



# Narratives of Endurance: Representation of Women in Odia Literature

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**Abstract**— *Over centuries the status of women in Odisha has been shaped by factors like patriarchal mindset, domestic violence, child marriage, poverty, superstitions, trafficking, migration, female feticide, unpaid labour and even low female literacy levels. Irrespective of the presumably improved status in contemporary society, women in Odisha are subject to discrimination and myriad challenges. Striding through their violation of rights as well as adverse family and societal circumstances in ancient, medieval and modern times, several women in Odia fiction and folklore demonstrate resilience. By analysing ancient, medieval and contemporary Odia literary works in English translation, my research focuses on the conditions, predicament and tenacity of women to understand their journey by battling patriarchal barriers and gender stereotypes.*



**Keywords**— *woman characters, tenacity, Odisha, fiction, folklore, English translation*

## I. INTRODUCTION

Simone de Beauvoir once said: “One is not born, but rather becomes a woman.” Odia women’s identity is shaped not just by their society and culture but also by their resilience. Have you ever wondered why most festivals in Odisha encourage fasting by women? If you look at Savitri Puja, Prathamastami, Khudrukuni, Kumar Purnima, Sudasa Brata and other such festivals, the rituals involve women attempting to placate gods and goddesses for the well-being of their husbands, brothers, children and family. Women in Odisha are encouraged to make sacrifices and deal with adverse situations. Remarkably amid the hardships and hurdles, the power of women to beat all odds also serves as an example of their resilience. The tenacity of Odia women is also reflected in the folktales, legends and fiction through the ages. This research paper analyses the adverse circumstances of fictional women characters of Odia literature in English translation and how they overcome those through their strength of character and emerge empowered.

## II. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

- To study how Odia literature in English translation depicts the resilience of women through characters, narratives, and their reactions to adverse situations.
- To appreciate the ways in which women protagonists battle patriarchal circumstances, social stigmas, and/or personal struggles in Odia literature and how these are presented or interpreted while being rendered into English.
- To recognise how strong women characters in Odia literature in English translation confront traditional gender roles and social pressures in rural and urban contexts.
- To bring to the fore feminist subjects within Odia literature that portray women’s resilience, examining how these unfold through translation and their relevance in worldwide discourses.
- To understand how the description of resilient women in Odia literature has developed in pre-colonial, colonial, and post-colonial eras, especially in response to historical, religious, social, political and economic

situations, and how these changes are painted in translations.

### III. METHODOLOGY

This research has employed a qualitative research design and interpretative approach to analyse strong woman characters of writers like Binapani Mohanty, Godabarisha Mishra, Fakir Mohan Senapati, Gopinath Mohanty, Devika Rangachari, Suprabha Kar, Gayatri Sharaf, Aratibala Prusty, Rabi Patnaik and others to understand how they show resilience. A close textual reading has been done to interpret their challenging circumstances by reading into their dialogues, actions, characteristics and relationships. Their character mapping has been done by interpreting their motivation, challenges and transformation, cultural contexts and historical evolution. Feminist literary theory has been used to evaluate how these strong woman characters form a resistance to patriarchal structures.

### IV. STRONG WOMEN CHARACTERS IN ODIA NARRATIVES

#### 4.1. Prithvimahadevi

The story of Prithvimahadevi in Devika Rangachari's *Queen of Earth* best epitomizes the life of a woman caught in the web of patriarchy along with her yearning for something larger. The circumstances, especially in relation to 8th-10th century Odisha under the Bhauma dynasty, bring to light the situation of women within the privileges that must have been bestowed on them.

