Gourishankar Ray (1838-1917) may be designated as a complete culture-leader, tenaciously fighting for all that is precious in the heritage even while clearing the ground and supervising over an extensive reconstruction to meet the requirements of a new historical situation. Not being primarily a political figure, an artist, a social reformer, a religious leader, though combining in himself the urges and sensibilities that describe all these, an individual like him runs the risk of getting marginalised in books of national history. A proper understanding of the story of Indian nation-making demands a greater awareness of the activities of distinguished regional leaders like Gourishankar, a father-figure with the Oriyas, than has been possible so far. The present monograph seeks to offer a short profile of the man and his marvellous engagement with the challanges of his times.

Dr Madhusudan Pa.., Professor of English at Sambalpur University, has authored besides a number of research articles relating to English, Sanskrit, Oriya, Indo-Anglian and Commonwealth literatures, two books of literary criticism in Oriya and three in English.

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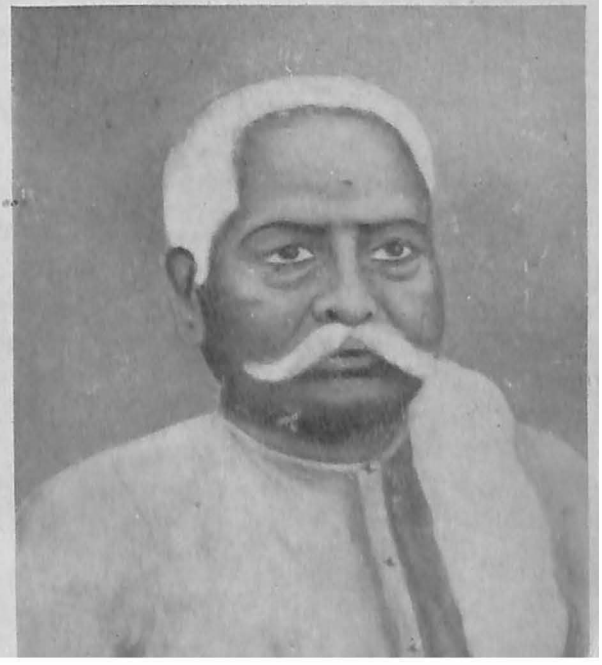
Gourishankar Ray

Madhusudan Pati



Makers of Indian

GOURISHANKAR RAY

The sculpture reproduced on the end paper depicts a scene where three soothsayers are interpreting to King Suddhodana the dream of Queen Maya, mother of Lord Buddha. Below them is seated a scribe recording the interpretation. This is perhaps the earliest available pictorial record of the art of writing in India.

From Nagarjunkonda, 2nd century A.D.

Courtesy : National Museum, New Delhi.

MAKERS OF INDIAN LITERATURE

Gourishankar Ray

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Introduction

Gourishankar Ray, a major figure in the hisory of modern Orissa, is but little known outside the state, a fact that throws into sharp relief the inadequacies of modern Indian historiography and the political marginalisation of Orissan culture. Modern India has not been built at the headquarters of the erstwhile British presidencies alone, nor only by great political leaders who were under the national limelight, leading mass-movements and occupying the centre-spread in national papers. Patriots like Gourishankar who either chose, or were forced by historical circumstances, to engage in reconstructive activities at the regional level for the most part, alleviating human suffering in their immediate environments, promoting educational, social, cultural and economic interests of whole peoples, but not seeking any kind of national recognition, and whose contribution towards social regeneration might, in fact, have proved to be far more extensive and abiding than that of those who operated in central committees of national organisations, drawing up blueprints and issuing manifestoes, are all but forgotten. Such men and women are to be more intimately known by us today if we wish to properly undersand the makings of this nation. It is, therefore, gratifying that the Sahitya Akademi has chosen to commission the present

monograph and draw the attention of a larger body of Indians to a phenomenon such as Gourishankar's which had hitherto been relegated into obscurity at the national level.

Designed as it is for a popular reading, the sketch offered here deliberately focusses upon certain broad features in the profile, making no attempt whatsoever to be exhaustive either in respect of Gourishankar's life and work, or of his times. The temptation to furnish a comprehensive background of history to properly situate Gourishankar's socio-cultural and political endeavours has had to be smothered in the interest of economy of space, but enough of history has been internalised in the narrative to make the readers appreciate their urgency and thrust. Pan-Indian socio-political features of which the Orissan situation was only another example are not elaborated upon, greater attention being reserved for individual elements that impart a distinctive point to Gourishankar's enterprise. Of the numerous and manifold activities of Gourishankar in the interest of Orissan renaissance and Indian nationalism only a few illustrative engagements have been described, briefly touching upon the rest for the benefit of a more curious reader who may feel impelled to investigate and know further on the subject on his own. Not that all that needs to be known regarding Gourishankar has already been made available even by scholars of Orissan history and culture. In fact, in terms of revealing details, our knowledge has not widened much beyond what the small but invaluable monograph written by Pandit Mrutyunjaya Ratha a few years after Gourishankar's demise records and suggests a painful testimony to our lukewarm curiosity and lack of nationalist ardour. *Satabdi Purusa*, latest study on Gourishankar to appear, hopefully, would stimulate greater interest among the Oriya scholars.

It is not easy to briefly enumerate Gourishankar's service to the nation, for he did not confine his leadership to any one

field of action. Working as an alert watchdog of Oriya interests consistently for more than half a century, striving to resuscitate its rich cultural heritage and to prepare it for the socio-economic and political challenges of a great transition, Gourishankar involved himself in nation-building on all possible fronts. His major field of contribution was, of course, journalism. It was as manager of the first Oriya printing company and editor of a pioneer news organ in Orissa, that he impinged on Orissan life and destiny in a comprehensive manner. We must understand, however, that his kind of journalism was much different from the present-day style of media management. It was not with a vast net-work of correspondents, editorial staff, and sophisticated equipment that he managed his onerous work. And, again, he was not engaged in merely recording and disseminating news. He was, in fact, functioning as an unofficial planning commission, investigative agency, cultural co-ordinator, social reformer, political activist and educational inspector – all rolled into one. However, he was not simply a script-writer, but an active agent of all these variegated programmes.

It requires a patient perusal of the successive issues of the *Utkala Dipika,* brought out through five long decades, to properly understand how manifold, sustained and far-reaching were his efforts. *Utkala Dipika*, which rose to be the central mouthpiece of Oriya aspirations and the prime agent of Orissan reconstruction in the second half of the nineteenth century, and which languised and died only all-too-soon after him, affords an inspiring and marvellous picture of Gourishankar's dynamic service, of which only certain select glimpses can be offered here. Again, while the identity of the *Dipika* stands merged in that of Gourishankar, it was but one of the channels – though the major one – through which his inexhaustible creative energy flowed to irrigate the native fields. There were a number of other agencies and activities through which Gourishankar's nationalist and humanist impulses fructified in various hues and

shapes. These can only be briefly suggested, or described in general terms, in the pages that follow.

Gourishankar, as would be reiterated in course of the monograph, was not an explosive genius or a great revolutionary who changed the course of human history. Greatness such as his is of a much more homely kind, apparently within the reach of many more who should be willing to summon a comparable dedication, clearsightedness and courage of conviction. And it is for this reason that lives such as his should be more intimately projected before the younger generation. More than great prophets and visionaries, it is possibly companionable mortals like Gourishankar who could better serve to keep the young from loss of faith and cynicism today, making them realise how stupendous can be the contribution of any moderately intelligent and sensitive person if only he decides to make himself useful to others and to employ his innate creativity and moral strength in a purposeful manner.

Contents

Preface

It is a happy event that Gourishankar Ray would feature in the *Makers of India Literature Series*. Preparing a short monograph such as this on Gourishankar was naturally beset with a number of difficulties – for as the following pages would make clear. His was an even-tenored excellence, sustained through multifarious involvements over a long period of time, that can be satisfactorily communicated only on an extended canvas; secondly, his mind and endeavour, as projected in his astonishing journalism of more than half a century, can be properly explicated only through long and patient study of a stupendous volume of writings that touched upon all the various aspects of Orissan life, small and big; and, finally, a number of facts relating to certain significant aspects of his life still remain to be uncovered, causing problems of interpretation and evaluation. If notwithstanding all the attendant risks of unequal attention and incomplete sketching, the present writer still readily went ahead to do the assignment, it was because of his personal earnestness that more and more of the like of personalities such as Gourishankar's – people who have been forced out to the peripheries of modern Indian historiography, but whose consistency of application has augmented the Indian renaissance no less appreciably than the extraordinary geniuses of a centralised few – needed to be introduced to our contemporaries for a better understanding of the shaping of Indian life.

The structural ordering of this narrative, beginning with a life-sketch, followed by relatively more extended accounts of two of the major engagements of Gourishankar along with brief summaries of his other manifold efforts, and rounded off with a broad critical assessment of his character and service, reflects the author's endeavour in tackling the difficulties mentioned earlier within the requirements of space and style set for the volume.

What success the intent has registered is for the reader to decide.

Author

Life and Personality

Gourishankar Ray was born on July 13, 1838, in the village of Dikshitpara. He was the eldest child of Sadasiv Prasad Ray, a *moharir* in the then revenue court at Cuttack. Sadasiv Prasad's father, Madhab Prasad Ray, had moved over to Cuttack in pursuit of a financially and culturally more satisfying situation than was available to him in his ancestral seat. Working as an ordinary *mukhtar* he soon made a name for himself with his exemplary devotion to duty and his immaculate conduct. The respect and trust he so diligently carved out for himself among his none-too-large a clientele served him very well, indeed. Thus it so happened that the head of the monastery of *Emar Matha* at Puri who reposed great confidence in Madhab Prasad, asked him to superintend *Sakhi Matha,* a branch of the *Emar Matha,* at Cuttack. The ownership of the building was subsequently transferred to his hands for a token sum. This prepared the grounds for the permanent settlement of his family at Cuttack.

This stroke of luck for Madhab Prasad was to be of profound significance for the Oriya nation; for his children and grand children would now be among the first ones to notice the glimmerings of a new educational and political order emerging in Orissa, and the astounding phenomenon of a Gourishankar would then be possible. Madhab Prasad was keen to equip his children with the best of education that could be made available

within his means. The eldest, Sadasiv Prasad, was taught, along with Oriya and Bengali, Persian, which was then the official language, making him eligible for a government job in the future. While posts were few, adequately qualified Oriyas were apparently fewer still. Thanks to the excellent reputation of his father– a major condition of eligibility in those days – and his education, Sadasiv Prasad had no difficulty in getting an appointment as a *moharir* in the revenue court.

Sadasiv Prasad had successfully imbibed the basic lessons in character and discrimination from his father. Though but an ordinary, lower middle-class individual, he enjoyed an excellent social standing by virtue of his honesty, industry and refinements of speech and conduct. Gourishankar was thus fortunate in being born into a family of hard-working, self-respecting individuals who combined deep love of native culture with eager anticipations of a new socio-political order. He had not been placed so low as to find himself altogether marginalised in a broader socio-political set up, nor so high as to be kept out of the bounds of common sympathies and experiences. Maturing at the very centre of a slowly unfolding renaissance, observing at close quarters the working of socio-political processes that generated colossal human misery and yet held the promise of deliverance and joy, he was prepared for a life of robust industriousness, uncompromising integrity and unfailing faith, and trained with skill and sensitivity for intelligently negotiating two colliding value-systems and world-views. He was so placed and fitted out that he could, if he so chose, naturally discover in himself the urge and potency to serve as a man of destiny. And this he did, unassumingly and without any heroics, but with splendid naturalness, quiet patience, and dogged perseverance.

The beginnings had nothing precocious or extraordinary about them. Gourishankar had his first schooling in the traditional village primary, the 'chatashali', learning the basics of

Oriya and arithmetic along with Puranic tales and snatches of ancient literature. Easily distinguishing himself as a meritorious student and earning the trust and affection of the forbidding 'avadhana', the traditional village school-master, he served as a monitor in the schoool. Not content with what he learned there, he took a course in Persian under the 'akhunji' of the local *maqtub*. The village schools referred to as 'chatasali' and 'maqtub', it may be cautioned, should not be allowed to conjure pictures of a scientifically regulated curriculum, a neat building, teaching aids, trained hands and so on. For all one knew, it would be some ramshackle, dilapidated cottage, if not the shades of a banyan tree, with only one 'avadhana' or 'akhunji' engaged in ramming in certain rudimentary concepts, year in and year out, with unsparing physical and mental rigour, into the minds of small groups of half-naked urchins, trusting more to the efficacy of the rod than to that of speech. That Gourishankar could convince both his tutors that he had mastered all they could impart in the space of about five years, and, at the same time, to be prized by either as his most cherished student, might, in retrospect, serve as an early testimony of his future personality ; but, in fact, no one then is known to have discerned in these early attainments traces and hints of a prodigious intellect or an extraordinary character. He was, to all appearances, merely a meritorious, diligent student who could be expected to, as is said, do well in life.

Village schooling over, Gourishankar got admitted into the Cuttack English School at the age of eleven. This was the only high school then available in Orissa. Text books written by people like Rev. Amos Sutton, Rev. J. Phillips, Viswambhara Vidyabhusana, William Lacey, and others covering grammar, history, geography, parables and fables, mathematics, and general science were the first crop of writings meeting the indigenous pedagogic requirements. A few texts prepared by the Calcutta Book Society were also made available to the students. The student had to learn Oriya, Bengali and English,

all three of which were used as media of instruction for the different texts. Modern Oriya prose was slowly evolving through this process of linguistic interaction and standardisation. The period through which Gourishankar acquired his Juniorship degree – equivalent to the modern H.S.C. – in the Cuttack school constituted a transitional phase when the need for improved school texts for Oriya students was being acutely felt. This experience was to act as a powerful driving force for Gourishankar later.

With characteristic singlemindedness and thoroughness Gourishankar mastered the school course, and earned a Junior Fellwoship at the final examination. He had, in the meantime, not only acquired a remarkable facility in Oriya, Persian, Bengali and English but also Urdu which he had learnt independent of the school course. By the time he was into his eighteenth year, he had thus exhausted all educational opportunities available in the state. He had got a degree with which he could enter Government service right away; he had learnt all five languages connected with the various levels of culture and authority in his world; he had built in himself an extraordinary physical and moral stamina – in short, in terms of the requirements of the time he had already graduated for life. But for the fellowship of rupees eight a month – a good sum in 1855-56 – and for the strength of mind evinced by Sadasiv Prasad to support the courageous resolution of his son to pursue higher studies in Bengal, this would have been the terminal point of Gourishankar's educational career.

Eliciting grudging permission of a reluctant family, Gourishankar set out for Hooghly, the nearest place where he could enter college. The first phase of the journey, undertaken on a bullock-cart, took him twelve days. He had reached Balasore. There was another long stretch of 240 kms to cover. The cart, he found, was too much of a luxury in terms of both money and time. He decided to cover the distance on foot. He could

not have chosen a more inopportune time or a more fearful road for such a long trek. It was early monsoon, filling the nullahs and small rivers with sharp floods and rendering the country roads, zigzagging through dense bamboo forests infested with poisonous reptiles and beasts of prey, frightfully difficult to traverse. Greater dangers lay in wait in the occasional inns and resting-places that would come his way. They were notorious places, full of criminals and thieves. Undaunted, Gourishankar walked on for ten long days, and finally arrived at Hooghly, exhausted but elated.

It was a two-year Intermediate course – the Senior Scholarship, as it used to be called then – that he joined there. In the very first year itself he distinguished himself as a front-ranking student of the college. It may be useful to note that at the end of the first year he was awarded a merit certificate for his excellence in English-studies, a subject that not only opened the gateway to modern knowledge but also held special prospects under the British Government. Everyone thought he was heading for a bright, coveted career. It is difficult, and idle, to speculate upon the direction of his life if he had been permitted to get along unhindered to yet higher courses at other centres of study. As it came to pass, however, he was not allowed even to complete the Intermediate course. And all because of certain developments that might seem to us today ludicrous and absurd. It so happend that in making a mark in the college Gourishankar drew a lot of attention to himself of prospective fathers-in-law in the neighbourhood. The news travelled to Cuttack, and Sadasiv Prasad, taking fright lest his son should end up as a son-in-law at Hooghly, declared enough was enough and ordered Gourishankar back. Gourishankar's loyalty to his father's will was unquestioning and boundless. And he well-understood how unrelenting he could be in certain matters. Disappointed but unprotesting, he packed up in November 1858 when most of the college courses had already

been covered and the examination was due in a few months' time. Gourishankar's educational career had ended.

On his way back home he rested for a few days at the house of his uncle, Bhabani Prasad, at Balasore. It so happened that the third teacher's post in the Balasore school was then lying vacant. Bhabani Prasad advised him to join the post, then carrying a monthly salary of twenty rupees. With his father's permission, Gourishankar thus began serving as a teacher at the age of twenty. It was a short career extending through just a few months. Gourishankar could not be at peace staying away from his family at Cuttack. But during the brief span of time that he served there he came in contact with three students who were to shine as great luminaries in the state in later years – Radhanath Ray, Baikuntha Nath De and Madhusudan Das. Even more important than those and other contacts was the first-hand knowledge he gained in course of those few months of the problems and possibilities of teaching in Oriya schools. As we shall see, this was to be of far-reaching consequence to the Oriya nation.

Back at Cuttack in 1859 he was advised to join government service forthwith. There was a temporary clerical vacancy in the Commissioner's office into which Gourishankar was quickly inducted. With characteristic zeal he mastered the office-procedures and distinguished himself in no time as an exceedingly competent and dependable hand. When a permanent post of a clerk fell vacant later, the Commissioner was only all-too-pleased to offer the appointment to Gourishankar. To an average lower middle-class Oriya of those days this would have meant a fulfilling experience, holding the prospect of one or two promotions, and a well-regulated, even-tenored progress towards a distant point of time when retirement would be due, with no distractions of any kind intervening in between. Financial security, social prestige, a certain feeling of self-important and complacency – everything was guaranteed, if only one knew

how to adopt to the changing tempers of mind presiding over the seats above. That done, all else would fall into place, and life would go smooth and sing-song.

But, of course, Gourishankar was made of different stuff. A job he needed, and there he was, a faithful servant of Her Majesty's Government. But that was not the be-all and end-all of his life. And even this decision had a context of its own. Before his journey to Balasore Gourishankar had taken some time off to go round Calcutta and enjoy the festive sight of its streets and buildings, then gorgeously decorated to celebrate the famous declaration of Queen Victoria, the end of the misrule of the East-India Company, and the promise of a golden period of peace and prosperity for the Indian sub-continent under the direct care of the British Parliament. The flags and festoons then fluttering all over the city had a message radically different from the one the banners hoisted all over India only a year back used to convey. The impact of the twist of history was too palpable to be missed by a sensitive person like Gourishankar. Thus the fact of his acceptance of a government job in 1858 has certain implications in respect of Gourishankar's mind which must not be missed.

