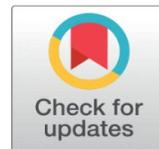# FROM REGIONALISM TO KOSLI NATIONALISM AND BEYOND: TOWARDS A SEPARATE KOSAL STATE IN (WESTERN) ODISHA

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ABSTRACT

If we analyze the discourses on regionalism or for that matter, movements along regional spirit and consciousness, in India or even while trying to make sense of such a tendency, people are taken aback given that it is seen and understood as something against the unity and integrity of the nation or being 'divisive' 'separatist' and 'parochial' and therefore, 'anti-national'. However, we may find that from a long time, even during the period of British colonialism, regional forces have had their impact at the level of organization of political system in their own ways. Needless to recall that when the Britishers entered India, they could sense the regional variations very well and therefore, established 'divide and rule' policy to suit their administration as well as to be fitted to the regional demands and peculiarities. It is, no wonder therefore, to find that the anti-colonial freedom struggle was not a process free of contradictions and variations over different regions. The fact of the matter was that the 'national' issue, namely, to establish a free independent and sovereign India superseded all the so-called 'parochial' claims of various regions and their demands. And it is, needless to say that these regional interests and demands, which were subdued during the freedom struggle found an expression and were articulated even within the first decade of India's independence, which has, in fact, grown both in its number and its intensity with every passage of time, which are reflected in various regional movements, over the period. In this paper, we discuss such a movement taking its stride with every passage of day, in the western part of Odisha—both in its historical as well as contemporary contexts. Taking a major point of departure, we suggest that it is rather high time to understand, analyze these movements and also to change the terms of our discourse such that 'region' and 'nation' or for that matter, 'regionalism' and nationalism' should not be seen as counter to one another. Contrary to this, what is suggested here is to see them only as a matter of degree and more as a part and parcel of a continuum. We make an attempt here to bring out what have been the historical causes which have given birth to such a tendency and the contours and trajectories that such a movement is going through over the period, including the current state of affairs as regards Kosal Movement, which is increasingly becoming so vociferous that we can hardly ignore it—either as an observer, as an analyst or as an activist—for or against the call for a separate state in Western Odisha.

Keywords: Region, Regionalism, Regional Movements, Kosal, Kosli Bhasa, Kosli Identity, Western Odisha, Kosli Nationalism, Kosal State

1. INTRODUCTION

The Discourses on Region, Regionalism and Sub-National Movements in India

Ever since the history of India, its political system has displayed are silience to persist amidst several challenges which are indigenous to the system itself. And one of the major challenges that India has been facing especially since the first decade of her independence is that of 'regionalism' 'separatism' and 'secessionism'. Due to her unique diversities, India has been very often characterized as "one of the greatest geographical museums in the world, where cultural pluralities are manifested in all dimensions, where political behavior is strongly coloured by considerations of communal identification, and where there is a lack of integration among the masses all over the country…" Majumdar and Singh (1997).

If we try to analyze the discourses on regionalism in India or even while trying to make sense of such a tendency, we may find that from a long time, even during the period of British colonialism, regional forces have had their impact at the level of organization of political system in their own ways. Needless to recall that when the Britishers entered India, they could sense the regional variations very well and therefore, established 'divide and rule' policy to suit their administration as well as to be fitted to the regional demands and peculiarities. It is, no wonder therefore, to find that the anti-colonial freedom struggle was not a process free of contradictions and variations over different regions. The fact of the matter was that the 'national' issue, namely, to establish a free independent and sovereign India superseded all the parochial claims of various regions and their demands. And it is, needless to say that these regional interests and demands, which were subdued during the freedom struggle found an expression and were articulated even within the first decade of India's independence, which has, in fact, grown both in its number and its intensity with every passage of time, which are reflected in various regional movements, over the period, such as the Andhra movement for the Telugu speaking people, the Dravida movement in Tamil Nadu, the movements for creation of Jharkhand, Bodoland, Gorkhaland, the Khalistan agitation and the Punjabi Suba movement, the demand for separate Ladakh, the rise of Kashmiri militancy, insurgency in the North-East and several other movements demanding a separate state of their own in almost every nook and corner of the country, which need detailed studies in their own right.

Here we may bring in the significant contribution of Ramashray Roy, an ardent follower of Indian politics, democracy and development, who looks at the conflicting as well as complementary discourses of nationalism and regionalism specific to the Indian context. As Roy (1985) opens up his debate, he underlines the fact that, "to many, nation-state constitutes the only, the terminal and by implication, perhaps the highest creative entity to serve as a framework of organizing and shaping political life in a country". But no sooner he adds that "the claim of the nation-state as the supreme symbol of people's socio-cultural identity as well as the only instrument of articulating and realizing their aspirations is however under heavy attack….it tends to overshadow all other identities insisting that every process, institution and attitude of its inhabitants ought to be fitted, one way or the other, to the state….it usually frustrates political and economic aspirations of the people…." (Ibid: 269). And it is, therefore, that the claim of region as a more appropriate context of political life and organization is advanced. Further, he explains that "region may in many cases reflect cultural identity of the people better and offer a more appropriate frame for planning and administration…. If the nation can and does superimpose on everything else the logic of its own primacy, so can and does region" (ibid: 269-270).