In the image of Prithvimahadevi, weaning and socialisation prepares her to understand how a woman can exercise her power and fulfil her potential while remaining politically dependent and submissive to the order of patriarchy. She questions the accepted male supremacy by these lines: "Are women any less intelligent than men? Are they not capable of holding the reins and discharging responsibilities? I am no less than Yayati, although society dictates that he be considered worthier because he is a man. I know that I am more resourceful and courageous than him, at least verbally. I have just not had the opportunity to test myself, to see how far I can go." (Rangachari 28)

She explicitly states that, like Yayati, she was also stuck in the male-dominated society, which did not give her the chance to showcase her skills. This claim of her wish to be acknowledged equal to a man is the experience of this author and many women who have existed in history but could not exercise their agency simply because of their sex. It is revealed in Prithvimahadevi's reflections that she is a woman of strong personality, willing to break the ceiling.

The inner tension of Prithvimahadevi escalates with the perception of her surroundings in a palace full of claustrophobic security. She is both physically and metaphorically imprisoned within the patriarchal frames of her existence. It also deepens with the anxieties of her prospective marriage, wherein she senses how the domestic life is going to imprison her.

Prithvimahadevi's awareness of becoming a political tool in her father's designs to advance in society is unsettling at first. However, her aunt explains how politics and marriage alliances usually involve women to be used as bargaining chips in familial power strategies; they were blindsided about how little authority women had in politics. Here is where Prithvimahadevi shatters their perception of her and sets out to peace. The realisation of a woman being devoid of choice other than as a misplaced watcher shatters the preconceptions. Accepting the reality of one's position is not an indication of accepting defeat, rather it is a clever way of controlling one's situation in a messy political sphere undoubtedly dominated by men. When things do not go her way like in this case, she first gets disappointed and frustrated but afterwards Prithvimahadevi is able to compose herself as someone who possesses emotional and political strength. The phrase "My anger eventually thins down to a dull resignation," shows her immense mental strength and resilience, ready to face future hurdles with grit and courage.

Her claim to fame and ultimate strategy was ascending to power after the death of Shivakara, proving that she possesses the toughness to prevail over personal tragedies all the while dutifully fulfilling the role of leader. When it comes to the havoc she displays restraint to a degree and embodies empathy and humanity to a level where she does not deeply damage her relationship with the children of Shivakara - Dhruva and Kusuma.

The life of Prithvimahadevi as a leader revolves around balancing personal goals, family duties, and the overarching politics of the land. As she aspires to rule and is ambitious to lead the Bhaumakaras, it is evident that she is hampered by the emotional attachments she bares towards family as well as lingering old love. Luckily, she is an exceedingly capable leader in the sense that she is able to mix sentiments and diplomacy exceptionally well. That was her main challenge - to be accepted by a group of people whose father overthrew their leader. Even when taunted by Shivakara's wife, she remains steadfast in her values and leadership ambitions. Prithvimahadevi's character in *Queen of Earth* is a pioneering figure balancing gender and power dynamics of her time.

## 4.2 Basanti

Like Prithvimahadevi, Basanti is also a strong and unconventional woman. Though not a traditional rebel, she was a deeply-nuanced woman who had a different way of approaching life. In the beginning, she was focused on social ideals, but she steers away from risk without losing her self-esteem or philanthropic values. For Basanti, the house of her husband and in-laws was no less a battleground where she had to accept 'outmoded customs' and bow to every dictate of her mother-in-law, without her desire in it. She bravely endured the insults of Debabrata's relatives because she belonged to a low caste.

Basanti's ideas on the roles of women are progressive for her time. Though her English education might have made her liberal, her mother-in-law made that very same factor seem like a fault. She did not bow down to the daily humiliation she had to face: "His [Debabrata's] mother was busy finding fault with the daughter-in-law; the entire village was awash with criticism of her." (Ray 87) The slander against Basanti increased when she opened a school: "The news of Basanti's opening a school created a stir among the traditionalists in the village...What greater shame could there be than for a newly-married woman to walk openly along the village road?" (Ray 108)

Views of Basanti and her husband Debabrata on the liberation of women did not match. Sadly, Basanti realised her husband believed that..."men should dominate women, to a lesser or greater degree." (Ray 115). Though their opinions were opposed to each other, still Basanti never for once let that affect her goals, aspirations or relationship with her husband. Basanti embodies the complexity of women's roles in a changing society that she showcases with wisdom, self-awareness, and a commitment to social change.

