

1 How the Vernacular Became Regional

In 1903, Gopal Candra Praharaj, compiler of the most extensive Odia lexicon of the early twentieth century, published a collection of episodic fiction called *Bhagawat Tungire Sandhya* (Evenings in the Bhagawat Hut). It was a satirical piece featuring conversations between three ubiquitous figures of nineteenth-century Odisha: a classically educated Sanskrit teacher whose “professed aim in life” was “to transform Odia into Sanskrit” and who did not “feel good unless he introduced a few pure Sanskrit words into his Odia speech”;¹ the English-educated village schoolmaster who had an “unnatural hatred for the Odia language and believed that it is impossible to express thoughts without peppering his Odia with choice English words”;² and, finally, the law clerk who was so “well versed in the loopholes of law that even when he spoke to his children at home some legal language slipped in.”³

Even as this satire lampooned elite Odia society of the nineteenth century, the linguistic characterization of the central protagonists invoked some reigning anxieties about the Odia language and its boundaries. While it is not surprising that these anxieties focused in part on the obliterating threat of English, Praharaj’s reference to Sanskrit is revealing. The threat of Sanskrit had to do with a worry about what the “purification” (read Sanskritization) of Odia speech would do to the singularity of Odia within the spectrum of Indo-European languages. Therefore, at stake here is Praharaj’s investment in the identity of Odia and its relationship with its peers. The jettisoning of Odia by more vehicular languages such as English or even the ritually vehicular Sanskrit and with the more institutionally influential language of law also poses the question of what

¹ Gauranga Charan Dash (ed.), *Praharaj Granthabali Vol. 1* (Cuttack: Vidyapuri, 2005), p. 8.

² *Ibid.*, p. 9. The Odia word for “unnatural” in the original text was *bijatiya*. By connecting the use of one’s mother tongue with the term *ḥati*, Praharaj was invoking both the notion of a physiological connection (*ḥati* as species) and a sociological connection (*ḥati* as community). A *bijatiya* hatred of Odia, therefore, was an alienation of both visceral and social connections with Odia.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

the proper place of Odia is, where is it at home?⁴ Not only the identity but also the locality of language is invoked here. In different ways, both English and Sanskrit are languages that come from elsewhere – from England or from the past. They are outsiders. How is the relationship of a local language like Odia properly established with languages such as English and Sanskrit? Should we draw inspiration from English as the language of modernity, capital, and empire or should we return to our classical Sanskrit roots to establish our non-Western cultural antiquity and sophistication?⁵ Praharaj's lampooning of adulteration suggests that neither of these options is welcome as neither allows Odia to be itself.

Elsewhere, in the preface of his quadrilingual Odia lexicon, Praharaj drew attention to the singularity of Odia in relation to neighboring languages such as Bengali and Telegu.⁶ In his preface, Praharaj set out the features of Odia that separated it from Bengali even as the two languages effectively shared a single root language. In this chapter, I seek to establish why the discrete selfhood of Odia mattered so much. Why was it important to ensure that the discreteness and singularity of the Odia language had to be proved, acknowledged, and practiced?

This investment in the discrete selfhood of the Odia language was founded on the categorical logic of colonial thought on Indian languages. By the end of the nineteenth century, major Indian languages had come to be seen as parallel to one another with progressive histories of their own.⁷ This historicization of Indian languages both required and produced boundaries between languages such as Odia and Bengali or Telegu and Tamil. Once they were posed as objects to be historicized, the limits of the languages had to be established, their specific origins had to be traced from the point in time when they diverged from commonly spoken

⁴ The term “vehicular” is often used to denote languages that travel, languages that carry ideas across boundaries. In other words, languages that are cosmopolitan.

⁵ For the conflation of English and modernity, see Javed Majeed, “Modernity's Script and a Tom Thumb Performance: English Linguistic Modernity and Persian/Urdu Lexicography in Nineteenth Century India”, in Michael. S. Dodson and Brian A. Hatcher (eds.), *Trans-Colonial Modernities in South Asia* (New Delhi: Routledge, 2012), pp. 95–115. For the social life of English, see Veena Naregal, *Language, Politics, Elite and the Public Sphere: Western India Under Colonialism* (London: Anthem Press, 2002) and Shefali Chandra, *The Sexual Life of English: Languages of Caste and Desire in Colonial India* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012). On Sanskrit in modern India, see Simona Sawhney, *The Modernity of Sanskrit* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009).

⁶ Gopal Chandra Praharaj, *Pumachandra Ordā bhāshākosha* (A Lexicon of the Oriya Language) (Cuttack: Utkal Sahitya Press, 1931), pp. i–xii, 1–32.

⁷ Research on Telegu best illustrates this trend towards the analysis of how languages were historicized in nineteenth-century India. See Rama Sundari Mantena, “Vernacular Futures, Colonial Philology and the Idea of History in Nineteenth-Century South India”, *Indian Economic & Social History Review* 42, no. 4 (2005): 513–34.

regional *prakrits*.⁸ Each language had to have its own moment of origin, script, vocabulary, grammatical structure, and literary culture that was distinct from those of its neighbors. Key to this emphasis on the boundaries between languages were discussions about the discrete limits of the domain of major Indian languages – both demographic and territorial.

To prove this discreteness of Odia, Praharaj orchestrated a curious tension in the preface of his lexicon. Praharaj argued that Odia has been a discrete, standardized language since the seventh century and has been devoid of any dialects. At the same time, he argued for a lexicon that takes into account all the variations of the language in his contemporary period. This avowal of the standard language and a deep investment in the everyday lexical messiness seems to pull the reader towards opposite poles. I would suggest that Praharaj's preface is not necessarily bipolar. Indeed, it is the object of his study that carries the tension within it – the vernacular. Praharaj's 1937 lexicon was the culmination of a century-long process of making the notion of the vernacular indigenous to India. The tensions that inform the lexicon give us a glimpse of how the vernacular as an idea performed contradictory labors in colonial and, ultimately, post-colonial India. This chapter contextualizes the tension in Praharaj's take on Odia in the longer history of what I like to call the politics of colonial vernacularization. I will do this through a history of how the term vernacular came to make its home in India and came to determine the career of language-based politics in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

The term has conventionally been understood through Ranajit Guha's really perceptive take on the term. As Ranajit Guha has long since argued, the term "vernacular" did tremendous ideological work in colonial as well postcolonial India.⁹ Although I differ from his take on the vernacular in significant ways, I would agree with Guha's foundational claim that the term signaled entirely different meanings across the colony–metropole divide. For instance, even a cursory review of textual databases from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries illustrates how the term vernacular denoted local, sometimes vulgar language in England in the former and came to be overwhelmingly used only to denote Indian languages in the latter. At first glance, it almost appears that England lost the use of the word once the empire was firmly ensconced in India.

⁸ This moment of divergence and regional languages such as Odia or Telegu is itself an issue of great debate. Right from the relationship between Sanskrit and the various prakrits to the question of the relationship between older regional prakrits and the modern regional languages in India, the connections have been debated since the emergence of colonial comparative philology in the nineteenth century. For the relationship between Sanskrit and prakrit, see Sawhney, *Modernity of Sanskrit*, pp. 5–7. Madhav M. Deshpande, *Sanskrit and Prakrit: Sociolinguistic Issues* (Delhi: Motilal Banarasidass, 1993).

⁹ Ranajit Guha, "The Authority of Vernacular Pasts", *Meanjin* 51, no. 2 (1992): 299.

Guha argues that in its new Indian career, the term carried the taint of slavery – drawing from its etymological root *verna* or slave. Consequently, vernacular served as a mark of colonial difference – constantly referencing the purported inferiority of Indian languages in relation to English and other Western tongues. Thus, marked with difference, the Indian vernaculars carried within them the possibility of radical politics. Ultimately, in Guha’s framework, these vernaculars could serve as the medium for a multipronged critique of oppression – both colonial and within the native community.

I would like to suggest that perhaps the term vernacular was much more loaded with imperial import than Guha suggests. And that perhaps some of this excess baggage would eventually undermine the vernacular’s radical potential. In the first half of the chapter, I will introduce the possibility of a more complicated understanding of the term vernacular and its implications for Indian linguistic politics than those provided by the existing frameworks. Then I track the multiple strands of meaning that should populate our understanding of the term in the context of colonial India. Finally, I will show how these meanings come to determine colonial policy towards Indian languages. Successive governmental language policies that often drew from an ideological investment in this new understanding of the vernacular have resulted in bestowing these languages with very discrete geographical domains and demographic constituencies.

Then, in the second half of the chapter, I will illustrate the native appropriation of the colonial descriptions and disciplinary interventions in struggles to demarcate the territorial and demographic domains of Indian vernacular languages. I will sketch the local consequences of this new discreteness of linguistic domains, in particular, how the boundaries between Odia and Bengali and their territorial domains came into question in the latter half of the nineteenth century. In tracking this history of how the term vernacular came to be ascribed to Indian languages, this chapter illustrates how some Indian languages came to be, first, vernacular and then developed to become regional.

Vernacular Imported

In 1837, the government of the Bengal Presidency passed Act no. 29 to change the language of revenue and business administration from Persian to the languages vernacular to the Presidency – Odia, Bengali, and Hindustani. At first glance, this seems like a curious move to make. As some of the responses from district-level officials about the feasibility of a shift away from Persian suggest, the change was slated to be cumbersome, expensive, and fraught with unforeseen challenges. By the early

nineteenth century, Persian had already had a long history of serving as the official language of the vast swathes of Indian territory under British control. This meant that there was already a well-established vocabulary of legal and revenue terms that the local languages like Odia did not have at this point. Also, as Persian served as the lingua franca of the northern Indian officialdom, newly minted colonial officials need only learn a single official language in any detail.¹⁰ This could have led to greater mobility and flexibility of governmental functionaries across British India. Why then was it essential that the change to the local languages be made at this moment?

In her treatment of this Act, Farina Mir has rightly argued that the colonial government's primary concern was to ensure "just" governance.¹¹ This poses the question as to how justice in governance came to be linked with the use of the vernacular in British India. We should not take the conflation of just governance with the use of the vernacular for granted. Even though this seems commonsensical to us, this conflation had to be debated and negotiated in metropolitan Britain just as it was debated amongst the officialdom of the Bengal Presidency. The connection between just governance and the use of the vernacular may seem further commonsensical to us given the linking of self-determination with use of mother tongues since the Wilsonian moment in the early twentieth century. The assumption that the change from Persian to vernacular languages in colonial India was in the interest of just governance surely had to be based on linguistic activism in metropolitan Britain from the late eighteenth century on. This move is an important indicator of the impact of metropolitan understanding of the salience of popular language to proper governance on language policy of the colonial government. Act no. 29 of 1837 is an important chapter in the history of how language and justice in governance – and by extension in the exercise of self-determination – came to be linked in the British Empire.

This conflation of just governance and the local or vernacular language reveals one of the primary burdens that the term vernacular bore on its journey to India – the idea that the vernacular was the best language of governance. As a letter sent to the court of directors of the East India Company by the Governor of Bengal in July 1836 noted, the introduction of the vernacular into the two departments was to be carried out "in order

¹⁰ For a precolonial history of Persian, see Muzaffar Alam, *The Languages of Political Islam c. 1200–1800* (Chicago, IL: Chicago University Press, 2004), pp. 115–40.

¹¹ See Farina Mir, "Imperial Policy, Provincial Practices Colonial Language Policy in Nineteenth-century India", *Indian Economic & Social History Review* (43) (4) (2006): 395–427. And, for a longer treatment of the Act, see Farina Mir, *The Social Space of Language: Vernacular Culture in British Colonial Punjab* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2010).

that the people may enjoy ‘*the inestimable advantages of having the public’s business transacted in a manner which secures their confidence, because it is plainly intelligible to them*’.¹² This is a particularly colonial formulation of state policy of language. The emphasis on public confidence suggests that the concern here is for ease of governance of a nonnative power over the Indian public as well as the need to establish local legitimacy of East India Company rule. The emphasis on intelligibility marks out the limits of this governmental concern about language. This move is not a governmental acknowledgement of linguistic affect held by the public, local linguistic identity politics, or any notion of ethnic particularity of the governed. This is not a move driven by the need to acknowledge difference among the people of the Bengal Presidency. Rather, this is singularly about the clarity of governance. Therefore, essentially, unlike twenty-first century notions of linguistic justice, which couple intelligibility of governance with the question of dignity (drawn from the idea of linguistic identity of the governed), the conflation of intelligibility and good governance is about the clarity of communication between the ruler and ruled.¹³

The linking of public confidence with intelligibility of governance suggests that the Company was drawing on debates in eighteenth-century England about the language of administration. The question of public confidence and intelligibility of governmental language had become a particularly fraught debate in late eighteenth-century England. In the 1790s, the passing of the Seditious Meetings and Treasonable Practices bills in England occasioned a debate about the need to use accessible language in order to reduce the opacity of governance. This debate, which was essentially about parliamentary reforms that would sustain a new sort of British government that was accessible to non-elite members of English society, resurrected a Lockean understanding of pure language or plain speech and set in motion some very important political, philological, and literary movements in England.¹⁴ Taking up Locke’s suspicion of the way in which language can sometimes obfuscate the truth, one of the important radicals, John Horne Tooke, wrote the *Diversions of Purley*, in which he argued that it is important to understand the etymological makeup of words to reintroduce the common people to responsible

¹² Papers regarding the enactment of Government of India Act 29 of 1837 authorizing the replacement of Persian by the vernacular languages in the Courts of Justice and the Revenue Department, Vol. 1, IOR/F/4/1684/67992, June 1835–December 1837.