Given such a tendency, the discourse of regionalism has been accorded a very negative connotation. Not only this, but it is important to note that despite regionalism being a major force moulding the nature and texture of Indian politics, much less attention has been paid to these movements and there is a conspicuous neglect of regional studies unlike studies on nationalism, communalism, casteism or for that matter, linguism. As Mathur (1983) reasons, "it is almost always operating in conjunction with other political forces and it is rare to come across examples of unalloyed regionalism....regionalism occurs, in real life, in varying mixtures with linguism and communalism and there are even examples of regionalism co-existing with casteism and in such cases, it becomes difficult to decide as to whether a given political phenomenon is to be considered under the title of regionalism or some other politically relevant social force, e.g., linguism". However, there are other kinds of alternative meanings implicit in regionalism. As a concept, regionalism suggests loyalty to one's region or regional patriotism. The root of regionalism goes to the idea of a 'region'. A 'region' etymologically refers to a homogenous area having physical as well as socio-cultural characteristics, which are distinct in their own ways from that of the neighbouring area.

Vora & Feldhaus go on to suggest that "a region is a mental construct. It is always a human product, whether the product of scholarship, political ideology, or daily life" (2006: 7). It is, therefore, that geographers, sociologists, economists, political scientists or for that matter, politicians divide a particular land into different regions, say on the basis of elevation, rainfall, flora and fauna, crops, types of clothing, means of livelihood or architectural style, language, script, family structure or voting patterns.

Here, we may discuss the way in which Bernard (1987), an American anthropologist well-known for his historic works on colonial India, defines "region" — 'subjectively' as well as 'objectively' and distinguishes several kinds of regions on the basis of different terms. He conceptualizes regions and regionalism to involve variables like the historic, linguistic, cultural, social-structural and so forth (ibid: 102). Thus, he categorizes a 'historical region' as one in which there are sacred myths and symbols relating the history of the region to its past, while a 'linguistic region' shares a standardized form of language which is usually identified with the educated groups, or a 'cultural region' can be conceptualized as that which shares cultural traits and patterned behavior among the common people (ibid: 103). He also conceptualizes a 'structural region' in which there are groups of associated structural variables which differentiate one structural area from another (ibid: 104). Although Cohn classifies these different types of regions, he suggests that these variable overlaps and because of this, cannot be put into water tight compartments. Similarly, he as well conceptualizes 'regionalism' as "the conscious or unconscious development of symbols, behaviours, and movements which will mark off groups with some geographic boundary from others in other regions for political, economic, or cultural ends" (ibid: 119). Further, he rightly asserts that "the study of regions and regionalism is a healthy corrective to the earlier concerns of historians that excluded this study from Indian history and society" (130). So, what we learn from these competing discourses on regionalism is that it is a multi-dimensional phenomenon and that it is created and nourished by human minds and emotions, especially by the regional elites of a particular region, which on the one hand, brings in regional consciousness among the people of the region and unifies them so as to achieve their regional interests and demands. On the other hand, it clearly marks them off from those who do not share their language, culture etc and are considered as the "Others'.

If we map out the literature on 'region' and 'regionalism' in India, it comes to the fore that analyses by social scientists in different disciplines such as history, geography, sociology, politics or economics, have not successfully provided a holistic understanding of these vexed issues while trying to make sense of a region and its regionalism. As Jayadev and Vakulabharanam (2017: 41) underline, the concept of 'region' could be seen in its manifestations at least in three multiple scales such as a) sub-national or provincial b) national and c) supranational, for e.g., the South Asia as a region. However, as they point out, "analysts have largely used either the national scale or the subnational, regional scale but rarely, both these scales. Either the nation manifests itself in a region or a particular region stands in for the nation. The conceptualization of the region and an examination of the dialectical relationship between the nation and the region have not received adequate attention so far" (ibid: 41).

Also, it is noteworthy to mention here as Kaviraj (2017: 56) emphasizes that "the concept of region does not exist on the material ground of space". Rather, "it is a concept and exists historically and, like any other social concept, is subject to the basic rules of historicity" (ibid: 56). Kaviraj goes on further to explain that "concepts like "nation" and "region" are historical in two clear senses. In the first sense, we can, the moment we expand the temporal span of attention, see that these concepts are referentially unstable/dynamic and have changed through historical processes like state formation, economic change, cultural configurations etc. These are also historical in the second sense, in that these are formed by contingent epistemic processes, that is, through highly specific ways in which intellectuals or social agents have epistemically formed these concepts by actual determinable epistemic/cognitive moves that we can study" (ibid: 56). And it is, therefore, always legitimate to ask when and why a region came into existence, and what people were doing with it and to themselves in devising a concept exactly like that. Furthermore, we may recall here the way Foucault (1980) emphasizes that certain metaphors are equally geographical and strategic, which is only natural since geography grew up in the shadow of the military. Accordingly, for Foucault, "a circulation of notions can be observed between geographical and strategic discourses in such a way that the region of the geographers is the military region (from regere, to command), a province is a conquered territory (from vincere), Field invokes the battlefield" (ibid: 69). Further, he notes that spatial metaphors help us locate the relations between power and knowledge. In the words of Foucault, "Region, a politico-strategic term is an indication of how the military and the administration actually come to inscribe themselves both on a material soil and within forms of discourse…. The use of spatial metaphors helps one to grasp precisely the points at which discourses are transformed in, through and on the basis of relations of power" (ibid: 69).