## 4.3 Rebati

The predicament of Rebati is one of resilience and determination in the face of harsh opposition showcasing the conflict between tradition and progress in a society that confined women's roles to domestic chores. Rebati refused to be perturbed in her quest of education despite being constantly blamed by her grandmother for the misfortunes that befell their family.

Rebati, however, had a deep curiosity and love for learning from a young age. She would eagerly listen to the religious texts her father read, like the *Bhagavat*, and was drawn to the prospect of acquiring knowledge. She was particularly inspired by the example of Jhankar Pattanaik's daughters, who could read religious texts, which gave her the courage to defy her family's orthodoxical take on women's education.

Rebati had to fight against the societal expectations of women and the stereotypical gender roles that confined them to household duties. But Rebati's unwavering determination to study, shows her resilience in the face of adverse circumstances like family beliefs and epidemic. Rebati ultimately succumbing to cholera may point to the persistent belief of her grandmother coming true but she transcended her time and age by her aspiration of intellectual and social mobility, that often comes with a price.

Rebati challenged the gender norms of her time and her defiance against oppressive gender roles and traditions as well as her undying quest for knowledge and education sends a transformative message. Her story shows that even if the personal and social sacrifices often accompany defiance of a woman in a conventional society, it highlights the importance of education in empowering women and reshaping societal expectations.

## 4.4. Pata Dei

No one in Pata Dei's village thought she could have been suffering for all the years that she was missing from her in-laws place. A victim of gang rape, Pata Dei shows her tenacity by keeping mum and becoming "indifferent, apathetic" to all the unnecessary allegations probing her character and conjectures about her disappearance: "The past three years seemed like ages now. It was difficult to remember bygone events. People who knew nothing started fabricating facts...Pata, the daughter of Jaggu, has come back with a child. Must be her own. Why else should she have the child around? Shameless, sinful woman. She abandoned a handsome, gentle husband. Couldn't stay on with her father either. Had to run away with someone in the middle of the night." (Mohanty 41)

It takes great guts to own in public your child born out of rape. The reticent and stoical Pata Dei is at first calm but she becomes aggressive and volatile when the mother-in-law of Mani Bhauja provoked her sensibilities by saying: "Aye! Do you have a frog in your mouth? Speak up. You could not stay even for a month with your in-laws. You ate up your father alive. And now you say the earth has given you this child? Speak the truth. Who is the father of this child? Otherwise, I myself will cut you to pieces before the day is over. Don't you know my anger?" (Mohanty 43)

Pata Dei's strength lies in her ability to co-exist with her rapists in the same village, without alleging them or confronting them, unless she had to under dire provocation. Though Pata Dei knew about her perpetrators, she chose to remain quiet. She revealed nothing, not because of cowardice but perhaps to buy peace and allow everyone to remain worry-free. Perhaps, in her mind, the sanctity of the village and society was also at stake. A brave and

empowered woman is not always the one who fights for justice, but also the one who waits for the opportune moment to reveal about her exploitation and it also happens at a point in time when the patience of the woman reaches the threshold limit. The anagnorisis comes at the moment when the old woman put her foot on Pata Dei's neck and she started gasping for breath. The irony is when she was physically intimidated, "she felt a surge of strength". Who is the father of the child, was actually not possible to determine in a gang-rape incident. She revealed: "You want to know who the father of the child is? There, they are all standing here. Ramu, Veera, Gopi, Naria, and a couple more. How can I tell whose child this is? That night, during the Dola festival when the mock fight was going on, these men stuffed a cloth in my mouth and carried me away to the edge of the graveyard. There, behind the bushes, they chewed me alive....like plucking flesh from bones...How can I tell whose child this is? Ask that Hari Bauri. He took money from all of them to leave me at Cuttack. All this time, I didn't come back because I didn't want to bring more shame on my father. Since returning, I've revealed nothing. But ask them all now. Let them swear on themselves and decide who the father of this child is." (Mohanty 43)

#### 4.5. Kamala

When her husband Sura drifted away to his colleague Chandramidha, Kamala wondered if the lost years of closeness, warmth and affection were real or an illusion- a mirage? Kamala's ability to tolerate her husband's hypocrisy is laudable. Sura laughed at the idea of remarriage and quiet often preached against infidelity and straying away from wedlock, when suggested it; however, he basked in his extramarital affair. Kamala kept quiet knowing about her husband's infidelity because of her sickness- that reeks of her strength of mind. A part of her heart wishing her husband's happiness after her death shows her resilience despite her adverse conditions of illness and betrayal.