¹³ See Philippe Van Parijs, *Linguistic Justice for Europe and for the World* (London: Oxford University Press, 2011). Helder De Schutter and David Robichaud (eds.), *Linguistic Justice: Van Parijs and His Critics* (London: Routledge, 2017).

¹⁴ For an detailed discussion of the impact of the sedition laws of the 1790s on philology, literature, radicalism, and constitutional reform, see Susan Manly, *Language, Custom and Nation in the 1790s* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007).

government.¹⁵ He suggested that this was possible only by revealing to them the meaning of terms used to govern them. The influence of Tooke's arguments about simple language during this period is evident in Samuel Taylor Coleridge's critique of the treason trials of late 1795. The Seditious Meetings and Treasonable Practices bills were passed as a measure to protect the person of the king in response to an attack on his procession in October 1795.¹⁶ The implementation of the bills enabled the English state to bring to trial a number of radical intellectuals, including John Horne Tooke and Thomas Hardy, who were arguing for parliamentary reforms. To counter the language of the seditious bills, Coleridge did an etymological analysis of one of the catchwords of the English state's rhetoric about the bill – "majesty." By arguing that, contrary to the English state's use of the word in the phrase "the person of the majesty," which was under threat from the treasonous masses, the word majesty meant the *people* rather than the king. Hence, an act of parliament that sought to gag the people's democratic voice, that curtailed the majesty of the people was, in itself, an act of treason. The English state, rather than the radical English people, was the perpetrator of the treason.

In this debate, popular access to an understanding of law was central to the possibility of proper governance. And this proper governance was portrayed as a specifically English thing to do. William Jones, who was then one of the most important Indological scholars of classical Indian languages, found himself engaged in this debate when he wrote a pamphlet entitled "Dialogue Between a Scholar and a Peasant", in which he posed a critique of prevailing elitist ideologies

¹⁵ Hans Arsléff, *The Study of Language in England (1780–1860)* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1967), pp. 44–114. For a discussion about the relationship between Tooke's thoughts on language and those of Locke, see Paul Lamarre, "John Horne Tooke and the Grammar of Political Experience", *Philological Quarterly* (77) (1998): 187–207. Lamarre quotes Locke to show how he was suspicious of the ways in which a multiplicity of words for common ideas produces confusion and discord among men. "Men, when they come to examine them, find their simple Ideas all generally to agree, though in discourse with one another, they perhaps confound one another with different Names" (Lamarre, 187). On Tooke's influence on important literary and political thinkers of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, see Andrew R. Cooper, "Monumental Inscriptions: Language, Rights, the Nation in Coleridge and Horne Tooke", *ELH* (66)(1999): 87–110. Bauman and Briggs elaborate a reading of what they call Locke's "anti-rhetorical rhetoric", which illustrates how Locke laid out a radical politics of language in "attempts to shape which ways of speaking would afford access to power, how privileged discursive practices would be learned and how one would learn them" (Richard Bauman and Charles S. Briggs, *Language Ideologies and the Politics of Inequality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. x and 19–70).

¹⁶ For more details about the controversy and the question of treason in this period, see John Barrell, *Imagining the King's Death: Figurative Treason, Fantasies of Regicide, 1793–1796* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 554–62.

of language by explaining parliamentary governance in simple and accessible language.¹⁷

Prominent among such ideologues was James Harris. Harris drew on a different reading from that of Locke to suggest that there were two layers of linguistic existence – the rational language and a more affect-based language of sensory experience. And Harris’s affect-based language, which drew from sensory experience, was always tied to the local and was unable to transcend its fleshy life to do the political work. The radicals would respond to ideologies such as Harris’s to argue that this is what buttressed the elitist power structure in Britain. And perhaps there should be greater attention to using plain speech. And by staking the Lockean investment in recuperating a pure language that could reveal important truths, radical philology of this kind called for an attention to etymology. This led to the valorization of the vernacular as natural language not yet hijacked by those in power.

While the influence of Tooke waxed and waned in the ensuing years, the cultural politics of language remained an important matter of literary, philological, and political debates. The impact of these discussions was far reaching. Tooke’s materialist understanding of language influenced early Romantic literary concerns with individual agency and the human relationship with the natural world. The investment of the Romantic poets in these questions was in itself a product of an engagement with the legacy of the French Revolution and the imperative to think about individual political agency in Britain where the non-elite had very little political sovereignty.¹⁸ The continental influence on the philosophy of language in English Romantic poetry is particularly evident in William Wordsworth’s thoughts on language. Wordsworth’s notion of language was founded on borrowings from the language-oriented philosophy of Locke and Condillac. He based his understanding on the principle of linguistic relativity, which makes three basic assumptions. First, that words are an expression of our private ideas of what we encounter in the world. This assumption drew heavily from Locke’s critique of language as nomenclature. That is, for Locke, words did not necessarily mean things, rather, they expressed our *abstract ideas* about things. This understanding of words had become increasingly popular across Europe and we find resonances of it in the thoughts of Condillac and Humboldt. The second assumption was that, as ideas were intensely private, they could only be

¹⁷ William Jones, *Principles of Government in a Dialogue between a Scholar and a Peasant* (London: Society for Constitutional Information, 1783).

¹⁸ For a discussion of Coleridge’s understanding of agency and the impulses behind his thinking about agency, see Steven E. Cole, “Coleridge, Language and the Production of Agency”, *Modern Philology* (88) (1990): 109–25.

expressed through the “sad incompetence of human speech.”¹⁹ This assumption was based on an understanding shared by Locke, Condillac, Herder, and Humboldt that “every individual has his own language.”²⁰ However, language is fundamentally a social thing. This leads to the third assumption, that language is a “social institution” that “embodies the communally shared universe of knowledge and feeling.”²¹ Hence, language in the moment of Wordsworth was understood as something both intimately personal and communally shared. Thus, the community that shared this language also shared a degree of intimacy through language.

This understanding of a private language that is intimate to a people’s collective thought drew on a much deeper history in the career of Middle English of the early modern period. Vernacular came to mean a very specific thing when literary figures of this period sought to separate it from Latin as well as from French. In this period, vernacularization involved the mapping of spoken language on to the written language of the middle elite and in doing so the language sought to rise beyond its vernacularity to take up a position as a national mother tongue that was always in competition with both other mother tongues and vehicular languages. In this period, the status of English as a vernacular was founded on the notion that it was the common tongue commonly spoken by the lower classes, as well as between the common people and the elite who had access to other classical languages as well.²² Also part of this vernacularization was a stronger investment in the idea of it as a mother tongue, which established a visceral connection between the speakers and the language.²³ Across Europe, the idea of the genius of language also emerged in this period. In his history of Italian, Paola Gambarota shows how the concern with the genius of language came to dominate European discussions about common tongue in the early modern period.²⁴

¹⁹ Hans Aarsleff, “Wordsworth, Language and Romanticism”, in *From Locke to Sassure: Essays On the Study of Language and Intellectual History* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1983), p. 375.

²⁰ Ibid. ²¹ Ibid.

²² Jocelyn Wogan-Browne and Ian Richard Johnson, *The Idea of the Vernacular: An Anthology of Middle English Literary Theory, 1280–1520* (University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 1999).

²³ Margaret. W. Furgusson, *Dido’s Daughters: Literacy, Gender and Empire in Early Modern England and France* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2003), pp. 83–134.

²⁴ Paola Gambarota, *Irresistible Signs: The Genius of Language and Italian National Identity* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011). He argues that “the building blocks of linguistic nationalism were long in the making, starting with seventeenth-century discussions of vernaculars that began consistently to link the genius of language to the genius of the nation” (p. 13).

Another factor that informed the idea of the vernacular in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century England was the linguistic experience of internal colonialism, which pitted English in an adversarial relationship with colonized languages such as Irish and Welsh. In this context, English had come to serve as the vehicular language or a language that travelled beyond the local confines of the community that initially spoke it and was also able to connect various language groups together by serving as a common tongue. While early modern textual evidence suggests that the English government sought to force the Irish to use the English language, by the nineteenth century we find that that relationship with Irish had become far more complex. Rather than being the only viable language of use that sought to obliterate other languages, English had come to occupy a very different position in the hierarchy of languages – it had become the worldly vehicular language that could connect the far reaches of the empire in which specific vernaculars were spoken. For instance, in the case of Irish and its relationship to English rule in the nineteenth century, we find discussions of Irish as vernacular where it denoted the local language and it also meant, very emphatically so, the language that was owned by the people.²⁵ It was described as the language that was best used to impart religious scripture as well as education.²⁶ In discussions of language planning, Irish was described as a language that could not be separated from the Irish population. At the same time, there was also a constant concern about how the Irish language did not have the ability to carry what the colonizing elite wanted to teach the colonized. The Irish language needed improvement. And this ideology established a culture of improvement of the colonized vernacular in relation to Irish. Furthermore, with the growing popularity of comparative philology and the increasing acceptance of an evolutionary historicist understanding of the relationship between languages of the world, the comparison between an inadequate colonized vernacular and a much more successful and well-endowed vehicular English had been set up by this time.²⁷

²⁵ In 1787, we find arguments about teaching in Irish. A 1787 pamphlet writer argued: “No, my lord, the natives of Ireland must ever be instructed in their vernacular tongue . . . No change could be lasting, which took place in contradiction to the passions of the people, who in all nations have been more affected by changes in local manners and customs, but particularly in language”. Tony Crowley, *Politics of Language in Ireland, 1366–1922: Source Book* (London: Routledge, 2000), p. 126.

²⁶ J. S. Taylor, “Reasons for Giving Moral Instruction of the Native Irish Through the Medium of their vernacular language, 1817”, in Crowley, *Politics of Language*, pp. 146–7.

²⁷ One of the first language-mapping projects in India was Robert Needham Cust’s Language Map of India, which dealt with revenue collection. See Judith T. Irvine, “Language Fields: Robert Needham Cust’s Language Map of South Asia, 1878”, in Cynthia Talbot, *Knowing India: Colonial and Modern Constructions of the Past* (New Delhi:

By the 1830s when the question of language became very fraught in India due to the Orientalist-Anglicist debate, we find that this shift in English from vernacular in England to vehicular in the empire was entirely in place. For instance, if we read Thomas Babbington Macaulay's Indian and British writings together we find that he placed English where the English would have placed Greek and Roman in the Renaissance in the spectrum of languages. In the Minute on Indian Education, Macaulay argued that:

The first instance to which I refer is the great revival of letters among the Western nations at the close of the fifteenth and the beginning of the sixteenth century. At that time almost everything that was worth reading was contained in the writings of the ancient Greeks and Romans. Had our ancestors acted as the Committee of Public Instruction has hitherto noted, had they neglected the language of Thucydides and Plato, and the language of Cicero and Tacitus, had they confined their attention to the old dialects of our own island, had they printed nothing and taught nothing at the universities but chronicles in Anglo-Saxon and romances in Norman French, –would England ever have been what she now is? What the Greek and Latin were to the contemporaries of More and Ascham, our tongue is to the people of India. The literature of England is now more valuable than that of classical antiquity. I doubt whether the Sanscrit [sic] literature be as valuable as that of our Saxon and Norman progenitors.

In Macaulay's characterization of languages, we find that there is composite understanding of language that is deeply implicated in the experience of colonialism and the politics of knowledge and power. Macaulay's understanding of language in this passage seems to be borrowed from a number of sources. Language here is primarily a custodian of knowledge and textual reserves of any particular community. In this we see resonances of Wordsworth's two-tier understanding of languages as the individual's ideas borne out of his/her responses to the natural world, which then get bolstered by a public consensus within the individual's immediate community. Language then bears the knowledge of both the individual's immediate experience and the shared knowledge of the community. This connection between nature, the individual, and the community could allow language to be the custodian of scientific knowledge. At the same time Macaulay's critique of Indian languages carries a whiff of Harris' understanding of the differing abilities of different languages; that some languages are too earthy to reflect complex and abstract thought. Macaulay's description of Sanskrit, in particular, is intriguing. While he acknowledges that there is knowledge in Sanskrit, he notes how this knowledge is misleading. But his comparison of

(Yoda Press, 2011). Joseph Errington, *Linguistics in a Colonial World: A Story of Language, Meaning, and Power* (Chichester: John Wiley & Sons, 2008).