As he was to prove right from the start of his professional career, he had not pawned his moral integrity or his burning spirit of nationalism for the sake of pecuniary benefits. In taking up the job and in serving the British Government with utmost fidelity and devotion he never felt he was doing anything unpatriotic. India had accepted a political change; the period of disillusionment was quite some way off; and Gourishankar was clear in his mind that the system could be improved upon and, more importantly, that service under the Government – a financial necessity – would not deter him from engaging in national service which meant for him service of the Oriya nation. Furthermore, such was his innate sense of self-respect and moral grit that not even a trace of fear remained in his

mind that he could ever be made to compromise with his character and values of life. We might cite here just one instance of his extraordinary fearlessness and self-confidence.

Gourishankar had been appointed to the post of a money-order agent. Once it so happened that one Mr Armstrong, then the Joint Magistrate, Cuttack, additionally managing the office of the sub-registrar, and, as such, Gourishankar's immediate boss, forwarded a money order for due processing. It was already past 3 P.M., the hour after which, according to rules, money orders could not be entertained. Still a young lad, Gourishankar had the cheek to return the order citing the rules in a forwarding note. Furious, the Magistrate rushed into Gourishankar's room and ordered him to comply. Polite but firm, Gourishankar refused point blank, saying he could not discriminate between an officer and an ordinary citizen in matters of official procedure. As far as he was concerned, all transactions of the day had been completed. When Mr Armstrong continued to insist, Gourishankar brought forward the ledger and cash-book and asked the Magistrate to process the M.O. in his own handwriting, if he so chose, in the capacity of the sub-registrar. Finding no other way out, the Magistrate did so, threatening Gourishankar with dire consequences. We would later have occasion to see what those consequences were. For the present it is enough to note that in the face of all the danger that Gourishankar had already invited upon himself, he had the further temerity to prepare an official memo on the incident and forward it to the sub-registrar. Gourishankar, that is to say, even while being in service, never would accept that he was anybody's servant. He was a free man doing a certain job, and rendering full service in return of the salary he was being paid. He would never allow himself to be brow-beaten or intimidated.

Gourishankar did not have the makings of a political radical. And, at the same time, he was not a bigoted loyalist either. His primary interest was in the field of socio-cultural service.

He was first an Oriya, and only next an Indian. The socio-economic condition of the Oriya people was his first concern, then as always. He began to involve himself actively in national politics only much later, only after he had attended, to his full satisfaction, to the major problems of the Oriyas. Gourishankar had clearly defined spheres of involvement, the local core being always kept at the centre. His protests against mal-administration and injustice – always firm, forthright, yet unvaryingly constructive – were characterised more by an immediate social concern than a political urge. In terms of spirit of independence, intrepidity, dedication and singlemindedness of purpose he could be a match to any political revolutionary. But the focus and modalities of national reconstruction had a very specific character for him. His was a battle against social iniquities, incompetent and unsympathetic administration, cultural colonialism – Indian and foreign alike – rather than a war against an alien political authority as such. To him problems of education, irrigation, food, and social security were more urgent and obsessive, calling for immediate local redressal than larger issues of political order requiring protracted agitation. And, in any case, the process of radical politics on the Indian scene was still a long way off.

It is worth mentioning here that all the pressures of human sympathy, cultural concern and national ardour that would not allow him to rest continuously for more than half a century would not, at the same time, detract him from his high standards of official duty. It was an astounding feat of physical, mental and moral exertion, indeed ; for, even as he undertook more and more of social service, he continued to ungrudgingly accept increasing loads of official duties, as well. Thus, for instance, he used to discharge the duties of a treasury clerk and a staff clerk together with those of the post to which he had been in the first place appointed. And he did so with his unfailing, uncommon rectitude, thoroughness and care. With him there could be no compromise on values, whatever be the nature and

place of the engagement. Thus it went on for long twelve years in course of which he had to face quite a few situations of unmerited official hostility, but everytime got his position vindicated, acquiring great appreciation as also admiration of the higher authorities.

He had, for instance, to cross swords with Mr Armstrong again. On the first occasion his position, as he had bravely articulated in the official memo, that 'a public servant makes no discrimination between a Magistrate in authority and a common man', had been vindicated by the Commissioner. Subsequently, Gourishankar openly criticised the capricious administration of Mr Armstrong as sub-registrar in the pages of the weekly edited by him. This naturally invited the wrath of the sub-registrar, who summoned Gourishankar to the office and asked him to come to a compromise, failing which he was to face the prospect of dismissal. Gourishankar was not one to be cowed down so. He re-affirmed his stand and said he had no personal quarrels with the sub-registrar and had nothing on which to compromise. Armstrong demanded that Gourishankar should retract, to which the latter rejoined, he had written in the paper what he had seen, and would report favourably only when he found the situation had improved. The higher authorities endorsed the logic of Gourishankar and Mr Armstrong had to acknowledge his mistake. It is to the credit of Gourishankar that his conduct all along had been unexceptionable and respectable enough to bring about a change in the attitudes of the said officer who came to repose great confidence in his perceptions in later years.

A public-spirited gentleman, Dinanath Bandyopadhyay, once lodged a complaint with the District Magistrate against Laxmi Narayan Chowdhury, a powerful zamindar of those days, who managed to manipulate evidence and turn the table on Dinanath. The redoubtable John Beames was then the District Magistrate. Beames advised Mr Chowdhury's son who was working in his

office to file a defamation suit on behalf of his father which he duly did. Beames tried the case, and to make an example of it, sentenced Dinanath Babu to two years' rigorous imprisonment. It was a case of blatant injustice, but for all the sympathy that the hapless gentleman evoked in the township, no one had the temerity to protest, or to come to his aid in the face of Beames' indignant posture. It was for Gourishankar, an ordinary government employee, to take up the gauntlet. With no personal stakes in the matter, he chose to court whatever risk was involved in championing the cause of the innocent Dinanath Babu, and went forward not only to seek his release on bail, but also to get the matter tried in the higher court, marshalling the needful evidence. He succeeded in getting Dinanath Babu honourably acquitted, and Beames, who was himself impressed with Gourishankar's management of the case is said to have admiringly quipped, 'In this town, he is a man, indeed.' Gourishankar for his part nursed no rancour against Beames who, he knew, had been led into a wrong assumption. A few months later when Beames received his orders of transfer, he sent for Gourishankar and said, 'You will be happy to know that I am leaving for another station.' Gourishankar, never a person to deviate, either in fear or in politeness, even a small bit from his honestly held feelings and opinions, replied, 'Saheb, we shall not have another Magistrate like you. I really feel sorry to know of your transfer.'

There were numerous other occasions when Gourishankar braved serious bureaucratic displeasure and the strain of protracted legal fight in defence of right speech and right action of public-spirited persons as also ordinary, innocent citizens. The manner in which he defended Pandit Govinda Rath against a vindictive government machinery after the Pandit had filed a complaint against certain corrupt practices engaged in by some *tehsildars* was one of the most outsanding and well known of such courageous cases of championing a public cause. If he could retain his service despite all such defiant gestures, it was

because of his exemplary devotion to duty, his punctiliousness and his uncommon efficiency. It is remarkable that after he had thus served for twelve years as a clerk, he was chosen for the newly created post of a translator in the Cuttack court. His salary was now raised to Rs. 100/- a month, a very handsome one in those days. And, more importantly, the job entailed much less work, allowing him much more leisure for public service. Gourishankar continued to discharge the duties of a translator with distinction for two decades, and when the burdens of social work became too heavy even for his shoulders, he gave up his job in 1892, consecrating all his time and energy for the service of his motherland.

One of the pioneers of native Press in Orissa, he had taken up in 1865 the onerous responsibility of editing an Oriya organ, *Utkala Dipika,* and managing the affairs of the Cuttack Printing Company as its Secretary. The unflinching devotion, competence and sagacity with which he managed the paper and other publication-work of the Company for long five decades would have to form the subject-matter of a separate chapter. It may be enough for the moment to say that Gourishankar and this institution became altogether inseparable entities; in fact, it is possible to view each as an extension or, verily, the soul of the other, the relation being publicly dramatised with Gourishankar shifting himself from his home to the Press. It was not for nothing that he gave his all to the Press. It was not for nothing that he gave his all to this institution; for, as we shall see, it is through this organisation that he played his role of a nation-builder with astonishing effectiveness, leaving an impress of his penetrating spirit and intelligence on every major event affecting the Oriya people for a whole half-century.

The scintillating account of his public life covering all those manifold activities encompassing educational, entrepreneurial, reformist, philanthropic, cultural, artistic and religious spheres might easily give one a false lead to suppose that Gourishankar's

iron will, unwavering determination, unremitting public service, and extraordinary sociableness were made possible because of a smooth, worry-free domestic life. Nothing could be farther from the truth. Gourishankar had much more than the common measure of human woes. Joys of domestic life were granted to him only for a very short period following his settlement and marriage at Cuttack. The first shock came in the form of his father's premature death. Gourishankar had deep love and respect for his father. The bereavement was not only emotionally unsettling; it also caused an overwhelming domestic strain. Now he had three younger brothers, a widowed mother and his own family to support with his meagre income. Gourishankar bore the burden without the slightest hesitation or unhappiness, and managed things with exemplary prudence, looking after the education of his brothers and the comforts of the family with great care and patience.

Just as the period of strain looked like coming to an end with his younger brother Gangashankar maturing into a brilliant young man full of promise, tragedy struck again. Gangashankar died, leaving the family disconsolate and bereft of the prospect of early financial relief. Gourishankar went on as before, putting his shoulders to the plough. His family grew, and further disasters followed. Gourishankar lost his sons, one after the other, in tragic circumstances. Only his three daughters survived. Financial relief came in 1872, but the worst tragedy of his life followed three years later. His wife died. As if this was not enough, his second younger brother, Harishankar, who had grown into an industrious, resourceful man passed away prematurely in 1892, leaving behind a wife and two small children in the care of Gourishankar.

Now only the last of his brothers remained, the rest of the family comprising widows, growing daughters, and young kids. Ramshankar, the youngest brother, was nearly twenty years Gourishankar's junior. He was particularly fond of the only

surviving son of Gourishankar who was the same age as he. Ramshankar happened to be seriously ill when his good friend and nephew accidentally got drowned while bathing in the river. The deep love Gourishankar had for his brother, and the extraordinary firmness of his character, may be known from the fact that lest the news should upset the patient, the bereavement was successfully kept concealed from Ramshankar who lay bed-ridden right there in the house. Till he had fully recovered no signs of the tragedy were allowed into his notice.

It is not as if with the death of his last remaining son Gourishankar's personal bereavements came to an end. He had to gear other excruciating agonies. His son-in-law, Akshaya Kumar Ghosh, whom he dearly loved and looked for support in his public activities, prematurely died. He was again plunged into an acute grief when his granddaughter was widowed at a tender age. The last, and possibly the deepest, grief was caused by his mother, Annapurna Devi's death in 1908. Gourishankar was extraordinarily attached to his mother, and used to derive immense emotional sustenance from her affectionate words and gestures. With her death he felt a kind of final severance : the last of the family bonds was, as it were, snapped. He was disconsolate; though, as ever, manly and stoical.

It was thus a life of continuous shocks, an unending stretch of personal agonies of which a much smaller span could have proved too much for an ordinary individual. It is necessary to understand the psychological aspect of Gourishankar's ceaseless public service in the context of this private history. He did not, again, suffer only bereavements; possibly yet more mortifying were certain emotional reversals that he had to bear, the most painful being the distancing from Ramshankar whom he had loved and tended as more than a son. All these psychological miseries, however, never made him cynical or embittered. He was, indeed, a lion of a man.

While confronting all the manifold problems of life – personal, social and national – Gourishankar presented a forbidding

personality, resolute, uncompromising, and adamantine. But more than the iron-cover, what made him so extraordinary a character, was the tenderness at the core which manifested itself in several fascinating ways in his habits and actions. In fact, it is possible to see all his public and private acts as an expression of a profound feeling of compassion and love. Whether it was the domestic sphere or the national, the basic impulse that made him so self-abnegating, charitable and dynamic was that of an inexhaustible kindliness of consideration and concern for others. He was a unique personality, combining soft and hard elements in a striking manner : 'vajradapi kathorani, mriduni kusumadapi', one might say. A number of contrasted features, operating conjointly, imparted to his character a rich humanity, and made him bewitchingly simple and heroic at the same time.

But for the strenuously cultivated habits of parsimony and meticulous guarding against waste of all kinds during the first phase of his service career he could not possibly have looked after the education of his brothers and the upkeep of the family so well as he did, retaining his self-respect and integrity to the full. This became second nature to him. He would not, even into his last days, waste a single scrap of paper or allow misutilisation of a copper. And, yet, when it came to philanthropic work or educational purposes, he would be astonishingly liberal, spending thousands of his hard-earned rupees without batting an eye-lid. In this he was a living embodiment of the famous Puranic ideal of Kubera. Such was his self-effacing nature and his sensitivity to the feelings of others that he would never divulge the facts of his private acts of charity to anyone. Grateful recipients would, however, acknowledge. Word would go round, and in later years, it was usual for Gourishankar to have some petitioner or other every day. He had a specially soft corner for needy students. But he was singularly cautious and discriminating, reserving his gifts for only the most deserving.

Among charitable public undertakings, the dearest to Gourishankar were establishment of schools and hospitals, digging of wells, cleaning of village tanks, renovation of dilapidated temples, tree-planting, and minor irrigation projects. A perusal of the available record of his philanthropy reveals an interesting feature. They were designed not merely to alleviate human distress at the present moment, but also to serve as sources of future sustenance and support to individuals and communities alike. He was a shrewd judge of things and was particularly hard on social parasites and wasteful projects of all kinds. For himself he managed to convert most of his local and incidental efforts, too, into a broader community enterprise. In reserving most of his private charity for up-and-coming students, Gourishankar had a fundamental national interest in view. And this was true of even his private concerns. When his grand-daughter was widowed, for instance, Gourishankar sent her to a girls' school, undeterred by all the outcry among members of his caste, and at once planned for a 'Bidhabashrama', a training institute for hapless young widows.

Gourishankar's human sensitivity had an aesthetic dimension, too. He was particularly fond of music and dance. Cuttack did not have in those days any institution to promote literary culture and performing arts of different kinds. Gourishankar had not had much of an exposure to the varied riches of Oriya literature in his school career. It so happened that in the early days of his government service he came in contact with a few colleagues who evinced a keen interest in Oriya poetry written by great masters of the *riti*-school such as Upendra Bhanja, Abhimanyu and their successors. This poetry, principally dealing with *Śṛingaṛa*-rasa, and composed in accordance with the ornate style popularised by ancinet Sanskrit poets like Magha, Bharavi and others, had attained an incomparable celebrity, vying with, and often excelling, the great Sanskrit tradition, in harnessing musical forms, alliterative and assonantal patterns, intricate verse-designs and multivalent semantic net-works. The taste for

a courtly poetry and Vaisnavite devotional compositions it generated among educated Oriya helped build a vast stock of *chhanda* and *champu*-lyrics forming a large repertoire of traditional songs. No systematic efforts at institutionalisation and popularisation of these forms were then in evidence, and they had been reduced to coterie-forms. Studying samples of these in the company of a few other enthusiastic *rasikas* at periodical evening-sittings, Gourishankar felt overwhelmed and enthralled. Popularisation of these and other great artistic achievements of the Oriyas now became a consuming passion with him.

He fulfilled a part of his mission in this direction by collecting and printing edited versions of some of the major compositions of this kind. Equally importantly, he began a tradition of literary appreciation, both by publishing critical notices and reviews in his weekly, and by organising discussions and meetings. Even that did not satisfy him. For while he could ensure through his press a resuscitation of the classics, he found it difficult to organise a similar programme for the revival and popularisation of Oriya music and songs. The tradition, no doubt, was still alive, but mostly confined to undistinguished clubs and troupes in the country-side, and to the soiree-rooms of courtesans and prostitutes in the towns. So great was Gourishankar's passion for this music and so intense his desire to sustain and promote it that when his financial condition had appreciably improved in the later part of his life he would organise regular weekly sessions inviting accomplished singers from brothels to present programmes of song and music before select gatherings of guests in his parlour. Gourishankar had to weather a lot of social criticism and scandal on this score. But nothing ever deterred him from his chosen course.

Gourishankar had himself acquired some training in music. He used to be a good singer, and commanded a fair measure of skill in instrumental music, as well. In fact, after having taken

private tuition from a number of local singers and musicians he had commissioned an instructor all the way from Punjab to take lessons in music. He used to take a personal interest in improving the knowledge of song and music among the harlots who constituted the main professional promoters of this art in the towns in those days. Gourishankar had a fond hope that those women would grow proficient in the art and would be invited to private ceremonies and festivals of the well-to-do, and to the public functions. But social orthodoxy was too strong for him to make much headway in this direction. And, in any case, not many of them shared Gourishankar's aesthetic passion. It is not as if Gourishankar used to organise the soirees simply as a promoter. No doubt, he did it also for personal relaxation and enjoyment in the compay of his friends. But the larger interest was very much at the centre, as he so often said and wrote. Later he regretted that he had spent so much labour and money on those singing-girls, and said it would have been far more useful if he had devoted himself to the organisation of a male troupe of professional singers and musicians instead.

It was his passion for drama that worked as a stimulus for his youngest brother Ramshankar and his grandsons, Aswini Kumar Ghosh and Kartik Kumar Ghosh, to grow into distinguished playwrights and dramatic organisers. Gourishankar used to encourage them in this direction from an early age, and used to take a keen critical interest in their efforts. When one takes into account the concepts of propriety and respectability, and of ideas of useful and frivolous engagements, current in Oriya society in those days, one cannot but admire Gourishankar's courage of conviction and artistic passion in encouraging educated young people of his family to devote themselves to the promotion of Oriya art and literature in both creative and organisational fields. One may have an idea of the intensity of his commitment and joy in this direction from the fact that when Ramshankar wrote his pioneering piece, *Kanchikaveri,* it was Gourishankar who, at his rather advanced age, went ahead to

direct and stage the play despite all his other onerous duties. The large contribution made by the members of his family to Oriya literature through three generations of writers and critics may in a very special sense be viewed as but a tribute to the marvellous artistic sympathy and vision of Gourishankar.

In his personal life he had but one failing; whether it was excessive work, too many personal tragedies, or simply the consequence of bad company (and Gourishankar thought it was the last cause), he developed a habit of taking occasional drinks late in the evening, after all the day's back-breaking work was over. He continued with this habit for a number of years; he used to serve drinks to his guests at the music sessions and feasts that he was in the habit of periodically organising; but he was never in doubt that drinking was an evil, and had to be combated. He used to champion all kinds of reformist movements against drinking, a social evil that had alarmingly spread among the newly educated people in the towns. When a friend once asked him how he could display such strong passion against a practice which he himself had adopted, Gourishankar humbly rejoined that he was not the one to rationalise and pretend that even his weaknesses had a certain virtue about them, and that from his own experience he knew how bad the habit was.