Against such a backdrop, we aim now to uncover the layers along which western Odisha   or Paschimanchal or the historic region called Kosal, as is being (re)imagined by the leaders and activists of the ensuing Kosal movement, has a definitive historical mooring of constituting or imagining itself as a unique 'region' having its multi-layered distinctiveness vis-à-vis that of the coastal part of Odisha and how gradually it has given birth to 'regional consciousness' and spirit of 'regionalism' among the people of the region, over the period and how did they graduate from a so-called "separatist" and "divisive" "regional outfits" to a more and more of "nationalist" crusaders fighting and forging a "nationalist spirit" in the region for the cause of their Mother land and Mother Tongue while contesting and negotiating with the Odishan Government a la dominant Coastal Others .

The Roots of Regionalism in Western Odisha

Like many historic regional movements in various parts of the country, Odisha as well has its own share of stories with regard to regionalism, separatism and sub-national upsurge from time to time. When we scan the pages of its political history, we come across numerous factors which have accounted for the growth of regional consciousness and the emergence of regionalism, especially in the western part of the State. If we go to the root of such a tendency in the region, we find that the trajectories of such a move could be seen both in the colonial as well as in the post-independent periods. Although we do not have so far, any substantial research and studies on these aspects, except some tangential passing references or at best some conjectural anecdotes and analyses, and that each of these factors, in themselves would be liable for series of publications and multiple volumes, I hasten not to engage with these factors in any great length here. Suffice it to mention here that among many of these factors, there are some which are most prominent and historic. For instance, one of the earliest articulations of regional consciousness in the region could be seen in the form of the resistance by the Rajas of Patna, Sonepur and Kalahandi at the time of the merger of princely states with that of the Orissa Province during 1940s-50s. As is well-known, Hare Krushna Mahatab, the then premier of Orissa and the so-called architect of Modern Province of Orissa, made frantic political efforts to work out a "Greater Orissa" including the amalgamation of all the princely states. But Rajendra Narayan Singh Deo, the then Patna Maharajaa not only Opposed Mahatab's move but exposed the dangers of the merger and ill-intentions of Mahatab and the Orissan government and mobilized all other rulers from the region and fought tirelessly for their separate political identity.

Another significant factor which added fuel to fire and ignited the spirit of regionalism in the region was the formation of Ganatantra Parishad in 1950 as a radical regional political outfit, again led and mobilized by Maharajaa R. N. Singh Deo. Although reasons for such a move are galore, given that the merger reduced their status equal to that of the commoners without any power and privilege, the creation of such a party was justified on the ground that it was only for the sake of the people and the region that the Party had come and specially to champion the cause of the toiling masses given that there was popular discontent against the Congress misrule in the region. This, in fact, accentuated regional animosity further and exposed the growing regional disparities in the state and awakened among the people of the region with a sense of inflicted injustice and a spirit of hostility. The party criticized further the Orissan government ruled by Congress for its step-motherly attitude towards Western Orissa and promised to take immediate steps for the overall development of the region.

The third major factor which furthered regional consciousness and regionalism in the minds of people in the region was the Hirakud Dam project, which is also well-known as one of the longest earthen dams in the world, which is about 5 Kilo Metres in length, built across the Mahanadi River, in Sambalpur district, as one of the first major multipurpose river valley projects of independent India. It is held that the main objective of building the dam was to control the flood water of the river in and around Cuttack. From the very inception of the Project, i.e., when the foundation stone was laid in 1946, the people of Western Orissa doubted the intention of the Government of Orissa and resisted tooth and nail and it resulted in mass agitation for quite a long period, which still continues even today. The construction of the dam, which is said to have submerged more than hundred villages and their fertile land, the subsequent human sufferings of the dam oustees and the affected population across so many generations -- have accentuated the long-standing

animosity and differences between the coastal and the western Orissa, given that many of the positive benefits of the project has largely accrued to the kataki people (a term colloquially referring to the entire coastal districts such as the undivided Cuttack, Puri and Balasore), whereas the people of the region suffered huge loss in terms of thousands of acres of fertile cultivable land, displacement without proper rehabilitation, uprooting of their culture and community life, and of course, the way the project arrived upon them as something which was biased and as a burden from the government without any concern for their needs, wishes and aspirations.

Another factor which added fuel to fire in raising the spirit of regional consciousness and regional divide in the State was the setting up of the Rourkela Steel Plant during 1950s-60s. In 1954, the Government of India decided to set up this huge plant at Rourkela in the Sundergarh district, which is mostly tribal inhabited. When land was getting acquired for this plant it is said to have uprooted about 3000 households from more than 30 villages and that 70% of these displaced people were tribals, who were neither taken into confidence while parting with their valuable lands nor were they rehabilitated and resettled. The promises which were made to them such as 'land for land and house for house' was hardly fulfilled. Also, due to their low level of literacy and education, hardly any of these people could get any suitable employment in the Plant. Thus, it brought to the fore the everyday conflict between the 'outsiders' and the 'native' people, who were exploited, marginalized and humiliated. Ganatantra Parishad, the radical political outfit of the region, which was also the main opposition party, at that time, took up the cause and staged number of hungers strikes outside the State Assembly. Even after so many decades these people's injustice is yet to be mitigated. So along with the thousands of people who were displaced by the Hirakud project, the people who were displaced due to Rourkela Steel Plant could feel with surety that the Orissan government was not at all concerned about them and their welfare and this became subsequently a bone of contention between the people of the region vis-à-vis the government which was controlled, regulated and managed by the coastal Orissa.