English, European classical languages, and Sanskrit suggests that this condition of inadequacy is not absolute for Indian vernacular languages. Anglo-Saxon and its contemporaries grew into English. This opens up the possibility for the future development of the Indian vernaculars through the influence of English. And that is precisely what Macaulay hoped that his “brown sahibs” could achieve. They could serve to filter Western knowledge that resided in English into the Indian vernaculars. In arguing for the creation of a new class of Indian men who were Indian in “blood and colour” but English in “tastes, manners and distinction,” Macaulay was not just arguing for the creation of a class of intermediaries for the administration of the Indian empire, he was also hoping to create a class of people across India who were tasked to reform, modernize, and empower Indian vernaculars to become languages that could do what English was able to do due to centuries of influence from Greek and Latin.

This brief discussion of ideologies of language in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries that the idea of the vernacular had come to acquire a range of meanings in the imperial metropole. It invoked the idea of the mother tongue, a common tongue that connected the nation across classes and natural or pure language. It was also applied to the language of the colonized that was lacking in knowledge and the equipment for carrying such knowledge. The colonized vernacular was a fit subject for reform. And despite its deficiencies the only language through which the colonized could be spoken to because it was their mother tongue and its use would fit with English notions of efficacious rule. And finally, as Robert Yelle has argued, the vernacular was seen as having the ability to confound attempts of local religious orthodoxy to beguile the common people through the use of opaque “classical” languages such as Sanskrit and Persian.²⁸

Colonial Vernacularization of India

In late eighteenth-century colonial India, William Jones, as well as his contemporaries who worked on Indian languages, started by looking at Sanskrit and Arabic as a means to gain access into understanding the Indian population and Indian legal systems.²⁹ Jones himself started studying Sanskrit because he served as a judge in Calcutta and he needed

²⁸ Robert A. Yelle, *The Language of Disenchantment: Protestant Literalism and Colonial Discourse in British India* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

²⁹ See Bernard Cohn’s famous essay on the language of command: Bernard S. Cohn, *Colonialism and its Forms of Knowledge: The British in India* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996); Thomas R. Trautmann, *Languages and Nations: the Dravidian Proof in Colonial Madras* (New Delhi: Yoda Press, 2006).

to understand Hindu law. Unlike Macaulay after him, Jones believed that an understanding of Persian and Sanskrit was key to a more nuanced understanding of Indian society to enable imperial rule.³⁰ Much of the early study of India languages was for such reasons. For instance, taking a different approach, Nathaniel Halhed wrote his grammar of the Bengali language to produce a language that would be intelligible to both the colonizer and the colonized so that the newly colonized Bengalis could be incorporated into the British empire as “more than subjects but less than citizens.”³¹ Understanding, codifying, and teaching Indian languages became central to the imperial project in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

The consequence of Jones’ and his contemporary’s investment in an understanding of language as the route to accessing some sort of primeval truth about India was that the early linguistic Indology ascribed to languages such as Sanskrit and Persian the capacity for holding some foundational truths about the Indian people. In the meanwhile, the launching of comparative linguistics and new ideas about the Indo-European language family, which connected Indian languages with European languages, also situated Indo-European vernaculars in a genetic and gendered relationship with Sanskrit, which, in turn, came to be understood as the mother of Indian languages.³² Thus was put in place a hierarchy of languages in which the classical Sanskrit or Persian was followed by the more lumpen Indian vernacular languages. The vernaculars were often thought of a vulgarized, bastardized version of the classical.

This hierarchy is visible in the first of the three crucial moments when colonial policy about Indian languages was determined in India. It is attested in the evidence that we garner from the Orientalist and Anglicist debate on education of the 1830s, which was concerned with choosing the medium of higher education in India between English and Indian classical languages, i.e., Sanskrit and Persian. The Anglicists argued that using English would allow Indians access to a large body of literature that came from the West. They were adamant that Indian languages did not have the ability to represent modern thoughts and neither did they have a sizable textual tradition that would be useful for

³⁰ Hans Aarsleff, *The Study of Language in England, 1780–1860* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1967), p. 122.

³¹ For a nuanced reading of Halhed’s grammar, see Henry Schwarz, “Laissez-Faire Linguistics: Grammar and the Codes of Empire”, *Critical Enquiry*, 23 (1997): 509–35.

³² Sumathi Ramaswamy, “Sanskrit for the Nation”, *Modern Asian Studies* 33, no. 02 (1999): 339–81. Judith T. Irvine, “The Family Romance of Colonial Linguistics: Gender and Family in Nineteenth-Century Representations of African Languages”, *Pragmatics* 5, no. 2 (2009). Errington, *Linguistics in a Colonial World*.

modern life. Thus, such tongues were unable to render Indians into productive subjects of the British Empire. The Orientalists held that the Indian populace did not desire Western knowledge and that there was much to be learnt from a classical Indian education. In a move that was reminiscent of Wordsworth's linguistic assumptions, they also argued that Sanskrit and Persian literature was important to the people of India because poetry in these languages was the "source of national imagery and the expression of national feeling."³³ While there are differences between the two sides, what is striking is that both sides maintained a consistent narrative of linguistic lack when it came to Indian vernaculars. Even someone like John Stuart Mill, who wrote about this debate and responded to some of the more vociferous Anglicist arguments, posed that the study of Indian classical languages was important *precisely* because it would enable the colonial state to improve Indian vernacular languages. This narrative of linguistic lack about the Indian vernaculars continued and we see this in discussions about Urdu in Delhi College, which talk about how Urdu is a language that is unprepared to speak modern thoughts and hence a new lexicon needs to be introduced into that language.

Despite the resolution of the Orientalist-Anglicist debate with the introduction of English as the language of higher education, the colonial state in the same period also invested in recognizing the vernaculars of India for administrative reasons. With the passing of the Act of 1837, the language of revenue and judicial administration in the Bengal presidency was changed from Persian to Hindustani, Bengali, and Odia. As I have discussed earlier, the justification for this change was that in judicial and revenue administration, justice could not possibly be served if the people who were being judged or accessed by the state were unable to understand the language of the state and language of law. This was a very clear reference back to the 1790s' moment in British politics. In the process involved in getting this Act passed, the government of Bengal asked its district-level officials to report on what languages were used in their districts and asked for their opinions about the possible drawbacks of these languages and what could be done to rectify these. A number of conclusions can be drawn from a reading of the correspondence that followed. First, we see that this call for district-level responses resulted in a very careful mapping of the languages of the Bengal Presidency. And we should note here that the Act was applied to other British provinces

³³ Lynn Zastoupil, and Martin Moir, *The Great Indian Education Debate: Documents Relating to the Orientalist-Anglicist Controversy, 1781–1843* (London: Psychology Press, 1999): p. 23.

immediately after and this meant that there was meticulous linguistic surveying occurring across India, although this was by no means the first linguistic mapping of India by the colonial government. This new mapping, however, was the first time the mapping was coupled with administrative changes. The correspondence, which runs into 430 manuscripts of district reports, reveals a discussion of how these languages were unable to serve as judicial languages because of their difficult script, lack of standardization, or lack of a judicial lexicon. The pervasive disdain for these languages within the ranks of low level colonial officials also comes through in the correspondence.

In twenty years' time, the linguistic mapping of colonial administration was mirrored in a linguistic mapping of colonial education with the institution of the Wood's Despatch of 1854, which stipulated that all primary education and some secondary education should be conducted in the medium of the local vernacular.³⁴ The ideological investment in teaching in the people's own language that comes through in the discussions about the Wood's Despatch echoes back to the experience of Irish in India.

The rigorous linguistic mapping of colonial India that ensued due to the institution of the Wood's Despatch forced colonial officials to draw discrete geographical boundaries between language zones. In the border zones of language, the question of the official language of instruction often became the subject of vigorous debates. For instance, the question of language in the Midnapore district of the Bengal Presidency had to be resolved between colonial officials as many people of the district were bilingual with an ability to speak both Odia and Bengali. As residents self-identified as either Odia speaking or Bengali speaking, it became difficult for officials to stipulate a clear choice for the language of instruction.³⁵ The question of the Midnapore district would become a point of contention later in the century, when members of the Odia intelligentsia would cite the example of the falling number of Odia speakers in the district as an instance of Odia-speaking people identifying as Bengali speaking due to governmental neglect of the Odia language. However, it was not just a question of the choice between major vernaculars in border areas of language zones in India that threw up problems for officials instituting the recommendations of the Wood's Despatch. In Chittagong, officials became concerned about what would be the language of instruction as

³⁴ Robin James. Moore, "The Composition of Wood's Education Despatch", *English Historical Review* 80, no. 314 (1965): 70–85.

³⁵ A collection of despatches from the Home Department on the subject of Education in India 1854–1868 (Calcutta: Office of Superintendent of Government Printing, 1870), p. 49.

the vernacular of the area was an adivasi language known as Chakma. Officials recommended a choice between Bengali, the dominant language of neighboring areas, or English, which was the most developed language in India. The protectionist language of the discussion about this choice throws into clear relief the limits of the government's stipulation that the language of instruction should be in the vernacular of the area.³⁶ Not every vernacular qualified as the language of instruction. These choices effectively put in place a hierarchy of languages in India. First English, then some of the major native languages including Tamil, Bengali, or Odia and, finally, at the bottom of the hierarchy were adivasi languages such as Munda, Ho, Chakma, and Gond. Earlier efforts for administration and proselytization did not make such distinctions as the impetus was on reaching the local population rather than a centralized effort to categorize the populations in unilingual language groups that could be educated in a uniform manner. Boundaries and minorities had to be rationalized into discrete monolingual zones.

By the end of the 1850s, when we look at how the colonial government works, we see that Indian languages have come to have discrete boundaries with discrete groups of speakers whose interests are staked with these languages. To be vernacular is now to be local to a particular part of India in contrast to the vehicular and far-reaching English. This understanding of Indian languages had already existed since the precolonial times. While there is no word for the vernacular as such in Indian languages, Sheldon Pollock has illustrated how these languages were thought of as local or *desi* in relation to the more cosmopolitan or *marga* language of Sanskrit. However, the locality of these languages, their territorial domains, had never before been so discretely marked and intensely contested (as it came to be later).

Now people had to speak, be adjudicated, and be taught in their own languages. Due to the influence of Romantic notions of natural language that informed British linguistic liberalism, vernacular has now become emphatically indigenous – not just to the locality or place but to the people themselves. And through the narrative of linguistic lack that pervaded early Indological and official discussion, vernacular now had also become, to some extent, powerless. It had become a vulnerable, abject object of native protectionism and activism.

However, this claim of powerlessness emerges through the very process that empowers these languages as languages of education and state by making them into languages that allow access to colonial boons. Therefore, written into the claim of the “enslavement” of the vernacular

³⁶ Ibid, p. 86.

is already tremendous political power – which will be harnessed by local regional elites to buttress anticolonial politics and regional hegemony over internal minorities. This is the new politics of vernacularization of colonial India.³⁷

The institutional process of colonial vernacularization gradually transformed the people of India into a collection of monolingual subjects in the eyes of the colonial state. This institutional monolingualism emerged with the growth of colonial governmentality in India in the last 250 years. The writings of early philologists including William Jones and administrators such as Thomas Macaulay suggest that languages in India were classified into classical languages (Sanskrit and Persian) and vernaculars (prakrit languages and the languages of the indigenous peoples of India). From comments such as “some languages not vernacular among them,” we can infer that in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, “vernacular” simply meant language commonly spoken by the people.³⁸ However, the shift in the relationship between language, place, and people had already begun with this usage. As Sheldon Pollock has argued, in the precolonial period, language was not linked to people but to place. In Europe, by way of contrast: “Origins of languages and people, morphing into chronologies and histories of kingdoms-and-peoples, can fairly be called an obsession [...] in the first half of the vernacular millennium.”³⁹ The history of colonial and comparative philology in India suggests that a trace of this European legacy carried into colonial linguistic policy. Using the example of C. P. Brown, a scholar of nineteenth-century Telegu, Rama Sundari Mantena has illustrated how colonial philology saw languages as having “progressive histories” that would foreshadow later debates

³⁷ This narrative of vernacularization in the nineteenth century that I am trying to establish produces these boundaries between Indian languages and between their domains and produces their own regional basis, but does not, however, suggest that there is no geographical life of the major Indian languages *before* colonialism. As the work of Sheldon Pollock illustrates, there is no term to denote the many meanings that the term vernacular carries in Indian languages. Through his study of the vernacular millennium as he calls it, Pollock illustrates that two kinds of language exist and they have a certain kind of relationship between them, which is both spatial and ideological; that is, the language of the path or *marga*, like Sanskrit, and the language of place or *desi*, like Odia. *Desi* is not thought of as a mother tongue. There are no words for the idea of a mother tongue. There probably does not exist the same kind of affective relations with language. While relationship between language and early modern polity exists, these discrete boundaries did not exist, the boundaries are much more fuzzy and the discreteness is new.

³⁸ L. Zastoupil and M. Moir (eds.), *The Great Education Debate: Documents Relating to the Orientalist-Anglicist Controversy, 1781–1843* (London: Routledge, 1999), p. 236.