It is this clearsightedness and firm moral judgment that insured Gourishankar's personality against degeneration. The defiance and strong will he exhibited in all things including the patronage of harlots could have easily led him into dissipation or arrogance. But Gourishankar was too noble, and too practical, one might also add, for all that. To one of his table-companions he once explained how he could maintain a firm hold on himself and on his resources even by being free with his purse for his parties. While others would have the companion's purse in view on such occasions and prescribe themselves no limit, he said he always had only the funds he

could possibly spare for this in view, and, in any case, he went to it for an occasional relaxation only; nothing ever made him lost sight of his main work, his primary mission in life. In everything he was his own mentor and law-giver. And thus it was that his moral taste, his pragmatism, his refined sentiments and his larger vision remained unsullied and kept him steady and strong.

Gourishankar displayed a high regard for society, and like other great social reformers proposed change only where it was due, never losing sight of the valuable aspects of the traditional social organisation and its mores. But once he was convinced, on dispassionate analysis, that a certain social practice was undesirable, and some occassion came up where a stand had to be taken, his tenacity and defiance were of an extraordinary order. The case of his grand-daughter Sailabala, who was widowed young, has already been cited. The *Kayastha* community to which he belonged felt outraged when Gourishankar made arrangements for Sailabala's educatioon in the local school. They raised a terrible hue and cry, and Gourishankar was threatened with social ostracism and other serious consequences. But he was totally unshakeable. Sailabala was admitted into school, and continued with her studies till the very last days of Gourishankar. And, yet, for all this resolute progressiveness, Gourishankar did allow her to observe the usual austerities of a Hindu widow.

This was not the first time Gourishankar had to weather a community-storm. As a fall-out of a movement among the *Kayastha*-community in Bengal in 1905, the Oriya *Kayasthas*, too, got drawn into a raging controversy on the issue of whether or not they should wear the thread establishing their *Kshatriya*-identity. Many were in favour, but chose to remain anonymous or to maintain a very low profile. A number of *Kayastha*-leaders from Bengal visited Cuttack on different occasions to persuade the Oriyas to adopt the custom of thread-wearing, but no one

dared follow their advice in the face of stiff local opposition. After long thought Gourishankar decided he would take the plunge. It was at this juncture that his mother passed away. Gourishankar wished to perform the thirteen-days' rites approved for *Kshatriyas*. His relatives and friends – some of whom having conceded that he was right – vigorously exerted themselves to dissuade him, but all to no avail. Gourishankar remained obdurate. The *Kayastha*-community was up in arms. No one, not even the famed Pandit Viswanath Satapathy who had made all the necessary arrangement, joined the rites. Undeterred, Gourishankar performed them as he had decided earlier, and on its conclusion, he and other male members of his family put on the thread. All floodgates now burst open. The *Kayastha*-convention met, and instructed him to retract and observe rites of atonement, failing which all his relations were to be made outcastes. Gourishankar refused to obey.

It is interesting to note that even while the community-ban remained in force for a year, Gourishankar continued to officially remain the President of the *Kayastha-Samaj* with his grandson-in-law, Akshaya, as its Secretary, and continued to extend his usual assistance to young students and other needy persons of his community. Gourishankar's act of defiance, it must be remembered, did not imply any loosening of the community-tie. As all his life, his sense of identity with his community continued to remain strong and deep.

This brings us to a typical feature in Gourishankar's personality. Unlike other great leaders who submerge their local commitments in larger ones and seek to transcend various dimensions of their local identity in adopting a national one, Gourishankar's multi-pronged. That he was incessantly striving at a higher plane of Orissan renaissance did not ever make him slight his more immediate links of community. Cuttack never made him forget Dikshitpara : if anything, it only provided greater opportunities of serving his village and his community.

He did build the Cuttack Town Hall at a cost of rupees eleven thousand in memory of his mother (though he did not get her name in any way attached to it), thus fulfilling a long-felt public need. But he also built a hostel for *Kayastha* students in the town and established an endowment for its maintenance at a total cost of rupees fourteen thousand. At Dikshitpara, again, he established a girls' school, and a kaviraji and an allopathic hospital, and created an endowment for those institutions at a personal expense of seventeen thousand rupees. At Asureswar, too, he established a boys' middle English school and a hospital.

It was not merely in such large, ambitious undertakings that his sense of responsibility for the welfare of his village, his town, and his state was highlighted. He looked after numerous less eye-catching but important needs such as digging a well, helping out individuals in times of difficulty, coming to the aid of needy students, and so on. He spent a lot of money on the Pyarimohan Academy and freely donated to institutions established by other communities like the Pathani Samanta Memorial attached to the hostel of the *Brahmana Samiti*. He got a shed built and trees planted at the cremation ground, donated rupees two thousand for the Coronation Library at Cuttack. The list would stretch through pages. And unrecorded charities far outnumber the known ones. After his income had grown through the Press and other avenues, Gourishankar continued to maintain his habitual strict vigil on expenses so that he could all the more munificently contribute to worthy individuals, institutions, and occasions.

A simple but touching – and revealing – act of his charity may yet be mentioned. Gourishankar was one day walking across a street in Calcutta. It was the Puja period. A young married girl was silently weeping in a corner. Gourishankar went up to her and asked her the reason. She said her mother-in-law had recently expired. Her husband was not there. Puja days had come, but she did not have the wherewithal to perform the

same. Gourishankar asked her to wait, and left the place. After sometime he returned there, carrying all the various articles necessary for a *Mahapuja*. He presented her the same, thoroughly explained the method of service, and only then resumed his journey. This act as much reveals his large heart as the huge expenses he used to incur on feeding hundreds of people on days of festivity and ceremony, or the large number of beggars and needy people he used to unfailingly feed with care and love on the occasion of family functions.

Some of these philanthropic acts used to land him in trouble, but those would never cause him to recoil from charitable engagements. Once it so happened that Gourishankar got a pucca crossing constructed for the benefit of certain villagers in the Kendrapara sub-division. The villagers used to raise an embankment at a particular place to store water for irrigation during periods of need. The breach through which water used to be released needed frequent refillings. It used to be difficult to cross over during the rainy season, and the villagers had to manage with long bamboo or timber poles serving as a bridge. Gourishankar got a pucca culvert there. One of the villagers filed a false case against Gourishankar and Ramshankar charging that they had ordered an unauthorised construction on his land, and when prevented, had got him manhandled and injured. The Deputy Magistrate went over for a personal inspection where a hundred villagers submitted before him that it was a wholly fabricated case : the embankment was there for decades, the culvert did not touch the land of the plaintiff, and Gourishankar had got a pucca crossing made for their benefit, and no one had done violence to the plaintiff. With all this deposition the Magistrate was not satisfied. He ordered criminal proceedings and issue of summons on the mason and the two coolies who had been engaged for the work. The case was tried, and in the face of all the contrary evidence convincingly submitted by Gourishankar, the poor fellows were sentenced to three months' imprisonment and a fine of rupees twenty-five.

Gourishankar was flabbergasted and outraged. He felt particularly distressed that the three innocent workers had been made to suffer. He wrote in the *Dipika,* filed petitions, and prayed that punishment, if any, be meted out to him and not to the poor mason and collies. The case, and Gourishankar's appeal courting punishment, created a stir. Gourishankar now appealed against he verdict in the High Court at Cuttack. The decision of the lower court was reversed, and the accused were honorably acquitted. Gourishankar pointed out how in the absence of facilities for bail at sub-divisional courts, innocent people who had the misfortune of being tried by incompetent magistrates had no scope for escaping unmerited punishment. The affair caused a lot of psychological tension and wastage of time and money on Gourishankar's part. All that because, he had, without any trace of self-interest, tried to help the poor inhabitants of a village. But this did not affect Gourishankar's zeal for philanthropic activities even a whit. He had no regrets, and no fear whatever.

It is instructive that a person who could spend so freely for others continued to be exceedingly parsimonious in his personal habits. He never hired a carriage unless it was most essential. He would choose to walk to his press getting drenched in the rain rather than spend a quarter of a rupee on his transport, saying it should rather be gifted to a poor man who could feed his family for a day with the same amount. Till his very last days he used to wear the same old rough garments, eat the coarse rice produced in his village and remain content with an exceedingly spare living. When he was to go to the *durbar* on invitation in 1913, Ramshankar, who had then grown into a very prosperous advocate, bought a horse-carriage for the purpose. Gourishankar quietly brushed off the suggestion, saying he would rather cover the distance on bullock-cart, and the carriage might be kept by Ramshankar for his personal use. It was not simply the wish to be economical that prompted him to spurn luxuries; it was also a habitual love of simplicity and

absence of vanity that was at work. Gourishankar, otherwise so powerful and awe-inspiring a personality, was essentially a very humble person.

This humility made it possible for him to accommodate and adjust with a number of social and cultural organisations whose attitudes and functional style were at a variance with his own. Utterly uncompromising and belligerent when it came to protecting national interest, championing the cause of the weak, defending certain basic values, or undertaking social reforms, Gourishankar was disarmingly tolerant of personal criticism, and of socio-religious mores of other communities. As we would see from his editing of the *Dipika* and management of the association, *Utkala Sabha,* which he had established and raised to the status of the most influential cultural and political forum of Orissa in the last decades of the 19th century, they were particularly distinguished for the spirit of understanding, amity, and tolerance evinced in respect of competing organs and forums that came up in their wake. Gourishankar had a liberal disposition and, with all the reverence he had for tradition, was essentially a modern spirit emphasising reason, pragmatism and objectivity in all things.

This temper of mind had two extreme, but connected, manifestations. On the one hand this would actuate him to advocate scientific attitude and modern methods of economic enterprise and management, and on the other lead him to the centre of the new religious movement of *Brahma Samaj* initiated by Maharshi Devendranath. It is interesting to note how, apart from counselling modern methods of cultivation in the pages of the *Dipika,* Gourishankar went on to give a practical demonstration in an orchard he grew with passionate care. Even in those days he had the wisdom to collect soil-samples, send them all the way to Calcutta for testing, and apply the manures and fertilisers specifically necessary for his land. He would collect the best variety of seeds, and produce enticingly healthy

fruit and vegetables, and organise exhibitions to popularise the method. Gourishankar was always a man of the soil; he knew what things were most important for the villagers and in various ways set out to educate them on basic things.

With all his passion, political involvement, concern for economic improvement of the people, and his deep love of art and literature, Gourishankar also possessed the characteristic Indian penchant for renunciation and religious devotion. He had already, in 1870, joined the Brahmo-Samaj; Jagmohan Ray, his colleague in the socio-cultural sphere, was the immediate inspiration. With growing age, the religious impulse grew deeper and deeper. Love of freedom, personal disappointments and bereavements in a long succession, disenchantment with certain customs and traditions sanctioned by the Hindu society, an urge for religious tolerance and syncretism, and the fascination for a simpler, yet philosophically more coherent system of worship combined to intensify his devotion to the Brahmo faith. Very soon he became the leading Brahmo of the *Cuttack Samaj*, unfailingly joining service each Saturday. There were days when he would be the lone devotee trekking the distance in rain and darkness to the Brahmo temple at Gangamandir, and offering worship for hours on end. Nothing ever caused him to miss a service. One of the most touching experiences for his fraternity was the tearful prayers he sang to the tune of the Vina only a few minutes after his beloved son-in-law Akshaya had breathed his last.

An individual like Gourishankar could not possibly court the fetters of government service much longer than was absolutely inescapable. Not that the fetters had ever bound him down. As the editor of the *Dipika*, and even as a self-respecting employee and social worker, he had always fearlessly espoused the right cause, running all the attendant risks of government displeasure time and again. As Secretary of a host of societies and organisations he had to fight the bureaucratic machinery again

and again. To cap it all, he had persuaded the Orissa Society to merge with the National Congress in 1886, and himself gone all the way to Madras – a week's journey by sea in those days – to attend the third conference of the Congress. He declared he might lose his service, but would certainly attend the meet for the sake of the country. He did not have to lose his service. He himself gave it up in 1892, the same year that his younger brother Gangashankar died, adding to Gourishankar's family burden. This he did, not merely because he would have more free time for social service, but because, as a conscientious employee and a nationalist worker, he now found it too difficult to reconcile his various duties.

A free man, now he plunged into all his multifarious social work with renewed vigour. In close collaboration with the leading figures of his time he engaged in national reconstruction and social renewal in a variety of forms. Editing and publication, meetings and conferences, religious and cultural festivities, educational and health services, village agriculture and civic life in the town, political programmes and art activities – he was there, in the forefront, in everything, touching the life of his society and nation on all possible points and getting totally identified with his world. For him this was more a period of consolidation and expansion than one of fresh initiatives. All the innovative zeal and insightful projects of his middle years had now burgeoned into a host of institutions and on-going projects. Sustaining them all was a truly Herculean task, for, as always, everyone continued to expect him to undertake a major share of the drudgery. It is significant that in most organisations he was chosen as the Secretary rather than as President or Adviser, the relatively more formal or decorative posts. He was the leading worker, and thus was rightly given the title of *Karmayogi*. This he remained all his life. As he crossed his sixtieth year, in the wake of a series of personal misfortunes and decades of back-breaking work, age began to

tell, and he thought it was time he began gradually unyoking his shoulders.

Except for major organs and concerns like *Utkal Sabha* and the Cuttack Printing Company which he had already nurtured for four decades, and which continued to expand and serve as central instruments of Orissan regeneration, Gourishankar slowly began divesting himself of numerous other responsibilities that had accumulated on his shoulders in course of his protracted, multifaceted socio-cultural activities. His nationalist fervour, however, had not declined a bit, as was movingly demonstrated by his long journey to Karachi in a failing body to join the meeting of the National Congress in 1915. But in his heart of hearts he knew his time had come. In 1915 he handed over formal charge of the printing compay – his spiritual and physical home.

After his wife had died, and he had spurned all family persuasion to marry a second time, he had made the Press his living quarters. For a number of years towards the end he used to visit his home only for his midday meal, cooking supper for himself in the Press. In 1915 he stopped his midday visits, as well, living all by himself, more or less a detached *Sanyasi*. For nearly a decade now he had totally given up non-vegetarian food and alcoholic drinks, turning more and more spiritual in his inner being. In 1916 he was awarded the title of Rai Bahadur. Gourishankar called it 'yet another infliction' on him. He had never courted official or social recognition; in fact, he always discouraged felicitations for himself and had never allowed his name to be attached to any of the so many institutions he had established. It so happened that the date fixed for formal award of the title in a *durbar* called for the purpose coincided with the one fixed for inauguration of his school in the village. It was characteristic of Gourishankar that he sent a letter of thanks to the government, but chose to participate in the function in the village for which he had given his prior consent.

Fame and blame had never been of any consequence to him. The only thing that had mattered was work — more and more of it — for the good of others. Now even that did not matter. He was fully reconciled to his lot; had done his bit, and was now ready. As he sat thinking in his Press-room in the morning hours of March 5, 1917, his head reeled, and he collapsed. Consciousness kept returning intermittently, during which time he dictated his will. He lay thus bed-ridden till the final call came around 9.30 P.M. on March 17.

A glorious life had ended.

The Nation-Builder

Gourishankar's impact on the mind and destiny of the Oriya people – those coming under the then British Orissa, in particular – has been too momentous and all-pervasive to report and assess in a small compass such as the one available here. He was not a satatesman vested with authority or armed with a vast mass-following to attempt sweeping, spectacular changes at one stroke. Nor was he a great creative genius like Rabindranath, nor an irresistible religious personality like Vivekananda, who could be expected to register a sudden and profound impression on the mass-mind. He had nothing extraordinary about him other than integrity of character, patient dedication and patriotic fervour. His had to be a slowpaced, consistent, unremitting endeavour stretching through long years, with no hope of immediate results, but one that for the very same reason would be more deep and enduring in character.

The problems he wished to tackle were vast and manifold, comprising poverty, social exploitation, mal-administration, educational and cultural backwardness, inertia, apathy, fatalism and sense of inferiority experienced by a whole people. Without the backing of wealth and power he had to forge an instrument that might fight decadence and iniquity on all major fronts of community-life – social, economic, political, administrative, and psychological. To this end, he devoted himself to the pub-

lication of a fearless, perceptive organ that could awaken the masses and the overlords of their political and economic destiny to the realities of the situation, and compel appropriate remedial and progressive actions. It was a wise choice; for, as the events were to prove, the inexhaustible energy of Gourishankar could not have been applied to a more fruitful national enterprise.

It was also a daring bid. The tradition of newspapers was still very new to the Oriya language. Before Gourishankar pioneered what should be called the first Oriya literary magazine and newspaper rolled into one, there had been only one astonishing attempt made in the same direction by an enlightened, liberal-minded saint named Sadhu Sundar Das, with his *muth* at Kujibara near Choudwar in the Cuttack district. He used to bring out palm-leaf news-magazines (subsequently, in country-made 'haritali' paper) and circulate them at fairs and religious congregations. The paper, called *Kujibara Patra* after the location of the muth, had an irregular, circumscribed circulation even before any news-papers had come into being in Bengal. It continued to disseminate information in its neighbourhood till the passing away of Sadhu Sundar Das in 1838. Only sixteen years later two other papers – *Jnanaruna* and *Prabodha Chandrika,* sponsored by Christian missionaries – appeared on the scene. Launched in 1855-56, the first one was, more or less, an abortive attempt; the second, *Prabodha Chandrika,* continued to be in circulation for three years as a monthly news-magazine.

Prabodha Chandrika was both a literary journal and a news-magazine. Edited by William Lacey, and brought out under the aegis of the Christian Mission, the paper was distinguished for its liberal outlook, and commitment to local culture and interests. William Lacey deserves the highest compliments for his sagacious editorship of the paper. Under his discriminating supervision it popularised a number of edifying stories from ancient Indian literature, conveyed brief but balanced and

representative accounts of the local, state, national and international scenario, incorporated a number of informative articles on a wide variety of geographical, cultural (including tribal-life), scientific, historical and religious subjects, and also carried a monthly calendar. Most important of all, it prepared the grounds for healthy indigenous organs to develop by transmitting an awareness of the vital significance of such attempts, and by demonstrating the flexibility and precision of a nascent modern Oriya prose in tackling a wide variety of themes.

The first editorial that Lacey wrote for the paper is a memorable document. In it he reminds the Oriyas of the ancient glories of their land and its vast spread, goes on to emphasise that even in its present state it is a considerable territory with a large population, draws their attention to the neighbouring state of Bengal where modern newspapers and books in the native language had proliferated in a short time through the efforts of intellectuals who had sharpened and polished their prose into an effective medium of modern communication, and with the support of new educational institutions had stimulated an economic and cultural regeneration in the state, and ruefully points out how the Oriyas have languished, cherishing small acquisitions and neglecting that knowledge with the aid of which far greater prosperity could be attained. The editorial then outlines a broad profile of the paper and concludes by saying it is not intended to further the interests of any particular religion and no one should apprehend a danger to his faith in subscribing to the paper.

