



# *Radhanath Ray's KEDAR GOURI - A Reprojection Ovid's "Pyramus And Thisbe": An Imitation, Translation, Transcreation And Equivalence*

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## **Abstract:**

19<sup>th</sup> CE Indian Literature during colonial British imperialism underwent a sea-change. Literature of all the regions particularly, 'bhasa sahitya', was deeply influenced by colonial modernity, which was a remarkable departure from existing tradition, paving the way for rejection and reconstruction in renaissance of consciousness and igniting conflicts and controversies from different angles. In this context, my paper is going to focus upon Regional Odia poetic literature of 19<sup>th</sup> CE when Radhanath Ray, like Fakir Mohan Senapati, rejected the medieval traditional 'Riti Yuga' or 'Bhanja Yuga' mode of poetry-creation, both in content and style, in his epoch-making text '*Kedar Gouri*' as a model of revolutionary change. He created this tragic-romance and the fictional legend as imitation, sometimes translation, transcreation and cultural-geographical and historical equivalence, in hybridity with Ovid's "*Pyramus and Thisbe*" an excerpt from *Metamorphosis*, a magnum opus of Western culture. In retelling the story of tragic romance of Kedar-Gouri, modelled up an alien legend, the poetic talent of Radhanath has tried to fuse the alien topography, culture and history with the Odishan culture, history and landscape as a post-modern artistic pastiche or remix as though it organically belonged to the typical soil of Odisha where all readers were emotionally entangled. The tragic story of *Kedar Gouri* in verse narrates that the bold lovers of matchless beauty of one neighbourhood were strictly forbidden by their rival parents for their love and union. However, their intense love did not bother about the physical obstacle. Throughout day and night, they shared the whisperings of their love-tiding through the cracks of a wall that separated the two families like an iron curtain. Finally, they eloped away to a lone place of nature, where the tiger's untimely appearance aligned with Gouri's scarf falling off her shoulder as a turn of destiny, became the cause of their fatal suicide.

## **Keywords :**

Colonial, Riti-yuga, imitation, transcreation, translation, hybridity, pastiche .

## FRESH LIGHTS ON RADHANATH RAY- AN AVANT GARDE ODIA POET OF 19<sup>TH</sup> CE :

‘Modern Odia Literature is lovingly spoken as the Age of Radhanath in contrast to the age of Sarala Das, Jagannath Das and of Upendra Bhanja’- an escape from the heavy burden of impenetrable ornate poetry to affect the weather of change, three men of literary genius were born towards the first half of 19<sup>th</sup> CE and worked together around 1866. Of the three, Fakir Mohan Senapati was the oldest and Madhusudan Rao the youngest.

Born of Bengali educated parents in the village of Kedarpur of Soro Block of North Balasore of Odisha in 1848, Radhanath had his advanced studies in Calcutta, away from home. He was diseased all through his life. He was the first boy to pass matriculation from Calcutta University in the whole district of Balasore. He started his life as a school teacher in a Govt. school and retired as Divisional Inspector of schools for his scholarly efficiency. He was a very well-read man and admired for his poetic talents by most of his contemporaries in Bengal.

### HIS RISE AS A POETIC GENIUS :

His English education and passion for modern European Literature helped nurturing in him radically innovative sensibility as a path finder of Renaissance of revolting consciousness. Among the millions of fledgling literary scholars of 19<sup>th</sup> CE Odisha, he has been considered as a trend-setter for Odishan or *Utkaliya* identity. In the words of Dr. Mayadhar Mansingh, ‘Radhanath was essentially a narrative poet, a *Kavya* maker par excellence. He may be taken as a modernized Upendra Bhanja.....for over half a century, Radhanath’s *Kavya*’s were definitely more popular in Odisha than the novels of Fakir Mohan Senapati. The secret lay in the fact that Ray’s *Kavyas* were also highly entertaining fiction, presented in the magic casket of alluring poetry’ (Mansingh:172). Towards the last three decades of 19<sup>th</sup> CE, Radhanath was intensely involved with his literary work. The tone of rejection of ‘Bhanja’ or ‘Dinakrushna Das’ style of composition of Riti-Yuga in Odia Sahitya (literature) started from 1650 and ended in 1880, around 230 years of incomprehensible melodious ornate poetry.

