

Kedaranatha Mohapatra : The Great Historian of Odisha

Dr. Jayanti Rath

A self made man, nationalist to the core and patron of art and culture, Kedaranath Mohapatra, the eldest son of Gopinath Mohapatra and Radhika Devi, was born in October 1911 in the temple city of Bhubaneswar. He belonged to a lower middle class conservative family.

He started his early education at Bhubaneswar but later, he was shifted to Khurda for his high school studies in 1925. He graduated himself in 1933 with honours in History from Ravenshaw College, Cuttack. But, fiscal stringency in those days prevented him from pursuing higher studies. But that did not deter him from pursuing further study and research beyond the university curriculum. He successfully completed the teachers training in education in 1935. In early youth, he got married to Yasoda Devi in 1930, who stood like a rock through thick and thin. He became a father of four sons and two daughters. He was a very affectionate father, a protective guardian of his brothers after the demise of his father in a joint family and virtually a guide to the Old Bhubaneswar people in all matters.

He was a voracious reader pervading the domain of History and Literature. His sincere quest for knowledge in historical and

archaeological matters fascinated him to deal with inscriptional sources. He was a social worker, a patriotic spirited youth who was doing everything in his capacity to uplift the cause of Odisha. During his college days he had developed intimate relationship with the leading Congress figures of Odisha and was working as a ground level worker for them. Generally, the sphere of activity embraced National Independence Movement, Odia Movement for the unification of the scattered Odia speaking tracts into one administrative unit, promotion of education and creation of consciousness about the cultural glory of the past. It was during this period, he started writing articles, which were published in the 'Prachi', Ravenshawvian and other Odia magazines. He was included in a group of volunteers and sent to Midnapore in 1931 to work for the amalgamation of that district of Bengal with Odisha division as it was predominantly populated by the Odia speaking people. The students of Odisha showed keen interest in the matter and on 17th November, 1931 students from Cuttack left for Midnapore to carry on propaganda work.

On 13th September, 1931, the Government announced the formation of the Odisha Boundary Committee. When the committee visited Cuttack in January, 1932, Kedaranath Mohapatra joined the fellow students

to press before it the demand for a separate province of Odisha. He even wrote in protest against the unjust amalgamation of the Odia tracts of Paralakhemundi and Jeypore Zamindaries with the neighbouring Andhra Pradesh in an essay entitled "Orissa Province Without Parla and Jeypore".

The second phase of his life started with the acceptance of teachership in Khurda High School in 1935. Subsequently, he also served in Victoria High School, Cuttack town and Banki High School in January, 1938. He joined as an Assistant Teacher in Puri Zilla School and it was his first assignment as a Government servant. In July, he was transferred to Sambalpur Zilla School. But his distinction in the pedagogic career brought professional jealousy. There was peer intolerance. The bone of contention was the publication of history books for school children. His book "Bharata Itihasa" was adopted as a prescribed text book for 8th and 9th standard students to the total dismay of the then Headmaster of Sambalpur Zilla School.

He became so much disgusted that he ultimately resigned from his Government job at Sambalpur and joined P.M. Academy at Cuttack.

After Completing three years of sincere and dedicated service at P.M. Academy he accepted an offer from the princely State of Kalahandi and joined as the State Archaeologist on 17th November, 1943. After the merger of the State with the province of Odisha he was shifted to the provincial Museum and joined as an Assistant Curator on 19.04.1950. Later, he was promoted to the rank of Curator and remained in charge of the Manuscript Section. Though, he was reluctant to take over the charge because of his interest in Archaeology, still the section got the right person for being organized during that period

and in course of time contained the largest collection of Manuscripts in India.

In February, 1962 he was elevated to the post of Superintendent of Museum and Archaeology of Odisha. But in 1965, the State Museum and the Archaeology remained in charge of Superintendent of Archaeology, Odisha. After a long dedicated service career he retired on August 1968. After his retirement, he was reemployed again and finally left the Government Service in April, 1971. In March, 1972 he was associated with the "Orissa Research Project" conducted by the Heidelberg University of Germany.

He started writing essays and articles during his student days both in School and College. In the year 1932, he wrote the first English article in the Journal of Ravenshaw College (Ravenshawvian) on the "Tradition of Orissa". He was also associated with 'Prachi', an English Journal and regularly contributed in it. His essays and research articles mostly deal with inscriptions and temple architecture. His articles were also published in a number of Odia Journals like Nababharat, Bhanjaprava, Jhankar etc.. Though, he was not very proficient in Sanskrit initially, he toiled hard and became a scholar of very high order. The outstanding works that made him prominent included the four volumes of "Descriptive Catalogue of Sanskrit Manuscript of Odisha". This has earned for him the epithet "Pothinath Kedarnath" by the illustrious Odia poet Mayadhar Mansingh.

His diligent studies brought to light "Khurda Itihasa" (History of Khurda) in 1969 and in 1973 he published "Sri Jayadev" and "Sri Gitagovinda". Kedarnath was instrumental in the organization of a Jayadev Seminar in 1966 sponsored by the Govt. of Odisha. He was also

made the Chief Editor of the 'Gitagovinda Compilation Committee' of the Government. He wrote an article in the special issue of the Odisha Historical Research Journal (OHRJ) on the occasion of the All India Oriental Conference held in 1959 at Bhubaneswar in which he established with evidence on the Odishan origin of Jayadev that drew the attention of both Indian and foreign scholars. Moreover, he wrote a few articles for the Encyclopaedia of Indian Literature published by "Central Sahitya Akademi". He had ungrudgingly helped many research scholars from India and abroad in pursuing their projects.

Kedaranath was an editor of great dexterity. Besides the four volumes of the Descriptive Catalogue of Sanskrit Manuscripts of Odisha, he took great pain in editing 'Kalpalata' by Arjun Dasa, 'Parimala' by Narasimha Sen, 'Kalavati' and 'Premolochana' by Vishnu Dasa and 'Chatta Ichhavati' by Banamali Dasa, the compositions of pre and post Sarala Dasa literary traditions in Odisha.

It was to his credit that he authored as many as 17 text and reference books on history and culture of Odisha. He contributed as many as 200 in English, 300 in Odia and 05 in Hindi

articles and essays in many journals and magazines.

For his outstanding contributions, he was awarded by "Odisha Sahitya Akademi", 'Prajatantra Prachar Samiti' (Visuba Milan), 'Odisha Cultural Forum' and 'Utkal Pathaka Samsada' during his life time and by the 'Sarala Samity' posthumously.

Kedaranath Mohapatra was a social activist and so to say the guardian of the people of Old Town of Bhubaneswar. He used to raise funds for the upkeep and maintenance of the Gouri Temple Complex. He organized a youth cultural organization for the development of the Lingaraj Temple. He was instrumental for the conservation of temples in and around Bhubaneswar during the period from 1956-1973.

After a long, dedicated and chequered life of 69 years, this scholar of erudition breathed his last on 20th April, 1981.

Dr. Jayanti Rath, Superintendent of Museum, Odisha, Bhubaneswar.