³⁹ Sheldon Pollock, “Cosmopolitan and Vernacular in History”, *Public Culture* 12, no. 3 (2000): 612.

about modernization of Indian languages.⁴⁰ In later years, regional linguistic activism would conflate the progress of the speakers with the progress of the language. For instance, in the late 1930s Tamil nationalists argued that the prosperity of Mother Tamil or *Tamiltay* would entail the prosperity of Tamil speakers – “If *Tamiltay* prospers, so will *Tamilians* and so will *Tamilnadu*” – language, people, and place now shared a common destiny.⁴¹

Tower of Babel: Language Policy and Affect in Colonial Odisha

In Odisha, language and community came to be coupled in a public debate in the 1860s when the Odia-speaking elite organized a campaign against proposals for the removal of Odia as a language of instruction in schools of the Odisha division of the Bengal Presidency. This drew the colonial government and the Odia elite into a debate about the viability of Odia as an official language, as questions were raised about the scope of existing Odia literature, the ability of the impoverished Odia-speaking people to finance the production of new literature in Odia, and the efficacy of granting state patronage to a language that was not equipped to serve as an official language due to the paucity of educated Odia-speaking people. This section will trace the shift in the understanding of language as an instrumental medium of communication to an object of affect – a mother tongue – as the Odia-language press engaged with the proposal to replace Odia with Bengali. This engagement, I will argue, is marked not only by the avowal of Odia as a mother tongue but also by an effort to question the hierarchical relationship between Odia and Bengali – where Bengali is understood as a more developed language. By lobbying for the continued use of Odia as a language of instruction in the schools of the Odisha division of the Bengal Presidency, the Odia elite effectively convinced the colonial state that the Odia language had a separate, inviolable geographical domain of its own.

While the formation of a discrete geographical domain of Odia was a colonial phenomenon, it would be incorrect to say that this was the first instance of vernacularization in Odisha. In sixteenth-century Odisha, under the influence of devotional Vaisnavism, the earliest Odia translations of the *Mahabharata*, *Bhagavad Gita* and *Ramayana* were produced.

⁴⁰ Rama Sundari Mantena, “Vernacular Futures: Colonial Philology and the Idea of History in Nineteenth Century South India”, *Indian Economic and Social History Review* 42 (2005): 513–34.

⁴¹ Quoted in Sumathi Ramaswamy, “En/Gendering Language: The Poetics of Tamil Identity”, *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 35 (1993): 691–2.

The term “translation” can only be used loosely in relation to these texts because even though the broad plot of these texts were based on the Sanskrit originals, their content departed sharply from the actual stories in the original texts. The Odia Mahabharata, written by a peasant poet Sarala Das, located the epic entirely in Odisha. These localized religious texts became extremely popular in rural Odisha. Instrumental in this process was the Bhagabat Ghara, a communally held hut present within most villages in Odisha, where these texts were read out loud to a devotional audience. Reports of the presence of such Bhagabat Gharas can be obtained as late as the last decade of the nineteenth century.⁴² It could be argued that this auditory literacy in medieval Odia religious texts shared by people across Odia-speaking areas, greater use of Odia in court proceedings and royal inscriptions, and a significant increase in the production of literature in Odia could have already created a sense of regional belonging based on language as early as the sixteenth century. Furthermore, the subsequent growth of Odia literature and folk traditions could only have added to this sense of belonging to one community. However, the capitulation of the last centralized Odia empire to the Mughal empire in the late sixteenth century, the emergence of smaller states all over Odisha, and Mughal and Maratha influence on Odia language, literature, and cultural life must have shaped the ways in which definitions of Odia-ness changed over time. It is evident that the provenance of Odia identity can be traced to a much earlier time. A straightforward linear history of Odia identity from its point of origin in the medieval period to its modern articulation in the nineteenth century could potentially simplify and distort a remarkably complex and internally differentiated process. Hence, even as I concede that the origins of Odia linguistic identity do lie in the precolonial period, in this chapter, I do not wish to identify some line of descent from precolonial times. My effort here is to treat particular moments in colonial history of the Odia language in their complexity rather than produce a linear narrative of the development of Odia linguistic politics. This politics is neither simply precolonial nor simply colonial. Furthermore, the danger of such a history is also that it would present Odia identity as a concept with a singular normative meaning commonly held by all Odia-speaking people.

Therefore, I do not argue that Odia as a language of affect emerged in this period. Surely, an affective relationship with language is not a modern phenomenon and a history of this affect may involve a much more

⁴² A discussion of Bhagabat Ghara is found in the 1893 travel memoir *Orisara Chitra*. Also see Bana Bihari Shukla, *Bhagabata Ghara and Village Panchayat in Mediaeval Orissa, 1510–1803 AD*, 1st ed. (Cuttack: Bharati Publications, 1986).

complex reading of nineteenth-century texts as well as those from earlier times. Such a reading is outside the scope of this project. Rather, I argue here that the transformation lay in the public, collective articulation of the Odia language as a “mother tongue,” which could not be replaced by another more developed language. This articulation and the ultimate acknowledgement by the colonial state of the Odia right to “learn in their own language” gestured at the transformation of the colonial state’s linguistic understanding of India. In future, the colonial state understood India as a collection of discrete linguistic areas. The eventual product of this new understanding of this vernacular geography of India was Grierson’s multi-volume magnum opus – the *Linguistic Survey of India*, which was published between 1903 and 1927.⁴³ The survey mapped the linguistic geography of India and effectively granted each major language its own geographical domain. The Odia–Bengali debate of the 1860s represents the moment when this transformation of British understanding of India was underway. Concomitant to this process was the emergence of identity politics focused on languages as the boundaries of linguistic domains came to be contested. Successive government initiatives such as the establishment of the 101 Hardinge vernacular schools in the Bengal Presidency and the Wood’s Despatch on education of 1854, which advocated the use of vernacular languages as the language of instruction in primary educational institutions throughout India, made the question of language in the Odia-speaking areas an important policy issue for the government.⁴⁴ What should the language of instruction in the schools of the Odia-speaking areas be? Is there an adequate supply of appropriate Odia literature and trained Odia teachers to cater to the needs of these schools and their students?

The problem with ascertaining the language of instruction in the Odia-speaking areas arose from the minority linguistic status of Odia speakers in the larger provinces of British India. In the case of areas where a majority of the population spoke Odia, the use of the vernacular was only partial. Odia was officially designated the language of instruction in

⁴³ George Abraham Grierson and India Linguistic Survey, *Linguistic Survey of India* (Calcutta: Government of India, Central Publication Branch, 1903). In his new book, Javed Majeed has showed how Grierson’s survey became the focus of interregional linguistic politics as many linguistic movements deployed the findings of the survey as alibis for their territorial demands. See Javed Majeed, *Nation and Region in Grierson’s Linguistic Survey of India* (New Delhi: Routledge, 2018).

⁴⁴ In 1844, Lord Hardinge decreed the establishment of 101 vernacular schools in the Bengal Presidency. Eight of these 101 were established in the Orissa division. For details, see Bharati Mohapatra, *Going to School in the Raj: Primary Education in India (1803–1903) with Focus on Orissa* (Bhubaneswar: V. B. Shastri, 2003), pp. 63–72. For more details on the Wood’s Despatch, see Mir, “Imperial Policy, Provincial Practices”.

the Orissa division of the Bengal Presidency. However, in Odia-speaking areas in the Central Provinces and Madras Presidency the language of instruction remained Hindi and Telugu, respectively. Hence, the subsequent Odia-language movement of the 1860s, which was organized to oppose proposals to substitute Bengali for Odia, developed mostly in the Orissa division of the Bengal Presidency.⁴⁵

By the late 1860s, Cuttack, the capital of the Orissa division, could boast of a fairly vocal albeit limited public sphere comprising of discussion clubs such as the Cuttack Debating Society and newspapers (for example, *Utkal Dipika*).⁴⁶ As a response to the mismanagement of the famine relief efforts by the government in 1866, *Utkal Dipika*, a weekly newspaper, was floated to apprise the government of the needs of the people of Orissa division. A secondary object of the newspaper was to work for the development of the Odia language. The *Utkal Dipika* provided the site where the notion of the economic, social and cultural interests of a community came to be conflated with the Odia language. The newspaper, edited by Gourishankar Rai, frequently carried articles and received letters about the economic condition of the people of Odisha, famine relief efforts by the government, and other governmental policies pertaining to Odisha.⁴⁷ In the late 1860s, the newspaper spearheaded the campaign against the proposal to replace Odia with Bengali in the Orissa division.

The debate about Odia and Bengali had been brewing for some time among colonial officials. As early as 1841, the Commissioner of Orissa was petitioned by the Sudder Board of Revenue that Odia be replaced by Bengali as language of governmental activity.⁴⁸ Reasons given by these early proposals were twofold: one, that there was very little difference between the two languages and the use of Bengali in the Orissa division

⁴⁵ This, however, does not mean that similar debate did not occur in other Odia-speaking areas in the Central Provinces and the Madras Presidency in the subsequent period. In fact, the first political movement for the separation of an Odia-speaking area occurred in the Sambalpur district of the Central Provinces. In Sambalpur, where a majority spoke Odia, the government of the Central provinces was attempting to substitute Hindi for Odia as the language of instruction. This led to a rather public debate in both Orissa division and Sambalpur. After much debate, the Central Provinces government rescinded the order and transferred the Sambalpur district and its associated princely states to the Bengal Presidency. For more details, see Nivedita Mohanty, *Oriya Nationalism: Quest for a United Orissa, 1866–1956* (Bhubaneswar: Prafulla, 2005), pp. 63–81.

⁴⁶ For a detailed list of other newspapers and the general state of newspaper media in the late nineteenth century, see *Ibid.*, pp. 55–60.

⁴⁷ For a cross-section of articles published in *Utkal Dipika*, see Sudhakar Patnaik, *Sambadapatraru Odisara Katha, Vol. 1 (1886–1881)* (Cuttack: Grantha Mandir, 1971).

⁴⁸ S. C. Patra, *Formation of the Province of Orissa: The Success of the First Linguistic Movement in India* (Calcutta: Punthi Pustak, 1979), p. 101. The events preceding this report are noted in Panchanan Mohanty, “British Language Policy in Nineteenth Century India and the Oriya Language Movement”, *Language Policy* 1 (2002).

would be in the interest of administrative economy; and, two, the lack of properly educated Odia-speaking officials made it difficult to find appropriate personnel. Thus, these proposals argued that using Bengali in the Orissa division made sound administrative sense.

Similar proposals were being made for the changes in the language of instruction in schools of the Orissa division.⁴⁹ The lack of qualified Odia school teachers and proper textbooks in Odia often formed the grounds for such proposals. Even as late as 1860, there were only seven Odia teachers in the entire Orissa division. As a result, most of the teaching posts in urban as well as remote rural areas were manned by Bengali-speaking teachers who, owing to their inability to teach in Odia, failed to enforce the provisions of the Wood's Despatch on education. Education in these areas could not be conducted in the officially recognized vernacular language – Odia. In 1864–65, both the Inspector and Deputy Inspector of Schools in Odisha recommended that Bengali be made the only language of instruction in the schools of Orissa division.⁵⁰ This sparked the Odia-language movement in earnest.

As a response to such proposals, the Utkal Bhasha Uddhipani Sabha (Association for the Development of Odia Language) was organized in 1867. Headed by both domiciled Bengalis and Odia members, this organization aimed at the development of the Odia language, encouragement of the involvement of common people (*sarbasadharana*) in this project, the replacement of the mixed languages used in government offices with pure Odia, and to ensure that only linguistically qualified officials be able to work as revenue officials in Odisha.⁵¹ The last of these aims perhaps points to the need for a larger number of educated Odia-speaking government officials to man the junior positions in the revenue department that had a major impact on the lives of the Odia populace.⁵²

⁴⁹ The fact that such proposals were being made in official circles is evidenced in the rebuttal issued by E. Roer, the first Inspector of Schools for Orissa, who said: "The Ooriah language cannot be considered as a dialect of Bengalee, though nearly related to it; but it is a language of its own which has its own grammatical forms, idioms and signs for the letters and mostly translations from Puranas, the Hitopadeshas, Baratrishasinghasana etc.", in Patra, "Formation of the Province of Orissa", p. 102.

⁵⁰ Mohanty, "British Language Policy in Nineteenth Century India", 62.

⁵¹ "Utkala Bhasha Uddhipani Sabha", *Utkal Dipika*, May 26, 1867, reprinted in Appendix 2 of Mahanti, *Odia Bhasha Andolana*, p. 121.

⁵² In his report on education in 1867–68, the Inspector of schools noted that there was a need for a surveyor school in Cuttack as there was a lack of Odia-speaking *amins*. See Instruction Bengal Dept. of Public, "General Report on Public Instruction in the Lower Provinces of the Bengal Presidency", in *General Report on Public Instruction in the Lower Provinces of the Bengal Presidency* (Calcutta: Printed [for the Government] at the Alipore Jail Press, 1867–68), pp. 58–9.

