



Odia Literature and Sarala Das

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In the galaxy of conspicuous poets of India, Sarala Das shines resplendently. He is well known as the antediluvian poet in Odia literature. During the infancy of Odia language and literature, he wrote the invaluable The 'Mahabharat' 'Bilanka Ramayana' and 'Chandi Purana' which laid down the solid foundation of Odia literature. His contributions to literature were reckoned as sources of inspiration for the succeeding writers in Odia. Hence Sarala Das has appropriately been called the gems of literature in Odia which substantiate the poets which has been fulfilling the people's quest for literary juice and devotional reverberations. Rightly has Sarala Das been christened the Byasa and Muni of Odisha.

It has been ascertained the Mahabharat (Odia) was written in the beginning part of the fifteenth Century during the reign of Kapilendra Dev, the conqueror. Only a semblance of his autobiography is scanned from the poet's confession not exhaustively in the Mahabharat. The poet was born in a farmer family in the modern Jhankada village in Cuttack District. He was named Siddheswar Parida. It was his devotion to the goddess Sarala that the Goddess blessed him so that he could compose the voluminous literary work.

No literature of exalted value could be written in Odia language before fifteenth century.

Very few people were analyzing Sanskrit and Odia language. General people had no facility of studying Sanskrit. In the prevailing situation, Sarala Das made the relentless bid to write the Mahabharata in eighteen *parvas* and proved beyond doubt that Odia language is expressive of miscellaneous emotions and moods in literature. The initiative taken by Sarala Das gave impetus and inspiration for creation of Odia literature to others. Hence it wouldn't be an exaggeration to call Sarala Das the father of Odia literature. It is willy-hilly indicative of the fact that had Sarala Das not lifted his pen, the flourishing Odia literature would have been impoverishingly delayed.

Although information about the poet's biography is very little available, his writings give vent to the poet's extraordinary poetic genius. The Mahabharat written by him is a great epic and great mythology. Despite stresses and strains down the ages, The Mahabharat is reckoned as very much adored and admired by the populace.

The Mahabharat is indicative of the poet's unprecedented flight of imagination, excellent art of creating characters, symmetry equanimity, ingenuity of character sketch. It is easily guessed to attain and materialize his aim, the poet was all his life devoted to achievement of his intention. The poet could usher in the spontaneous flow of Indian culture in Odia speaking region through



the Mahabharat. The concept of the Mahabharat expressed in a regional language in the age when Sanskrit was the medium of writing literature gives vent to poet's ingenuity in streamlining in the thoughts through a nascent language like Odia and it amounts to the poet's indomitable endeavor of the creation of literature.

Sugandhika, Chandrabatee, Neelandree, Sovabatee, assassination of giant Kundalee, giant Jayasingh, the fight between Arjuna and Nagarjuna, the sketch of Bellabalee, the anecdote of Kadamsur, Babanabhuta, Belalaseena is unique.

Sarala Das has given vent to his uncommon scholarly bend of mind and creativity by portraying his mythological characters in distinct and separate manifestations. His characters are more or less prone to humanistic faux pas and imperfections. Like common people, they are imbued with jealousy, greed, spite, subterfuge. The common reader is exceedingly bewildered with their achievements, imperfections, moral turpitude. Although the characters in Sanskrit Mahabharat are endowed with divine connotations, Sarala Das has portrayed them more and more adorned with humanistic characteristics. The illustrative example in this connection are Hunda, intolerant Bhima, conspiring Sakuni, arrogant Duryodhan. It won't be an exaggeration to say Sarala Das was quite efficient in creating unique and lively characters as seen in case of other great poets.

The background of Sarala's creation contains benevolent patriotism. Through the epic Mahabharat, he has permeated the significance of Utkal quite ingeniously. The geography, history, traditions, folk lore, Matrimony, worship and rituals etc. of Odisha have been given a lively portrayal in the Mahabharat. Among books written in Odia, The Mahabharat was the first and

foremost in projecting Puri, Bhubaneswar, Jajpur, Konark, Chilka in a unique way.

Odisha is the place of assimilation of heterogeneous religions. Down the ages Odisha has earned the distinction of religious liberality and propagation of religions but no religious movement took place here. Here we find the curious combination of essentials of all religions. Jagannath cult signifies the great connotation of liberality and harmony of religions. Sarala Das wrote the Mahabharat and Chandipurana keeping a perfect balance between the Aryan cult, Post Aryan Cult, culture, trends of civilization. Although he has confessed time and again the benedictions and blessings of Maa Sarala for which he could write the Puranas, he hasn't forgotten to tender his obeisance to Jagannath, Bishnu, Rama, Krishna, Surya, Ganapati in his books.