Sura compares Kamala with wives of other nations and belittles her and blames her for his lack of opportunities: "Kama, I could have gone places if only I'd a wife to help me out a little. Getting a D.Litt wouldn't have remained only a distant dream...Kama, you Indian women make good housewives but poor partners; mentally and academically you're all miles behind your husbands." (Mohanty 69) What apparently seems like the helplessness of Kamala is actually his ability to withstand pressure. It is her bravery to accept a loveless marriage, an unfaithful husband and an ailing body. Mohanty, through Kamala, brings out the resilience of many such Odia woman (even women across India) who have saved the institution of marriage, and thus contributed to the upkeep of a sacred social practice.

#### 4.6. Sulochana

A women character who at first feels helpless and tolerates the alcoholism and debauchery of her husband, and then strikes back rising from victimhood also demonstrates resilience in her own way. Ironically, when Sulochana beats Chandramani with a broom and he develops boils on his body, she is not able to eat anything the next day: "She could see that the broom had left marks all over his body; blood had clotted in some of his bruises. "What have I done!" she cried disconsolately. "I beat my husband with a broom! What terrible fate will be mine!" She prayed to the Gods again and again, begging their forgiveness, tears streaming down her cheeks. She brought a bowl of linseed oil and gently rubbed the swellings." (Senapati 41).

As Sulochana rises from victimhood to empowerment, she also shows lot of tolerance and hope towards her husband's transition from a drunken and debauch to a reformed man. Her resilience lies in her hope of transformation of her husband, despite his spoilt lifestyle and habits. Patriarchy has ingrained in the mind of a wife that she should deify her husband. Hence, Sulochana feels guilty of trying to change her husband: "She kept weeping incessantly, praying to the Gods to forgive her sin." (Senapati 41)

#### 4.7. Malati

Malati saves the job of the priest by moving away from her illegitimate child. Though the priest, in fatherly affection, never thinks of deserting her: "Today, I'll leave this temple, but I cannot leave my daughter." (Kar 21) Her ability to bear her 'fallen woman' status is her strength. The ironical part is, in a patriarchal society, no one bothers about the man who impregnated the woman: "Every door in the wide world was forever shut to me. Society, without any reflection on my sin, closed all roads and left me with only one option. On seeing the path, my entire being trembled with repulsion. Carrying the burden of all sins, I came away from there - society conferred on me, with great kindness, the title - a fallen woman! But the man, who took advantage of my pitiable condition and built this reputation for me is an esteemed gentleman in the eyes of the society." (Kar 19)

To a woman who had been spurned by her father the moment she was born, discriminated because of her skin colour, abused by her husband and lost her son, the benevolence of a fatherly figure like a priest was everything she could ask for. But in her sacrifice of forsaking the affection that she had been craving lifelong lies her grit and courage. She could not bear the old man's name getting tainted because of her: "What? In this old age you have to endure such humiliation for giving me shelter? Drive me away. Let me go off to some distant place. I can bear any amount of humiliation, even hatred, but I can't tolerate your humiliation on account of me!" (Kar 21)

