The English have brought modern technology to India—the printing press, newspapers, railways, telegraph, postal services, and scientific agriculture. Their politics is liberal and rule-bound—they are committed to freedom and hence liberated

people from slavery, they treat all religions with equal affection, and besides, they also conduct decennial census to discover and address the problems of the governed. They also represent fine personal qualities of character—perseverance, self-reliance, courage, and truthfulness.[47] In other words, the poet constructs a hyperreal collective-figure of the English people, and presents this figure as the best monarch available to the colonized Indians.[48] Many have ruled in this country in the past, he says. However, no one ever was as concerned about the welfare of the people as the English. Also, there is none comparable to the English in the present times. Their liberal politics, which values the comfort of the *praja*, is the best option available to the Indians.

> "Many a king have ruled in this country
> But who did give so many facilities and so much comfort?
> Who was so diligent about the welfare of the people?
> And, these days, is there anyone comparable in any other country?"
> …………..
> "English politics is quite liberal
> Among the model norms, this is the best,
> Bound to well formed order is this politics
> The comfort of the *praja* is its foundation." [49]

5. *Praja*: acclamation, judgment and loyalty

The third and most important section of the poem is about acclamation, judgment, and sentiment. It is here that the political and aesthetic work of the *kavya* genre finds its most sophisticated articulation. It articulates the figure of the *praja*. The *praja* acclaims as well as critically judges monarchical and imperial political regimes. The *praja* also constructs and sustains a vision of *rajabhakti* wherein the sentiment is first described as a *swadeshi* sentiment, and is then extended to any ruler who follows *rajadharma* irrespective of the latter's race and religion. This figure of the *praja*—the locus of acclamation, critical judgment as well as sentimental affect that is at once local and universal—is the accomplishment of the genre in which Chintamani writes. This figure of the *praja* sits alongside the figures of the liberal critic and the *satyagrahi.*

Having delineated the conduct of the Indic and the English king, the poem moves on to the realm of the performative in the third section. In a formulaic manner, the poet utters a laudatory acclamation in a series of quatrains—"Victory to the Briton-Moon, Victory to the English."[50] The first quatrain in the series will furnish a sense of the general style at work:

"The righteous deed of the English
Utkal sings with joy in eternal songs
Both the animate and the inanimate sing
Victory to the Briton-Moon, Victory to the English."[51]

Scholars of political theology help us read these hyperbolic acclamationsas a measure that seeks to nourish the British Empire. The *kavya* fashions a hyperreal image of the English—the modern technological inventions, the liberal rule-bound politics, and the fine qualities of personal character etc.[52] It then seeks to clothe in glorythat version of the British rule which it creates in its verses in the first place. In the process, it aestheticizes British imperial power, covers and dignifies "what is in itself pure force and domination."[53] Time and again the poem acknowledges the fact of Brtish military domination, "Terrific power they have on this earth" and "Their command can even imprison air / immensely powerful are they on this earth."[54] The acclamations seek to aestheticize and clothe with glory this imperial military dominance.

Political-theologists also enable us to argue that this poetic glorification seeks to nourish not only the British empire but also the poet-*praja* who utters them. In the realm of hymns and acclamations, "the semantic aspect of language is deactivated," its signifying function is suspended.[55] Instead, the seemingly empty turning of the words produces nourishment of the divine and regal power. In the process, the one who utters them also produces his own nourishment.[56] Thus, the*kavya* fashions a hyperreal English-king and seeks to nourish imperial rule. Corresponding to this hyperreal English-king, it produces and nourishes a hyperreal Indian *praja.* These hyperreal figures acquired a concrete presence in the experiential world of the colonized Indians.[57] It is not a surprise that the language of *rajabhakti*in Chintamani's*kavya*is formulaic. The formulaic seeks to transcend the semantic aspect of language and moves on to its proper function, which is to nourish both the regal power and the self.

The *kavya* does not, however, reduce the *praja* to a glorifying function. The *praja* also judges and vernacularizes. The narrator makes an observation that includes a veiled reference to the partition of Bengal. If out of error, he writes, the king punishes the subject people, inhabitants of India are not to be aggrieved. Such instances of erring and repentant kings, and forgiving subject people abound in Indic *shastra*s.