In spite of Utkaliya idiosyncrasy, Sarala Das was the par excellent propagator of all inclusive Indian culture. His treatises propound the message of Aryan and post Aryan Cultural assimilation. It is presumed that he undertook writing Chandipurana in order to substantiate the exalted significance of the women. In the confessions of his characters, we find the trends of All-India culture. Abiding by the path pioneered by the religion, one can avoid weal and woe in life, the poet has amusingly made Managobinda or Duryodhan confess in Bana Parva -

“O! hearken, Managovinda
Treading the right path
Misfortune keeps it self
At arm's length”

In the pretext of tendering advice, Sarala Das has described kingly prerogative, ruling the kingdom, rudimentaries of economy. The prime aim of the poet was to enlighten the people with Indian customs and traditions, tenets of Smurtee



and Sastra. It is the duty of the king to rule over the subjects evenhandedly. It would be beneficial for all the concerned if the king rules over the people through the tenets of justice and providing them happiness and peace.

It is the prime lookout of the king to respect the Gods, Brahmins, the enlightened and virtuous and not to be niggardly towards the poets. Wielding power, the king must not be swayed by the doctrine of paramountcy and he mustn't take away others property nor should he exploit the farmers. Sarala Das has described in Santi Parva:

“Rule in this way
So rare is unhappy,
The happiness of the ruled
Makes the king to attain bliss.
If the king sticks to justice,
While administering his subjects.
Water God Indra unhesitatingly
Gives rain to the kingdom
The tending of the king in right earnest
Brings the creation ecstasy.
Make it a point to recognize the virtuous
O king !
Don't be parsimonious to the poets”

Sarala Das has left a cornucopia of counsels as regards making the general life restrained, transparent and humane. As excessive inclination for something is portent with sorrow, in much the same way, wrath, greed, passionate, attachment, wine, wealth are the harbingers of troubles and tribulations for man. It is advisable to suppress such evil tendencies and take resort to the ways of Dharma. So it must be kept uppermost in mind to respect the Gods, Brahmins, Superiors, to be hospitable, to have piety on others, to help others and to be truthful. Through Gandhari the poet has harangued to Dhritarastra :

“Shoo showering calumny and
Contumely on others
O ! Dhritarastra.
The world is so transitory
The body is illusory
Relinquish avarice, attachment
Anger, arrogance, aspersion
With this, achieve mental calm
And pave the way for attainment of tranquility”

Man has to reap the consequences of his doings. Noble work helps increase longevity and wealth. Evil work makes man short-lived and suffer the hazards of his work-

“All the people and creatures,
Must do good work.
Treading the path of Dharma
Increases wealth and longevity
Transgressing the ways of Dharma
One reaps the evil of losing
Longevity and material gains”

Unlike the Sanskrit Mahabharat, Sarala Das stresses on abstinence, not on enjoyment. Sarala Das has aptly depicted through heterogeneous characters that avarice, infatuation, abhorrence, jealousy, subterfuge, terrorizing, victimizing people are to end in sorrow and tears. The poet has excellently portrayed the hallucination lying latent illusion in the context of Duryodhan swimming across the river of blood on his dead son. In the transitory and fluctuating world, the consequence of a life of debasement, immorality is disastrously pathetic.

“At the age of fifty
Man gets gradually weak
At the age of sixty
Forgetfulness adorns the mind
At the age of seventy
Vexatious mental troubles come,
Glory to God he never utters.
At the age of eighty man



Is swamped by forgetfulness
He can't recognise his house.

At the age of ninety, he can't
Distinguish self and others
He grows childish;
So that none comes to his side
He can't recognize his son
When paying him respect
Ask him "Who are you?
And "what brings you here ?
O! Yudhistir,

Through the hard practice of
meditation one lives for a hundred and
twenty years
for the sins, he suffers
pain and anguish

The torture of Jama is nothing Compared to it"

Sarala Das has put up his extraordinary perspicacity through the writing of the Odia Mahabharat and the Chandipurana. He hitched the prospects of the evanescent Odia language to the skies through his exploits in the realm of literature. His language, application of appropriate facts and situations, style of description is exceptional and incomparable.

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