However, even as this organization was striving towards strengthening the position of Odia in governmental and educational institutions, the leaders used the development of Bengali as a template for future efforts to achieve their goals. The career of Bengali under colonial rule was seen as an exemplar of the manner in which a native population had been able to preserve, modernize, and develop an Indian vernacular. The influence of the Bengali model is apparent from the proceedings of the first meeting of the Sabha. Rangalal Bandyopadhyay, the president of the session noted that: "If we investigate the rise to favor of our Bengali language in such a short time then we will find that printing presses and organizations for religious propaganda are responsible."⁵³ Hence Bandyopadhyay argued that, as religious texts had been so successful in the spread and development of Bengali, the old Odia religious texts should be reprinted. It was to be the responsibility of the Sabha to unearth the background of the authors of these classical texts and enable the dissemination of the texts through publication.

Paradoxically, even as the Sabha was established for the development of the Odia language in a climate where Odia was being displaced by Bengali based on claims that Odia was merely a dialect of Bengali, Bandyopadhyay reiterated such claims rather than questioning them. He argued that the difference between Odia and Bengali was not any more pronounced than the distinction between regional variations of Bengali. This inability to break away from the foundational claim against the establishment of Odia reveals how entrenched this idea was among the educated elite.

However, the argument against Odia was not always based on the similarity between Odia and Bengali. The most influential statement in favor of Bengali was a speech made by Rajendralal Mitra at the Cuttack Debating Society in 1868, where he argued for the removal of Odia from the schools of the Orissa division on the grounds that the Odia-speaking population was numerically too small to support the production of new Odia school textbooks.⁵⁴ Mitra was well known both in the Orissa division as well as in Calcutta. An active member of the Asiatic Society of Bengal, Mitra had strong links in Odisha due to his research on Odisha

⁵³ "Atirikta", *Utkal Dipika*, May 26, 1867, reprinted in Appendix 2 of Mahanti, *Odia Bhasha Andolana*, p. 200.

⁵⁴ The Cuttack Debating Society was an organization of students and teachers at the Cuttack High School. It was held in the building of the printing press of the Odia weekly *Utkal Dipika*. In its early years, it remained one of the more popular forums for public discussion in Odisha where Odia intellectuals, government officials and visiting scholars discussed a variety of issues. For details, see Nataban Samantaraya, *Odia Sahityara Itihasa (1803–1920)*, (Bhubaneswar: Granthalaya, 1974).

antiquities. In 1875 he published *Antiquities of Orissa*.⁵⁵ He was also very vocal in the debate about vernacular education in Calcutta.⁵⁶

In his speech Mitra argued that the lack of an adequate number of people who speak the Odia language could render the survival of Odia as an independent language impossible. He noted:

Any well wisher of Utkal will first introduce Bengali and replace Oriya. As per the Famine Commissioner the total population of Utkal is twenty lakhs now. If we discount the women and the children, it is possible that only ten to twelve lakh people know how to read and write. But can this small number of people maintain a language? Nobody can be successful in writing new books here. Bengal is a vast country and has progressed so much because its population is large. If Bengali is introduced in Utkal then Bengali books will be read here. And the Oriya people will get good books easily.⁵⁷

Thus, for Mitra, not unlike the colonial government, the lack of textbooks was the central problem that informed the deliberations about the status of Odia in the schools of the Orissa division. However, Mitra introduced a revealing dimension to the debate by raising the question of population and the economics of textbook production. In this remarkably practical allusion to liberal economic practice, Mitra argued that a language could only be supported if there were a market for its consumption. The number of Odia-speaking people was an important concern as they constituted the market for Odia texts. Unfortunately, argued Mitra, the famine of 1866 had severely depleted the Odia population. Elsewhere, Mitra elaborated this claim by arguing that it would be unreasonable to expect support from any other linguistic group (the Bengalis, for example). Furthermore, he contended that it would be unfair for the government to devote its own resources to the development of texts in the Odia language. This, he warned, would mean that the government would be supporting a project that would separate the Odias from the Bengalis, effectively implying that in so doing the government would be practicing a policy of divide and rule.⁵⁸ Such a policy, Mitra cautioned, would complicate governance as it will mean raising “a tower of Babel to disunite and disperse the native races.”⁵⁹ In the absence of state support, the

⁵⁵ Rajendralala Mitra, *The Antiquities of Orissa By Rajendralala Mitra, . . . These Are Some of the Relics of the Past, Weeping over a Lost Civilisation and an Extinguished Grandeur. . . . Published under Orders of the Government of India* (Calcutta: Wyman & Co., 1875); Rajendralala Mitra and Jogeshur Mitter, *Speeches by Raja Rajendralala Mitra* (Calcutta: S. K. Lahiri, 1892).

⁵⁶ Mitra and Mitter, *Speeches by Raja Rajendralala Mitra*.

⁵⁷ Quoted in Mohanty, “British Language Policy in Nineteenth Century India”, 66–7.

⁵⁸ The Honourary Secretaries, “Remarks on Mr Beames ‘Notes on the Relation of the Uriya to the Other Modern Aryan Languages’”. *Proceedings of the Asiatic Society of Bengal* (1870), 211.

⁵⁹ *Ibid*, 211.

development of Odia language would be ultimately the concern of the Odia-speaking people alone. However, Mitra pointed out, a majority of the Odias were desperately poor. Could they possibly afford to sponsor the production of new Odia texts?

Mitra had another argument against the use of Odia in the schools of the Orissa division. He noted that the new governmental desire to promote the use of vernacular languages in primary as well as higher education would be very difficult to execute in the case of Odia. In a language that did not have adequate textbooks for primary education, textbooks for college-level education would require huge investment of time and money. Mitra argued: "To suppose that such a thing is possible for a poor community of 2½ millions of Uriyas to accomplish, is to suppose an impossibility."⁶⁰ Consequently, the Odia-speaking people would be reduced to primary- and secondary-level education and left unprepared for college education, which is conducted in English and Bengali. In such a circumstance, there will not be a quantum body of highly educated Odia people. The result, Mitra warned, would be the creation of a generation of unimaginative clerks – "bad substitutes of Babbage's calculating machines!"⁶¹ This definitely would not serve the long-term interests of the Odia people.

Mitra's arguments had two major implications for the future articulations of Odia linguistic politics. First, by connecting the fortunes of the Odia language with the numerical strength of the Odia-speaking population, Mitra unwittingly sparked the earliest Odia discussions on the need to lobby for the amalgamation of the Odia-speaking tracts in the Bengal Presidency, Madras Presidency and the Central Provinces under a single administration. The response in the Odia press to Mitra's claims focused on refuting his argument about the lack of an adequate number of Odia-speaking people and establishing that Bengali was textually rich because of a long history of patronage from the colonial state. In a two part article entitled "Odia Bhasha Unnati Prati Byaghat" (Obstacles to the Development of the Odia Language) published in *Utkal Dipika*, the author argued that the primary obstacle to the development of the Odia language was the territorial dispersal of the Odia-speaking people had led to a lack of state support and patronage as Odia was a language spoken by a minority in different British provinces.⁶² As such a language, Odia did not have access to patronage from the colonial state in the form of grants for schools, textbook publication, and college-level classes conducted in the vernacular. Such a situation, the author argued, was responsible for

⁶⁰ Ibid, 211. ⁶¹ Ibid, 214.

⁶² *Utkal Dipika*, October 3, 1871, in Patnaik, *Sambadapatraru Odisara Katha*, p. 244.

the present state of the Odia language. The author countered Mitra's claim about the more advanced state of the Bengali language by pointing out that as the dominant language of the huge Bengal Presidency, Bengali had been benefiting from state patronage for many years. If Odia were to have access to such help from the colonial state then, over time, Odia, too, would be able to support a vernacular educational system. The article writer argued that Mitra's accounting of the Odia population was wrong because he had not counted the Odia-speaking people in provinces other than the Bengal Presidency. If all Odia speakers in different British provinces were counted, then it would be evident that Odia was a language spoken by a large number of people and the colonial government would definitely support the development of the Odia language. The article ended with a proposal to organize the Odia people to agitate for the amalgamation of the Odia-speaking tracts.

The other implication of Mitra's arguments against the use of Odia, particularly his contention that governmental support to the Odia claim would create divisions among the "native peoples of India", raised the question of divisiveness of such regional claims. The specter of divisiveness of regional politics would mark both discussions about regional identity politics within Odisha and non-Odia attitudes towards such politics as Odia regional linguistic politics came to dominate the Odia public sphere over the following decades. Even emphatic calls to the Odia-speaking people to protect and maintain the particularity and identity of the Odia community often punctuated their argument with qualifications about how such a move would not threaten the intrinsic unity of India. In fact, such qualifications often ended with the claim that such regional efforts actually strengthened the unity of the Indian community.⁶³

We return for a moment to the article "Obstacles to the Development of the Odia Language", and its argument with Mitra's thesis about the future status of the Odia language. It appears that the author of the article and Mitra were speaking at cross-purposes. Mitra's concern was to speed up the development of the education of the Odia people and to ensure that they catch up with the more advanced regions of British India. Fundamental to his argument is the assumption that the Bengali and Odia languages are interchangeable because they are merely languages of instruction or means of communication. The author of the article, however, while refuting only the superstructure of Mitra's argument by taking up the question of population, did not bother to address this idea of interchangeability. On the contrary, the article begins with

⁶³ I will discuss this point further in Chapter 2.

the question of the development of the Odia language and the possible obstacles to it. This reveals an investment in the Odia language that Mitra did not have. It is evident from this that, unlike Mitra, the question of replacing Odia does not even arise for the article writer. The fundamental disagreement between Mitra and the author of the article draws from the difference in their attitude towards language.

In the Odia press during this period, the question of language came to stand for the question of the development of the Odia-speaking community. If Odia did not survive and thrive then the Odia community would gradually melt away. Reference to Odia as “mother tongue” or “mother” abounded in newspaper articles addressing the debate.⁶⁴

Finally, in 1869–70, the office of the Governor of Bengal Presidency addressed this issue by requesting statements from the Inspector of Schools in Odisha, Commissioner of Orissa, and the Director of Public Instruction for the Lower Provinces of the Bengal Presidency, describing their views on the matter of replacing Odia with Bengali. Both the Inspector of Schools and the Commissioner advised against such a move even though the Commissioner pointed out that it was difficult to obtain qualified Odia-speaking teachers for the schools of Odisha division.⁶⁵ The Director of Public Instruction differed from the Inspector of Schools and the Commissioner by advocating a policy of noninterference. He suggested]: “[I]n the main it must be left to settle

⁶⁴ A number of articles appeared in *Uktal Dipika* in 1870 and 1871 addressing these issues. For details, see Patnaik, *Sambadapatrararu Odisara Katha*.

⁶⁵ Instruction Bengal Dept. of Public, “General Report on Public Instruction in the Lower Provinces of the Bengal Presidency”, *General Report on Public Instruction in the Lower Provinces of the Bengal Presidency* (1869–1870). Furthermore, Inspector of Schools Martin, who took over in 1868–69, wrote in his first report that: “In Orissa there are but sixty four schools attended by 3787 students, and in Chotanagpore but thirty-four schools with 1599 students. I do not think either of these Provinces has had fair play, for an inspector has nearly sufficient work in Bengal without either of them, and is naturally more inclined to push on work where he sees immediate results than to set about new work, where, as a matter of necessity, it must take years before a harvest can be reaped. I do not myself see any reason why the province of Orissa should not be in ten years as far advanced as the Bengal districts under me *now* are, but at first it will be an uphill and discouraging work; I think, however, I see my way before me. I have been working with a fixed plan for the last few months and I mean to go on pushing, provided I am supported, as I expect to be, by the higher authorities.” Bengal Dept. of Public Instruction, “General Report on Public Instruction in the Lower Provinces of the Bengal Presidency”, *General Report on Public Instruction in the Lower Provinces of the Bengal Presidency* (1868–9). To this end, he made the following proposals: “[A] normal School, in which both Pandits and Gurus may be trained, should be opened in Cuttack. The study of surveying should be taught in Orissa. There are no amins there. The study of Oriya should as speedily as possible supersede the study of Bengali in what are called the *vernacular schools of Orissa*.”

itself, and the policy of Government should be to wait.”⁶⁶ Instead of taking a “decisive step” in either direction, he recommended that Odia be used in elementary education because there were adequate textbooks for lower levels of education. On the subject of higher education, he maintained that the government should “leave it to the people themselves to develop a higher literature in Odia if they really desire it.”⁶⁷ Furthermore, in order to ensure a steady supply of textbooks in Odia, he advised that a committee be set up for “supervising the preparation of any Odia school books that are *really* required”⁶⁸ (emphasis added). However, the actual production of these textbooks should be the responsibility of the Odia people.