"If erroneously the king punishes one who is innocent
The *praja* of this country are not aggrieved;

Listen o children to examples of this
this is not something false or fabricated;
rather, this is what the *sashtras* say."[58]

The narrator goes on to allude to the instances of sage Mandavya from the *Mahabharata* who was unjustly punished by an erring king for a theft he did not commit,[59] the young son of sage from the *Ramayana* who was hunted down in error by king Dashrath,[60] and of sage Shamika again from the *Mahabharata* who was unfairly treated by king Parikshit.[61]Scholars have rightly argued that allusions are "metonymic elements" which help an author to construct a dialogue between multiple texts. The critical reader needs to perform the role of a "text-archaeologist" and reconstruct the meanings of the inter-textual dialogue.[62] We thus need to lend a fuller visibility to the allusions that Chintamani makes to the *Mahabharat* and *Ramayana.* Thereby we reconstruct the meanings of the intended dialogue between his *Rajabhakti* and the older epics. In the Sanskrit *Mahabharat* and *Ramayana,* in each of the alluded instances the king acts in haste and goes on to acknowledge his error, and repents. Thus in the episode of Mandavya, the king comes to speak to him and beseeches his forgiveness:

"And the king said 'O thou best of Rishis,
I have offended against thee in ignorance.
I beseech thee to pardon me for the same.
It behoveth thee not to be angry with me.'"[63]

In his turn, Dasrath recalls how he felt intense remorse,

"Helpless I stood, faint, sorely grieved…
The deed my heedless hand had wrought
Perplexed me with remorseful thought."[64]

As for Shamika, the errant king Parikshit felt sorry for his own conduct precisely because the sage maintained his equanimity in the face of mistreatment.

"But that *Muni* observing then the vow of silence, spoke not unto him a word. And the king in anger thereupon placed upon his shoulder a dead snake, taking it up with the end of his bow. The *Muni* suffered him to do it without protest. And he spoke not a word, good or bad. And the king seeing him in that state, cast off his anger and became sorry."[65]

On his part, the suffering *praja* is an embodiment of the virtues of forbearance and fortitude. He forgives the repentant king. Thus, as he remains impaled, Mandavya does not blame the king but rather his own *karma*:

> "Thus asked, the tiger among Munis
> then answered those Rishis of ascetic wealth,
> 'Whom shall I blame for this?

In fact, none else (than my own self) hath offended against me!'"[66]

> The dying young sage tells Dashrath,
> "My senses undisturbed remain
> And fortitude has conquered pain."[67]

Shamika advised his son against anger and retribution.

> "Child, I am not pleased with thee. Ascetics should not act thus. We live
> in the domains of that great king. We are protected by him righteously.
> In all he does, the reigning king should by the like of us [be] forgiven. If
> thou destroy Dharma, verily Dharma will destroy thee."[68]

However, in the moral imagination of the epics, the errant king
does not escape the consequences of his own *karma*. They receive
their comeuppances. In the instance of Mandavya, the god of
dharma himself had "to be born among men even in the Sudra
order" for the punishment he had inflicted on Mandavya had been
"disproportionate in severity."[69]In the case of Dashrath, the dying
king recalls how his karma has come to bear its fruit

> "Done in wild youth, O Lady dear
> When it was my boast to shoot by ear
> The deed has borne the fruit…."[70]

And, Parikshit dies by snake-bite according to the curse of
Shamika's ascetic son Shringi.[71]The epics thus underline the larger
dharmic order in which both the king and the *praja* are situated.

In strategic manner, Chintamani's*kavya* does not directly draw
attention to the consequences the kings faced in the epics. Rather,
allusion to the epics enables Chintamani to evoke a political-
theological vision that indirectly invites the English king to reflect on
his own errant conduct. The explicit emphasis on the forbearance
of the native *praja* implicitly draws the reader's attention to the
larger *dharmic* order in which the English king will also face the
consequences of his errant conduct. Chintamani's*kavya* thus
constitutes an allusive dialogue with Indic epics and thereby judges
and vernacularizes British rule.

Chintamani's project of vernacularization posits a continuity
between the ideal Indic kings of the past and the occasionally erring
but liberal imperial regime of the present. *Rajabhakti* concludes on
a *swadeshi* note that qualifies the alien nature of the British rule. It

presents *rajabhakti* as a *swadeshi* sentiment. Appropriate devotion to the king is a characteristic quality of the land, an ancestral custom of the people. The narrator exhorts children to adhere to its practice.