#### 4.8. Mulgi

The objectification of Mulgi in Rabi Patnaik's *Savitri* by the police is paradoxical because her honour is violated by the very persons who should have protected it. Defamatory phrases like 'a fine piece of goods' and 'crunchy little cucumber' among other 'unprintable obscenities' 'welcomed' her to the place that is supposed to safeguard a woman. Mulgi knew that her husband Salkhu was innocent, yet she had to beg in front of the police to release him from the lockup. Seeing her husband badly beaten, Mulgi forgot her identity as a woman: "Mulgi hardly registered the roving hands of the policeman." (Patnaik 118) What is even more sad is the husband that she was fighting for was also rude to her; his reaction to seeing her in the police station was not welcoming: "Go away. Run. And don't ever come again. He slumped down, his face between his hands." (Patnaik 118)

The police took full advantage of a helpless woman despite her making a statement like: "My husband knows nothing. Neither do I. All those leaders did come to our place in the evening, but they didn't tell us where they were going afterward." (Patnaik 118)

Though victimised and exploited, Mulgi's ability to tolerate her sufferings definitely comes from a strong-headed woman whose goal seems unwavering, no matter what the situation demands. She never for once thought what impact this would have on her husband. Would he be happy about his release at the cost of his wife's honour? Would she have to justify the need for her defilement in front of Salkhu? Though Mulgi was ruthlessly gang-raped, her only hope was "...at the end of the ordeal she'd take her husband home. She would keep the vow she had made to herself and snatch him back from the jaws of the tiger, like the mythological Savitri from the very hands of Yama, the god of death." (Patnaik 119)

The character of Mulgi shows to what extent a woman can go to save the life of her husband. The courage of Mulgi, in the face of such adversity, is unimaginable.

#### 4.9. Bharati

When everyone was scared to talk about the murder scene, it was 11-year-old Bharati who, without batting an eyelid, bravely revealed to the police: "Sir! Sir! I have seen who did it! It was Bina Panda who stabbed Kuna Sahu." (Acharya 167). This attitude of Bharati had a dangerous repercussion; Bina Panda pledged to make her his wife: "I will make that truth-telling bitch my wife. Go and tell this to her father tomorrow. If he marries his daughter to someone else or sends her away, I will kill his other children." (Acharya 369) However, the valiant Bharati did not stop at that. When Bina Panda approached a 19-year-old for marriage, the first thing she did was go to the village

doctor to sterilize her so that she would not give birth to more villains/murderers like Bina Panda. She tells the doctor: "Doctor sahib! I am not a mad woman nor am I a woman of loose character. I come from a respectable family. My marriage is fixed with a murderer and my marriage will take place after a month. To save my family from being ruined, I agreed to marry this murderer. I do not mind being the wife of a murderer, but I can never bring myself to become the mother of killers and criminals, nor can I give birth to sons who are cowardly or impotent. The world is peopled by timid, spineless persons like you and murderous criminals like my would-be husband. Doctor sahib, please save me from such a terrible fate by sterilizing me. I want to remain a barren woman for the rest of my life." (Acharya 373)

To marry a criminal requires guts and many in the place of Bharati might have chosen to end their lives; however, she chooses to end his lineage. Such is the dauntless attitude of Bharati, that is both unconventional and laudable.

#### 4.10. Nila Mastrani

The nerve of the educated young Brahmin woman Nila Mastrani to break out of the stereotype of the societal expectation of marrying within the caste framework is remarkable. At the cost of severing ties with her father and brother, Nila Mastrani marries Sebayat Madan Sethi of the washerman caste, and reduces herself to the drudgery and grind of washing dirty clothes of people daily. Though society bears it at a loss of a good teacher who could contribute more meaningfully to educating the community, Nila Mastrani does not look down upon washing clothes as a menial task. In fact, she even offers to wash the 'Baula Pata' of her brother's wife. Washing that saree also raised a hope in her mind that she would be able to meet her brother. Nila Mastrani brings her Brahmin brother to the lanes of the washerman colony, again daringly shattering the caste hierarchy of the society.