The director based his comments on the principle that diversity of language caused impediments to the spread of enlightenment in India. He argued:

Diversity of speech is a great evil; it obstructs intercourse and offers a serious obstacle to the advance of civilization. Whenever possible, it must clearly be desirable to remove this barrier between neighbouring populations; and till it is proved that the barrier is of sufficient strength to with stand the pressure which the progress of enlightenment may naturally bring to bear upon it, the expediency would seem at least doubtful of adopting any measures that would make it less easy of removal hereafter, and tend to give permanence to the mischievous separation which it causes. The immediate difficulty is to decide whether it is hopeless to look for the removal of this separating barrier between Bengal and Orissa.⁶⁹

This statement echoes Rajendralal Mitra’s anxiety about the erection of a tower of Babel that could lead to discord among the population of British India. However, the Director departs from Mitra’s stand by pointing to the danger posed by linguistic diversity to the colonial civilizational mission. The Director’s argument functioned at a practical as well as abstract level. On a practical level, he was referring to the obstacles posed by the use of different languages of instruction in the education of the masses. Such diversity of language, he argued, was not conducive to economic or administrative expediency in the management of public instruction. Hence, it would hamper the spread of mass education in Odisha. On a more abstract level, both Mitra and the Director were arguing on behalf of a universality of human life, which was the foundation of community allegiance for Mitra and essential to the progress of enlightenment for the Director. As both these positions spoke to the

⁶⁶ Instruction Bengal Dept. of Public, “General Report on Public Instruction in the Lower Provinces of the Bengal Presidency”, *General Report on Public Instruction in the Lower Provinces of the Bengal Presidency* (1869-70), p. 60.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 62. ⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 60. ⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 61.

civilizing mission of British colonialism, they were very powerful arguments against the acknowledgment of diversity between Odia and Bengali.

Despite such arguments, the colonial government ultimately upheld the claims of the Odia-speaking people for the use of Odia in the schools of the Orissa division. In a response to the Director of the Department of Public Instruction, a memo from the Office of the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal decreed that “all schools in the province of Orissa up to the Zillah schools (of which there are only two) the Uriya language should be the language of instruction and in the Zillah and high school it should be optional.”⁷⁰ In order to promote the publication of textbooks in Odia, the memo declared that “a committee for the purpose of considering and reporting on original works and translations in the Uriya language, with a view to assist the committee of the School Book Society in deciding on the application made to them for publication of Uriya school books, has been recently appointed.”⁷¹

Countering the Director’s proposal for the policy of nonintervention, the memo noted:

Your proposal, therefore, to continue the study of Uriya in elementary schools, and not beyond, is, in the Lieutenant-Governor’s opinion, not only against the wishes of the natives of Orissa, but is opposed to the policy which he considers the Government is bound on every consideration to follow, viz. that our chief care should be to give to the Uriyas an opportunity of *learning their own language*, and that the means for this end should be extensively supplied.⁷² (emphasis added)

The Lieutenant Governor’s comments reveal that economic and administrative expediency was overshadowed by the government’s ideological commitment to provide access to education in the people’s own language. In addition, this decision was influenced by concern about public opinion. This was despite the consensus among all parties involved in this decision that the introduction of Odia at the level of higher education and the extension of the use of Odia in lower-level schools was a rather expensive and long-winded process. Such an ideological stand probably drew from the earlier concerns about “just” and “liberal” governance

⁷⁰ Ibid, p. 65. The option in this case would be between taking classes in Bengali or Odia at the zilla and high school level.

⁷¹ Ibid, p. 65. Textbooks in vernacular languages of the Bengal Presidencies were produced under the auspices of the School Book Society. Long before this memo, the Calcutta School Book Society was responsible for the publication of vernacular textbooks. For a history of the School Book Society, see Mohanty, “British Language Policy in Nineteenth Century India”.

⁷² Bengal Dept. of Public, “General Report on Public Instruction in the Lower Provinces of the Bengal Presidency”, p. 64.

through popularly intelligible languages that emerged in the discussions about the institution of Act 29 of 1837.

Similar to this concern about just and intelligible governance, the attention to public opinion while deciding matters of government policy indicated in the reference to the “wishes of the natives of Odisha” drew partly from the colonial government’s professed desire to establish liberal governance in India. The reference to “learning their own language” signalled a departure from this earlier more limited concern about just governance. To state that the government was prepared to go to great lengths to ensure that the people had an opportunity to learn their own language was to acknowledge that Indian vernaculars were not interchangeable. Bengali could not replace Odia because the Odia language was not simply a medium of communication: It was a mother tongue particular to the speakers of the Odia language. Also, inherent in this statement is the idea of a community or people who “own” a particular language. Without overdetermining the productive force of colonial rule, it should be noted here that a new idea of language was emerging in India. The right of the people to learn their own language, to *have* their own language, trumped administrative as well as economic imperatives of rule. While it can be argued that this concern with language for its own sake rather than as a means of communication as in the case of Mitra, the Director of Public Instruction, or even Act no. 29 of 1837, drew from ongoing research and interest in Indian languages among Orientalists and philologists, its emergence in policy discussions marks a dramatically new approach to vernacular languages in government circles. Vernacular language was now seen as something that rallied public opinion. To put it differently, this statement reveals the colonial government’s acknowledgement of linguistic identity politics.

Thus, by the end of the decade of the 1860s, a new understanding of language as unique to each community rather than simply a means of communication was emerging among colonial officials and the Odia-speaking elite. The increasing investment in the future of the language and the identification of this future with the possibilities of development of the speakers of Odia laid the foundation for Odia cultural politics of the subsequent years. In the years to come, forums for the discussion of Odia language and literature came to house the earliest articulations of the political demand for the creation of a separate administrative state of Odisha and broader discussions of anticolonialism and all-India nationalism.

A more immediate consequence of the 1860s’ debate was the growing anxiety among the Odia elite about the lack of appropriate Odia texts that could be used as textbooks in the schools of the Orissa division. This

anxiety organized early Odia efforts to mobilize the educated elite in the interests of the Odia language. In the years after the government decision to retain the use of Odia in schools, essayists and newspaper editors called for a greater production of new Odia literature and recuperation of older Odia texts that could serve as textbooks for young children. The emergence of modern Odia literature in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries can be traced back to this question of textbooks.

**On Boundaries Between Languages: Colonial Philology
and the Question of Linguistic Differentiation in *Oriya
Swatantra Bhasa Nahe***

The Ooriah of this district, whether it may originally have been, is not but a dialect of Bengalee, from which it differs chiefly in pronunciations and in its written character . . . I would submit as a measure of general policy, it is desirable that the Ooriah should cease to exist as a separate language within the British territories.⁷³

Collector of Cuttack, the capital of the Orissa
division of the Bengal Presidency, 1854

Another factor that precipitated a change in the understanding of language in Odisha and India was the establishment of clear boundaries between Indian languages as a result of colonial philological efforts to map the linguistic geography of India.⁷⁴ As the boundaries between languages came to be defined through philological study of grammatical structure and origins of words, the question of actual geographical domains of these languages came to be raised. In a time in which this increased academic and governmental attention to language was accompanied by discussion among vernacular language-speaking elites about the status and function of their language in community life, this question of differentiation between languages and the demarcation of their geographical domains came to be the site of contestation between groups engaged in debates on language.

⁷³ Quoted in Patra, "Formation of the Province of Orissa", p. 101. The term "Ooriah" is a corrupted form of Odia and was often used in official correspondence.

⁷⁴ In his essay entitled "The Two Histories of Literary Culture in Bengal," Sudipta Kaviraj discussed the porous boundaries between precolonial Odia and Bengali (Pollock, *Literary Cultures in History: Reconstructions from South Asia* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2003)). He argues that the notion of bounded territorial domains of sovereignty was in itself a new concept in colonial India. In precolonial India, sovereignty, be it of rulers or of their sponsored language was marked by porous and indeterminate boundaries. Hence the domains of neighboring languages, including Odia and Bengali, often bled into one another. The idea of mapping India introduced by the colonial state affected the formation of discrete spheres of influence of languages such as Odia and Bengali.

In Odisha, too, apart from the an increased attention the ability of Odia language and literature to sustain primary and higher level vernacular education, the most important feature of the Odia–Bengali debate of the 1860s was the question of the relationship between Odia and Bengali. Advocates for the use of Bengali in Odisha argued that Odia was merely a dialect of Bengali and need not be used separately in Odisha schools and state institutions. Proponents of the independence of Odia as a language argued that the similarities between Odia and Bengali were due to the common origin of the two languages. A highlight of this debate was the publication of a Bengali monograph titled *Uriya Swadheen Bhasha Naye* (Odia Is Not an Independent Language) written by Kantichandra Bhattacharya, a Bengali school teacher from the Odia-speaking district of Balasore.⁷⁵

Through a reading of this text, published in 1870, this section illustrates how an academic question about a linguistic difference between Odia and Bengali came to be put in service of proposals to remove Odia from schools. Often such arguments invoked the social, religious, political, and migratory history of the Odia-speaking people to make the case for the derivative and subordinate nature of the Odia language. That is, by historicizing the development of the Odia language against the backdrop of social, cultural, and political changes in Odia-speaking areas in the longue durée, these arguments produced a cultural life history of the Odia language and established a link between the fortunes of a language and its speakers.

Hence, in this section, I will argue that another element in the emergent understanding of language in Odisha was the conflation of the history of the Odia language with the history of the Odia-speaking people. As a consequence, arguments about the lowly origins (read aboriginal) of the Odia language caused great anxiety within the Odia-speaking elite about the nature of the Odia population. In particular, I will reveal in this section how discussions about the history and development of the Odia language came to be embedded in a colonial history of race in India.⁷⁶

Furthermore, a reading of Bhattacharya's text also reveals an additional reason for Odia elite anxiety about the lack of texts in Odia. The need for an Odia textual tradition that would illustrate the uniqueness of Odia was

⁷⁵ Kantichandra Bhattacharya, "Odiya Swatantra Bhasa Nuhe", in *Odiya Bhasa Andolana*, Bansidhar Mohanty (ed.) (Cuttack: Friends Publishers, 1989). This is an Odia translation of the original Bengali text. I regret that I was unable to locate the Bengali original.

⁷⁶ I will discuss later in the section how colonial philology and colonial understanding of race were very closely allied in discussions about languages and the peoples of India. For details, see Thomas R. Trautmann, *The Aryan Debate*, Oxford in India Readings. Debates in Indian History and Society (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2005).

dearly felt as philological arguments in this debate on linguistic difference were based on evidence from Odia and Bengali texts. Odia texts that provided such evidence were often translations of Bengali or English texts in the first place. In these translations, the similarity of content often extended to a similarity of style, idiom, and Sanskrit-derived vocabulary as the translators strove to stay true to the Bengali and English originals.⁷⁷ Consequently, critics such as Kantichandra could argue that the few recently published Odia texts contained language that was, indeed, very similar to the Bengali originals.

The context for Bhattacharya's discussion was the ongoing discussion among colonial philologists about the origins, classification, and inter-relationships between various vernacular languages. In the nineteenth century, the problem of differentiating between major Indian languages had become a very vexed question for colonial philologists and linguists. Ever since William Carey of the Serampore Mission began philological research on Indian languages in the second decade of the nineteenth century, colonial philologists had been attempting to map the diversity, development, and identity of various north Indian languages.⁷⁸ The fact that in northern India most of these languages came from the same root language (Sanskrit, or its colloquial form, prakrit) and often shared a significant number of words made the differentiation between languages a rather tricky problem for philologists.

While these discussions among colonial philologists formed the broad context for Bhattacharya's arguments, his chief interlocutor among colonial philologists was John Beames. Beames, a noted linguist and long-time senior colonial official in Odisha, wrote extensively about the philology of the Odia language and its relationship with other north Indian languages.⁷⁹ In some ways, Bhattacharya's arguments were based on Beames' discussions about Indian vernaculars and the idea of dialects. However, by putting the arguments about the derivative nature of the Odia language in the service of the move for the substitution of Odia with Bengali in Odia schools,

⁷⁷ Such arguments about the need to develop an original modern Odia textual tradition by avoiding translations from Bengali and Odia appeared repeatedly in the Odia-language press until as late as the 1890s.

⁷⁸ A short history of colonial philology can be found in the preface to the 1971 reprint of the *Outlines of Indian Philology*, written by Suniti Kumar Chatterjee. See John Beames, Suniti Kumar Chatterji, and George Abraham Grierson, *Outlines of Indian Philology, and Other Philological Papers* (Calcutta: Indian Studies: Past & Present, 1971), pp. iii–vi.

⁷⁹ Among the most notable of his works are the following: John Beames, *A Comparative Grammar of the Modern Aryan Languages of India* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1966) and Beames, Chatterji, and Grierson, *Outlines of Indian Philology, and Other Philological Papers*, as at n79.

Bhattacharya departed from Beames' philological ideas in crucial ways. Hence, we should make a brief foray into Beames' discussions about north Indian languages in order to understand the politics of Bhattacharya's discussion of Odia as a dialect.