> "The country which stands first in the virtue of *rajabhakti*
> You have taken birth in that country
> The custom which your ancestors followed
> Always o children follow it in your heart and breath."[72]

The *kavya* then moves on to its closing argument—the English king follows *rajadharma,* and is dedicated to the welfare of the people. Hence, the *swadeshi* sentiment of *rajabhakti* needs to be extended to him:

> "The English king are endowed with all good attributes,
> how shall we ever repay their debts…
> …hence listen to me O children
> remain devoted to the English king."[73]

In a subsequent prose tract of 1930, also titled *Rajabhakti,* Chintamani spoke again for this expansive form of the *swadeshi* sentiment of *rajabhakti* that could transcend racial and religious boundaries. The king, he submits, may belong to a different race or religion. But *rajadharma* remains the same for all kings—it consists in nurturing the subject people. Hence, one should remain devoted to an ideal king, even if he belonged to a different race or religion.[74]

6. Conclusion: Chintamani'sPolitical Language

This paper discusses the formation of a political language of monarchical loyalty in colonial Odisha in the early years of the twentieth century. ChintamaniMohanty, a poet quite well known at the time but largely forgotten since then, chose to write poetry in the *kavya* genre, and reflect on questions regarding kingship, imperial rule, and the role of the *praja.* His poetry was produced in a world of vernacular print capitalism where royal patronage as well as limited access to an imperial commons played crucial roles. And, vernacular print capitalism was closely associated with Odia language movement. Produced in such a historical context, Chintamani's*kavya* furnished, as it were, an ambivalent response to the transformations in Indian liberalism in the period. In the late years of the nineteenth-century—more particularly in the wake of the partition of Bengal and the rise of the Swadeshi movement—Indian liberals censured the British Empire as an exploitative alien political formation. They first searched for a political solution within the framework of

the empire, but, soon moved beyond and developed anti-colonial projects. Inspired by the swadeshi ideology, people searched for vernacular political forms in Indian discursive traditions and hoped to find in them pluralist alternatives to a centralizing modern state. Scholars have studied such search for vernacular political forms in the context of formal treatises produced in academic spaces. Chintamani offers an opportunity to move beyond, and venture into the space of ephemeral literature produced in provincial locations.
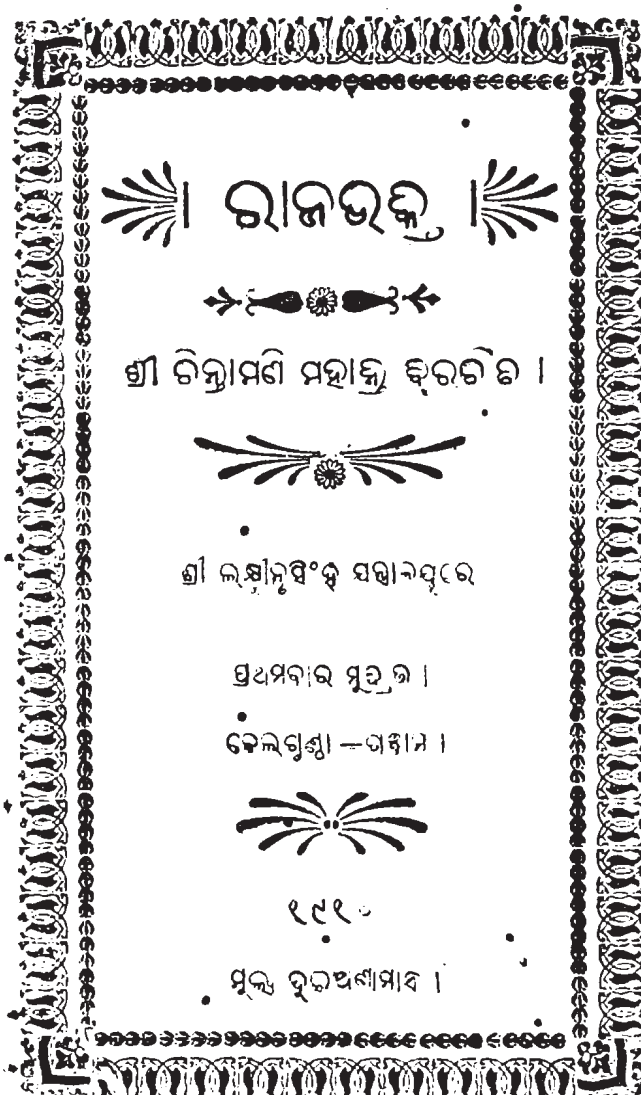

Figure 1: Title Page *Rajabhakti*
Courtesy: Srujanika.