Whether Nila Mastrani was affected by the village gossip or not is debatable: "One said what happened was the fault of education, another said it was the fault of society and the third person said that neither education nor society was to blame, it was the fault of Nila Mastrani." (Mohapatra 270)

#### 4.11. Amrita & Kumari

'A Mother from Kalahandi' is an interesting perspective about the lives of two strong women - one from the city and the other from remote Kalahandi. Amrita feels an 'excruciating pain' and 'her body was burning with the fire of humiliation' when she realised that her husband was buying young girls from Kalahandi to satiate his lust. Despite the betrayal in marriage, Amrita is strong-willed and decides to invest her energy in helping the girl go back to her village, rather than herself wallowing in self-pity. It

is a daring act by Amrita when she decides to keep the baby girl of Kumari with her, knowing fully well it is her husband's as well, and looking at her would remind her daily of his betrayal. It is the voice of her iron-will that said to Kumari:

"I'm taking your child to give her the rights she is entitled to. Just like my mother, the mother from Kalahandi bears the child in her womb, goes through the pain of labour, and feeds the baby with nectar from her body. Like their fellow Indians, the children from Kalahandi have the same right to love, food and clothing. They are not born to be sold." (Sharaf 144)

Likewise, Kumari displays her courage by confiding in Amrita her troubles, despite the threat that she would be sent off to Kalahandi by Swapnesh. The bravest thing she does is reveal her story to an absolute stranger when Amrita tells her: "You seem to be having some problem. Why don't you tell me? I am like a mother to you. Who is he? Who would sell you?" (Sharaf 140)

#### 4.12. Gurei

Whether rapists being killed by an innocent person is wrong is an ethical question that Aratibala Prusty raises in 'The Worn-Out Bird'. Gurei's father lost his life trying to 'bring those scoundrels [who had raped his daughter] to justice, and Gurei also became a murderer killing the rapist of her daughter: "Before Gurei had time to reflect and decide if she was right or wrong in taking the life of a rapist, the police arrived and forcibly handcuffed her. She then realised that by stabbing the man to death in broad daylight, she had become a criminal in the eyes of the society. She was no longer the Gurei of the past. She was now a murderer." (Prusty 163)

Two innocent people faced punishment for trying to bring justice; however, the real culprits roamed scot-free and the police remarked: "Such incidents are not uncommon. Does anything change? Then why are you making such a fuss about it? Those boys are the spoilt children of important men. The politicians need them for their survival. We have been ordered by a higher authority to release them." (Prusty 159)

Gurei shows courage despite her unending adversities, including physical abuse of her drunken husband Raghu Nayak, whom she once thought as an ideal husband material - who had accepted her with her illegitimate daughter. Though she had gone to jail trying to give justice to her daughter, she could not protect her from the subsequent gang-rape and suicide.

Gurei is an empowered woman because she has the guts to go kill the man who ruined her daughter, despite knowing the consequences she would have to face for it. She could

not trust the police to give her justice remembering the plight of her father who dies fighting an endless battle for justice.

#### 4.13. Lakshmi

Lakshmi belonging to the Balaram Gotra of Anantapur village of Odisha shows spine by fighting against the bride price prevalent in ancient Odia society. The community made it a mandate to quote higher bride price for a woman with greater beauty and maturity. But Lakshmi never swelled in pride because of her abilities and appearance. Rather, she was brave enough to express her displeasure (to both her father and husband) against the prevalent practice of bride price, and stood firmly against it. Though her father took great pride in her daughter's ability to fetch a good bride price, Lakshmi shattered his dreams when she returned the amount of Rs.700 to her husband. She was bold enough to criticise her father: "Shame on you Father! If you had sold me for 700 rupees and taken the money, what a sin that would have been! You have no son - I am both son and daughter to you. I shall take care of you for all the time to come. When you go on a fast, I shall feed you. You have enough money, Father; please give up your greed and do not thirst for more." (Bal 249)

To her husband Narayan, she said: "I have read somewhere that it is wrong for a bride to allow herself to be sold for money. It was also what my teacher taught me in school." (Bal 251).