### BRIEF HISTORY OF THE TRADITION OF POETRY BEFORE RADHANATH

It is pertinent to mention here that Radhanath *Kavya* Literature has flourished upon the controversies of Riti-Yuga-*Kavya* (poetic) style. After the death of last Hindu king of Odisha, Mukunda Deva in 1568, Odisha had been a frequent accession to the foreign invaders- ‘a veritable cockpit of rival war-lords and marauders’. It was successively captured by Mughals, Afghans and Marathas. The voluptuous royal courts of Muslim rulers during Moghul periods-maintained harems to gratify their sexual urge through promiscuous relationship with many women. They patronized literature as a past time. Physical enjoyment of women was their chief preoccupation. Exactly Riti poets like Bhanja, or the courtly poetry or Vaishnava poets like Dinakrushna Das and Abhimanyu Samata Sinhara had, in conformity to the prevailing culture of society, emphasized creating sensuous poetry of ornamental words – arousing an erotic *Rasa* or Pleasure, where pornographic description of woman’s body is the target, not having a sublime aim beyond it.

Poet laureate Upendra Bhanja superbly describes in his masterly work *Labanyabati* in stanza 1 of 22 canto where Labanyabati is intensely feeling love-sick and pining for the absence of Chandrabhanu with the approach of instant cloud in the sky :

*Dekhi naba kalika bakalika malika*

*Ali kalika kanta smare*

*Rakhya kemante kari kahiba mattakari gatiki*

*Emanta bichari se, sahachari*

[Seeing the new cloud cranes like garland flew in sky

Princess (Labanyabati) dreading as Goddess kali chanting Siva om Siva om

Who can hinder the lion – the bearer of Goddess Kali

Aggressive towards running elephant] Eng. Trans.

Rain is conducive to erotic longing which creates the lust in lover for the beloved. However, Bhanja with the repetition of alliterative consonant ‘ka’, ‘la’, ‘ra’ has made those lines intensely lyrical. This weakness in Bhanja has been surpassed by Radhanath in 19th CE with an adaptation of western elements combined with an easy colloquial idiom.

#### **Transition :**

Meanwhile, British occupied Odisha in 1803, inculcating changes in all spheres with the cultural fusion of India and the West. Thus, Radhanath’s poetic literature is a direct outcome of this cultural hybridity – East and the West. This transition is convincingly established in 1876 in his *Kabitabali* a combined work of Radhanath and Madhusudan like *Lyrical Ballads* in 1798, a combined work of Wordsworth and Coleridge, giving the clarion call for the manifesto of Romantic poetry- ‘the principal object in these poems was to choose incidents and situations from common life and to relate or describe them...in a selection of language really used by men...humble and rustic life was generally chosen, because in that condition, the essential passions of the heart find a better soil....’ (B.B.Das, 34)

Consecutively from 1886 to 1890, he had composed five kavyas of unique style originated from one source, signifying the steady growth of his inbuilt-genius. They are *Kedar Gouri (1885)*, *Chandrabhaga (1886)*, *Nandikeswari (1887)*, *Usha (1888)*, *Parbati (1890)*. Infact all these Kabyas, he has borrowed the raw materials from western mythology – that is Roman poet, Ovid and successfully tried to bring out an equivalence in the context of the existing theory, topography and the culture of Odisha. Radhanath by his sheer individual talent had made these foreign stories indigenous- as if genuine stories of our soil and culture with an artistic knitting.

Thus, as a rejection to the ornate style of *Bhanja Yuga*, Madhusudan has stepped down to the lucidity of language where everyman’s access to the language has been legalized to derive its fundamental pleasure. Thus, he speaks in the beginning line of “Paban” (Wind) of *Kabitabali* :

*Ke to sama bali kaha samira?*

*Asima ananta tora sarira ("Pabana", 23)*

[speak thou wind, who is your equal ?

Infinite and endless is your body] Eng. Trans.

The lines are so transparent as if a transparent cloth is thrown over a women's body from which the visible internal organs look more glorious. It does not mean that Radhanath's poetic literature is without ornaments, but the contents of his poetry are not profusely arrested with ornaments.