His search for vernacular political forms does not aim to produce an anti-imperial idiom. Nor does it produce philosophical reflections on the nature of the state. Rather, his chosen literary genre of *kavya* helps him create a more sentimental experience of an ideal polity—a conditional relationship of mutual nourishment between the ideal *raja* and the ideal *praja*. The *praja* acclaims as well as critically judges monarchical and political regimes, and extends loyalty to any ruler—irrespective of his race and religion—who follows *rajadharma*. This figure of the *praja* remained central to the modern political and aesthetic imagination in clonial Odisha in the early decades of the twentieth-century.

Notes

1. Mohanty, *Rajabhakti*, 9-10. Quatrain number 34, 36 and 37. My translation.
2. "Odia" refers to the language spoken in the Indian state of "Odisha." Earlier, the name of the language was spelt as "Oriya." There were other names for the region as well, "Utkal" and "Orissa." I will use these names interchangeably throughout the essay and remain sensitive to the historical contexts of their usage.
3. Maharana, *Odia SahityaraItihas*, 362. My translation.
4. Mohanty, *ChintamaniGranthavali: Prathama Khanda.* See the short biography of the poet included in the section titled "Kavibara Chintamaninka Sankshipta Jivan Charita."
5. Established in 1903, *Utkal Sahitya Samaj* was the most influential literary society in Odisha in the first half of the twentieth-century. Chintamani chaired its twenty-seventh annual conference in 1931-32. Utkal Sahitya Samaj, *Utkal Sahitya Samaj Itihas*, 30.
6. Mantena, "Popular sovereignty and anti-colonialism," 309.
7. Mantena, "Popular sovereignty and anti-colonialism," 311.
8. Mantena, "Popular sovereignty and anti-colonialism," 311.
9. Mantena, "Popular sovereignty and anti-colonialism," 311.
10. Mantena, "Popular sovereignty and anti-colonialism," 311.
11. Mantena, "Popular sovereignty and anti-colonialism," 311-312.
12. Mantena relies on Radhakamal Mukherjee's works notably *Democracies of the East* and *Local Government in Ancient India.* On the historiography of vernacular political forms, she cites academic scholars such as R. C. Majumdar and H. N. Sinha. Mantena, "Popular sovereignty and anti-colonialism," 311-312.
13. Mantena, "Popular sovereignty and anti-colonialism," 311-312.
14. For this understanding of the term *praja*, I rely on Pritipuspa Mishra who in turn relies on Raphael Rousseleau. Mishra, *Language and the Making of Modern India*, 115-116.
15. I borrow the term from Hofmeyr, *Gandhi's Printing Press*, 15.
16. Mohanty, *Jibana Panjika*, 92-97.
17. Ramusack, *The Indian Princes and Their States*, 140.
18. Ramusack, *The Indian Princes and Their States*, 147.
19. Mohanty, *Jibana Panjika*, 113-128, 195-198, 207.
20. Burton and Hofmeyr eds., *Ten Books that Shaped the British Empire*, 4.