The impact of such a revealing and exciting document on sensitive, partiotic minds of the time is easy to imagine. It is no idle guess to suppose that the vision and ardour communicated by documents such as this, particularly after his personal experience of the more developed cultural climate of Bengal, played a crucial role in shaping the thinking of Gourishankar. Notwithstanding all that Gourishankar gained from his prede-

cessors and contemporaries, however, his title to fame as the pioneer of Oriya journalism cannot be questioned. For in his case the entire enterprise was indigenous, and built with all-too-meagre resources. The paper edited by Gourishankar, *Utkala Dipika,* came out in 1966, nine years after the initiation of *Prabodha Chandrika,* and the faith and reassurance this native effort generated all around may be known from the fact that in the next two and a half decades forty-seven other literary and news organs had sprouted in different parts of Orissa.

Two years before the publication of *Utkala Dipika* the resourceful and far-sighted Gourishankar had joined hands with an equally dedicated compatriot, Bichitrananda Das, to set up an Oriya printing press at Cuttack. The major share of the credit for establishing the press would have to go to Bichitrananda Das who was instrumental in persuading a number of kings, zamindars and businessmen to extend financial support for the venture. Among the share-holders and Directors of the Cuttack Printing Company Ltd., which was floated in 1864, we read the names of a number of well-known intellectuals and patriots of the time, such as Biharilal Pandit, Madhusudan Das, Jagmohan Rai, and Banamali Singh, apart from those of a few wealthy patrons and respected members of the local gentry. Gourishankar served as Secretary all his life, and managed the affairs of the Press with remarkable competence. As we are told, the company began with a capital of rupees seven thousand and five hundred only. When Gourishankar retired from the management in 1915 he made over a property worth rupees sixty thousand and a profit of rupees fifty-five thousand, a vast sum in those days. The figures speak for themselves.

It should be noted in this context that the company was not a business concern, but a welfare project. As was clearly highlighted in the annual report of the company in 1866, the press had been established 'at great expense and pain' to 'end the misfortune of Orissa and ensure her prosperity', and not

as a commercial enterprise with 'the hope of mere profit'. Clearly enough, the dedicated band of entrepreneurs knew what they were about. The press was not simply a gadget to help dissemination of knowledge; it was well-conceived to function as an instrument of national reconstruction, creating among the people an awareness of their rich heritage, their present predicament, and their great potential for future development. William Lacey's exhortation of a few years before had not fallen on deaf ears.

This was the first native press in Orissa with an immediate commitment to national regeneration, sharply distinguished from the purpose and functioning of the Mission Press which had been established in the same town of Cuttack by Christian Missionaries in 1836. It must be appreciatively acknowledged that, as elsewhere in the country, the Mission press here, too, did not confine its activities to the publication of missionary literature alone. Notwithstanding the obvious political and sectarian motivation behind the establishment of schools and standardisation of language, it was the administrative and missionary sponsorship of linguistic and literary projects in the state which laid the real grounds for its cultural renaissance. Native endeavour of a more wide-spread, far-reaching kind was possible because of the lead already provided by British misionaries and intellectuals like W.C. Lacey, Amos Sutton, W. Miller, John Beames, G.A. Grierson and others. With all their liberal outlook, however, these distinguished savants could not be expected to have an insider's feel of the problems and possibilities inherent in the intellectual and cultural situation in the state. Nor could they be expected to share an urgent, aggressive spirit of emergent nationalism with the English-educated Oriya patriots of the time.

Cuttack Printing Company Ltd. reflects this new sense of ardent nationalism. Making a tentative start, therefore, the company began publishing, not merely simplified tales from

Sanskrit, or books for school-children, as the Mission Press did, but major literary works of the past like Krishna Singha's *Mahabharata,* Viswanath Khuntia's *Bichitra Ramayana,* and the great *riti*-poet Upendra Bhanja's compositions. It published, too, laws and regulations then in vogue for the benefit of the native lawyers, *muktars* and litigants, and for facilitating knowledge of the law at the relatively more common level of the ordinary Oriya-knowing people. But most important of all, Gourishankar used the press to publish the weekly news-and-literary-magazine, *Utkala Dipika.* In all this effort Gourishankar was only giving expression to a widely-felt national need. He was the leader who understood in advance of the others the precise requirements and possibilities of the time. As in the case of the news-organ, so also with the press, he pioneered a movement that was to catch up and spread with extraordinary rapidity. Within a spell of two decades after the establishment of Cuttack Printing Company Ltd., thirteen more native presses had sprung up in different parts of Orissa along lines set by Gourishankar, catering to the self-same objective as his. Bichitrananda and Gourishankar had, indeed, been leaders of a socio-cultural revolution.

How difficult and painstaking the enterprise was may be appreciated when one realises the kind of technical indigence with which it had to be kept going. Luckily for him, Gourishankar had a dedicated compositor, Bhagirathi Sathia, who had picked up the rudiments of the printing technology – then still in a primitive state – from an Englishman. Initially they had to make do with stone sets brought from Puri. Lead types were available to the press a few years hence, but the machines were hand-operated, and at most could print a thousand sheets a day. We have an extremely amusing record of the difficulties that beset such undertakings in Fakirmohan's autobiography where he details out the comic bathos resulting from the initial failure while setting up the second native press at Balasore in 1868. All such constraints and problems could not, however, deter

dedicated patriots like Gourishankar who kept at it for months and years, and converted the building at Alamchand bazar which housed the press into a veritable temple of nationalism. Gourishankar shifted his house to the first floor of the building, and devoted himself for long forty years to editing, publication, and management of the affairs of the company.

Utkala Dipika came on the scene at one of the most critical points in the history of the Oriya people. Its birth coincides with the appearance of the Great Famine, the worst of its kind in the annals of the coastal belt, which wiped off more than a fifth of the population. Known as the 'Na-Anka' famine, since it occured in the ninth year of the reign of the new Gajapati-king at Puri, it wreaked colossal devastation and paralysed a whole people. But for the *Utkala Dipika* and the people who used it as a goad to activate the bureaucracy and whip up philanthropic zeal in the country-side, the impact of the famine would have been far more wide-spread and devastating. Apart from this unprecedented national calamity, the Oriya nation was also passing through a phase of terrible cultural insecurity in the face of a series of moves made by certain forces in the neighbouring states to jeopardise their linguistic identity and economic interests. *Utkala Dipika,* and some of the sister-publications that soon followed, proved themselves a matchless weapon in the hands of nationalists to rout those insidious pressure-groups and bring about, in the process, a marvellous cultural resurgence.

All this called for extraordinary determination, patience, percipience and intellecutal ability. Gourishankar's editorship and management of the paper showed how specially gifted he was for the enterprise. As has already been suggested, *Utkala Dipika* was to touch all important aspects of the Orissan life and, in its pursuit, of the objectives of national regeneration and immediate public welfare, had to fight a heroic battle

simultaneously on two fronts : against an alien government, and against an ignorant, reactionary, apathetic native mass at the same time. It had to function, at once, as a social and a political weapon in the broadest sense of the term. It had to address itself to a number of large, fundamental issues concerning economic, cultural, social and political future of the Oriyas at the same time as it had to attend to hundreds of specific cases of injustice, mal-administration and corruption. And, in addition, it had to fight or negotiate numerous internal challenges and conflicts that were natural off-shoots of a process of socio-historical transition. All this it performed with amazing success under Gourishankar's stewardship.

If we take an over-view of the kind of material *Dipika* foregrounded in its pages we get a fairly accurate picture of Gourishankar's objectives and efforts. The paper offered select news from abroad, carefully chosen on the basis of either their international significance or their immediate socio-cultural relevance, snippets of the national scenario that were of particular interest to the local readership, news of the state and the neigbourhood, book-reviews drawing the attention of the readers to new publications and to their ancient heritage, scientific and economic matters that excited general curiosity, new plans and projects that affectd the living condition of the people, public grievances, lead articles containing valuable practical suggestions for the government and the people at large, the Oriya almanac, rules and regulations that needed to be known by the ordinary people, information on cultural life, and so on. The entire project was to improve knowledge and perception, to make the Oriyas aware of their situation, to serve as a watch-dog of their interests, and to prepare grounds for a better socio-economic, cultural and political order in the state. Critical intervention in the matter of ensuring immediate relevance of the news-service was writ large on the organ. It was truly a shining 'candle' for Orissa.

It is necessary to remember here that this was the first indigenous venture at an all-purpose news-journal. Gourishankar had to fall back upon his own discriminating intelligence and sensibility in monitoring the tone and approach to all those various material served in the paper. The balance and insightfulness he demonstrated in handling the text of the paper, the unflinching commitment to truth and journalistic rectitude he displayed, and the fearlessness and sagacity with which he intervened in numerous sensitive issues to guide the government and the people, were, indeed, extraordinary for that age. The *Dipika* is a classic for all times, a model for similar organs to emulate. But that is only one aspect of its great title to fame. It was not only marvellous in what it was; it was even more spectacular in what it effected and achieved in immediate, practical terms.

DIPIKA AND THE GREAT FAMINE

Floods followed by severe drought in 1864 and 1865 had resulted in unprecedented loss of crops in the coastal belt of Orissa. A complacent, insensitive administrative machinery had refused to see the horror-inspiring writing on the wall. Nature and men thus conspired to produce one of the worst disasters known to Indians in recent centuries. But for the shaping hand of history at this juncture in throwing to the fore a few dynamic patriots of Cuttack who established the Cuttack Printing Company in July 1865, and, even as the great Famine stalked the land, floated a national mouthpiece, *Utkala Dipika*, the catastrophe and resulting confusion would have been far more widespread. The role of the *Dipika* in mitigating he colossal human suffering through timely intervention has but few parallels in the annals of journalism. This was so largely because it happened to be available at that juncture with the right kind of information, perception and practical sense, filling a void that had rendered the administration so very out of touch with the realities, and so very obtuse. *Dipika* generated public opinion, presented an

authentic picture, inspired charitable activities, unerringly pointed out where and how the rescue operations were getting infructuous, and even going berserk, offered extremely helpful suggestions that showed immediate results, and mediated between the public and the government with exemplary success. And all this it did right in the year of its birth, 1866, when the calamity was at its severest.

Scanning through the early issues one is struck by the quality of mind operating through the paper. There is no attempt at sensationalism; a deep human sympathy is vibrant, but conveyed in a dignified, level, objective tone, leaving no scope for wasteful rhetorical flourish, reality being stronger and stranger in this instance than any fiction could be. The editor's attention is unwaveringly focussed on a few basic objectives : dissemination of authentic information on the state of affairs and on relief measures planned or undertaken by the government; highlighting individual acts of charity in the state and outside with appeals to other people to follow the example ; close analysis of the situation so as to offer various perceptive recommendations; incorporation of news items from the national and international scenes with a telling manipulation of subtle links with the domestic situation, and so on. We may refer to the second issue itself by way of illustration.

The issue, dated August 11, 1866, begins with a short account of the destruction caused by the famine and the psychological state of brooding despondency it had produced all around; mentions the measures advertised for relief which were 'pleasant to hear' but not so reassuring in actual operation; makes a cryptic reference to the numerous famished souls ceaselessly on the move, begging alms in the streets of Cuttack, to prove the point with a quiet but trenchant precision; refers to the fact that certain parts of Bengal, too, had been afflicted, and devotes a long paragraph to the charitable acts being performed by many rich people there to conclude with an

exhortation for the well-to-do in Orissa to follow suit – all this in the space of less than two pages. Under a different head the next two pages engage in a balanced analysis of the functioning of the relief committee. After mentioning the three resolutions they had passed on Aug. 3, and complimenting them on their good intentions, Gourishankar puts his finger on the defective parts of the mechanism with unerring accuracy. He picks up the most sensitive problem – the care of helpless children – and diagnoses the basic reason why it could not be properly tackled. The relief committee, he points out, had only one non-British member in its fold. Without any understanding of the local situation they had invested an English missionary with the responsibility of taking care of the children. In consequence, for fear they might be converted into Christianity, most of the distressed people did not allow their children to seek relief there. Gourishankar goes on to lament the terrible consequences : a number of children had been gifted away or sold to brothels, others had been left vagrant, forcing them to take to evil ways.

Next he goes on to enumerate the benefits that would have resulted if some wealthy people and educated gentlemen of the locality had been taken in as members and entrusted with the task of supervising the relief work. The white members had neither the requisite knowledge, nor the sense of urgency, nor time, for the work. Nothing would, therefore, be gained by merely employing some paid native overseers, he continues. The work of the underpaid overseers in the villages, in particular, needed to be watched. But this could not be done by an Englishman. If a person conversant with the ways of the villagers and familiar with their speech were to do the supervision he could easily ascertain the truth of the situation, and wastage of public funds and suffering of the people could be averted, he concludes. It is interesting to note that in the next issue of the paper Gourishankar is happy to report the impact of his observations. The relief committee had been

reorganised and native supervisors employed. Although this was but the beginning of the story, from this development alone one can assess the kind and extent of Gourishankar's success in improving the lot of the famine-stricken people through his forthright comments and sane advice.

Under the weekly news-coverage in the same issue Gourishankar introduces items on important administrative orders passed during the period. Many of them had a direct bearing on the famine management. Thus he mentions the order of the Collector preventing retailers from lifting more than five bags of rice a day from the Government store, and the decision to supply them only fine variety of rice which had to be sold at a particular price. After providing the information, Gourishankar puts in just two small sentences, saying the frequent changes in pricing policy were difficult to understand and wondering if the retailers would ever bring the prices down in such a situation. Other news items follow. Famine in the Bhagalpur district is mentioned and donations made by certain individuals – English and Indian – for relief work reported. Apparently a casual reference is made to famine in certain parts of Madras, followed by a piece on the marriage of the princess of Vijayanagar at Varanasi where the entire populace was feasted and fed, and a dowry of Rs. 9 lakhs offered by the king to the groom. The subtlety of Gourishankar's suggestion needs no glossing.

With a few other bits on public charity, annual accounts of revenue collection and expenditure in Bengal, Bihar and Orissa for 1865-'66, and a sensational piece on a French girl who had tried to kill her mother and sister in order to drink their blood, Gourishankar passes on to still other news of the famine. He mentions in brief the case of the poor people around Patna who had been engaged by the Government in thousands to dig ponds and prepare roads, and earn their sustenance during the period of the famine. Gourishankar does not elaborate, for the message

needed no elaboration. Next he refers to the fact that rice was plentifully available at two rupees, and eight to twelve annas, a maund in the Barisal district, the area from where Government was procuring rice for Orissa, and adds a cryptic question : for how much would the Government sell the same rice here – five seers, or four and a three quarters, a rupee ? The precision and point are characteristic of Gourishankar's journalism.

Next he relates the case of a cannibal woman in the village of Mahanga with a lot of details. The woman had been suspected to be a witch and branded by the villagers earlier. This time they beat her severely. Gourishankar comments, 'she was not a witch, but a demoness, who should have been rather offered *prasad*'. Introducing a comic aside on superstition, he thus subtly conveys that it could have been only an extreme manifestation of the horrors of the famine. Even events clearly unconnected with the famine, get someway related to the major preoccupation of his mind. Thus while narrating a death by water, he exclaims, 'had all things in nature now grown inordinately hungry ?' The weekly resume concludes with a reference to the recent heavy rains that should help the next crop, but not before incorporating a pithy comment on the aggravation of human suffering in the process : the hungry people had been rendered homeless; with their collapsed walls, Gourishankar says, 'it appeared as if the houses were having a free conversation with the earth'. The issue concludes with a long letter to the editor expressing gratitude to the king of Dhenkanal for having come to the aid of the school at Mahanga which had been left to languish for a long time.

From this broad summary of the contents of the second issue of the *Dipika* it is easy to assess the editorial inention, mood, and style right from the start. Analytical study, investigative reportage, general description, subtle suggestions, revealing questions and comments, and moral insinuations involving a large variety of tones and approaches, are all pressed home to

stimulate a proper appreciation of the reality, to make useful suggesions, and to make both the Government and the people conscious of their responsibilities. What must have been very heartening for Gourishankar and his colleagues, and what strikes us today as something extraordinary, was the way they registered in the minds of all those to whom they had been addressed, producing immediate results. Unlike most newspapermen today, Gourishankar was not simply peddling news for a curious readership. He was not offering merely apparently judicious, detached analysis of a situation, nor engaging in journalistic histrionics. He was deeply involved. Forthright in his comments, and critical of the native people and the British bureaucrats alike, never for once showing bad temper or immoderate passion, always willing to see the good side of a matter, penetrating in his assessments and recommendations, always precise and to the point, he was using himself and the paper as only instruments in the service of national health. Journalism was neither good business nor exciting politics; it was a sober, serious, self-effacing, moral engagement.

The third issue of the *Dipika* has a long essay on the history of the calamity, a write-up on the relief committees and feeding centres functioning at Cuttack, Puri, Balassore and the countryside, a short note on the list of the aided people, three pieces of news-items connected with the famine-situation, one on Madhusudan Das, and a letter to the editor complimenting the efforts of the *Dipika*. Summarising the history, Gourishankar shows how there had been sufficient advance notice of the things to come, but the administraion had remained lax and complacement, obdurately holding on to the notion that it was an artifical scarcity caused by greedy zamindars and merchants who wished to take advantage of two successive bad crops. Even the starkly visible line of refugees, sharp increase in premature deals, desperate bids by a number of people to commit minor crimes so that they could have the succour of the jails, did not open the eyes of the government. As summer

came, and more and more inedibles were consumed by people, cholera took an epidemic form of alarming proportions. Even that did not register. Gourishankar laments that the rulers could be so very much out of touch with the realities and so much bereft of commonsense. He puts a stinging question, 'had anyone ever seen rice-shops in the villages, or known the landlords to have engaged in grain-dealing ?' If three-fourths of the people in the country-side where rice was the main medium of exchange and most people lived on cultivation were clearly famine-stricken, how could one conceive, wonders Gourishankar, that a handful of shopkeepers or zamindars had huge hoards that could meet the entire requirement of the vast population ? The Government came to recognise the truth only much later, and after being caught on the wrong foot, when it began a belated rearguard action, it just could not cope with the task. There was no evidence in all this of the famous administrative excellence of the Briish, says Gourishankar. Having said this, however, next he goes on to compliment the Government on some of its recent efforts, and cautions them on the problems of transportation during the rains, the absence of effective regulating methods, and the consequential confusion that would be caused. He concludes the piece by suggesting that the Government ought to supply rice to the retailers at their villages, thereby ensuring a standard price all over.