The fifth major breakthrough that galvanized regional spirit and regional conflict in the minds of the people in the region was the Gandhamardan Movement or BALCO Agitation. More as a continuum of the innumerous environmental movements in the country which rose to their prominence during the 1970s-80s, the story of this movement brings out the story of people of the region who were most vocal not only for their own selves, the survival of their life and livelihood but perhaps one of the longest running environmental movements for protecting and preserving the Gandhamardan hills, its rich biodiversity, priceless ecosystem and in pursuit of sustainable development. Gandhamardan Hills, which is well-known not only for abundant gift of nature in the form of its flora and fauna, world-class mineral deposits and priceless medicinal plants, but it has also a rich cultural history since the mythical and ancient past. Gandha Mardan Hills lies amidst Balangir, Bargarh and Nuapada districts of Western Odisha, covering about 20,000 hectares of reserved forest land. The Hill range is also considered too sacred and a pilgrimage centre not only for the people of the region but also for people from adjoining states like Chhattisgarh and Madhya Pradesh especially for the two major entry points which are conjoined by Nrusinghanath temple in the North and Harishankar temple and falls on the South. Legend goes that this is the same mountain range during the Ramayana age, from where Lord Hanuman is said to have taken the bisalyakarani, a medicinal plant to bring back life into Lakshman, who got unconscious during the battle of Ram and Ravana. Also, it is historic in more than one way, which has been so graphically well-documented by the Chinese traveller Hiuen Tsang, who visited India including this region during 7th century and suggests how important a major seat of Buddhism schooled by Nagarjuna flourished here. The rich bio-diversity of

this area has also attracted innumerous scientists and botanists ever since the British period, who have so elegantly talked about hundreds and thousands of varieties of unique and life-saving medicinal plants in the area. However, there was a jolt to the conscience of the people in the region when in the 1980s the government of Orissa was selling the hills to a private company Bharat Aluminium Company (BALCO) for mining Bauxite and other minerals. When the then Chief Minister Janaki Ballabh Patnaik came to lay the foundation stone for the same, people of the region mobilized themselves and resisted tooth and nail against such a conspiracy of the Orissan government. It gradually resulted in violence of worst kind when more than dozens of people were seriously injured and two dozen of vehicles were burnt down. The movement gained its tempo despite all threats by the State government and marked a historic move as one of the earliest environmental movements in the country to have successfully thwarted the collusion of the government and that of the Company. Even today, one can see the spirit and resonance of the movement in the region whenever there is any such news of taking over of the hills for its exploitation. And this was undoubtedly one of the major factors, which brought together the people of the region against the Orissan government and gave impetus to the regional consciousness and regional conflict in the state.

And not to forget the recurrent drought, famine and poverty in the region, which in fact, rose to prominence and became a matter of public outcry world over during the 1980s and 90s thanks to the attention paid by not only national media but also global media such as the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), which showed unbelievable and untold miseries of poverty, backwardness and underdevelopment in the region including that of starvation deaths and child-selling and opened up a new chapter of the very ill-famous "Kalahandi syndrome" which put a Big Question mark on Development, Democracy and Basic Human Rights not only in the state but all over the country. This resulted not only in recurrent visits of so many Ministers including the then Prime Minister Mr. Rajiv Gandhi to one of the poorest and unheard-of villages in Kalahandi and Balangir but the saga of Kalahandi brought the people of the region in confrontation with the Orissan government in its worst possible ways. Whereas the whole world was trying its best to make sense of the whole situation and developmental aids were flowing to the region from all over the country and the world, the State government and its Bureaucracy were in a denial mood not to accept any such story and rather criminalized and threatened to those who were trying to "create and sell" such stories. There were Public Interest Litigations filed with regard to these cases of starvation deaths and child-selling in the region, Human Rights Commission set up Special Committee and Special Benches for hearing of the issues and exposed the callousness, insensitivity and inhumane attitudes of the State government. This in fact, brought to the fore, how despite resistance on the part of the people of the region, they were forced to be part of the Orissan state but far from the promises made by the government, of keeping the development and welfare of the people of the region, it has rather betrayed. Questions were thus, asked about the ill-intention of the state government which suggested that the government led by people of coastal belt was showing step-motherly attitudes towards the people of the region and was interested only in the development of coastal Orissa and that although the region was more than equally contributing to the State exchequer, they were hardly getting any benefit from the state policies and provisions. In fact, the Report presented by the Prafulla Ghadei Committee in 1994 also so graphically showed and substantiated how there was a clear-cut divide in terms of developmental indicators such that all the "Backward" and "Most Backward" Blocks belonged to the undivided Kalahandi, Balangir and Koraput districts whereas all the "Developed" Blocks came

only from coastal Orissa. Thus, was spurred the consciousness of "regional divide" in the state and the seed of separatism was sown in the region only as the only alternative to usher in the development of the region and guarantee welfare of people of the region.

And above all, the attitudinal conflicts between people of coastal Odisha vis-à-vis western Odisha, which is, in fact, growing over the period, have contributed significantly to the growth of regionalism and regional politics in western Odisha. Besides that, this regional identity is strongly grounded on a distinct historical, cultural, political, economic and linguistic root. The accumulated effects of all these cleavages carried forward by the sense of exploitation, deprivation and domination have given birth to acute regional consciousness, nay Kosli Nationalism, and finally giving birth to the demand for a separate Kosal state of their own.