21. Burton and Hofmeyr eds., *Ten Books that Shaped the British Empire*, 4.
22. Burton and Hofmeyr eds., *Ten Books that Shaped the British Empire*, 5.
23. Mohanty, *Jibana Panjika*, 95.
24. Mohanty, *Jibana Panjika*, 134. Vyasadeva is the narrator of the epic *Mahabharata* and Ganesha served as his scribe.
25. Mitchell, *Language, Emotion, and Politics in South India*, 61-62.
26. Mitchell, *Language, Emotion, and Politics in South India*, 66.
27. Mitchell, *Language, Emotion, and Politics in South India*, 66.
28. Mitchell, *Language, Emotion, and Politics in South India*, 36, 59, 61-66.
29. Venkatachalapathy, *The Province of the Book*, 48.
30. Venkatachalapathy, *The Province of the Book*, 47-48, 75.
31. Utkal Sahitya Samaj, Utkal Sahitya SamajItihas, 13-37.
32. Nanda, *Sir Basudev Sudhal Dev*, 71-74.Radhanath developed a close patron-client relationship with the ruler of Bamanda, Sir BasudevSudhal Dev KCIE. The poet wrote in a public letter, "If at all any development of Utkalsahitya has been accomplished by me, the primary reason for this is Bamanda, or the most honorable ruler of Bamanda, MaharajSudhal Dev," 72.
33. Rao, *Bamanda Raja Prasasti*, 1911.
34. Praharaj, *Purnachandra Odia Bhashakosha*, Volume VII, i.The volumes were published in the Interwar years from 1931 to 1940, and were dedicated to native princes and colonial officials.
35. SurendraMohanty, a famous novelist, short story writer, journalist and member of the Indian national parliament, began his public career after the Second World War as a follower of M.N. Roy. He served as the Odisha correspondent for the *Vanguard*, the English language periodical Roy's Radical Democratic Party brought out from Delhi. Besides, he was familiar with the work of Roy's Indian Renaissance Institute and the weekly*The Radical Humanist*. On his part, Sir Rajendra Narayan Singhdeo KCIE, the ruler of the Patna princely state, patronized the *Janata* as it was a vehicle for non-Congress political opinion in the region. Surendra played crucial roles in the political parties Rajendra Narayan went on to lead in independent India, the Ganatantra Parishad and Swatantra Party.Mohanty, *Patha O Prithivi*, 93, 97 106,121, 124.
36. Mohanty, *JibanaPanjika*, 127. My translation. For a short assessment of the decline of modern *kavya* in Odia see Mohanty, "Adhunika Odia Kavya Sahityare Prachina Sanskrutika Aitihyara Prabhaba," 39.
37. Samantaray, *Odia SahityaraItihas*, 591. My translation.
38. For a discussion of *rajadharma* see, Ramusack, *The Indian Princes and Their States*, 4-5.
39. Mohanty, *Rajabhakti*, 1-7. See particularly quatrains 23, 14 and 18.
40. Mohanty, *Rajabhakti*, 7-9. See the quatrains 25 and 29. My translation.
41. Mahapatra, *Prajaniti*.
42. Mahapatra, *Prajaniti*, 11. My translation.
43. Mohanty, *Rajabhakti*, 15-17. See the quatrains 58 and 65.
44. Gregory Claeys, Christine Lattek, "Radicalism, republicanism and revolution," 202, 204.
45. Academic arguments about republicanism in ancient India also made their way into Odia public sphere. See Ramachandra Acharya "Prachina Bharatara Prajatantra Sashana."
46. Mohanty, *ChintamaniGranthavali: Prathama Khanda*, "ka." See the short verse eulogy or *prashasti* titled "Bhaktyupahar"at the beginning of the volume.

47. Mohanty, *Rajabhakti*, 9-19. See the quatrains 52, 53, 57, 58, 62, 63, 65, 71, 73.
48. I borrow the term "hyperreal" from Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*, 27-28.
49. Mohanty, *Rajabhakti*, 15, 19. See the quatrains 56 and 72.My translation.
50. Mohanty, *Rajabhakti*, 19-23.
51. Mohanty, *Rajabhakti*, 14, 19. See quatrains 55 and 75. My translation.
52. I borrow the term "hyperreal" from Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*, 27-28.
53. Agamben, *The Kingdom and the Glory*, 212.
54. Mohanty, *Rajabhakti*, 10, 11. My translation.
55. Agamben, *The Kingdom and the Glory*, 232, 237.
56. Interestingly, Agamben's formulations on the relationship between acclamatory language and nourishment are derived from Marcel Mauss' work on Vedic hymns and theology. Agamben, *The Kingdom and the* Glory, 232-234.
57. I borrow the term "hyperreal" from Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*, 27-28.
58. Mohanty, *Rajabhakti*, 23. See quatrain 91. My translation.
59. The story of Mandavya is narrated in the "SambhavaParva" of the "AdiParva" in the Sanskrit Mahabharat. See, Ganguli, *The Mahabharata*, Sections CVII-CVIII.
60. Griffith, *The Ramayana*, Book II, Cantos LXIII-LXIV.
61. The story of Shamika is narrated in the "AstikaParva" of the "AdiParva" in the Sanskrit Mahabharat. See, Ganguli, *The Mahabharata*, Sections XLI-XLIII.
62. Hebel, "Towards a Descriptive Poetics of Allusion," 139–140.
63. Ganguli, *The Mahabharata*, Section CVIII.
64. Griffith, *The Ramayana of Valmiki,* Book II, Canto LXIII-LXIV.
65. Ganguli, *The Mahabharata*, Section XL.
66. Ganguli, *The Mahabharata*, "SambhavaParva" in the "AdiParva," Section CVIII.
67. Griffith, *The Ramayana*, Book II, Canto LXIII.
68. Ganguli, *The Mahabharata*, Section XLI.
69. Ganguli, *The Mahabharata*, Section CVIII.
70. Griffith, *The Ramayana*, Book II, Canto LXIV.
71. Ganguli, *The Mahabharata*, Section XLIII.
72. Mohanty, *Rajabhakti*, 24. See quatrain 95.
73. Mohanty, *Rajabhakti*, 25-26. See quatrains 99-100.
74. Mohanty, "Rajabhakti" in *Bibidha Chinta* (Cuttack: Mukur Press, 1930), 3-4.

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