Secondly, the poetic world of Radhanath came out from the sleeping bed of queen's glamorous Zenena to the eternal beauties of manifested Nature with hills, meadows, streams, rivers, forests etc. First time, Radhanath has established the identity of Odisha creating lyrical resonance through his immortal lines about the green-geography and the multi-coloured history of Odisha. In his famous poem, nature became an integral part of Odisha's national consciousness through the modern romantic sensibility, exhibiting the geography and topography of this homeland in splendid imaginative colour. What Kalidas did for India, Radhanath did so for Odisha. Thus, he sings in "*Chilika*" at the opening line:

*Utkala-kamala-bilasa-deerghika*

*Marala-malini neelambu chilika*

*Utkalara tuhi charu alankar*

*Utkal bhubane sobhara bhandara'*

[Hey Chilika!

Thou Goddess Laxmi of Utkal- treasuring eternal pleasure

In long expanse of Lake-water

Swan-replete blue lagoon- blossoming sky in heart

Thou splendid ornament of Utkal

Utkal for you beauty-treasure] Eng. Trans.

#### **NEW DIMENSION TO FEMALE IDENTITY IN HIS POETRY :**

Further, in matters of love, he has given a new dimension to female identity. They are not the objects of sexual commodity as treated by the Riti-poets, rather, they are more natural and realistic exhibiting the warmth of love. He has so nicely rendered the failure and frustration of the love that no poet of earlier ages has attempted to dramatize the psychological remorse and despondency. He has not only

expressed the pages of jilted lovers or unrequited love, rather death-consciousness is another side of love. As a result, his content has been multi-faceted rather than stereotyped physical confinement of Riti-Yuga lovers. Like Freudianism, his love has been instinct based, which no human being can deny. In this regard, he is completely modern. Re-projection of the mythology was an important aspect of Radhanath's poetry. All these things will be vividly focussed in *Kedar Gouri* which is our subject of study and research.

### **Radhanath Ray's Kedar Gouri: an imitation, translation, transcreation and equivalence :**

According to Plato's imitation theory (mimesis) in *Republic*, all art imitates life. It is a photographic representation of the actual reality, that is, God's transient world as presented in external form. As Roger Fowler, in his *Dictionary of Modern Critical Terms* (1973) has clarified that 'Aristotle's imitation combines a sense of the literary work as the representation of some pre-existent reality, with a sense of the work itself as an object. The poet imitates best by allowing his work to achieve excellence. Imitation of one writer by another (Homer by Virgil, both by Milton, all three by Pope) is an important feature of Neo-classical literature. Hence Pope's short and clear line on Virgil:

Nature and Homer were, he found, the same (Fowler, 126)'

In the light of above theoretical dimension, it can be arguably stated that 19<sup>th</sup> CE Radhanath poetic literature is a residue of tradition and imitation. It has become a precursor to modernity, for his individual artistic talent in the remaking of the old. Imitating the original story of Ovid's "*Pyramus and Thisbe*" and in remaking the same in alternative title of *Kedar Gouri*, Radhanath has excelled Ovid in transcreating the original in perfect adaptation to the existing history, culture and the Nature's geographical scenery of Odisha. It is right to say in the words of Dr. Natabar Samantray in his *History of Odia Literature (1803-1920)* that 'had there been no Ovid, today's Radhanath could not have been possible'. (Samantray, 278) It has to be kept in mind '*Kedar Gouri*' is of 108 lines a complete transcreation of original translation and in imitation of Ovid's "*Pyramus and Thisbe*" of 110 lines. However *Chandrabhaga*, *NandiKeshari* and *Usha* are partly imitated, when *Parbati* is imitated and modelled upon the Greek play *Agamemnon*. Simply, he has not imbibed and imitated, but skilfully in adaptation to *Utkaliya* flora and fauna, aligned with the existing historical myth has been nicely assimilated into the real soil of Odisha.

The actual 'remake' skill of Radhanath is in borrowing the western myth and legend and in selecting judiciously with his artistic talent the appropriate folktales, legends, myths and the so-called history of Odisha and adapting it to the drapery of Nature's beauty in the so-called districts of Balasore, Cuttack, Puri and Mayurbhanj. As a result, this hybridized *Kedar Gouri*, in imitation of Roman poet Ovid has been a real believable story of our Odisha or Utkal in the skill of 'suspended disbelief'. It is poignantly romantic, glued with a fine spectacle of Nature – an abode of 'Rasa' more mesmerizing than the sensual 'Rasa' of Bhanja literature.