Gourishankar does not forget to offer similarly helpful, incisive comments elsewhere in the news section. Thus, for instance, reporting on the relief employments he argues for the wages to be paid in the form of rice rather than money. Talking of the weekly government report on the amount of relief extended to the people he suggests that instead of an over-all statistics, it would be very helpful to prepare the lists locality and community-wise, so that it would be easier to identify the sectors where relatively more extensive relief-work was called for. The editor has also a keen eye for news from abroad that may be of benefit to people in the state. He thus devotes

nearly half a page to a certain simple method of curing cholera discovered by an Italian doctor, and after carefully explaining the procedure, recommends its wide adoption in the epidemic belt.

The fourth issue dated Aug. 25, 1866, similarly begins with an account of the activities of the relief committee at Cuttack which now had five native members, and points out how the earlier contention of the *Dipika* had now stood vindicated. But he is still not satisfied with the constitution of the committee, for it did not have any representative from the rural areas where more of service had to be rendered. He recommends the names of two well-known, public-spirited, capable persons from the villages and says they had close familarity with the conditions there and could extend greater help to the Government agency as also expand the relief programmes they had already started on their own. Gourishankar says most of the well-to-do people in rural areas did not yet have the proper motivation and practical ideas for engaging in relief operation, and calls upon the people in authority to enlist their cooperation.

As an example of investigative journalism mention may be made here of an analysis Gourishankar offers in this issue of the sale-and-distribution system adopted by the Government. He has collected detailed, up-to-date information on the mismanagement and corruption involved in the process to prove how the system entailed considerable loss to the Government and hardship to the consumers. After proving the point conclusively, he offers a disarmingly simple but effective solution to the problem. It is clear that this practical wisdom and competent advocacy are but products of a deep commitment to the cause and willingness and capacity for spending a lot of time and energy for the same. The weekly news-survey in the same issue, similarly, mentions his experiences at certain feeding-centres and sales-counters in the city. The feeding was sliphsod, corruption and high-handedness were rampant, and the quality

of food was deplorable. Giving examples to prove the point, Gourishankar recommends the appointment of a superintendent and repeats his earlier comment that ill-paid, small employees must not be vested with too much responsibility. The situation at the sales-counter was frightful. With no senior officer present, there was no discipline in the distribution. Only the relatively stronger could approach the counter and rush back with whatever little they could buy; the large hordes of emaciated people had the benefit of only some merciless beating. They did not then have the strength or the urge to make a second attempt. Stingingly he comments — 'they went to remove the pain in their bellies; they only got the pain on their backs removed (!), and return with that satisfaction.'

Towards the end of the section, Gourishankar mentions the recent departure of the Lieutenant Governor for Darjeeling again, reportedly for improving his health, and comments with some asperity, 'While numberless people are dying of hunger, should he have gone to inhabit some secluded hill-top in search of better health, instead of moving around the belt affected by famine and seeking the removal of their woe ?' On three other occasions in subsequent issues Gourishankar offers a dig at this heartless indifference of the Lieutenant Governor. And, it must not be forgotten, he was only a junior clerk during that period.

Nothing escaped his solicitous attention. His judgment was sure and strong, and his passion for alleviating the suffering of the famine-stricken people inexhaustible; but he never allowed his objectivity to be clouded over by sentiment. Thus, for instance, he takes issue with the temporary rehabilitation programme drafted by the relief committee, and in the fifth number of the *Dipika* expresses his strong reservation against putting them in groups of a hundred or two in different parts of the city. He refers to their present unhygienic state of living, the various ailments many of them were suffering from, and makes the forthright comment that they must not be kept

congregated at populous points in the city posing a health hazard to the others. And what additional benefit, he asks, would accrue to those poor refugees ? The feeding centres being located at distant points, they would have further woes to suffer everyday. They should rather be accommodated on the sprawling acres adjacent to the Commissioner's office and the non-residential Lalbagh area where the feeding centres were located. In that case it would be easier to look after their eating and health needs, and to keep the areas clean. In case it was to be decided to put them into smaller camps, Gourishankar advises, those should be located near the residences of the members of the Committee who would feel forced in that situation to take a proper interest in their hygienic living. Subsequently, in the weekly news round-up, he expresses his sorrow on the chaotic conditions prevailing at ticket and food counters, and the rough treatment meted out to the supplicants there. His sympathy for the poor folk prompts him to comment with some pungency that things could have improve if the committee members, instead of simply holding weekly meetings in a two-storeyed building, inspected the camps and saw for themselves how their decisions were being implemented. This is followed by a brief piece on how the Government's policy had resulted in rising prices, concluding with a devastating irony – 'these are English retailers'.

The next issue of the paper again gives a feedback on the improved management of children's rehabilitation which served to vindicate the perceptiveness of *Dipika*'s earlier suggestions. This is followed by a review of another resolution of the relief committee relating to sick refugees. They had requested a number of native officials and other professionals to take an interest in the matter, and, should any of them find a refugee lying on the road, to send him to the hospital after requisitioning a country-stretcher and bearers for the purpose from the police station. It is right, Gourishankar says, that the general citizenry should be asked to extend their helping hands in such an

emergency and the committee should not be expected to do everything. But, he adds, the people who had been requested for the purpose spend most of the day at their places of work. They may chance upon sick people while on way to, or way back, from office, or while out shopping. Pressure of time would naturally cause them to neglect the sick even if they were sympathetically disposed. Gourishankar asks if the committee realised how much time would be required to render such a service, and thus bringing home the impractical nature of their suggestion, recommends that the duty be entrusted to the police who should be warned against dereliction in such matters and a small supervising body be there to keep watch and report cases of negligence to the higher authorities.

Gourishankar is keen to publish reports of both exemplary service and corrupt practices in relief work, but always with restraint and objectivity. He praises the efforts of the Assistant Collector at Jajpur, complimenting him on the initiative he displayed in ensuring supply of rice, but adds, he did not publish the related write-up of his news-reporter because of its circumlocutory style and needless padding. Such a statement, apart from being a warning to other prospective reporters, also goes to enhance the credibility of the paper. It is most instructive to note Gourishankar's instinct for fairplay and justice in this context. He makes no distinction whatever between English officers and native people associated with relief work, offering praise and blame impartially. For instance, the fervour and passion with which he goes out of his way to defend the Collector against an unjust reprimand by the Commissioner on the basis of a wrong assumption of neglect of relief-work ring as an extraordinary piece of honest and spirited journalism even today.

Dipika had been particularly severe with an ill-tempered English officer, who had been deputed to assist the Collector in the relief operations, and who was capricious and impulsive

in the extreme. But in a later issue it was fulsome in its praise for his relief management. When the Commissioner faulted the Collector's administration, *Dipika* did not take it as a matter for quiet glee, enjoying the discomfiture of a senior English officer. It rather chose to take it as an affront to justice and to be vociferous in condemning the unfair pronouncement and wrote in defence of the Collector who was known to be toiling hard for amelioration of the distress of the famine-stricken people. Gourishankar convincingly argues how the Collector was really hard-pressed, with no real assistance available to him in the matter, and laments that the unmerited stricture would dampen his enthusiasm. He goes on to specifically suggest a simple administrative reshuffle by which things could be improved. It is significant that Gourishankar devotes a central place to this discussion in more than two issues of the *Dipika*, expressing his appreciation of Mr. Cornell, and disapproval of the Government's attitude, in lines full of eloquent sentiment and irrefutable logic.

Gourishankar's discriminating sympathy extends to all categories of people. Thus he writes a long piece on the appeal for tax-relief made by the zamindar, and defends their position with superb clarity of thought, showing how the obduracy of the Government would further aggravate the miseries of the ordinary people as also of the zamindars in question. As relief management begins showing signs of improvement, and the Government and the urban elite begin expressing their satisfaction, Gourishankar keeps on reminding them that it was still very irregular and inefficient in the rural areas. When general observations fail to make an impression, and conditions worsen, he offers special, detailed studies of the situation reminding the readers of his earlier warnings, mentioning with characteristic insightfulness precisely how and where urgent intervention was necessary. Gourishankar understood his city and the countryside equally well, and served them with equal zeal. And he understood, as a distinguished leader should, the necessity for

educating the minds of the villagers on basic issues. And thus he provided analytical pieces in a simple, logical manner for them to appreciate certain basic things. Thus, for instance, he wrote a lead article explaining the importance of trade initiatives, persuading village-folk against unwise suspicion, in the wake of the famine, of all mercantile operations – against exports, in particular – and made them conscious of the wider implications of their economic network and situation. Similarly, again, he wrote favourably of the new irrigation projects undertaken by a land company and solicited the villagers' cooperation.

Contingent improvements did not satisfy Gourishankar, as it did the most others. And so, he would not allow himself rest after attending to the immediate practical needs, and continue to think and plan for the future even as he so closely attends to the problems at hand. His understanding of the various administrative and economic aspects associated with the calamity is admirably conveyed both in his practical, managerial advice and in his counselling for large systemic changes. Thus he discusses how without a permanent land-settlement policy no real preparations for meeting such calamities in the future could be made. And as always in all such discussions, he demonstrates a wonderfully intimate appreciation of the various practical implications of a policy, making his argument powerfully persuasive and incisive. And he always goes to the very roots. Tackling the social, psychological, economic and administrative aspects of the matter in a series of write-ups, Gourishankar attempts to provide a complete answer to the problem, refusing to remain content with the service he had already rendered by being so closely watchful of the details of relief management at the present moment. It is interesting to note in this context his perceptiveness in treating the elements of social psychology and educational preparedness with the same kind of keenness as the more obvious objective aspects connected with new administrative and entrepreneurial projects.

Dipika was thus not just a news-magazine, but a marvellously effective instrument of human service in the hands of Gourishankar. From the kind of feedback we find incorporated in the *Dipika* itself, and the close monitoring of public opinion and response evident through the reportage, it is easy to see that Gourishankar's voice elicited respectful attention among people in authority, influential and eminent persons, as also the masses. *Dipika* was the first native venture at systematic arousal and assertion of informed, critical public opinion. Credit for its success would, of course, principally go to Gourishankar for his responsible, forthright, well-documented and insightful comments and for the extraordinary application and passion he displayed on behalf of the suffering masses, but the British administration in general and a number of other public-spiritied gentlemen and socially eminent persons of the time also have a share in the compliment for exhibiting a constructive, alert responsiveness. The service rendered by the *Dipika* in the context of the Great Famine was thus unique both in terms of the extent of its impact on the administrative machinery and charitable agencies, and on the consciousness of the Oriya people as a whole. *Dipika* was, indeed, a source of light and security in that hour of darkness.

Gourishankar never left a work incomplete. His solicitude of the famine-affected people did not end with the passing off of the crisis. He continued to take a keen interest in the fortunes of those who had been earlier forced to leave their hearth and home. Their proper resettlement – particularly of the orphaned children – remained his major concern for a long time. With characteristic thoroughness and vigour he went on probing their situation and recommending appropriate rehabilitation measures. It was largely due to his tenacity that the vast multitude of helpless orphans did not have to suffer social maladjustment, and could keep within the Hindu fold even while receiving official succour funnelled through missionaries for a number of years. Gourishankar was always alert in defending certain

categories of people who naturally ran the risk of being misunderstood by the Government, or the community, in the wake of the tragedy. Thus, for instance, when some people were shouting themselves hoarse against the corrupting influence of the brothels on some of those children, his stand that, while all efforts should be made for their proper rehabilation, the society should gratefully acknowledge the service rendered by many of those ill-famous institutions in protecting the children from starvation and disease while they had been left out in the cold by the others, offers a fine illustration of his sense of fair-play and justice. Wherever proper, he thus defended the Governent's action, too, with little interest in empty sentimental hysterics that usually overwhelm ordinary minds at such times.

But he was not willing simply to forget and forgive. With keen persistence he followed the course of the enquiry ordered by the Government to determine the causes of the colossal loss of life. He himself testified before the commission, persuaded others to marshalling appropriate arguments for it, pointed out educational, economic and administrative steps necessary for guarding against future recurrence of the tragedy, and sought a permanent solution to the problem. The relentless struggle of the *Dipika* bore fruit. Orissa attracted the solicitous attention of not only the Indian Government, but also the British Parliament. The Great Famine became a landmark in the history of Orissan reconstruction. Gourishankar had not only served to alleviate the sufferng of the masses but also had laid the proper foundation for the all-round advancement of the Oriyas by using the occasion constructively for generating alert public opinion and motivating the government and the people for a number of basic structural changes.

IN DEFENCE OF LINGUISTIC AND CULTURAL IDENTITY

Right in its infancy, *Dipika* had to wage a relentless struggle on yet another major front. This battle was much different from

the one it fought against an apathetic administration to protect the masses from the ravages of a great natural calamity. This was to be a more complicated and vexatious task, and even more important than the other campaign. What was at stake was the very national identity of the Oriyas and their entire future. It had begun as merely an administrative issue, but Gourishankar and his compatriots were not deceived – they well-understood the sinister implications, and even through the famine years and through the next decade, they made a heroic effort in educating the public and the government together to protect the interest of the Oriya people. What made the menace so much the more difficult to combat was the involvement of a number of influential native people. Bengali officials in Orissa and Bengal, and some of the important English officials, who could muster up the courage to hit at the very roots of Oriya culture in pursuit of certain petty interests because of the absence, till then, of a sufficiently powerful body of public opinion. *Dipika* had been born at the appropriate historical moment to fill the void and save a culture.

Gourishankar had always envisioned the *Dipika* as an instrument of national regeneration, and not merely a news-magazine. And like all great social reformers and political leaders he knew his first task was to instil a sense of pride and dignity among his people and to emancipate their minds from the fearpsychosis and intertia that had settled deep through centuries of foreign domination. This he did unremitingly, finding occasions for it every now and then. Gourishankar well-understood the fact that the threat to Oriya culture and socio-economic interests was posed by the Bengalis more than by Englishmen. With the establishment of the Bengal Presidency and the political weightage accidentally gained by Bengal, there had been an early spread of English education and expansion of socio-economic and cultural opportunities there. Orissa, the last province to be conquered by the British in 1803, had been put under the Bengal Presidency, and had suffered constant

neglect. Whatever subordinate official posts were created for the administration of Orissa were easily grabbed by the Bengalis. Earlier on, during the period of Pathan rule the influential ones among them had systematically captured the zamindaries in Orissa, and had also helped petty deputies to go over and hold key offices. During British rule the same process continued, Orissa being rendered into a two-tiered colony, exploited at one level by the British and at another by the Bengalis. While the exploitation by the British was carried out at a level beyond the grasp of the ordnary people, the same by the Bengali zamindars and petty officials was too immediate and palpable for them to miss. These neo-colonisers had very little interest in the welfare of the local people who were only commodities for exploitation or alibis for their personal promotion. Most of them cultivated an upstartish arrogance and contempt for the Oriyas, whom they viewed as a cheap, vassal-community. These vested interests naturally wished to perpetuate their artificial superiority and, just when the new education began filtering in through the agency of the missionaries and a new crop of Oriyas slowly began appearing on the scene, set upon a diabolical course of obliterating the Oriya identity.

This they could not accomplish by themselves. And so, with the extraordinary cunning that is characteristic of such people, some of them initiated a process of official action, as also public campaign, to convince their British masters that the Oriyas were basically a retarded pepole and their language and culture were merely decadent, imitative forms of Bengali. The design was two-fold : one, to remove Oriya from the scene as a language of administration and education in the state; and two, to perpetuate its political status as a supernumerary of the Bengal Presidency, so that they and their descendants would continue to enjoy the spoils without any local competition. Unfortunately for them, there were certain fairminded British officers, well-informed English and Bengali scholars, and a new generation

of moderately educated, patriotic Oriyas who could not be so easily taken for a ride.

Those morbidly – and short-sightedly – self-seeking, misguided Bengalis were not the only ones in the state who had roots in the Bengali culture. Contact between the two neighbouring peoples had been long and extensive. Particularly after the emergence of Chaitanya as a major religious force in Orissa, and his long stay at Puri, socio-cultural and religio-intellectual intercourse beween Bengalis and Oriyas had grown quite intimate. Many of the kings of Orissa having turned Vaisnavite had welcomed Bengali scholars and officials to settle in their territories. Many of those immigrants had got themselves permanently settled in Orissa, getting wholly absorbed in the Orissan cultural mainstream in course of time. During the periods of Mughal and Pathan suzerainty over Orissa, similarly, with their regional headquarters in Bengal, a number of Bengali petty officials had found employment in the state. They were mainly confined to the coastal districts because of various geographical and historical reasons. With the passage of time these Bengali families, too, got assimilated into the Orissan ethos. Perpetuation of Bengali in certain religious and official circles did facilitate retention of their links with the mother-tongue, but with time they had adopted Oriya as their main language of communication, no longer identifying themselves with Bengal. Some of their descendants, Gourishankar being the foremost among them, were uncompromising Oriya patriots, dedicating all their talents to the service of the Oriya nation of which they had become an integral part. Modern Oriya culture owes a great deal to them.

Gourishankar's forefathers had settled at Dikshitpara near Asureswar, about eighteen miles from Cuttack, for nearly three centuries. It is not possible yet to be certain about the exact period of their migration to Orissa, but it is safe to assume that Gourishankar's family-ancestry in Orissa dates back to the

last quarter of the sixteenth century. Originally his family carried the surname of Basu, or Bose, a surname that happened to be accidentally attached to even one of Gourishankar's own official certificates, but they were known as the Ray-family of Dikshitpara. His father and grandfather had both carried the surname of Ray. We have seen how, emotionally and culturally they had been so thoroughly absorbed into Orissan life, that Gourishankar's higher studies had to be abruptly stopped owing to his father's apprehension that he might end up as a son-in-law to some Bengali at Hooghly.

Gourishankar had great national pride, both as an Indian and as an Oriya. This was reflectd in numerous acts of defiance and self-assertion challenging the might of the British bureaucracy in his own personal life. He used the *Dipika* as a powerful medium for generating a sense of self-respect among the Oriyas and stimulating in them a spirit of national pride. We might instance here just one small issue over which he had felt considerably exercised, the issue of keeping the footwear on while approaching British dignitaries and senior officials. Speaking of the Agra durbar where all the eminent kings of the country had been invited by the Governor general, Gourishankar expressed his satisfaction on the courteous recognition Her Majesty's government wished to accord the native royalty, but indicted the Governor General in the severest terms for requiring them to approach the dais on bare feet. With telling passion and precision, he asked the authorities to realise how it departed from the norms in the court of their own queen, what the feelings of the native kings and their followers must have been on the occasion when native officers serving the Governor moved with their shoes on whereas the kings were asked to approach unshod, and what an impression it had created in respect of British civility in the minds of the Indians.