Discrimination, Marginalization and Humiliation: History, Culture, Language and Literature of Western Odisha

As has already been discussed at length in my earlier papers on 'Situating Kosal Region in Historical Perspective' (Kumar, 2020) and on 'Rethinking Kosli Identity' (2018), western Odisha or the entire Kosal region had a rich cultural heritage and history of its own. Moreover, as Dr. Dola Gobind Bishi, one of the pioneers of the movement elaborated during our interview on 25th March 2017 that the history and culture of Kosal or western Odisha is very unique and different from that of Odisha. He says that the territory of the current state of Odisha is comprised of 50% Kosal, 30% Utkala and 20% Kalinga and that Kosal was, until the merger of princely states, not a part of Odisha. Further, he explains that even during the Kalinga war by King Ashoka, we were not the ones defeated by King Ashoka, which has been recorded by King Ashoka himself that although he conquered a large part of the territory in Odisha, he could not win the Atabika janapada, which expanded from Sambalpur to Kalahandi and Koraput. So, Dr. Bishi insists why people of Kosal should not share the defeated history of Kalinga. So, when Biju Patnaik gave a proposal to name Odisha as Kalinga, there were protests by people of the region including Pandit Prayag Datta Joshi and Dr. Dola Gobind Bishi.

The archaeological excavation at sites such as Asurgarh and Maraguda valley represent one of the best planned township and commercial centres in their heydays. The temples of the region such as Ranipur Jharial, Indralath brick temple, the stellate brick temple of Patalesvara at Budhikomna, the Kosaleswari temple at Baidyanath, the leaning temple of Huma, reflect a unique Kosli style of architecture. The cave paintings of Nrusinghanath, Guda Handi and Vikram Khol take the history of the region to pre-historic times. However, the official or the standard text books on history and culture of Odisha do not say anything about such historic monuments, despite that some of the world-famous historians such as Charles Fabri and Vidya Dehejia have been attracted by them and have written volumes on them. There has been a discontentment among people in the region whomsoever I talked to during the field work that had these monuments been located in coastal part of Odisha, they could have been protected and promoted much more in bigger way than the temples of Bhubaneswar, Konark or Puri. Many people complained that although the State Archaeological Survey has already taken up these monuments, they hardly are taken care of. Their historical importance is hardly taught in the official text books on Odishan history and culture and they hardly find their place in the tourism map of the state. Rather, they are marginalized under the domination of coastal conspiracy rather than being appreciated.

Likewise, as has already been pointed out, the language spoken by people in western Odisha is very different from that spoken by people of coastal Odisha. The

state of Orissa, many pointed out, was created due to the language movement, which was to unify all the Oriya speaking people who were living in Central Provinces, Bengal Presidency and Madras Presidency. The language agitation was also against the imposition of Bengali or Hindi language over the people of Orissa. However, people of western Odisha realize that the same kind of domination has been applied to their language, literature and culture. The activists of Kosli language movement have been producing volumes of literature including on grammar, syntax etc and trying to prove that Kosli or Sambalpuri language stands a a distinct language in itself. On the other hand, the people in coastal Odisha look down upon the writings in Kosli language and one can hardly find books, journals and magazines written in Kosli language in any bookshop in coastal part of Odisha. As a consequence, the regional consciousness among the people of western Odisha is increasingly giving way to polarization and extreme kind of regionalism. One may add here that there were outbursts on both the sides once when the Chief Minister had recommended Kosli/Sambalpuri language to be included in the 8th Schedule of the Constitution. One prominent Oriya linguist Prof. Debi Prasanna Patnaik wrote a very reactionary article accusing the proponents of Kosli language movement as 'divisive' and 'separatists' and warned the Chief Minister and the State government not to fall prey to the pressure of these people, which will be 'suicidal' in its consequences for the state and the socio-cultural fabric of Odisha. This was followed by several rejoinders by the supporters and activists of Kosli language movement. There was also hue and cry in the entire state when the song 'Bande Utkala Janani' was proposed to be the official anthem of the state. People of western Odisha protested against such a move and asked about what happens to 2 crore people of western Odisha who did not belong to Utkala but to Kosal. Thus, one can see that the tendency towards regionalization could be seen almost in every kind of debates and discourses going on for so many decades, which is, in fact, gaining in its strength with every passage of day and night.

Some other issues which have also polarized regional consciousness in the region are some of the unresolved issues with regard to fulfill the development needs of the region. Recently when the government of Odisha has been trying to work for vision-2020 or to celebrate the centenary year of formation of Orissa with vision-2036, questions have been raised by people of western Odisha what has happened to the development promises of so many governments about prosperity of western Odisha? Why there is still absolute poverty in the region and the distress migration from the region is, in fact, growing day by day and there are reports about farmers suicide almost every year from the region. Add to it, questions have also been raised about ensuring good education and basic health services to people in the region. Particularly, they have been arguing that the huge percentage of dropout rate in the region is due to the fact that the medium of instruction is not Kosli but an alien language, which becomes very difficult to grasp from early childhood for millions of children in western Odisha. Also, the coastal government's apathy was questioned when one tribal Dana Majhi from Kalahandi was compelled to carry the dead body of his wife because he had no money to pay for the van. It was highly discussed all over the country including in foreign media and was a bone of contention for all the medical facilities advertized by the state government, although people in the western Odisha were denied even the basic health facilities. They further accuse that although crores of revenues are contributed by western Odisha due to their rich natural, forest and mineral resources the state expenditure on the region is very dismal. It has also been pointed out by many that the Western Odisha Development Council which is meant for the people of western Odisha is located in coastal city of Bhubaneswar, due to which people are neither aware of the

provisions of the Council nor are they able to avail of the schemes of the Council. There is a demand for immediately shifting the Office of the Council to somewhere in western part of the state.