#### 4.14. Ketaki

When Moti's father told Ketaki: "You'd better go home. You're a woman. What can you do here?", he could not fathom what steel Ketaki was made up of. Not everyone feels deeply about the death of an acquaintance who is not even related by blood. But Ketaki understood the dangers of such rowdy young men roaming free for young girls (including her own daughters). She never deliberated for a split second whether she should fight back or not: "If Moti could die because of a cursed woman like Ketaki, could Ketaki not fight against all odd? Would she have to carry the burden of this debt for all time? All of a sudden her own life seemed meaningless." (Mohanty 59)

It was not that Ketaki had not measured the repercussion of attacking the young men responsible for the death of Moti. But the guilt that Moti probably died because of the narrative she had shared with Moti killed her from inside. Ketaki could have ignored the death of Moti and gone her way, but her fearless spirit led her to avenge her murder: "...when those young men had their fill of drinks and dropped down drunk to the floor, she had poured out the gasoline from the can, lighted a match, and locked on the door, carefully latching it from the outside. The debighara had barely caught fire when a young man came rushing

from somewhere and tried frantically to open the latch. It was then that Ketaki had sliced through him with an axe. The head had rolled away from the man's body and came to rest besides the boulders. She sat on the boulder and kept chopping." (Mohanty 62)

Moti was not related to Ketaki. She was just her customer. Yet, humanity prevailed and a thirst for justice apart from the pinch of opium made Ketaki heady for delivering justice to the murder of Moti. By avenging the murder Ketaki's life that had seemed purposeless till now got a meaning.

### 5. Folk Tales of Odisha

In some of the folk tales of Odisha like Tale of Kanchanbati, Tale of Maunabati, Tale of Paansori and The Tale of Pomegranate Prince, we see recurring themes of polygamy, domestic abuse, and complex man-woman dynamics. In these cases, the women of these stories display unwavering strength and resilience.

**(a) Kanchanbati:** Kanchanbati is the story of a brother who kills his sister at the requests of his wife, who feels insulted that Kanchanbati has received praises that she cannot cope with for cooking better than she does. This begs the question of the brother's motivations: does he want it out of love for his wife or out of jealousy and intolerance for his sister's success?

#### **(b) Maunabati:**

This tale narrates a prince who wants to marry a woman who would survive ten punches. That would be mirroring some sort of cultural approval for domestic violence in early Odisha - maybe an awful acceptance of abuse in marital relationships, The princess Maunabati is smart, wise, and strategic. She agrees to marry the prince but not passively; she challenges him with a condition: if he can make her speak, he can marry her, and in return, he may beat her. It is a very complex arrangement, and her motivation is unclear. One interpretation could be that she wants to provoke the prince to prove his worth and possibly fail, saving her from a forced marriage. Alternatively, it could be a way for her to escape the abuse she might face, using the challenge as a means to regain control over her own fate.

**(c) Paansori:** In this tale, king, who had neglected the kingdom completely for his infatuation with Paansori, marries another woman named Tarabati. He continues to compare Tarabati with Paansori, which affirms that polygamy was also acceptable in ancient Odia society. Questions arise about love, loyalty, and the relationship between a man and his multiple wives: why did he marry Tarabati if he loved Paansori so much? And why does Paansori welcome him back home after he marries another?

## V. CONCLUSION

The role and status of woman characters in Odia literary works discussed in this research paper point to the complex societal norms and power dynamics in ancient times, where polygamy and domestic abuse were not uncommon. These characters give us insights of how women lived in a very complicated web of love, jealousy, and survival fighting patriarchal structures and restrictive gender roles. They raise pertinent questions like whether women had any real choice about accepting such conditions. These stories represent how women, despite the oppressive or difficult circumstances, are smart and strategic in all their planned actions. In some instances, such as Maunabati's case, women seem to be managing situations to their desired end, apparently seeking to escape from potential harm or gaining freedom. The recurring theme across these tales is that though women may face hardship and abuse, they are also serve as resourceful agents who challenge the dynamics imposed on them. In these narratives from Odisha - both stories and folklore, women often display remarkable wit, courage, and agency, challenging discriminating gender stereotypes while straddling through complex situations of love, power, and domestic dynamics.

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