John Beames addressed the problem of classification of Indian languages in his 1867 text *Outlines of Indian Philology*. He wrote this as a preliminary statement about the norms of philological study of the north Indian languages.⁸⁰ These norms formed the basis of his subsequent three-volume work titled *Comparative Grammars of the Modern Aryan languages of India*. In his chapter entitled "On Dialects" in the *Outlines*, Beames attempted to treat the commonly held standards that were used to determine whether a language was dialect of another language or an independent language in its own rights. Here, Beames attacked the commonly held test to ascertain whether a language was dialect or an independent language based on the rule of "mutual intelligibility." According to this rule, if the speakers of two different languages could understand one another then the two tongues were dialects of the same language. Beames argued that such a test was unsuitable for Indian languages because many languages either shared similar words (for example, Hindi and Bengali) or the same grammatical structure (for instance, Hindi and Punjabi). Beames warned that these pitfalls could result in a misclassification of Indian languages. These pitfalls, he argued, could be counteracted by supplementing the rule of "mutual intelligibility" with another set of parameters. To this end he noted that:

1. The test of mutual intelligibility is a very unsafe one, as it depends on the intelligence of individuals, the savage and the peasant will exaggerate it; and the man of education will make too light of it.
2. By taking into consideration certain influences which have operated on the people, the mutual intelligibility test may however be brought to bear to this extent that, that it may be fairly said of two forms of speech that if they are not mutually intelligible, they ought to be, and in fact they may often be so much alike, that the student who is master of one would almost, if not altogether, understand the other, though two natives could not.

⁸⁰ In his introduction, Beames maintained that: "The following pages are a compilation from the best and the most accessible books on the science of language, supplemented by facts derived from personal observations. They do not pretend to be anything more than the outline for the use of those who having no knowledge of linguistic science, which to record and preserve dialects of obscure and uncivilized tribes with whom they may come into contact; or any of the countless peculiarities of leading Indian languages which may be spoken in their neighbourhood." See the preface to Beames, Chatterji, and Grierson, *Outlines of Indian Philology*.

3. These influences are, geographical position, civilization, political, and physical accidents, religion, difference of pronunciation, education.⁸¹ Hence, Beames called for a juxtaposition of observations of contemporary speech patterns, vocabulary and sociocultural contexts along with the study of the historical context for the development of languages in India. Interestingly, despite his efforts to propose a multipronged approach the study of language differentiation, the overall consequence of such efforts was an increased attention to the search for material that would serve as evidence in the linguistic study of languages. Invariably, apart from ethnographic observation of common speech, the primary source of evidence for linguistic analysis came to be textual. This is evidenced by the subsequent efforts by Kantichandra Bhattacharya's efforts to illustrate the similarity of Odia and Bengali through the use of evidence from school texts in both languages. This privileging of textual language as evidence might explain the Odia anxiety about the lack of a modern Odia textual tradition.

Eventually, Beames observed that even though a system of classification of Indian languages would be useful, a much more detailed and comprehensive study of all Indian languages had to be carried out before any binding set of criteria for classification could be set forth. A proper systematic classification was essential, Beames argued, because it would make learning Indian languages much easier for non-native students. If it were established that several tongues were merely dialects of one major language then the student of Indian languages would have only one language to master. This would make apprehending the complex linguistic variety of India far easier because: "[I]t is less difficult to learn one language than twenty."⁸² However, Beames warned "the consciousness that proving these forms of speech to be dialects rather than languages, be an advantage ought not to lead any one to enter in the study of them with even the wish to obtain this result."⁸³ Instead, he suggested that such classification be deferred until most Indian languages have been systematically and intensively studied.⁸⁴

It is this uncertainty about the actual boundaries between Indian languages that opened the door for Kantichandra Bhattacharya's stipulation that Odia is a dialect of Bengali in the *Uriya Swatantra Bhasha Naye* (Odia Is Not an Independent Language). However, Bhattacharya's arguments did not betray any such uncertainty. His argument was simply this – given the geographical contiguity between Odia- and Bengali-speaking areas, it could be inferred that Odia was actually a dialect of Bengali that had been corrupted by influences from non Indo-European

⁸¹ Ibid, p. 53–4. ⁸² Ibid, p. 52. ⁸³ Ibid, p. 53. ⁸⁴ Ibid, p. 53.

languages spoken in the Odia-speaking areas.⁸⁵ He based his argument on a set of parameters for “language differentiation,” which he borrowed from contemporary research on Indian philology. Hence, in his introduction, he noted that:

Linguistic experts have said that large seas, very tall mountain ranges, impenetrable forests, colonization by a powerful and intellectually evolved community, development of daily practices, religious knowledge and education can cause the differentiation between one regional language and another.⁸⁶

This set of parameters, almost identical to Beames’ supplementary parameters, seems to be an effort to make a scientific and systematic argument about the derivative nature of the Odia language. Nowhere in his text does Bhattacharya mention the concept of “mutual intelligibility.” Instead, he makes a conscious effort to base his observation on concrete textual and historical evidence. Hence, it can be safely said that he was making an effort to move away from such commonsensical distinctions between languages and establish his argument on what contemporary philologists such as John Beames considered more firm evidentiary footing. However, Bhattacharya went beyond Beames’ scheme by classifying these factors of language differentiation into natural (rivers, mountain ranges, forests) and artificial (colonization, migration, education, etc.).

His argument is an interesting play on the role of natural and artificial factors for language differentiation where the natural is ultimately privileged. He argued that, it has been historically impossible for man to reorient natural boundaries. In the matter of Odia and Bengali, he noted: “[A]ccording to natural divisions (this entire area covering Odisha and Bengal) should be a place (*stana*) with one language.”⁸⁷ He also noted that the case for the existence of a single language is strengthened because people in both areas have similar religious and daily lives.

His subsequent argument reveals that he did not consider other more historically contingent factors such as migration and colonization as

⁸⁵ It should be noted here that colonial philologists believed that the languages spoken in India could be divided into three major categories—Indo-European, Turanian, and Semetic. Major Indian languages such as Hindi, Marathi, Bengali, and Odia were derived from Sanskrit or its more popularly spoken form, prakrit. These languages were part of the Indo-European group. The Turanian languages were spoken by communities such as the Hos and Santhals of Odisha. By the end of the nineteenth century, colonial linguists had come to a consensus about the mixed roots of Odia, which derived mostly from prakrit but also from the various Turanian languages spoken in the Odia-speaking areas. For a more detailed discussion, see *Ibid.*, pp. 1–15.

⁸⁶ Bhattacharya, “Odiya Swatantra Bhasa Nuhe.” This is an Odia translation of the original Bengali text published in 1870. The author regrets to note that she has been unable to obtain the original Bengali edition and is forced to depend on the translated version.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 158.

having as much credence in the creation of separate languages as natural boundaries and religion. In his effort to explain why Odia sounded so different from Bengali even though it was a dialect, Bhattacharya gave a historical account of the progressive bastardization of Bengali in the Odia areas over a long period of time. He claimed that as one moves away from the site where Bengali in its purest form is spoken – Calcutta – it becomes increasingly distorted due to assimilation with other tongues. By using the tropes of purity/pollution, Bhattacharya argued that: “As faults arising from contact with undesirables results in a deterioration of character, so does such contact in the case of language lead to the deterioration of language.”⁸⁸

In the case of Odia and Bengali, he noted, the undesirable element was the tribal population of the Odia-speaking areas. In Bhattacharya’s scenario, the Aryan advent into India was accompanied by the introduction of Sanskrit into India. Gradually, a number of spoken languages sprang from Sanskrit. Bengali was one of these languages. According to him, the Aryan advent ultimately produced Bengali as a root language or *Mula Bhasha*. This root language, in its migration away from its site of origin, interacted with languages spoken by tribal populations of various areas and produced a number of dialects. In the case of Odisha, this mixing produced what was commonly known as Odia. This mixing, he pointed out, resulted in the transformation of Bengali into “a rude, harsh, impure, colloquial and lowly dialect.” In his later chapters, he analyzed the language used in school textbooks and popular works of literature to establish that in its refined, written form, the Odia language is, indeed almost identical to Bengali.

Bhattacharya’s narrative reveals that he understood the influence of tribal language only as the introduction of easily removable extraneous impurities rather than fundamentally constitutive of the Odia language. This attitude was at odds with the prevailing understanding of the role of tribal language in the emergence of Indian vernaculars. In colonial philology, the study of the antecedents of Indian vernaculars was closely tied to the theory that the population of northern India was the product of the assimilation of invading Indo-European Aryans and preexisting aboriginal peoples of India. This racial assimilation led to the mingling of languages spoken by the two groups and spawned the earliest versions of a majority of the languages spoken in northern India. As John Beames statements in the *Outlines of Indian Philology* reveal, colonial philologists agreed that even though the aboriginal peoples were eventually enslaved and colonized by the invading Aryans, they left their mark on the resultant Aryan-dominated

⁸⁸ Ibid, p. 159.

culture of India.⁸⁹ In terms of language, this meant that many aspects of modern Indian languages could be traced back to the various languages spoken by the aboriginal people, collectively called the Turanian family of languages. Hence, according to contemporary theorists the original aboriginal languages were fundamentally constitutive of the modern Indian vernaculars. In both his books, the *Outlines of Indian Philology* as well as *Comparative Grammars of Modern Indian Languages*, Beames painstakingly proved that Odia drew heavily from tribal languages.⁹⁰

Bhattacharya, however, dedicated the second half of his text to prove that this influence of tribal language was a colloquial, easily removable impurity that only slightly mars the purer, more refined textual language in Odia school textbooks. To this end, he analyzed the words used in Odia school textbooks, biographies, dictionaries, and folk songs in order to establish that the language used in these texts was the same as Bengali, barring a slight difference in diction. He argued that, with the increasing development of education in the whole of Bengal, the “dialects” that had resulted due to the distorting influence of “uncivilized races” would gradually be straightened out. Therefore, it would be a fallacy to think that Odia is a separate language when, through education, the distortion of language can be removed. In conclusion, Bhattacharya called for concerted efforts to “purify the lowly corrupted language of the southern region (Southern region of the Bengal Presidency, namely Orissa Division).”⁹¹

Bhattacharya’s claims about the derivative origins of the Odia language excited strong responses from various quarters. Professional philologists such as John Beames and Richard Temple attacked his lack of methodological rigor and claimed that the text was based on an inadequate knowledge of the Odia language.⁹² Both Beames, in his speech at the Asiatic society 1871, and Richard Temple, in his critique in the *Calcutta Review*, wondered why the author had chosen only words of Sanskrit origin used in Bengali and Odia to make his case. Beames questioned Bhattacharya’s methodology by asking why he did not account for spoken language in his thesis:

In plain English, such Sanskrit words, as were used by the Uriyas and Bengalis twenty-five centuries ago, have since then undergone the usual fate of words, and have been corrupted, abraded and distorted, till they often bear no resemblance at

⁸⁹ See John Beames, “On the Distribution of Indian Languages”, in Beames, Chatterji, and Grierson, *Outlines of Indian Philology*, pp. 24–5.

⁹⁰ For more details, see *Ibid.* ⁹¹ Bhattacharya, “Odiya Swatantra Bhasa Nuhe”, p. 207.

⁹² See John Beames, “On the Relation of the Uriyas to Other Modern Aryan Languages”, *Proceedings of the Asiatic Society of Bengal* (1870), pp. 192–201; Richard Temple, “Review”, reprinted in Appendix 2 of Mahanti, *Odia Bhasha Andolana*, p. 215.

all to the original word. As it is these corrupted, or as they are called *Tadbhava* words, that are the real living words of the language, the words that have worn into their present shape by long use in the mouth of the people. These words our fastidious writers reject, and when by going back to the Sanskrit for their words, they have composed a work to their taste, lo! They say Uriya and Bengali are one language; for proof read such and such works, I would suggest rather, let them take a *chása* of Dacca and a *chása* of Gumsar, and then see how much they understand of one another's talk.⁹³

However, in spite of such critiques, Bhattacharya's thesis found supporters among those who had been arguing for the removal of Odia from the schools of the Orissa division. Most notably, Rajendralal Mitra in the same meeting of the Asiatic Society of Bengal responded to John Beames's critique of Bhattacharya's failure to realize that spoken language is the true language rather than the language of written text – by arguing that: “[L]ocal peculiarities of pronunciation do not constitute language and therefore no notice should be taken of them in deciding the questions of linguistic classification.” Furthermore, proponents of the use of Bengali in Odisha drew on the arguments made by Bhattacharya to draft a petition to remove Odia from the schools of the Odisha division. The “secret” petition was circulated all over Odisha and Bengal and attracted a number of signatories. Even though the petition did not result in any change in government policy, it drew the attention of the Odia language press back to the Odia–Bengali debate.⁹⁴

Articles appeared in the Odia press that criticized Bhattacharya's argument about the derivative nature of the Odia language. For instance, a review article published in *Utkal Dipika* built on the point made by Beames and Temple and queried Bhattacharya on his methods of proving the similarity between Bengali and Odia by drawing on words with Sanskrit roots. The article inquired why Bengali should be considered an independent language if the occurrence of common Sanskrit words in Odia and Bengali makes Odia a dialect of Bengali. Would not Bengali then be considered a dialect of Hindi on the same grounds? The article introduced a new dimension to the critique of Bhattacharya's thesis by raising the question of independent tribal languages in the area where he argued only Bengali was spoken due to the absence of any geographical barriers:

In the area where the author argues that only one language—the Bengali language—is spoken; why do aboriginal groups such as Garo, Santhal, Khond, Suanga, Sabara

⁹³ The term *chasa* in both instances denotes the cultivator caste of Odisha and Bengal. Ghumsar is an Odia-speaking area.