There has also been a demand for since long for a Bench of Odisha High Court to be established in western Odisha. The Bar Association of all lawyers of western Odisha underlines the fact that millions of people in the region are denied justice because they can hardly visit the court on a regular basis which is 400 Kilo Meters away. So, there have been several dharnas, strikes, hartals and numbers of memoranda have been submitted to concerned authorities. Also, recently, when Cyclones have been regular features in coastal part of Odisha, which has been destroying thousands of crores of government properties, which are taxpayer's money, people in the western Odisha have been giving proposals to shift all the government administration of the state to western part of Odisha, which is quite stable and prone to any such kinds of natural disasters. So, one can see that the people of western Odisha are now raising their voice against any kind of insult, injustice or exploitation and domination by their coast counterpart including the State Government.

Politics of Development vis-à-vis Developmental Politics in (western) Odisha

The fact that western Odisha has been an epitome of poverty, backwardness and underdevelopment has been well recognized by several researchers and more so also by several reports prepared by so many Commissions and Committees both at the State level as well as at the Centre. Its chronic poverty is yet to be ameliorated. Nor the promises made by hundreds of anti-poverty measures implemented for so many decades have successfully delivered true development in the region. It is against such a realization that some dedicated developmental projects have been initiated both by the Centre as well as by the State to usher in development and to minimize the regional imbalance and disparities, such as the KBK Project and the Western Odisha Development Council specifically to take care of the needs of the region. Below, we look at these two Developmental Projects and whether and to what extent, they have been really serving the interests of the people of the region.

KBK Long Term Action Plan

Chronic poverty and conspicuous underdevelopment and backwardness of western Odisha have been a cause of concern for the state government as well as the government of India. It is, therefore, that way back in 1993, the Government of Orissa brought out a Resolution establishing a Steering Committee of Special Project to develop and implement different plans and programmes in this region. It was realized that sustainable economic development of these areas requires a holistic approach and adoption of a comprehensive and integrated strategy. This subsequently gave birth to a Long -Term Action Plan for the now very ill-famous Kalahandi, Balangir and Koraput (KBK) districts which was formally launched by Prime Minister P. V Narasimha Rao on 18th August 1995. The Plan was formulated with two principal objectives in view: 1) drought proofing, and 2) poverty alleviation and comprehensive development. However, a meager allocation of 20. 49 crores were sanctioned for this and it did not take off due to non-availabilty of sufficient funds.

A revised Long Term Action Plan for the KBK districts was submitted to Government of India in 1998 on their advice. This project envisaged "an integrated approach for speeding up the socio-economic development of the said region by

synergizing effectively various developmental activities and schemes under implementation both in Central as well as State sectors". Crores of rupees is being pumped into the region for their development for so many decades, by now. But in real terms, it has hardly helped them come out of their chronic poverty and backwardness.

Western Odisha Development Council (WODC)

Likewise, the Western Orissa Development Council (WODC) was constituted in 1998 under the Western Orissa Development Council Act. This Council was created by the government "for the overall development of western Orissa comprising 9 districts, such as Bargarh, Bolangir, Deogarh, Jharsuguda, Kalahandi, Nuapada, Sambalpur, Sonepur and Sundergarh". The government had also framed the Rules in 1999 for carrying into effect the provisions of the Act. The Council, constituted under the aforesaid Act, had demanded more autonomy and powers to the Council under the provisions of the Act and Rules framed thereunder with a view to achieve the objectives. Further, in 2000 there were amendments in the rules which repealed the previous Act and provided for the establishment of the Council for the accelerated development and advancement of 10 districts of Western Odisha with the addition of Boudh district so as to remove the regional divide and imbalances. In 2003, the Act was amended further and Athamallik Sub-Division of Angul District has been included as a part of WODC.

However, people from the region are far from satisfied with the working of these special projects meant for their development. During my field work, many people pointed out their ignorance about such projects and those who were aware of, pointed out that either they are inaccessible or they are full of corruption and scams. The Head Office of the WODC is based in Bhubaneswar, and is highly guarded. When I wanted to visit the office and have a firsthand knowledge about their projects, it was too cumbersome even for me to convince the officers let me in. The Council is supposed to have various experts helping them design and formulate various development plans. But the sorry state of affairs as has been pointed by many leaders of the movement is that the State government is not so serious about proper functioning of the Council. For years, either the constitution of the Council is carried on as a matter of ritual only. One can also see that the vacancies in the Executive body of the Council are hardly filled in regularly and the Experts Members of the Council are hardly any experts in true sense of the term that they are, by and large, sitting MLAs from the ruling party, who hardly have any say but to comply with whatever is asked of them to comply with by the Ministers and the Government. Also, many of these so-called Experts and Members including the Chairman have been found to be party to so many cases of corruption, scam and financial irregularities. And it is, therefore, that they have neither been able to fulfill their novel objectives nor have been able to redress the grievances of the people of the region to their satisfaction. And it is due to this that for quite a long time, the leaders of the Kosal movement have been demanding to shift and establish the Head Office of the Council in any strategic location in the region shifting from Bhubaneswar, the state capital, which is about 400 to 500 kilometers from the region, which is very difficult on the part of the poor people of the region to access and which has hardly rendered any service to the people of the region so far.

The Head Office of KBK Project is located in a very remote corner of Koraput, which is hardly functional and which is also not so easily accessible to the people of the region for whom it was meant for. The officials, who usually come from coastal part of Odisha, also show their bureaucratic arrogance in a very conspicuous manner and there is nothing substantial contributions to the development of the

region that one can boast of for last so many decades, although we come across so many advertisements for this and related projects.

