



National Journal of Hindi & Sanskrit Research

ISSN: 2454-9177

NJHSR 2025; 1(63): 262-268

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www.sanskritarticle.com

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Voices of the people: Social and Domestic life in Medieval Odishan Writings

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.20040334>

Abstract

Medieval Odishan history has been explored from a multitude of angles and narrative orientations ranging from political, military, and diplomatic chronicles to histories of economy, trade, and culture. These studies have made available a wealth of information about elite behaviour and constitutional developments, devotional activity and temple construction, artistic expression and literary innovation, and the consolidation of a mature society. Medieval Odishan literature, spanning from the 8th century onward by many Odia poets and writers, offers a unique window into the socio-cultural heritage of Odisha through their writings. This paper explores the reflections of Odia life in medieval literatures, examining the ways in which the social, cultural, and religious practices of Odia society were represented in literary works of the time. Through a critical analysis of key texts, i.e. the works of *Sarala Das*, *Panchasakhas* and *Jayadevas* this study reveals the intricacies of Odia life during the medieval period, including the role of religion, caste, and gender. The paper argues that medieval Odia literatures offer a unique window into the values, beliefs, and experiences of Odia people during this period, providing insights into the historical and cultural context of the region. By examining the reflections of Odia life in medieval literatures, this study aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of Odia culture and identity, to highlight the significance of these literary works in understanding the region's rich cultural heritage and its continued relevance in contemporary society.

Keywords: Social History, Odia Society, Literature, Domesticity & Vernacular Records

Introduction

Literature, as an art form, is not only the reflection of society, but it is also the design, portraiture, and modifying power of society. This complementary relationship has found expression in every period of literary history. It holds true in the comparative study of Indian literature as well. Among the various Indian literary traditions, the antiquity of Sanskrit literature is beyond doubt. Moreover, scholar Max Muller does not mention any application of Indian literature in his famous anthology "Sacred Books of the East"¹. But, naturally, all the cultures of India are having their own literature, expressing their unique ideas, beliefs, customs, etc. and Odishan literature is one from them. Though, Odishan Society has also seen many ups and downs, like any other society, in her history, yet, the unique identity of Odishan society is undoubtedly found in her literature. Under the said period, literary men of Odisha had to go through major adversities, creating an impasse and intellectual drought in the literary field. Odisha, the eastern coastal state of India, is the country of multilingual and rich cultural heritage. This has been a melting pot of Indian culture down through the ages, having assimilated vehement and vibrant cultural facets of various cultures of India and some from other countries.

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Medieval Odishan history has been explored from a multitude of angles and narrative orientations ranging from political, military, and diplomatic chronicles to histories of economy, trade, and culture. These studies have made available a wealth of information about elite behaviour and constitutional developments, devotional activity and temple construction, artistic expression and literary innovation, and the consolidation of a mature society. Apart from questions of state and elite life, little is known about the experience of the vast majority of the population—those who were not rulers, nobles, warriors, priests, or prominent merchants; those who lived in villages and towns rather than fortified urban centres; and those who rendered service to or earned a living from the land. The following seeks to fill this lacuna. More specifically, it explores the day-to-day experience of those at the lower end of the social hierarchy—peasants, labouring castes, and social outcasts—an experience that has remained largely in the realm of silence within the historical record.

How did these men and women meet their quotidian needs in a constantly changing, complex, and risky world? What routines shaped their lives, what resources and assets fueled them, and what contingencies intervened? What roles did family, neighbours, and community play? The focus is on social and domestic life, defined as the intersection of everyday routines and practice with the people who carried them out. In particular, it explores household and family composition, the nature of work undertaken by different household members, the division of tasks, the days' rituals and festivals, the demarcation of domestic space, and aspects of food, health, economy, and security.