⁹⁴ For contemporary newspaper articles that discussed the secret petition, see Mahanti, *Odia Bhasha Andolana*, Appendix 2, pp. 155–220.

etc. speak different languages? Perhaps, in order to respond to this question, the author will take assistance from Hunter and argue that all these languages have a singular root but he will not be able to deny that these languages are separate.⁹⁵

In this oblique reference to the existing research on the tribal provenance of the Odia language, the article questioned the basic premise of Bhattacharya's argument that the Odisha–Bengal area could not possibly have more than one language. By raising the question of tribal or adivasi languages in the Odia-speaking areas, the article was making a case for the particularity of this area. More significantly, it should be noted that it is the adivasi presence in the Odia-speaking areas that enables the author to counter Bhattacharya's argument about the derivative nature of the Odia language. In other discussions of the Odia language, including Beames' reading of it, it is the adivasi provenance of the Odia language that distinguished it from other languages of Sanskrit origin. Thus, in a context in which the distinction of Odia from other languages was in question, it became necessary for the proponents of the independence of the Odia language to draw attention to its adivasi roots. At the same time, this avowal of the adivasi provenance of the Odia language, which suggested a deeper racial and historical relationship between the upper-class and upper-caste Odia elite and the adivasi population of the Odia-speaking areas, led to anxieties about the possibility of the "lowly" ancestry of the Odia-speaking elite.

In the future, such use of the adivasi population to make arguments about regional particularity would necessitate new definitions of the Odia community that would include the adivasi element through recourse to the origin myths of the dominant Odia Hindu deity Jaganath. Through the use of these myths, the Odia elite would eventually portray the adivasi population as actors in the history of the formation of the mainstream Odia community. Hence, due to this presence of the adivasi element within the Odia population, the community had to be defined as more than just a linguistic one. Rather, it was also a religious community held together by a common allegiance to the Jaganath cult. Thus, the category Odia could never be a purely linguistic identity. It was always marked by an idea of religious brotherhood based on allegiance to the Jaganath cult.

There were two major consequences of Bhattacharya's argument and the accompanying debate about the roots of the Odia language, on the development of Odia cultural politics over the next few decades. The long-term result of Bhattacharya's argument was the foregrounding of

⁹⁵ Unknown, "Uriya Swatantra Bhasha Nahi", in *Ibid*, p. 200. This was a review of Bhattacharya's book.

what could be called the “adivasi specter” in Odia cultural politics. Colonial philology in the nineteenth century had established both the adivasi provenance of the north Indian vernaculars and – by the very nature of their retrograde study of languages in India, which traced particular languages spoken by modern communities to their earliest antecedents – the dominant mode of historicizing linguistic communities through the histories of the emergence of languages spoken by them. That is, histories of linguistic communities like the Odia community came to be located in the complex history of the emergence of the Odia language, which was understood as a product of the interaction between aboriginal tribes and the invading Aryans in the first millennium AD. Hence the ancient history of the Odia-speaking community became the history of the Odia language and the speakers of the antecedents of ancient Odia.

Kantichandra Bhattacharya brought this mode of historicizing the Odia community to the attention of the Odia public sphere by basing his argument on this primal linguistic history of the interaction of aboriginal speech with Aryan prakrit. The Odia vernacular press had to argue for the constitutive role played by aboriginal languages in the emergence of the Odia language in order to counter Bhattacharya’s claims about the derivative nature of Odia, which was based on an understanding that these adivasi influences were merely superficial impurities that made Odia appear different from Bengali. While this avowal of tribal influence re-enforced the uniqueness of Odia culture, it also laid the history of Odisha open to comments like that made by W. W. Hunter in his *History of Odisha*, in which he described Odisha as a primal, uncivilized land that still has evidence of primeval life extinct elsewhere.⁹⁶ This led to the persistent Odia dilemma centred on how to represent the adivasi legacy in Odia social, religious, and cultural life. The “adivasi specter” haunted both the descriptions of Odisha history and the definitions of the Odia community. Interestingly, this very anxiety produced the dominant understanding of the Odia community as a community of equals based on a religious affinity to the Hindu deity Jaganath, who was said to have roots in adivasi religious practices.

The more immediate consequence of Bhattacharya’s text was the reinforcement of the prevailing Odia anxiety about the lack of appropriate Odia texts that could be used as school textbooks. Bhattacharya’s text argued that none of the existing literature in Odia – whether it was school textbook or folk tales – was either unique to Odisha or uniquely Odia. Whether or not his claims were true, the publication of his text drew media attention to the fact that there was very little modern Odia

⁹⁶ A detailed account of Hunter’s argument will appear in Chapter 4.

literature being produced in Odisha at that time. In the subsequent period, the anxiety about the lack of texts that emerged from the seemingly innocuous question of textbooks impelled of the most productive, contested and influential debates on Odia literature. The next chapter will discuss this literary debate of the 1890s, which dealt with the efficacy of traditional Odia literature and its relevance to the modern life of the language. However, before we move on to the literary debate of the 1890s, I would like to end the chapter with a short discussion of Gopal Chandra Praharaj's Odia *Lexicon* to illustrate how the modern role of Odia as a vernacular came to be ultimately elaborated.

The Dual Life of the Vernacular: Odia in Praharaj's *Lexicon*

In the early twentieth century, Gopal Chandra Praharaj became reputed as a proponent for the use of "chaste, idiomatic and homely language in preference to polished, labored and Sanskritized style."⁹⁷ Given his reputation, he was encouraged by his supporters to put together a lexicon of Odia that would be truer to the common usage of Odia than existing dictionaries of the language that were often put together by Baptist missionaries. These, he complained, tracked a language that could "neither be called Odia nor Sanskrit, and was neither the language of the book nor of the hut."⁹⁸ The lexicon evolved from a simple Odia-to-Odia dictionary into something much bigger. Praharaj hoped to produce a dictionary in which "one can find out the meanings of classical words, the vocabulary of the mass, the court language and even the language used by educated people at home, not to speak of the dialectical and provincial words used in the outlying Odia speaking parts."⁹⁹ In this concluding section of the chapter, I would like to discuss two major themes that emerge from a reading of the preface of his lexicon published between 1935 and 1937.

How did he justify the structure of his lexicon? And how did he characterize the object of his study – the Odia language?

Praharaj justified his choice of languages for the quadrilingual lexicon by arguing for a cosmopolitan approach to language:

My humble efforts at making the Odia language known, appreciated and admired not only by the sister nations in India but by the civilized world of letters, by linking it with the medium of thought of the civilized world (namely English), with the lingua franca of India (namely Hindi) and with one of the most advanced sister

⁹⁷ Gopal Chandra Praharaj, *The Odia Language and Lexicon* (Vizianagaram: International Faculty of Andhra Research University of India, 1937): p. 4

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 4. ⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

languages (namely Bengali), deserve encouragement and support from every true patriot.¹⁰⁰

Praharaj's efforts were driven by a cosmopolitan impulse to situate Odia in a relational nexus with other vehicular languages. To be vernacular to Odisha, Odia needed to sustain its locality and particularity through a constantly pitched differential relationship with vehicular languages like English and Hindi and more developed languages such as Bengali. There is also a comparative element to his approach, which seeks to illustrate the borrowings from and distinction between these languages. The cosmopolitanism and the comparative approach both support Praharaj's efforts to carve out a space for Odia in the world republic of letters. This approach is borne out by his complaint that his contemporary writers had become too parochial in their efforts and did not incorporate cosmopolitan ideas in their writings.

He drew the mandate for his lexical project from S.W. Fallon's introduction to the Hindustani–English dictionary, which defined what a vernacular dictionary should do. Fallon's introduction was a treatise on hence how we should locate the scope and limits of a vernacular. In a departure from earlier efforts of language collection that focused on textual forms of Indian languages, Fallon argued that the wealth of a language was in the spoken language as "living dialects are the feeders of language." An attention to spoken colloquialism, vulgarisms, and idiomatic speech could enable a lexicographer to capture the ways in which the "paramount dialect of national speech" gains in "copiousness, flexibility and expression":¹⁰¹

The *integrity* of the language, the demands of the philologists, the sociologist and the philosopher, *the perfect knowledge of and mastery* over language which would be impossible if any part would be kept back, the insight into the minds of the people which is obtained to this very class of words, and above all the absolute importance of this *knowledge to the judicial and executive officer* most emphatically call for the insertions of words which are conventionally branded as abusive, indelicate, slang or obscene. In the various equivalent expressions used by the illiterate classes and in the rustic, provincial or dialectal varieties of words the *student may grasp at a glance the root source and history of words* and thus acquire a ready mastery over the popular language and the motley rustic speech. They are also instructive to the philologist. *A great many Prakrit forms are still present in the rustic language.*¹⁰² (emphasis added)

¹⁰⁰ Gopal Chandra Praharāja, *A Lexicon of the Oriya Language* (Cuttack: Utkal Sahitya Press, 1931), p. xii.

¹⁰¹ For a detailed treatment of Fallon, see Walter Hakala, *Negotiating Languages: Urdu, Hindi, and the Definition of Modern South Asia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016).

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, p. vi.

Fallon's description of the lexicographer's task illustrates the multifaceted labors performed by the vernacular in colonial India. The audience of a vernacular lexicon ranges from the philosopher to the judicial official. And for all of these audiences, popular language is crucial. As the integrity of language drew from both elite as well as rustic speech, mastery over it is possible only through an attention to popular language. Therefore, disciplinary knowledge (of philologists, sociologists, and philosophers) required attention to "motley rustic speech." The rustic tongue was seen as a museum of language that gives easy access to the old form of language that may have passed out of textual usage. Here, another mastery that Fallon alludes to, that of the judicial and executive office, also required a broader approach to the limits of language. All these forms of mastery over language have in common the impulse to gain insight into the minds of the people.

The parallels between Fallon's position and the position of policy-makers in the early nineteenth century when the first big vernacular shift happened is quite striking. Both are driven by the need for scholarly and administrative access. However, Praharaj builds upon and transforms this lexical mandate. While he agrees that rustic speech needs to be seen as wealth rather than as pollution, he does not approach this wealth as a resource for understanding the past of the language. Rather, the incorporation of the spoken tongue is an effort to think of Odia as a rich language that could be seen as developed precisely because it has multiple means of expressing the same ideas.

"The richness of the vocabulary" Praharaj argued "is the index by which the vastness of a vernacular can be gauged. The Sanskrit, the German, the English, and the Latin languages are counted as advanced languages as one word or idea can be expressed in various forms through the medium of synonyms." This reference to richness of vocabulary was not just a slavish imitation of more powerful languages. He used the narrative of richness to produce an optimistic reading of the peculiar historical experience of the Odia language. The Odia-speaking areas had been under some sort of colonial rule since the Mughal acquisition of Odisha in 1592. The Mughals brought with them Arabic and Persian. The Maratha presence in Odisha in the eighteenth century contributed to an influence of Marathi on Odia and, finally, the European presence in coastal Odisha from the seventeenth century onwards meant that English, French, and Dutch also influenced Odia. Rather than viewing this history as a history of disempowerment and the erosion of Odia purity, Praharaj posed the history of external influences as a productive force in the making of modern Odia. Hence, for Praharaj, the wealth of the Odia language was a product of contact and growth rather than the survival of

older forms of the language. His was an argument about radical transformation rather than preservation of older forms.

And yet we find a parallel thread of a more conservative argument about Odia. In his efforts to locate the object of his study, Praharaj argues that unlike other sister languages such as Bengali, Hindi, and Marathi, Odia was established as a distinct vernacular in the seventh century AD. Odia was unique in that it did not have any dialects and “the grammatical framework or the trunk of the Odia language remains constant.”¹⁰³

Odia was also unique among northern Indian languages because it has preserved the Sanskritic phonetic values attached to the different letters. What accounts for this conservatism in defining language when Praharaj spends so much energy building a more expansive scope for his lexicon? In this radical and conservative description of the Odia language, we find the two contradictory labors performed by the vernacular in nineteenth- and twentieth-century India. The vernacular had to serve as a populist mode of expression that could make the state accessible to the citizen/subject. In this role, the vernacular could grow and mutate endlessly to represent the changing everyday life of the people who spoke it. It was fundamentally a democratic object continually being reconstituted by popular usage. By the same token, and precisely due to the state’s use of the vernacular as the means of reaching the broadest spectrum of people, the vernacular was also a “language of command.” And, as a language of command in a profoundly multilingual country, the vernacular needed to be standardized and its boundaries clearly demarcated so that it could be separated from other languages. In the next chapter, we will see the impact of this contradictory role of Odia as a modern vernacular on the production of modern Odia literature.

¹⁰³ Ibid, p. xii.