Imitation is not a mere copy, rather a legalized artistic activity. The same story of "*Pyramus and Thisbe*" has been recast by the British Poet Geoffery Chaucer of 14<sup>th</sup> CE in his *The Legend of Good Women*. This tradition of imitation of the same story continues till to the age of Elizabeth when Shakespeare has

redesigned with *Romeo and Juliet* (1595). Radhanath in the same way respeaks it in *Kedar Gouri* in the pure elemental Odia language, seeming it to be complete original.

The original story of Babylon came to Greece through Ovid and reprojected as “*Pyramus and Thisbe*”. The original Shemiramis of Babylon has been replaced with king Lalatendu Keshari who actually established “Kedar Gouri Temple as Siva Parbati incarnate. The palacial Empire of Babylon constructed by Shemiramis, inhabiting two young lovers there, nestled in intense love has been replaced by Radhanath with a factual local colour at the beginning of poem.

*Hemachal shire Lalata Keshari*

*Rachile Ramya nagar.L-1*

*Utkalabhubane deshe deshe khyata*

*Hela Bhubana-Ishwara.L-2*

.....

*Kedar Gouri kishora kishori*

*Thile Bhubana-Ishware.L-5*

*Taruni tilaka Gouri, taruna*

*Tilaka Kedara nare.L-6*

#### Eng. Trans.

[‘Lalata Keshari Himachal atop  
Did a magnificent town  
Got its fame in entire Utkal as Bhubana-Ishware  
.....  
Juvenile lovers Kedar Gouri  
Lived at Bhubana-Ishware  
Gouri, prettiest young girl  
Kedar, most hand some among men]

Radhanath with the so- called local color has tried best with a trick of equivalence that his fictional world in the story of *Kedar Gouri* is deemed to be a historical fact though there is not the authenticity of the history pertaining to the present day Kedarshwar temple and Gouri reservoir. The ‘magic realism’ of *Kedar Gouri* has intoxicated the readers with its tragic-romance and Radhanath defying its old spiritual entity gave it a kind of newness, asserting its contemporary relevance as the temple for the success of love.

Kedar and Gouri were both the young matchless lovers. Both of them lived in one neighbourhood since their childhood. Both conquered each other’s heart. Their parents hostile to each other strictly forbade their union. Consequently, they remained asunder from each other by an adjacent wall to their dwelling places. Parental resistance from both sides rather intensified their love. However, destiny made a hole through the wall since the day of construction. They exchanged their love tidings after sunset through that hole. Radhanath has exposed the painfull psychic torment of lovers when they are forbidden to meet

physically. Metaphysical lovers are least bothered about the physical obstacles. Thus, in this context, Radhanath says :

*Bheta sambhasana barile barana*

*mane ki premika mana.L-15*

*Sukhmaku sthulare patha ogalile*

*Sthula ki tahin bhajana? L-16*

*Nirmana dinaru prachira sandhire*

*Randhra thila alakhyare. L-17*

#### Eng. Trans.

[If forbidden to meet and talk,  
Can the lovers obey obstacle?  
If material things deters subtle path  
Can it oppose the metaphysical lovers?  
Hole was since the day of erection,  
Unseen was it to all. ]

Radhanath, in contradiction to the Riti tradition of limiting love only to physical gratification, made it more human and metaphysical. They are indebted to the benevolent wall, having a hole to pass the message of love from each side. The agony of love became so intense that finally the canonized lovers eloped to a lone place beyond the city, girdled around with wild tulip with the noise of fountain murmuring, as in the original story Pyramus and Thisbe eloped to a graveyard near a mulberry tree, ripe with red fruits. Thus, Radhanath in his remaking says:

*Premara sanyasi sanyasini hoi*

*duhen jibe desha para*

*Nagara prantare Nirmala nirjhara kutaja bana bestita*

*benenkar bheta tahin heba boli benie kale nischita*

#### Eng.Trans.

[ Cannonized lovers pledged to go afar      A wild tulip forest  
murmuring a stream inside there

Be their place of destination.]