The Rise and Rise of Kosli Consciounesss, Kosli Nationalism and the Demand for a Separate Kosal State

And it is due to this persistence of acute poverty, backwardness and regional disparities in western part of Odisha vis-à-vis their coastal counterparts and the increasing polarization of their attitudes towards each other with every passage of time that the leaders, activists and champions of Kosal movement are alluding to mobilize people in the region and advocating that the only answer to all their problems would be solved, only if a separate state of Kosal is formed, without any further delay. It is noteworthy to mention here that the demand for a separate Kosal state was raised in the 1940s by Maharajas of Patna and Kalahandi during the anti-merger agitation. However, by the 1960s, the movement had an abrupt end when Maharaja R. N. Singh Deo ultimately won the 1967 Orissa Assemble elections and enjoyed his power as the Chief Minister of the state during 1967-1971. The movement was revived, however, again in the 1990s due to the initiative of Advocate Prem Ram Dubey, a prominent lawyer of Sambalpur, who is also known as the Father of contemporary Kosal movement. He spread the movement with his message that western Odisha, which was part of the glorious ancient Kosal and was having rich and glorious past has been exploited by the dominant coastal power which is solely responsible for the sorry state of western Orissa today. He published Kosal Khabar, one of the first newspapers dedicated to the cause of the Motherland, and also published "Why Kosal State?", mobilized Kosal Sena and organized Kosal Sammelanis during 1992 and 1993 and submitted so many Memoranda and Appeals to the President of India, Prime Minister of India and other concerned authorities to consider their demand for a separate Kosal state. The next historic phase of the movement was led by former BJP MLA Bal Gopal Mishra, who undertook a Kosal Mukti Rath Yatra during 2004 to generate public opinion in favour of such a demand, which also gave birth to many dedicated activists of the movement in the region. Subsequently many organizations and associations were established such as Kosali Ekta Manch by Gorekh Nath Sahu and others to strategize the movement more systematically. This Kosli Ekta Manch worked like a mouth piece to give voice to the millions of Kosli people which subsequently gave birth to a dedicated regional party, Kosal Kranti Dal, in June 2007, so as to mobilize the movement and claim their share in the political affairs of the state. They fought both 2009 as well as 2014 elections without much success. Now, they are preparing for the 2019 general elections and going to the nook and corner of the region and working towards massification of the movement. Also, it is important to note that Advocate Pramod Mishra, who was one of the founding members of Kosli Ekta Manch and also the President of Kosal Kranti Dal although has been supporting both the Kosli Ekta Manch as well as the Kosal Kranti Dal, he established Kosal State Co-ordination Committee (KSCC) a non-political platform and appealing all people and various parties to support the cause of the Kosal State.

As I can see for myself, the movement is increasingly becoming more and more of mass-based. If in the earlier period of my field work, I had to tirelessly search for people who were part of the Kosal movement, now one can find them almost in every street and village in the region. As Pramod Mishra, one of the main leaders of the Kosal Movement elaborates during my interview dated 29th March 2017, the movement has gone through at least three distinct phases. Stage -1, according to Mishra, begins from the 1970s when many literary figures in the region led by Pandit Prayag Datta Joshi tried came together and to prove that the language spoken

by the people of the region was not Odia but Kosli and produced volumes of inspirational literature in Kosli language. The second stage, according to Mishra came around 1990s, when Advocate Prem Ram Dubey started calling for Sammilanis at different places and it was during this period that Kosli Ekta Manch came to its existence, which undertook so many campaignings to get wider support for the movement. The third stage of the movement could be seen with the coming of the Kosal Kranti Dal in 2007, which is a political outfit dedicated to the development of the region.

However, it may be mentioned here that there are many programs such as bandhs, hartals, cycle rallies, rail roko etc. are organized from time to time. On April 1st every year, one can see that Utkal Divas, the Orissa state formation day is celebrated as the Black Day. The map of Odisha is torn apart or burnt down as an extreme form of resentment among the people of western Odisha who are no more in a position to continue as an appendage of the coastal other. There are now protests and resistances to almost any kind of announcement regarding new development projects by the state government, which is said to be benefitting only the people of coastal Odisha. Very often, the educated youth of the region have been complaining about the conspiracy of the coastal administration to conduct various examinations only in Bubaneswar and Cuttack Centres which are far from the region due to which many eligible candidates are not able to go to these distant places, which are really expensive affairs because they have to travel by bus or rail while going and coming and also pay for their lodging and boarding during their stay in a unfamiliar distant land. Also, there was hue and cry in the region when the state government announced a long list of Plan of Action programmes for government employees especially during the period in which nuakhai, the main festival of the region is celebrated by one and all and during which everybody gets together with their family and friends. Also, questions are very often raised about the persisting underrepresentation of the region--be it in terms of leaders from the region in the Ministry or in the government, bureaucracy or in the political administration. Many people pointed out during our discussion that so far in the history of more than eight decades of the state, there have been only three people from the region who have been Chief Ministers of the state, and that too for very short terms, namely, Rajendra Narayan Singh Deo (8 March 1967 – 9 January 1971), Hemanand Biswal (7 December 1989 – 4 March 1990 and 6 December 1999 – 5 March 2000) and Giridhari Gamango (17 February 1999 – 6 December 1999). Last year, when three seats of Rajya Sabha feel vacant due to tenures of Dilip Tirkey, Ananga Udaya Singh Deo and A. V. Swamy, who came from western Odisha but were fillied in by members from coastal Odisha such as Prashant Nanda, Soumya Ranjan Patnaik and Achyuta Samanta, people of western Odisha felt cheated that the new members should have been filled in only by people from their own region rather than from the coastal part.

