

Sarala Dasa, The Originator of the Oriya Literature

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Sarala Dasa was one of the great scholars of Oriya literature whose work formed perennial source of information to the succeeding generations. It was a perennial spring from which the later Oriya literature flowed like a stream without a break. He was the first scholar who wrote his works in Oriya in 15th century A.D.

The life of Sarala Dasa is very obscure. The date of his birth can't be accurately determined, but he can safely be placed on the second half of the 15th century A.D. He was born at Kanakavati Patana is known as Kanakapura, one of the Sidhikshetras in Jagatsinghpur District. His early name was Siddheswar Parida, later he was known as Sarala Dasa by the boon of Goddess Sarala.¹

There is a story, which tells us that Siddheswar in his boyhood was once ploughing his father's field and singing so melodiously that the goddess Sarala stopped and listened to his song and endowed him with her power of composing beautiful poems. Such stories are also similar with the early life of other Indian poets. Particularly of the great poet Kali Dasa, who is said to have illiterate in his early life but he could become a great poet through the grace of goddess Saraswati.

Sarala Dasa belongs to Sudra Caste and a cultivator by profession. The title 'Dasa' means a slave or a servant of a particular gods or goddess.

We have this a long list of poets preceding and succeeding Sarala Dasa; whose names end with Dasa e.g. Vatra Dasa, Markanda Dasa, Sarala Dasa, Jagannatha Dasa, Balarama Dasa, Yasovanta Dasa etc.²

Saral Dasa was famous for his three books like -Mahabharata, Vilanka Ramayana and Chandi Purana. He has also written the book, Laxmi Narayana Vachanika. The Adi Parva Mahabharata opens with a long invocation addressed to the Lord Jagannatha of Puri, from which it is known that Sarala Dasa started writing his Mahabharata in the reign of Kapileswar, otherwise known as Kapilendra, the famous Gajapati king of Orissa (1435-67 A.D.). He tells us that Maharaja Kapilesvara with ennumberable offerings and many a salute was serving this great deity and hereby destroying the sins of Kali age.

There were reasons for the rise of Oriya literature in the reign of Kapilendra. In Gopinathpur stone inscription a verse proves that Kapilendra was a native of Orissa. After a centuries a native of Odra-desa or Orisa

ruled its own people, giving them a sense of pride and self-respect, hopes and aspirations leading them to battle fields for his extensive conquests and opening to them a new geographical horizon. A love for the Oriya language and literature and culture therefore is an inevitable consequence of the new format created by the strong and vigorous rule of Kapileswar.³

Sarala Dasa followed the main outline of Sanskrit Mahabharata in writing the Oriya Mahabharata. He made numerous deviations and added to it copiously the stories of his own creation and various other matters known to him. In the final form Sarala Dasa's Mahabharata is a new creation analogous to Kalidasa's Raghuvamsa based on the Ramayana.

Mahabharata brought to light about the eighteen parva's like. 1. Adiparva, 2. Sabhaparva, 3. Vanaparva, 4. Virata Parva, 5. Udaya Parva, 6. Vishma Parva, 7. Drona Parva, 8. Kanna Parva, 9. Slaya Parva, 10. Surtika Parva, 11. Stri Parva, 12. Shanti Parva, 13. Anusasanika Parva, 14. Asramavasika Prava, 15. Mahaprasthanika Parva, 16. Asvamedha Parva, 17. Mausala Parva, 18. Swargarohana Parva.⁴

The Chandi Purana⁵ is based on the well-known story of Durga killing Mahishasura (the buffalo headed demon) given in Sanskrit literature but here also the Oriya poet has chosen to deviate from the original at several points. His earliest work Vilanka Ramayana is a story of the fight between Rama and Shahasrasira Ravana (thousand headed Ravana).

Sarala Dasa had no systematic education from early age. What he achieved through self-

education and untiring efforts have all been attributed to the grace of the goddess Sarala the deity of the devotion and inspiration. Poetry was in the blood of Sarala Dasa and it flowed from his iron stylus as words flow from his mouth. What he wrote once was final. His verses are simple, forceful and musical with no trace of artificiality in them. He had a finer sense of composition and application of all colloquial words for his poetical purpose. His writing was free from Sanskritization.

Earlier Oriya folk songs were orally popular and were being used in various folk dances. Such as Ghoda-nacha (Horse Dance). Dandanacha and Sakhinacha (Puppet Dance). One metrical peculiarity of these songs is that both the lines of a verse do not contain an equal number of letters though the last letters of both the lines produce the same sound. All the works of Sarala Dasa are found to have been composed with this metrical peculiarity and therefore, the metre use by him can be regarded as a direct descendant of the metre used in the folk songs. By the fifteenth century the Oriya language had assumed almost its modern form and had become ripe for literary compositions.⁶

The predominant sentiment in Sarala Dasa's poem is not love but war. He was also motivated by a strong religious zeal to compose religious books in a language intelligible to all and to make them available to the general public in Orissa. He tells in no uncertain words that he composed his poems for the benefit of "human beings". There are several indications in his Mahabharata that he served as a soldier in the army of the Gajapati King of Orissa and his association with the army brought to him a variety of experiences. The stories he heard the battle scenes which he witnessed, the places that he visited with the company of the

army the historical incidents and names that he could know all remained stored up in his mind to be utilized in his writings.⁷

Sarala Dasa spent his last time at Bila Sarala but the native place Kanakavati Patana known as Kanakapura at Tentuliapada with a religious establishment known as Munigoswain, which marks as the traditional spot, where he composes his works. Thus, Sarala Dasa was really an originator of Oriya literature. His works inspired the succeeding generation of writers to make it more popular among the people.

References :

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4. Sarala Dasa, Mahabharata (Oriya), Cuttack, 1981, PP 86. - 5) Sarala Dasa, Chandi Purana, Cuttack, 1981, PP 67.
6. K.C. Panigrahi, Sarala Dash, Makers of Indian literature serie, Sahitya Ekademi, New Delhi, 1975.
7. K.C. Panigrahi, OP.'CIT, P 292.

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Shri Naveen Patnaik, Hon'ble Chief Minister of Orissa going round the newly constructed library and reading room of the OAS Association at Bhubaneswar on 2.10.2004.