True love is not guided by social constraints and taboos. The course of the true love never runs smooth. Despite this, the true lovers are always pledged to overcome the obstacle at the cost of their life. Radhanath has not spiritualized the nature like Wordsworth, rather he has, at the backdrop of nature,



expressed the human agony and the highest value of life through reflection. Here mere imitation disappears, but a true creation with the highest human value is superimposed upon the narrative .

Destiny intervened between the lovers and sealed the lovers journey in fatal suicide. As proposed Gouri reached earlier and was afraid to see a tiger approaching with a blood-stained mouth and claw, killing a deer at hand. She hastily disappeared to hide inside a cave, unnoticingly dropping her scarf off the shoulder. The tiger tore apart the scarf in rage. Kedar arriving late saw the tiger's paw and mistook the blood-stained torn scarf of Gouri, This strange coincidence made him convinced that Gouri must have been killed by the tiger, which prompted him to stab with a dagger. It is the irony of fate Gouri, coming out of the hiding place, was awe-struck to see Kedar and love made her bold to pay back in the same coin. She too committed suicide and boldly followed Kedar's path to be united in other world. Like Ovid, Radhanath is not a dull narrator of romance rather he has elevated it to a spiritual dimension making it immortal. Thus, Gouri says :

*"Paraloka pathe kanta pada chihna  
Jibi muhin anusari. L-91  
Mryutu ghataila a biraha, mryutu  
Karidebi sahachari." L-92*

Exactly in the original version of Ovid, Thisbe speaks on death-bed."

*For death which only could, alash! asunder part us twain  
Shall never so dissever us, but we will meet again".*

Radhanath in contextualising the situation be it imitation or translation, transcreation has been brilliantly adapted to cultural belief and historical facts of Odisha. Gouri being bold to accept death, prayed lord Shiva at 'Ekramra Bihar' for union in heaven-satitwa (feminine integrity) as Hindu cultural rite.

**Thus, she said :**

*Ekramra Ishwar prabhu Digambar  
Padapadma dhyai chitte. L-93  
Sahasa bandhila hrudya abala  
Pranadeba kantaprite. L-94*

**Engl.Trans.**

[ Meditated the lotus-feet of Digamber –Lord Shiva of Ekamra  
Strengthened her weak heart  
To die for her sweet love for unison in Heaven. ]



Only love can conquer death. The multi-faceted angle of love dramatized by Radhanath, has eclipsed both Bhanja and Ovid. This poetic approach is an extension of Riti- Yuga tradition, confining love only to epicurean pleasure and looks forward to welcoming modernity.

### CONFLICT :

Genius of both Radhanath and Upendra Bhanja has been challenged at a later stage very vehemently by the prejudiced fans. One group supports Bhanja and condemns Radhanath as an ordinary poet- a voice for the middle class people, whereas the other group supports Radhanath condemning Bhanja as sensuous and erotic. These ordinary verbal duels of strange controversies continued one and half year in the then two Odia literary journals “*Indradhanu*” and “*Bijuli*”-“*Indradhanu*” for Bhanja supporters and “*Bijuli*” for Radhanath fans. This unresolved conflict at last calmed down when Radhanath humbly penned with his poetic genius in “*Chilika*” poem :

*Bhagyaban bene Baninka kumara -*

*Kabi Baladeva, Bhanja birabara*

*kahin Sehi, kahin muhin akinchan?*

*Dekhuthili sina jagrata swapana!*

### English Translation :

[Poet Baladev, poet laureate Bhanja worthy son of Saraswati.

How can I ignominy be equal with them ?

Dreaming always to be their follower)

Thus, conflict was resolved at last with this humble approach of Radhanath.

### CONCLUSION :

Thus, the paper convincingly asserts from one angle that 19th century Odia literature is a residual by-product of the existing tradition. In rejecting the tradition, it has tried to establish a literature of new skill and technique with a remix of the past and the present but gained the artistic finish, though conflicted from different angles, with the sheer individual talent. Thus, Radhnath’s *Kedar Gouri* is a metaphor for change. Secondly, imitation of Ovid has been so organically done a patch – up with our Utkaliya or Odishan identity, integrating history, geography and culture that it turns out to be a classic literary text for all time.

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