Given such a history of political underrepresentation, discrimination and humiliation, it is interesting to note that since June 2007, people of the region came together and organized politically, giving birth, thus, to the political outfit of the region, Kosal Kranti Dal (KKD). The coming of KKD was very historic and it symbolically challenged the hegemony of the dominant political parties of the state who had not been able to either deliver development or provide justice to the millions of people in the region. They raised the demands for immediate resolution of number of unresolved issues to be taken seriously by the government. And they also mobilized the masses and appealed to join the movement to achieve their birth right of self-determination in terms of a separate Kosal state. For many of the ills, they suggested that the only way out is getting separated from the dominant coastal state and to fight for a Kosal state of their own.

However, within such a short span of, say a decade or so, we see a crisis of leadership in the movement. There are infightings among the leaders accusing each other and not only not supporting but openly anti-campaigning for their self-interest while putting the spirit of the movement in bad light. One also wonders that whereas immediately after the Kosal Kranti Dal was formed in 2007, they contested the 2009 General Assembly elections and also the 2014 elections, although without any success. By now, if they could have really campaigned and mobilized appropriately, the 2019 elections could have really been a historic milestone in the history of the movement. But leaders are divided among themselves and whereas some are keen to follow the path of participating in the political competition, there are some who are looking for other dominant political parties in the state and in the Centre that they should put their demand in their manifesto, if they wish to win the elections. And there are also others who are mobilizing people to cast vote on NOTA (i.e., None of the Above) if no political party openly addresses their demand. So, it is time to take into confidence the people in their constituencies and make them conscious of their rights and claims which they may be able to deliver when they are voted to power. So, what is needed is the massification of the movement. Kosal State Coordination Committee as well as Kosal Kranti Dal should be firm enough to prepare a Road Map before the people of the region and mobilize from the very grass roots level rather than concentrating their programmes in select towns and cities.

One can also see the production of volumes of writings on uniqueness of Kosal as a region and its variegated problems and dimensions, Kosal history, Kosli culture and literature etc., including in Kosli language which is adding fuel to the rise of Kosli consciousness not only in the region but also outside the region including non-resident Kosli people living outside the country. One can see almost every day, a number of Kosli books, magazines and newsletters etc., are being added to the shelf of Kosli readers. One can also see a number of dedicated publishers and distributors of Kosli language and literature working seriously for the cause of their mother tongue and mother land. Now, one can see them taking pride in their language, literature, history and culture which were looked down upon by the 'dominant coastal other' and they are celebrating and organizing so many programmes as a part of birth and death anniversaries of pioneers of Kosli language movement and prominent Kosli writers and poets in addition to organizing festivals such as Nuakhai, Puspuni etc. not only in the region but by Kosli diaspora living all across the country and also in many parts of the world, which is also working like a catalyst for the rise of a 'Kosli Public Sphere' and to galvanize the movement in a vigorous manner. In language front also, there has been recognition of writers and poets including by the State as well as the Kendra (Central) Sahitya Akademi and also that of Padma Shree as awarded to Kosli poet Haldhar Nag by the President of the country in 2016. They are also asserting to declare Kosli as the "second official language" of the state and include Kosli language in the 8th Schedule of the Constitution so that it would not only guarantee equal respect and identity at par with the language of the Kataki (pejoratively designated to the language of the coastal Orissa taken as a whole). So, one can see that Kosli consciousness giving birth to Kosli regionalism and Kosli nationalism is rising with every passage of day and these different mobilizations could be seen as complementary to each other for the cause of their mother land and Mother tongue. As we can see, there are mobilizations going on among the Kosli language activists, writers and researchers on a war-footing basis, which are headed in two directions--one, to deny and denounce the age-old identity of their language and literature, which was marginalized, looked down upon and laughed at by the people of coastal Odisha only as a mere "underdeveloped and uncivilized dialect", and second to reclaim,

assert and re-establish their identity by forging their nationalist spirit by using their linguistic and literary tradition. It is worth noting here that over the last few years, we have seen how they have burnt down the symbol of so-called Odia language with the burning of Chhabila Madhu Barna Bodha, which is considered as a very "sacred text" for the Odias as it happens to be one of the most popular Primers to learn the language. Also, there has been uproar in the region including in the State Assmebly when Bande Utkala Janani, a so-called patriotic song written by Laxmikanta Mahapatra way back in 1912 was declared as the "State Anthem" and was included in the school text books and to be recited by every student in the state. Not only there have been mass agitation and resistance in the region to such a move by the government, but that now a number of nationalist and patriotic songs related to the region are being written and worked out by the language activists of the region. Many programmes and celebrations are now going on in the region such as Kosal Ektaa Divas (Kosal Unity Day) and Kosal Swabhiman Jatra (Kosal Dignity March), Kosli Sanskruti Din (Kosli Culture Day) etc., rediscovering their glorious past and recalling and reminiscing the illustrious leaders, writers, authors, poets, and activists of the region while celebrating their Birth and Death Anniversaries.   And as we sum up, their movements—both linguistic as well as political—are gaining strength and momentum with every passage of day, and it's only a matter of time, to see and celebrate their "Freedom" from the clutches of the coastal Odisha, which they wish to culminate, ultimately in the political formation of a separate Kosal state.

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