It was this hurt pride that made Gourishankar passionately pursue the question of native employees and publicmen wearing

shoes while entering into the chambers of senior British officers and judges. First it was ordered that they must remove their footwear on such occasions ; next it was said they would be allowed with British shoes on. A fastidious officer demanded that socks must be worn, too, in such cases. Something that appears ludicrous and amusing today, and something that was accepted then as a matter of form by most, was extremely galling to Gourishankar, who featured the subject in a series of issues of the *Dipika* and deployed all his resources of wit, irony, and argument in burying this hateful, deplorable convention. To him this was a major issue, rubbing shoulders with items relating to famine, education and so on, in the pages of the *Dipika.*

We get an interesting insight into the working of Gourishankar's mind in a subsequent issue of the *Dipika* (Dec. 15, 1866) where his thoughts on the subject crystallise in a lead article – a seminal essay in the Oriya language, in fact – where he addresses himself to a basic question, 'why is the administrative system in our country not successful ?' In providing the answer he intellectualises the issue of native self-respect, making no reference whatever to the various provocations that had made him so sensitive and indignant. First of all, he details out the various law-making and law-enforcement hierachies operating in the country, down from the queen and her Parliament to the village chowkidar, saying such an extensive mechanism was unprecedented in the history of the country. Having done so, he then points out the multiple levels of tyranny ordinary citizens had to suffer, furnishing telling instances of highhandedness and corrupt practices engaged in by various categories of government employees. He goes on to narrate a story of a mountain once going into labour ; when a multitude of curious onlookers had assembled, expecting something gigantic to issue from its wombs, a mouse emerged from a crevice and scampered away, to the diversion and disappointment of all. Similar is the case with the British administraive

machinery in India, says Gourishankar. The rules and regulations it had so meticulously formed would make an outsider feel highly impressed, creating in him the belief that no miscreant could ever escape the tight law in this country. And then, if he had to go to the villages and see for himself the tyranny let loose by petty officials there, he would feel profoundly astonished and chastened.

Who is to blame for all this, asks Gourishankar. And, then, he offers an answer, going to the very roots of the problem, showing how both the rulers and the native were at fault. The main reason for the suffering of the people lay in their timidity, their lack of manliness. Having had to tolerate tyranny for centuries they had grown exceedingly docile and tended to behave as if they had lost all their virility. The injunction of Christianity to turn the other cheek when one was slapped on one was observed, not by the Christians, but by the natives who were ever willing to bare their backs if anyone raised his fist. They do not complain – most felt going to the law for protection meant incalculable hardship with no promise of redressal. How should the Government be, then, blamed ? The people were the authors of their own woe – for the law, as an English author rightly commented, says Gourishankar, fails to serve a people who had no means and courage to invoke it. And, secondly, the people had no unity; they habitually shied away from scenes of injustice and tyranny, never mustering enough courage to rush to the aid of the native sufferer. Such tolerance and fear alone made the tyrants fearless and highhanded. It was, therefore, necessary for the Government to simplify legal procedures, instil faith in the minds of the people on the rule of law, encourage persons with means like the zamindars to report against bureaucratic exploitation and aid the poor ryots – in short, to see that the subjects learned to fight for their rights.

Gourishankar's analysis of the problem and his recommendation were both succinct and clear, his illustrations being

specifically designed to appeal to the masses at large. The simplicity and incisiveness of his argument were remarkably effective in the circumstances. And since he himself epitomised the highest commitment to civil rights, self-respect, fearlessness and dogged perseverance in the interest of justice and fair play, his advice had the ring of profound authenticity. Gourishankar knew what he was about – he was out to cause a revolution of minds, attacking the real stronghold of the socio-political problem of the time, which was more a product of the native psychology than the alien rule as such. This being his spirit and approach, one can easily perceive the kind of urgency and passion that were generated in him – and which, in turn, he set about generating in the minds of the Oriyas – when he came across indications of a sinister conspiracy to rout the Oriya culture and destroy all prospects of Orissan advancement.

It began as an apparenlty ordinary thing – a small remark in an official note making a dig at the Oriyas as a community of intellectually retarded people who evinced no initiative or resourcefulness in seeking economic and cultural advancement. Such a statement, made in a constructive vein by an Oriya sympathiser, would have been ignored by Gourishankar. But he had known only too well the rank prejudices circulating among a section of the Bengalis who were out to keep Orissa in a servile state so as the better to prey upon it. One of the first things that Gourishankar sought to tackle in the pages of the *Dipika* was this deliberately cultivated prejudice. Right from his initial days in the *Dipika,* Gourishankar had displayed an uncanny mastery of the art of effective journalism. Thus he did not prepare a passionate condemnation of the attitude, full of fire and invective. He rather offered a calmly deliberated judgment, seriously taking up the question whether the belief that Oriyas were naturally stupid was a correct one. In the article he wrote on the subject, with full force of logic he dismisses the allegation as an ignorant, prejudiced view, and proves the reverse as true. Oriyas, he claims, were basically an intelligent,

creative race, who had languished through lack of care and patronage.

Gourishankar adduces to the kind of attention the Bengalis had received in the hands of the British, the reason why they were relatively more advanced than the Oriyas, and not because of any latent superiority. Going back in time he refers to the state of the Britons before the invasion by the Saxons, and the various cultural streams that had joined to enrich English language and culture. Bengali had received state patronage for a long time, and yet, Gourishankar affirms, it could not boast of a single composition that could match the rich and various poetic achievements of the Oriyas. True, in recent times, Bengali had had a richer body of writings on school subjects, but how many of them, he questions, were original pieces ? For the most part they were either faithful translations from, or imitations of, English texts to which Bengal had had greater access than Orissa. The only independent, creative writing on which they showed an exorbitant pride – *Vidyasundara* by Bharatchandra Roy – would pale into insignificance, he says, when put beside compositions of a much earlier date by Dinakrushna and Bhanja in Oriya, many of whose writings were no longer in circulation, but some of whose extant pieces had their only peer in the great Sanskrit masters whom they often surpassed, demonstrating an extraordinary creative fecundity. At this point Gourishankar grows sentimental, lamenting their non-availability in print and expressing his deep longing for making them see the light of the modern day.

Thereafter he enlarges the scope of comparison, referring to the fall of Greece, of Rome, the rise of England and the decline of India as but consequences of the march of history. Next he draws attention to the metropolis of Calcutta, now so rich and spectacular, which only a few decades ago was the habitat of foxes and jackals, full of thorny bushes, and inaccessible. The English who now controlled large parts of the earth were some

centuries ago living the life of forest tribals. Today there were no major oceans and rivers on which the British merchant ship did not sail. It is no wonder then, says Gourishankar, that the Oriyas who had once kept as vassals all the kingdoms from Hooghly to Cape Comorin, and among whom geniuses of the order of Jagannath Das and Upendra Bhanja had flourished, should today be dubbed as ignorant and uncivilised by short-sighted foreigners. Those who call them naturally stupid can only be characterised as utterly ignorant persons, with no knowledge of history. Only fools would suspect, Gourishankar adds, that God had been partial in his dispensation, reserving intelligence for only certain chosen races. There is no nation which should be looked down upon as naturally stupid. All human societies have been endowed with identical powers of mind, he says – only, some had forged ahead by dint of united, hard work, and consant search and application, whereas others, who had remained indolent and perverse for a certain length of time, had been relegated to the background. It was all a question of degree of application, and of suitable opportunities. Even those who had remained in a primitive state like the African tribes had been shown by Christian missionaries to be capable of civilised behaviour.

Gourishankar concludes by saying that Oriyas in the past had placed themselves in the forefront of the Indian peoples by exhibiting their innovativeness and strength in all fields of human excellence – martial, industrial, aesthetic, commercial, and so on. He exhorts his fellow brothers to arise from slumber and exert themselves to revive their ancient glory and remove the stigma of being a retarded race. Uncharacteristically enough, he then presses home a series of rhetorical interrogations, asking them how long more should they remain indolent and supine, a laughing stock of other advanced peoples. The restrained fervour and passion implicit in the essay, the variegated feelings of indignation, pride, sadness, and hope so vibrantly, yet

gracefully, monitored through it, leave a powerful impact on the mind.

The threat that Gourishankar and other Oriya patriots had discerned loomed large all-too-soon. To touch only the broad surface of the history, one has to go back to a noting forwarded by the Collector, Mr Bowring, in 1848, to his higher authorities. He claimed that it was undesirable for the Oriya language to have a separate status in the administration of the Bengal Presidency. The then Commissioner, Mr Goldbury, rejected the argument, saying Oriya was a separate language, and not a dialect of Bengali. But the official debate persisted. It was lucky that at this point of time certain missionaries, among them William Carey, William Lacey and Amos Sutton, who have carved out a permanent place in the history of Orissa as pioneers of a renaissance, had engaged themselves in producing a number of religious and secular texts in relatively more chaste Oriya than had been circulated by the Mission Press at Serampore two decades earlier. New schools had been established by the missionaries producing a small number of native youth with some familiarity with English and Bengali who could understand, and rebut, the argument of uninformed Englishmen and Bengali chauvinists to do away with Oriya as a language of administration and education in the state. And when the crucial hour came, *Dipika* was there, followed on the heels by another nationalist organ at Balasore.

Gourisankar took one of the earliest opportunities to reflect his concern. In a long article dated September 1, 1866 – that is, in the fifth issue of the *Dipika* – he uses a news-item on the vacancy caused by the death of the Deputy Inspector of Schools for Puri and Anugul as a take-off point to launch a frontal attack on the champions of Bengali in the state. He begins by referring to the common practice of recruiting Bengali officers for the state of Orissa. He concedes that more competent persons might be available in Bengal, but argues for a special

consideraion for Oriyas in view of the peculiar requirements of the state. Bengalis in general, he says, were prejudiced against the Oriyas, and ignorant of the language and customs of the local people. Put under transfer every two or three years, they did not wish to, or simply, fail to, pick up the language. Consequently, none of the Bengal deputy inspectors posted from Calcutta had ever taken any initiative on the improvement of the Oriya language; instead they had been systematically substituting Bengali for Oriya in the mofussil schools. One such Bengali officer – Babu Umasharan Haldar – had had the temerity to express his contempt for the state in his annual report to the Government. This was a major source of discouragement for people wishing to get their children enrolled. Those who had been appointed to improve education in the state sought to cover their own incompetence and negligence in that direction by talking against imaginary defects of the people. They had thus miserably failed, argues Gourishankar, because of their ignorance of the local language and because of their in-built prejudices and lack of interest.

He then goes forward to recommend certain remedial measures. Recruitments ought to be made by the local commissioner, and not at Calcutta, from out of native candidates who had successfully cleared the entrance examination in English and belonged to respectable families. Such a deputy-inspector would not only properly guide and improve the teaching in the schools ; he would also build a proper rapport with the gurdians and profit from their feedback and enlist their cooperation. Only such a person was likely to take initiative on, and successfully accomplish, preparation of suitable text-books for the Oriya children. Gourishankar concludes the perceptive piece by making an appeal to the Commissioner – who was known for his enthusiasm on spread of education in the state – to advise the government suitably. The efforts of the *Dipika* ultimately bore fruit, with Gourishankar keeping a close

watch on the developments. Thus we find him complimenting the government (on 31 October 1874) on the appointment of a Special Inspector for Orissa, but also indicting the authorities with unusual severity for posting Robert Perry to the job instead of recruiting a suitable Oriya gentleman. Again the efforts of Gourishankar bore fruit ; and he is happy to report on 5.12.1874 the appointment of Sri Nandakishore Das to the post, offering tributes to the Commissioner for his sagacity, and hints to the new appointee on the promise he held for the state.

This was preceded – and followed – by a long fight, for the champions of Bengali were too toughly mailed for a single charge. Notwithstanding the popular discontent voiced by Gourishankar and others – because of it, rather – they set about gaining their nefarious end with alarming tenacity. They prevailed on the Director of Edcuation and the Inspector of Schools to recommend compulsory teaching of Bengali in Oriya schools and adoption of Bengali books as school texts. In a lead article dated 4 January 1868, Gourishankar drew the attention of his readers to this 'serious' development, and lashed out with barbed words against the conspiracy to 'uproot' 'all future hopes of advancement of the state'. The official logic, he says, was not known ; but it was easy to guess that the twin conventional arguments of non-availability of suitable Oriya texts and supposed inadequacy of the language constituted the main planks. Gourishankar pointed out that all the good intentions of the government in improving the condition of the Oriyas through spread of education would at one stroke be defeated if the recommendation was acted upon. It was ironical, he says, that the people appointed by the government to improve education in the state were thus successfully negating the very purpose for which they had been appointed, and marvels at their capacity for 'digesting their salary' while enaged in acts of sabotage.

With stinging irony he then asked, 'What kind of Bengali text-books had been made available when new schools were

established in Bengal ?' If there was no proposal then to adopt a non-Bengali medium there, how should such an argument find credence in the context of Orissa, he wondered. The Bengali deputy inspectors, he complained, had been systematically reporting on the non-availability of Oriya text-books ever since modern schools were established in Orissa, but had taken no steps whatever for making good the deficiency, and, but for the exemplary efforts of the missionaries, there would have been no Oriya text-books till that date. Instead of engaging in remedial measures and advancing the cause of education in the state, they had only been devising ways and means for ensuring better living conditions for themselves. Gourishankar concludes his arguments with a piece of vitriolic satire : those Bengali educators had behaved like cowards, and instead of manfully taking up a challenge had only conducted themselves like truant school kids, who took the alibi of non-availability of chalk for keeping away from class, and had made use of the excuse of non-availability of text-books for not doing anything useful themselves.

The message immediately took effect. Public opinion was aroused; there were meetings, letters to the editor kept coming in, and resolutions were passed at a number of towns condemning the move. In a follow-up article on 1 February 1868, Gourishankar warned that if Bengali would be thus imposed on the state the only consequence would be the closure of the schools. He pointed out the lukewarm interest the government had shown in the matter of text-books, by publishing revealing figures on the large support given to Bengali publications and the total neglect of Oriya publications. The deficiency would be made good, he asserted, through local efforts. Native presses had been established, and preparation and printing of text-books had already been undertaken. He went on to declare that even if the government heedlessly went forward to impose Bengali, they would not succeed in extirpating the Oriya language. Till forty years after the British had annexed Orissa, Persian had

been the language of administration and Oriya had, in that process, been long without official patronage. It had not died out. Could a luminous gem, he asked, be kept concealed by darkening the room ? In conclusion, he advised the Bengal Presidency to take a leaf out of the record of the government in the Central Provinces under whom Sri Bichchanda Patnaik, an Oriya inspector of schools, had been appointed for Sambalpur, and under whose care four school-texts in Oriya had already been prepared in course of just one year.

On 4 April 1868, again Gourishankar addressed himself to the same question, and prepared a long, closely argued write-up justifying four recommendations : banning of Bengali from all Government-managed and aided schools; extension of financial help to persons interested in preparing Oriya text-books; finalisation of school-texts by a committee of two eminent Oriyas, and not by the Inspector; and publication of all advertisements and orders relating to the Department of Education in newspapers. Only through such honestly motivated, sincere efforts alone, he asserted, could Orissa benefit from the educational schemes of the Government, and the language could attain to a new excellence and precision. But while he thought of such sweeping measures, advocates of the Bengali medium were preparing for yet another assault — taking advantage, this time, of the visit of Rajendralal Mitra, the well-known archaelogist, to Orissa. Ironically enough, *Dipika* had not merely flashed the news of the visit, offering compliments to the historian for taking a personal interest in projecting the Orissan heritage, but had also appealed to the Oriya people to gratefully offer all their help and cooperation to him in his search. Gourishankar inscribed appreciative comments on Sri Mitra's endeavour twice more in the pages of the *Dipika*, hoping it would help establish the glories of the Oriya people.

Rajendralal Mitra was invited to speak at the Cuttack Debating Club, which was run by a Bengali coterie. He spoke

to the gallery, roundly assertng that whosoever desired the improvement of Orissa must strive to substitute Bengali for Oriya as the principal medium of communication and education in the state, for Oriyas, because of their small number, would not on their own be able to support and sustain standard vernacular publications in any appreciable number. As he wrote on 13 March 1869, Gourisankar had at first chosen to briefly flash the news, politely praising the speaker's command over language but without mentioning the contents of his speech. He had, however, to take up arms when he found that the speech was being used as a new handle for the demolition of Oriya language and culture. With characteristic wit and precision, he pointed out the basic factual errors in the speech, and described the actual reasns for Oriya languishing in the modern times, and proved its hollowness and mischievousnes in clear terms. Gourishankar advised others against similar delusion as Sri Mitra's, and remarked, 'the followers (of the view) were only tiring their hands and feet by swimming in the mist.' Gourishankar concluded the piece by saying that the language of the Oriya people sufferd most through their being kept under three separate administrative regions, thus subtly pleading for a reunificiation of the dismembered tracts. In the very next issue of the *Dipika* he elaborated upon the necessity of bringing them under at least one educational district and closely coordinating teaching programmes all through the Oriya-speaking belt.

Rajendralal Mitra would reappear in the pages of the *Dipika* again in January 1873, this time for proposing at the Bethune Society that the Oriya and the Assamese people ought to accept Bengali as their lingua franca in the interest of their own future, a view that was contested by Rev. K. M. Banerjee there itself. This gave an idea to Gourishankar of how the Bengali lobby was still at work behind the scene, pouncing upon every bit of opportunity to undermine the Oriya language. In the wake of the hue and cry generated by Mitra' speech at Cuttack, the lobby had changed its strategy. Umacharan Haldar, the deputy

inspector of schools, published a long letter to the editor in the *Cuttack Star,* advocating the use of Bengali script for publications in the Oriya language. It was easy for Gourishankar to put Haldar in his proper place. He showed up the absurdity of the proposal in the *Dipika* on 10 July 1869, with a diverting touch of comic irony, something that *Dipika* generally eschewed. Subsequently, on 14 August 1869, he expressed his dissatisfaction with the Cuttack Debating Society for raking up certain old arguments in response to Haldar's submission, and in yet another issue advised them to desist from further debate on the question which was now building up into a communial confrontation. In the same issue he published a long letter written by Sri Rangalal Bandopadhyaya, a well-known Bengali writer then living in Hooghly, who had earlier served as a Deputy Magistrate in Orissa. Rangalal's was a cogent, dispassionate analysis, arguing against imposition of Bengali in Orissa and adoption of the Bengali script, and suggesting that the focus of the debate should rather shift to the possibility of having one lingua franca – Sanskrit – for the whole of India.

Sibadas Bhattacharya, the deputy inspector of schools at Balasore had, in the meanwhile, taken certain precipitate action for the adoption of the Bengali medium in the schools under his jurisdiction. Public outcry was deafening, and he had to be transferred urgently. Provocations and incitements, however, kept coming in from other quarters. *Indian Mirror* in Calcutta published a long lead article mentioning an entirely new argument, namely, that following the establishment of close social ties between Oriyas and Bengalis the former were eager to give a pride of place to Bengali. It also submitted that Bengal had a large stock of modern books, was easy to learn, the Bengalis were more advanced and were spread through a vaster territory, the language was sweet and popular, and had earned the respect of other nationalities. Gourishankar wrote a long, indignant rejoinder in the pages of the *Dipika* on 25 September

1869, showing up the mischievous intent and the ignorant assertions. All this alertness and close fight was bound to yield results. On 27 November 1869, Gourishankar was happy to report that the Governor had approved Oriya as the medium of instruction, and had agreed to extend patronage to the School Book Society of Cuttack which had in the meantime been established by nationalist Oriyas, Gourishankar as usual taking up a major part of the initiative.

Defeated on the second round, the Bengali chauvinists resorted to acts of harassment against Gourishankar. Pouring ridicule on him in their meetings and writings, they grew restive when those did not take effect, and dragged him to the court of law on a cooked up charge of defamation. The Magistrate, however, could not be deceived, and Gourishankar proved himself innocent of the charge. This neither made him more strident and vindictive, nor withdrawn and over-cautious. He remained what he had always been – honest, forthright, and fearless.

The final Act in the drama opened on stage early in 1870. A Bengali pundit in the Balasore Zilla School, Kantichandra Bhattacharya, who was one of those to experience constant discomfiture in his class under the recent rules making Oriya the medium of instruction, published a long pamphlet entitled 'Udia Swatantra Bhasa Noy' (Oriya is not an independent language) and got it widely circulated, not forgetting to send a copy to the editor of the *Dipika*. The fire had been lighted again. It generated a lot of heat in either camp. Kalipada Banerjee, editor of *Utkala Hitaisini*, the mouthpiece of the Cuttack Debating Society, representing vested Bengali interest in Orissa, came out in defence of the pamphlet, ridiculing Gourishankar as one who behaved as if he were a monopolist of Oriya interests – all this fury caused by a long write-up in the *Dipika* which demolished the thesis of Kantichandra with wonderfully compact and irrefutable arguments. Gourishankar's

position was endorsed by Sri Bhudev Mukhopadhyaya, the famous editor of the *Education Gazette* at Calcutta, and by certain respected English newspapers such as *Calcutta Review*. In Orissa, a number of powerful voices besides Gourishankar's were raised, vehemently criticising the pseudo-scholarly, mischievous pamphlet which was full of factual distortions and ignorant interpretations.

Gourishankar had shown in his review how Kantichandra's affirmation on Oriya being a dialect of Bengal was based on various mutually contradictory positions and how all his arguments could be used to prove the reverse as true. Most of the arguments and illustrations offered by Kantichandra revealed total ignorance of Orissan history, social systems, geography, language and literature, and basic philological misconceptions as well. The tract was a case of 'Hujjate Bangla', said Gourishankar, underscoring its superciliousness and blind partisanship. Silenced on the intellectual and administrative fronts, Kantichandra, Sibadas Bhattacharya and a few others resorted to a fraudulent campaign, collecting signatures from a number of uneducated Oriyas endorsing a printed petition in Bengali requesting the authorities to withdraw Oriya from the Schools. The name of the press was not mentioned. Gourishankar matched the print to prove that these had emanated from the same press as Kantichandra's pamphlet. In a caustic rejoinder Gourishankar exposed the foolhardiness and fraud involved in the attempt, and suggested that the Government should institute an enquiry to reveal the sharp practice and bring the culprits to book. One immediately tangible consequence was the transfer of Sibadas Bhattacharya and the appointment of Radhanath Roy in his place, another great Oriya of Bengali-descent who was to play a distinguished role in the Orissan renaissance.

The painful tug-of-war between Bengali and Oriya interests thus carried on for nearly two decades ultimately concluded with victory for the latter. Occasional revivalist attempts that hap-

pened to be shrewdly made later were immediately pounced upon and scotched by the ever-watchful Gourishankar, as, for instance, the short shrift given in *Dipika* (18 April 1878) to a proposal to provide teaching in Bengali to Bengali students illustrates. Such cases were, however, rare. The die had been cast. No doubt Gourishankar was not the only one to have unremittingly struggled on behalf of the Oriya nation at this juncture, but he certainly proved to be the most outstanding of all in terms of the impact registered on the Oriya public, on the Bengali promoters, on fair-minded people in Bengal and in the government. His contribution was not limited to either this episode or to the long journalistic campaign he had led in that context. He was also to play a role, more marginal in character, though, in the context of the retention of Oriya in the Sambalpur and Ganjam tracts where the local people fought valiantly, and long, against Hindi and Telugu domination respectively.

It was one thing to get rid of the Bengali menace. Getting Oriya properly established as a viable medium of teaching was altogether a different enterprise, calling for a lot of hard work, skill and imagination. Luckily, there were a number of dedicated souls who joined hands at this juncture to produce suitable reading material for the Oriya students. Gourishankar made it clear in the *Dipika,* again and again, that the long-drawn-out battle against Bengali was not an expression of ethnic intolerance or jealousy on the part of the Oriyas ; it was simply a necessary effort at clearing the ground before the foundation for a new structure could be laid. In the name of Oriya nationalism, however, sub-standard texts were not to be tolerated. While pleading for patience in the matter, Gourishankar was always vigilant against the growth of native vested interests in the publication and syllabus-formation sectors. He put the Cuttack Printing Company at the service of text-book writers, goaded the Government and wealthy donors for support,

motivated others to take an interest in this momentous undertaking, and had the satisfaction of finding the basic needs met in a short time.

If he had done nothing else but lent the kind of support that he did to his people in the context of either the natural calamity or the socio-cultural threat that we have at some length described, Gourishankar would have found a permanent place in the Orissan roll call of honour. But he did much more. One could instance a number of other nationalist programmes to highlight his heroic struggle in protecting the interests of the Oriyas and making them grow into a prosperous, healthy people. The *Dipika* and the records of a host of other institutions and activities with which he was centrally connected make a long, exciting reading to reveal the quality and extent of Gourishankr's contribution to a national cause. In the space that remains here, however, we have to remain content with glimpses and brief summaries.

Paving the Path of Progress

The second half of the nineteenth century gave birth to a number of political leaders, inellectuals, social reformers and creative artists of a high order in Orissa, all of whom constituted an expression of a new urge and new faith of a renascent culture. Gourishankar's special place among the galaxy was determined not by virtue of a preeminence of his genius in any of those fields, but because of the practical ability he demonstrated in planning and monitoring numerous programmes of action through various agencies for the advancement of Orissa in a comprehensive manner. He was a great coordinator and an indefatiguable organiser. Not remaining confined to any particular field of social reconstruction and cultural enrichment, but vitally in touch with every such national effort, his name would feature in any specialised historical account of the times relating to education, literature, social reforms, culture and political movements. There was no one to match Gourishankar in terms of such a large, all-inclusive engagement.

Education, Gourishankar knew, was the main instrument through which to attempt an all-round progress of the state. It was thus that the *Dipika* had always a major space reserved for educational issues. For nearly half a century Gourishankar kept a close watch over all the aspects of the educational programmes in the state. Text-books, teachers, teaching meth-

ods, student-enrolment, supervisory staff, examination results, extra-curricular activities, management, academic successes achieved by Oriyas outside the state, need for new institutions – nothing ever escaped his attention, and on each of these things he went on offering compliments, criticism, analyses, suggestions, appeals, and warnings as and when required. It is not possible here to relate the protracted attention he gave to those issues; it may suffice to mention that the keenness of his interests was of an astounding intensity, and the sagacity and penetration of his observations and recommendations were matchless. It is difficult to know which of those multifarious plans and views were all his own, and which only representative. But, no matter which of them were original, and which shared, even today it is gratifying and exciting to see how the *Dipika* records a continuous process of active history — the history of proposals put forward, pursued, and realised as fact. Satisfaction of success of this dimension comes only to a few.

The comparative analysis he offered of examination results, the fond interest *Dipika* took in the career of each meritorious student of the state, the respect it showed to each sincere teacher and educational officer in the state and rushed to his defence, whenever necessary, with alacrity, the public criticism it offered against mismanagement and negligence, the numerous acts of personal service Gourishankar rendered to individual students and educational institutions, the close watch he kept over every minute detail of education in the state, appear unbelievable today in the context of his other multifarious interests. Education of Oriyas had the pride of place in his nationalist agenda. One notices in the write-ups, again and again, the suffering of personal emotion; delighted of wincing, grateful, or indignant, hopeful or frustrated, serious or relaxed, as the situation prompted, the news-items almost invariably carry an impress of deep personal involvement, and make one realise the difference between a news-reporter and a committed national leader. Higher secondary school, Normal School for would-be

teachers, Sanskrit studies, Ravenshaw College, Law College, Girls School, Medical School – every new venture had Gourishankar's energised impetus behind, and close critical company ahead. The situation of a small primary school in the village was as much deserving of his personal attention as that of a large state institution as the Ravenshaw College. Gouri-shankar was the guardian of Orissan Education.

One of the major contributions of Gourishankar relates to the improvement and standardisation of Oriya prose without which the new education could not have matured. That Gourishankar was conscious of the importance of what he was doing in that direction in the pages of the *Dipika* is brought home to us through a number of his editorial comments. It is interesting to see how he relates the relatively greater advancement in the Bengali and Hindi tracts to the earlier availability of the printing press and formation of a flexible, vernacular prose there to serve as a medium of cultural dissemination and socio-political efforts, and urges greater attention of Oriya intellectual on the shaping of a modern prose style (*Dipika,* dated 30 May 1878). With remarkable perceptiveness Gourishankar approvingly points out the steady improvement shown by Oriya prose through its enhanced contact with the life of the people in the pages of the newspapers. Thus, for instance, after drawing attention to the varieties of Oriya speech available among the people, he illustrates the kind of enrichment that was brought into being by using them in serious discourse by pointing out the case of a sister publication, *Utkala Darpana,* which had changed its prose-style from the earlier urban, Sanskritic variety to a more colloquial form, with the advent of a new editor who had deeper rooots in the village (*Dipika,* dated 18 April 1878).

Gourishankar was himself capable of deploying a variety of prose-styles. Depending on the issue he was examining, the kind of people he was addressing, and the tone and voice he wished

to bear upon a subject, his prose underwent a versatile change. But for this keen experimental zeal in handling prose-style and a rich repertoire collected from different forms of literature and social groups in the urban and rural areas, Gourishankar could not have made the *Dipika* so formidable an instrument for the arousal and articulation of public opinion. He was not a creative artist. The abundant resources of colloquial prose so marvellously exploited by a great creative artist like Fakirmohan was, no doubt, altogether beyond his reach. But his was, in a certain sense, even a more immediately useful service; for Gourishankar demonstrated for a large audience how Oriya prose could be successfully employed for all kinds of communication with ease and flexibility by every educated person. Any student of literature and culture knows how seminal is the importance of the formation of a modern prose-style in the making of a new society. Gourishankar's contribution in this regard is yet to be adequately assessed by Oriya scholars. Here it may suffice to say that in his enterprise as one of the distinguished architects of modern Orissa, his role as an organiser, regulator and propagator of modern Oriya prose was one of the most crucial.

Gourishankar's enchantment with Oriya Kavyas, as has been already said in an earlier chapter, began with a chance exposure to certain fragments in the company of some of his colleagues in the office. While, on the one hand, he cultivated a taste for those masterpieces for gratification of his own aesthetic interest, as editor and publisher, on the other hand, he made use of them as material through which to strengthen the resurgent Oriya pride. He was also keen to develop a culture of literary review and appreciation in the state through the pages of the *Dipika*. It was Gourishnankar who began the tradition of literary debate, answering certain charges against older Oriya poetry, notifying new writings with brief critical comments, offering short comparative statements on different occassions, and publishing the views of readers in the letters column. The brief noting he offered on the publication of *Babaji*, the first mdern Oirya play,

was typical. He hails it as a first venture, but says it does not properly meet the requirements of either Sanskrit drama or English, though it compares very favourably with the recent Bengali plays. He goes on to compliment the writer on his dramaic speeches and the excellent manner in which he has handled the theme of superstition, and concludes by saying that it was a successful first effort and that since it had paved the way, now it was for others to devote their talents in producing good dramas in Oriya. It is a short review, no doubt; but the clarity of Gourishankar's critical perspective is made quite manifest.

In fact, Gourishankar surprises us today with the keenness of his literary judgment and the sobriety and balance of his pronouncements at that very early stage of Oriya criticism. It is the same perceptiveness and objectivity that distinguished his reviews later when critical polemics held the stage. Thus, for example, to the detractors of ancient Oriya Kavyas, he did not offer either dismissive or merely derisive rejoinders as did many others during the famous battle of journals between *Indradhanu* and *Bijuli,* which occurred as a historical confrontation between ancient taste and modern, represented by the poetry of Upendra Bhanja and that of Radhanath Roy, respectively. Gourishankar pointed out on a number of occasions how the 'moral' reactions against the erotic content in Bhanja involved both an unhistorical perspective and an aesthetic distortion. Bhanja, he said, represented a whole school of poetry which was popular in a certain period of time, the aesthetic preconceptions of which had to be borne in mind while evaluating him. Some of the best, as also the most extensive part, of his poetry related to *rasas* other than *Shringara.* There chunks that dealt with erotic passion were not meant to be read by adolescents, the language and style being too tough and complex for them, in any case. Gourishankar decried the superciliousness and blind partisanship that made some people reject wholesale the great

riti–tradition of Oriya poetry. He emphasised and advocated wider study of both literary and musical aspects of those Kavyas in the interest of the native aesthetic culture.

Characteristically enough, the taste and sympathy he thus displayed in the defence on ancient poetry did not prevent him from discovering the merits of contemporary compositions. As he assays an appreciation of Radhanath's *Parvati* (3 October 1896), he demonstrates a strikingly modern sensibility. The impress of the contemporary reaction against the theme of incest between father and daughter handled in the poem is, no doubt, evident in his review. Gourishankar begins by expressing his wonder that Radhanath should have chosen to concentrate on the only one of such a heinous episode in the annals of a national history which was replete with acts and events of timeless glory. But, then, he leaves the matter at that, and goes forward to discuss the poem at length strictly as a piece of literary composition, felicitating the poet on the excellence of the narrative flow and its limpid style and the beauties of its imagery. He mentions certain occasional blemishes, too, relating to poetic excess, grammatical inaccuracy, obscurity, structural weakness, unrealistic details and so on – but only after cautioning the reader that the artistic merits of the poem far outweigh the lapses. The rigour of critical appreciation displayed by Gourishankar was of an uncommon order, and was particularly instructive for his age which generally went for sentimental effusiveness. The way he evaluates the poem in terms of its 'craftsmanship', a word he uses a number of times in course of the discussion, making his readers realise that they were in the presence of literary piece, not a moral or socio-political tract, is remarkable, indeed.

While on the one hand Gourishankar struggled for linguistic and literary advancement and cultivation of a sense of pride among the masses over the Orissan heritage, he was vigorously at work on the other in combating supersition, fighting the

reactionary elements and proposing a number of social reforms in the interest of a more humane and progressive social order. It is important to recognise in this context Gourishankar's deep loyalty to the age-old socio-religious norms. He was not a radical mind proposing a total rejection of the old order. In fact, today we can describe him as only a conservative. But, for his world, he was radical enough in both his thoughts and deeds. Mention has already been made of his valiant championing of female education – the schools he established and supported and the stand he took in respect of the education of his widowed granddaughter – his singlehanded bid to reform the *Kayasthas,* his adoption of the *Brahmo*-religion, and so on. This defiant urge for social reforms finds extensive expression in the *Dipika.* Gourishankar had a special penchant for picking up news-items that in some way or the other contributed to the lifting of superstitions from men's minds. And thus we have a number of pieces on fraudulent *sadhus* and miracle-men, magic-cures, and so on, published in the *Dipika* with telling comments attached to each piece.

Gourshankar's keenness for popularising remarriage of child-widows was in evidence right from the beginning of the *Dipika.* Painstakingly he collected information on the subject from all parts of the country, the various movements launched in favour of the programme and actual events, and prominently focussed upon them in his paper. He also put in occasional bits to remind his readers of the common practice of widow-marriage prevalent in the foreign countries. And every time there was a news-item in any form relating to the subject, Gourishankar had something interesting or persuasive to offer on his own.

Sribatsa Panda, then the leading social reformer in Orissa, was reported to be arranging re-marriage for a certain widow. *Sambalpur Hitaisini* observed in that context that it was first of all necessary to properly motivate the uneducated or semi-educated Brahmins who constituted the major part of the

community ; merely gaining the approval of the educated few was not going to effect any appreciable advance in the matter. Gourishankar responded to it at some length. He rejected the argument of *Hitaisini*, saying if one had to wait for universal endorsement, the reform would never take place. Educated people, as leaders of the community, should first of all break new ground. But this – Gourishankar significantly observed – was, in any case, a marginal reform when compared with the more fundamental programmes of prevention of child marriage and expansion of female education. Concentration on widow marriage to the exclusion of those more basic issues amounted to 'pouring water on the top of the tree instead of irrigating the roots'. Gourishankar then went on to declare that widow marriage was beneficial only in particular situations and ought to be left to the decision of the individuals concerned. Prevention of child marriage would drastically reduce the number of widow, and if women could be made educated and self-supporting, those of them who might suffer the misfortune of widowhood would not feel helpless and feel forced to either desperately search for a husband or compromise with their virtue.

Gourishankar gives an extended coverage to Jagmohan Lala's daring reformist act. of getting his daughter, a child-widow, married to a young zamindar of Sahajahanpur in full traditional form, in the presence of a large number of relations and guests who had been clearly warned in the invitation-card about the nature of the ceremony. Providing full details of the bride, the groom and other persons involved in the marriage, Gourishankar converts the news into an exemplum, and presents a long and impassioned appeal to others in the state to follow in the footsteps of Jagmohan Babu who was one of the most eminent public personalities of his day. Talking of the initiation of the movement by Iswar Chandra, the formulation of a law by the Government, and the repeated resolutions passed at national reformist conventions, Gourishankar expresses his regret that in course of the half-century-long movement not even fifty widow

marriages could be performed in Bengal. Contrastedly, though a branch of the Society was established in the Hindi belt only long years after, they had already solemnised more than a hundred and eighty such marriages. People of the Hindi belt, comments Gourishankar, had now proved themselves superior to Bengalis in terms of both physical and moral strength. Orissa, he hoped, would demonstrate a similar moral grit.

Gourishankar thus engaged himself throughout his long journalist career in picking up social practices that were undesirable, wasteful or culturally retrograde, and singlemindedly, systematically struggled for years to generate a healthy, objective, reformist reaction against those among the Oriya masses. No institution or person was too high for his reformist target – not even the Jagannath temple and the Gajapati King whom people revered as *Visnu* in a mobile, human form. As the curious may verify, among the numerous issues and themes that *Dipika* tackled in the process, the impulse working was not simply that of an idealistic civilising temper but that of a patriot who mounted an assault against those very forms and customs that either caused moral and emotional emasculation, or economic and socio-political decline, of the Oriya nation. The reformist venture was more particularly nationalist than broadly humanist in character. Gourishankar's energy was specifically directed at making the Oriyas earn a place of honour among the Indian peoples, and getting them so equipped that a healthy, progressive society would come into being in the natural course of things. And, interestingly, his competitive zeal with respect to the neighbouring Bengali culture was almost invariably on the fringe, if not the centre, of every such discourse. Gourishankar's hurt pride as an Oriya was the central battery.

Progress would not come without communication, without commerce, without improved agriculture, and without a large body of committed, educated young men to sustain the recon-

structive efforts. Gourishankar's keen, consistent pursuit of these objectives over long stretches of time, arousing public opinion, preparing ably documented, convincingly argued out write-ups in the *Dipika,* submitting various memoranda and public petitions signed by thousands of people to the Government, and coordinating the efforts of like-minded patriots in the state, produced an irresistible cumulative effect. Success came, slowly and incompletely, may be ; but even more than the heartening results that ensued in concrete terms, the interest and awareness he generated in respect of such programmes of action among a hitherto apathetic, uninformed mass of people constituted an outstanding, fulfilling demonstration of national leadership.

One might refer to the laying of new rail-roads through Orissa. For *Dipka* it was an epic struggle continuing through three long decades, a history full of tantalising hopes and disconcerting disappointments, but one of consistently unyielding, determined application leading to the commencement of work at Jenapur in 1896. Without going into the details of the history we might only mention here some of the interesting and significant features of the campaign as they relate to the *Dipika.* The most irresistible impression that a perusal of its pages registers in the mind today, is one of an exceedingly penetrating study of the importance of the proposal and the depth of emotion involved in the advocacy. The impact of the persuasion is gratifyingly borne home through the numerous news-items mentioning public activities elsewhere, and sponsorship by certain kings and wealthy people of the state who bought out shares worth crores of rupees. *Dipika*'s leadership was so eye-catching that it even aroused the ire and jealousy of one of the rival news-organs at Calcutta, though, for itself, *Dipika* had never tried to take any personal credit in the matter – in fact, it was self-effacing enough to laud the campaign elsewhere in most generous terms and to lament the fact that no such equally strongly motivated bid was in evidence among the wealthy people in its own immediate neighbourhood. *Dipika*'s vision at

this juncture extended to embrace the Garjat areas, as well, and it took up the question of a rail-link in a broader perspective of reorganisation of the Orissan territory and of closer cultural integration between the coast and the hills.

Another important aspect of *Dipika*'s journalism in that context relates to its close follow-up. Gourishankar did not rest content, as did many others, once the construction work was underway in a particular sector. He went on keeping a close watch on the proceedings, and arguing for expansion programmes, marshalling a large body of statistical evidence from other parts of the country and pinpointing the relatively more urgent needs in the state. Once the first rail-link was established, Gourishankar added it to his list of major concerns, constantly suggesting improvements in the service and keeping the authorities on toe. More importantly, he made periodical studies on the improvements in commerce and administration that had been facilitated by the railways, and projected his findings and comments in the *Dipika* inviting the people at large to understand the implications and to profit from the same. One recalls to mind the persuasive articles he had written through the famine years to persuade people not to resist external trade, to cooperate with the projects of the East India Irrigation Company which would help both cultivation and trade, and to make the ordinary people conscious of broader implications of many such social-welfare programmes. Educating the minds, and not simply monitoring a news-service, was Gourishankar's primary concern, and in this he stands head and shoulders above the common run of Oriya journalists of his day.

One is struck by Gurishankar's range of vision, understanding and sympathy as one looks into the pages of the *Dipika* following the operation of the railway service through the state. On the one hand, he draws attention to the improvements shown by trade and commerce, and on the other, he offers extended, factually supported analyses of the extent of profit accuring to

foreign concerns, exhorting the local people to take initiative in building industries of their own to meet the requirements of the railways and prevent funnelling out of the profit to the English. His vision of large issues, however, does not make him miss ordinary matter that affect the common people most. Thus we find the *Dipika* untiring in its efforts to draw the attention of the authorities to the plights of the third-class passengers 'who contribute the maximum revenue' and suggesting exceedingly apt remedial measures. It is this balance, this capacity for constantly engaging in large questions and ordinary details at the same time, this sympathy for the ordinary folk which never gets smothered under the plea of major preoccupations that made Gourishankar a matchless journalist, educator, and socio-cultural worker of his times.

Gourishankar's activities in pursuit of improved conditions of living for the Oriyas and in defence of Oriya interests of various kinds were not confined to the agency of the *Dipika* and to his own manifold private initiatives. He was associated with a number of organisations in each of which he distinguished himself as a major shareholder of responsibilities. It is interesting to note that whenever a new institution or organisation came into being at Cuttack with his initiative or cooperation – and almost all of them which proved to be of consequence for the Oriya nation had him as a prime collaborator – the post of the secretary would by general consent be always earmarked for, and forced upon, him. And, thereafter, the main burden of the organisation would rest on his wide, accommodating shoulders. In line with the narrative approach so far adopted in this volume, we may only take up some illustrative case to indicate the kind of comprehensive involvement and leadership Gourishankar displayed on all important socio-cultural and political fronts.

Utkal Sabha or the *Orissa Association* was one such organisation Gourishankar served as Secretary for long thirty-five

years. The Association had its beginnings as *Utkalollasini Sabha*. Sometime later, a few Bengali supporters formed a rival organisation named *Cuttack Society*, and engaged in acrimonious debate. Gourishankar proved himself too strong for them, but instead of gloating over pyrrhic victories, he took a constructive approach to end the feud which was vitiating the social climate of Cuttack and persuaded both the associations to merge into one with equal numbers of their members in the new executive. Thus was born the *Orissa Society* which, however, could not vitalise itself because of the simmering suspicion and hostility that persisted as a kind of hangover. In 1882, when Local Self-Government was ushered into British India, Gourishankar and his colleagues decided to revamp the Orissa Association. A general meeting was called with that end in view. Gourishankar was again chosen as the Secretary. Till he resigned in 1905 because of failing health, he remained the king-pin of the Association. The farewell tributes paid to him then speak volumes of the kind of trust and confidence Gourishankar had generated among the members.

We can do no better here than the famous biographer Mrutyunjaya Ratha, who lists the various major issues taken up by the Association to give an idea of the kind of service Gourishankar had rendered as Secretary of the Orissa Association. Those include, constitution of the Cuttack Municipality, fixing procedures for election of commissioner and chairman, determination of voters' eligibility, formulation of election procedures for mofussil municipalities ; drawing up procedures for election to the District and Local Boards, formation of properly elected Local Boards, formation of properly elected Local Boards in villages : scrutiny of the Bengal Pessants' Rights Act and recommendation of changes in line with the peoples' response; appeals to the Government on public welfare measures, such as, steamer service from Cuttack to Chandbali and to the lighthouse, water-supply through the canals etc ; successful pleading for clemency in the case of a person who had

unintentionally committed a crime and was sentenced to a life-term; extending support to the people of Sambalpur and Ganjam in their fight for restoration of Oriya; advocacy for the formation of a new judicial territory and a new university territory to include Orissa; and so on. The amount of energy on patient study and close pursuance of these objectives through memoranda, petitions etc that Gourishankar had to spend must have been phenomenal.

Gourishankar was primarily an Oriya nationalist, giving his all to the cause of Orissan renaissance. But this did not prevent him from demonstrating his solidarity with broader programmes of Indian nationalism, exhorting his fellow Oriyas to respond to major national calls, and contributing to the great cause the Indian National Congress was fighting for. In fact, he was, amazingly enough, one of the first Oriyas to propose the linking up of institutions like the Orissa Association, and later, the more powerful *Utkal Sammilani,* with the National Congress. Every-time the National Congress planned a general session, Gourishankar would be up and doing, circulating the programme, calling upon leading Oriyas to participate in the session, and pleading with the others to contribute their mite in building a mass-following for it. Nothing could possibly demonstrate his deep sense of belonging and involvement better than the fact we have already noted earlier, namely, that among the sessions of the Congress he joined, one was when he was in government service, running the risk of loss of job, and another was when he was past seventy-six, carrying his age-worn frame all the way to Karachi, running the risk of loss of life.

He had converted the *Dipika,* in part, not a mouthpiece of the National Congress ever since its inception, zealously espousing the calls given by Congress leaders from time to time. He wrote long essays to create an awareness of the need for an organisation like the National Congress, to persuade people to adopt *Swadeshi* and support cottage-industries, to reveal the

large-scale economic exploitation by the British, to plead for unity of thought and action among the people, to make them realise the importance of a one-nation concept, pointing to history and to future needs by way of offering idealistic and pragmatic arguments in favour of the idea, and so on. These make very interesting reading today, bringing home to us Gourishankar's percipience and national outlook. With all this, however, it would be true to say of Gourishankar that he was but first an Oriya, and next an Indian – not because he was narrow minded and did not command a broad national outlook, but because of his choice of field of work. Regional engagements such as Gourishankar's do not preclude a broader spirit of nationalism ; in fact, they strengthen it with the vitalising power of their local soil.

Summing-up

There are situations where history and its men of the moment fit in so closely that it becomes difficult to assert, either, that history produced the man, or conversely, that it was the man who determined history. Gourishankar and the late-nineteenth century Orissa were similarly interfused. He was the principal agent through whom the hopes, aspirations, dignity and will of the Oriya people were affirmed and activated in multifarious directions informing their entire national life for half a century. His personality and activities had nothing very spectacular about them; yet they were heroic and extraordinary in character. Gourishankar was not one of the all-time greats of human history. But he was the kind that was most needed by Orissa at that juncture, a person who could merge his identity with that of a poor and struggling people with a proud heritage, one who had education and intelligence enough to know what had gone wrong and the practical sense and audacity to go about setting it right by exploring all available avenues and resources. Integrity of character, a fearless disposition, tenacity of purpose, penetrating commonsense, wide sympathies, and a vast capacity for hard, patient application – these were some of the qualities if mind and personality which he brought to bear upon his life's task. He did not wish to be a leader of men in any specific field. He was, as it were, a tireless, self-denying patriarch who

had to take care of every need of his vast family, their food and shelter, hygiene and health, education and economy, art and culture, in short, their entire present and future. And this he wished to perform in the capacity of a self-respecting, dedicated worker, rubbing his shoulders with everyone in the family, and not seeking a platform from where to direct and control. He was thus great in not pursuing personal greatness, a leader in spite of himself.

In coming to know of Gourishankar with a certain measure of intimacy – although, thanks to our lack of curiosity and incompetence of scholarship, a vast lot still remains to be known about him – we come to know of the limitations of history as it is recorded and disseminated. India and the world are told a great deal about a large number of other nineteenth century Indian political leaders who have caught the attention of history by being close to seats of power either in the capacity of antagonists or of collaborators. That people like Gourishankar still do not find a place in Indian national history goes to show that the kind of marginalisation against which he battled all his life persists even today. It also shows how little we have understood the actual porcess of social reconstruction during the period of the Indian Renaissance, the peculiar regional problems that needed to be – and still need to be – resolved and transcended, the complex historical forces that had to be tackled, and the legacy of psychological, cultural pressures they had generated. A more thoroughgoing and careful reading of Gourishankar than could be offered here is going to be of immense relevance and value to all those who are engaged today in the business of effecting a healthy, integrated growth of the Indian nation.

Mathew Arnold distinguished between what he called ages of expansion and those of concentration, and argued how the former prepare the grounds for the emergence of the latter. We might similarly describe the characters of leaders – some re-

presenting concentrated bursts of creative energy in specific fields of human excellence, and others representing a self-effacing, expansive urge – great technocrats who translate scientific insight into large-scale human welfare gadgets and who prepare the instruments for still more productive inventions in future, great workers who validate the claims of prophets through their untiring work and make prophecy credible and respectable. But for gifted workers and great enactors like Gourishankar, the promise implicit in heightened historical situations would have remained mere exciting speculations and possibilities. Gourishankar is a marvellous demonstration of the power inherent in men and women who may not be born as prodigies, but who have a deep urge to serve a cause with unflinching determination.

One marvels at the functioning of the mind that is suggested by the record of Gourishankar's activities. Conistently for more than half a century, he kept on thinking out new plans and strategies of action, examining hundreds of deails that affected the life of his people and finding out the appropriate remedies, initiating measures on his own and prodding the others, not neglecting any of his own domestic and official responsibilities in the process, bearing a series of private misfortunes and disappointments with fortitude, and not allowing any kind of cynicism to take root. *Dipika*, in itself, represents a colossal endeavour of the mind, and not simply organisational endeavour of the mind, and not simply organisational excellence of a high order. And *Dipika* was but one – though an all-important one for Orissa – of Gourishankar's manifold concerns. It is truly mind-boggling to think of the numerous issues, individuals, societies and institutions that received Gourishankar's personal attention and care with none of them ever going by default because of preoccupation with another.

Gourishankar the man was a complete individual, who lived a full, mellowed life, responding to all his manifold social and

individual obligations and urges without feeling constrained to seal off any of them. With remarkable assiduity and devotion, he made time for each of those intellectual, artistic, nationalist and spiritual concerns of his. Thus, for all the tragedies he had to bear, his was a fulfilling life. It was owing to his multifaceted interests and engagements that he could evoke the trust and regard of a wide variety of people – urban and rural, high and low, learned and ignorant, political and spiritual. He could be a zealous fellow-worker to any group of honest men and women, sharing their joy and sorrow, their hardships and delights as a true insider. There were greater individuals than him among his younger contemporaries, individuals whose names come first in the modern Orissan roll call of honour, but none of them matched him in his wide sympathies and his large, diverse involvements. And that is the reason why he touched the Orissan life on many more fronts than any of the others in his time.

Gourishankar did not always monitor a larger Orissan vision embracing the dismembered parts to the south, the west, and the north-east. He did champion territorial and cultural reintegration of the state – there are a number of places in the *Dipika* where he argued for unification but only in certain contexts such as expansion of communication, preservation of Oriya, spread of commerce, and so on. And he did play a supportive role in the context of the struggle of the Oriyas under other states to preserve their Orissan identity. But this issue of Orissan reunification gained in political prominence only towards the later part of his life when he was no longer capable of commanding his earlier resources of physical and mental energy. With all the extenuating factors, however, it seems somewhat perplexing that Gourishankar did not take up this issue earlier with his characteristic vigour and sense of urgency. One reason for it could be that it did not the appear to him at a feasible proposition. Another reason could be that his hands were already too full, and the multitude of pressing problems

nearer home kept him overly preoccupied. The main reason, however, seems to lie in his inability in focussing upon the subject as a primary concern for the Oriyas. And this involved a certain limitation of vision and sympathies. Gourishankar had had no opportunities of knowing the Western region in particular. Orissa to him primarily meant the coastal districts which then comprised the state, an area which he understood exceedingly well. The Gadjat areas in the West appeared to him merely backward and inaccessible : in fact, so uses the word 'junglee' and 'uncivilised' to describe them at certain places in the *Dipika*, and confesses that there were very little socially binding cultural or commercial ties then in evidence between the coastal and hill regions despite a common cultural ancestry and marginal trade-contacts. Gourishankar, in this instance, was only an average contemporary mind, not able to look beyond the wall, confessing how absence of communication and living contact had resulted in woeful mutual ignorance.

It is possible that Gourishankar would appear to some as only a regional leader who, for all his intellectual sensitivity to international developments, and to larger interests pertaining to the Indian nation and civilisation as a whole, as reflected in the *Dipika*, kept his mind and energy rigorously centred upon promotion of Oriya nationalism and alleviation of the sufferings of the Oriya people. Such a view may be valid to a cultural demographer. But it must not be allowed to lead to an artificial classifactory conceptualisation marking him out as but a local, provincial sympathiser whose outlook and efforts did not relate to a broader national field, or to the universal human condition. Selfless devotion and fearless espousal of social and political justice of the order and intensity that we find reflected in his career make little sense of such a classification. Whatever the extent of the area of operation and whatever the specific issues tackled, it is ultimately the quality of the associated human feeling and temper of mind that counts. Greatness has its own absolute measures apart from relative, statistical ones. In

essential terms the greatness of Gourishankar as a human being and a leader is of the same order as would have been acknowledged if he had taken up international or larger Indian issues instead of Orissan ones. The difference pertains not so much to his quality of being as to our own capacity for proper assessment and recognition.

As has earlier been pointed out, Gourishankar was never the one to ignore the small in the interest of the big. He had no inhibitions whatsoever in identifying himself with and responding to the demands of various levels of his community life. He never thought it necessary or desirable to foreswear his links of caste and village so as to present himself as an enlightened all-Orissa leader, for he did not see – and did not allow – any contradictions between various levels of human obligation. As long as self-interest was not the driving force, service of any group of human beings was as ennobling as that of another. And, among the social leaders of his time in Orissa, Gourishankar was unmatched in his insistence in ever remaining a worker, and his consistency in spurning the title of a leader. He led and captained in many fields, was always in the forefront, clearing the passage himself, and not simply issuing directions to others. For such a mind the local and immediate naturally demand, and deserve, the greater attention, but that must not be misconstrued as sectarian engagement. It is human service, the same as it would have been had he shifted his place of work from Cuttack to Delhi. Had there been more such regional leaders with a feeling of obligation for the suffering humanity right around them, and less of those whose 'national' instinct made them neglect the field which needed their hands more, the history of modern India would have been much different from what it has been, and is.

When one thinks of making an asessment of his impact, of the improvements he effected, and not of his personality as such, the task appears to be similarly tough. It is much easier to

evaluate the impact of leaders who moved at the head of a large army, either already available or inspired by their call, and singlemindedly forged towards a specific objective. In the case of people like Gourishankar who struggled on a number of fronts at the same time, often alone by themselves, and whose concern for human welfare did not have merely a political or entrepreneurial meaning, but involved an inclusive, integrated body of undertakings, the achievement is exeedingly difficult to measure. Gourishankar succeeded in his efforts times without number, but the objectives were so very multi-layered, involving situations and interests of such a diverse kind – individual people and communities, social and political causes, economic and religious programmes – that a total stock-taking appears to be well-nigh impossible. Even if one were to take into account his main, relatively more well-known, public activities, it would still appear difficult to make the assessment, for he sought to count, the depth to which the roots had been sent is not all that easy to gauge. Through all the various issues and situations he handled, Gourishankar's main intention – and his greatest contribution – related to the arousal of a cultural consciousness, to the improvement of the mental, as also physical, health of a nation, even while organising hundreds of things – small and big – that were necessary for improved living and general advancement of a people. How much he succeeded in his attempt is, therefore, not easy to spell out. We can only use broad, general terms and say, his was a prodigious endeavour, and his success was phenomenal. He came upon the scene when the time was ripe, and the inspiration already available, for a person like him to serve as the agent of history – indeed, to embody it for a time. He played his destined role with extraordinary devotion, and prepared the grounds for even greater men of destiny to follow. That seems to be his greatest achievement.

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