The scholastic contribution of the medieval Odia poets such as Jayadev, Sarala Dasa, and Panchasakhas represents the true reflection of life in society. The reflection has been made most naturally, and almost at the same time when contemporary English literature, known for its classical development in prose and poetry, was modified acculturally for its readers who were tired of the conventional way of literary expressions. Medieval Odia poetry was illuminated with themes shorn of outer brilliance, chiseled out of the home-grievances traditions and culture, and it corroborates the historical fact that literature came to light in Odisha much before the arrival of the then Aryan in the northeast part of India. An important cause of the declusive aspect in this context is the unavailability of the vast stock of old Odia writing, particularly the works of Ananta Kandali, Shishupalatankara, Adi Karnapurana, etc., that were written during the ancient period.

The literature of the time when Odisha was under the Kesaris (i.e. the Somavamsis) and the Ganga dynasty is called the old Odia or Ancient Odia literature, and the literature of the time of Gajapati kings is called medieval Odia.² The literary output started with the Ornate Period known as "Purnadharm Prasanga" written by the first known poet, Sarla Das, and was completed with the romantic play "Lavangalata". In between, well-known poets like Salabega, a Muslim poet, Balaramdas, and Kabi Ratnaka, along with a good number of famous poets and

poetesses, wrote in a variety of literary genres.

Portrayal of Oriya Social Life in Saral Dasa's work

The importance of the Sarala Mahabharata for reconstructing the social history of 15th century Orissa is immense. It is very often mentioned by Sarala Dasa, in his Mahabharata and Chandi Purana that he composed these epics in Oriya for the welfare of the people (sam- sara jana hite).³ Every word of it has to be valued in its proper context. The thoughts, aspirations, ethical standards, dress and festivals of that time are reflected in it. In fact, the pulse of the 15th century Orissa can be felt from this work. However, the difficulties in studying the Sarala Mahabharata are many. The historical and cultural data is mixed up with legendary, fictitious, and mythological materials. As the main story of the Sarala Mahabharata has been borrowed from its original Sanskrit version, many interpolations have been added to it, obviously to embroider the original story. There is every possibility of misleading and faulty conclusions. Non-availability of an authentic edition adds to the difficulty. The published edition of this work is full of additions and interpolations. It, sometimes, gives us new stories which are not be found in the original manuscripts. On the other hand, one cannot depend upon a single manuscript. It differs from other manuscripts in many respects.

Social Stratification: Social stratification in medieval Odisha is vividly reflected in its literary traditions, where texts composed in Sanskrit and Odia reveal a society structured along rigid caste and occupational lines. Works such as the *Madala Panji* (the temple chronicle of the Jagannath Temple) and devotional poetry by Sarala Dasa and Jagannath Dasa illustrate how Brahmins and temple functionaries occupied a dominant position, while kings legitimized their authority through religious patronage.⁴ These texts also highlight the roles of artisans, servitors, and peasants who were integrated into the temple-centered economy but remained socially subordinate. At the same time, Bhakti literature subtly challenged rigid hierarchies by emphasizing devotion over birth, suggesting a limited ideological space for questioning caste distinctions^{5,6}. Recent scholarship further indicates that although the caste system was deeply rooted in medieval society, it was not entirely rigid; a degree of occupational flexibility is reflected in literary and inscriptional records of medieval Odisha⁷. Thus, medieval Odia literature not only mirrors the stratified social order but also provides insight into the cultural and religious mechanisms that sustained and occasionally softened it.

Position of Women: Sarala Dasa has described woman as a mother, a wife, a sister, a daughter-in-law and a mother-in-law. In order to lead a good family life, both husband and wife should be prepared to adjust themselves. Sometimes the wife is quarrelsome, sometimes she is obstinate, and sometimes she may commit many a mistake to annoy her husband. The husband should be prepared to excuse her hundred times. On the other hand, the wife also should not mind the faults of her husband. The wife also should obey the orders of her husband.⁸ A house wife is praised if she

can cook well. A man should not divorce his wife. In a family the husband is supreme. The wife should always care for the aspirations and ambitions of her husband. But the position of women is not underrated in the Sarala Mahabharata.

The marriageable age of a man, according to Sarala Dasa is thirty, and that of a woman is eighteen. In the work of Sarala Dasa, there are frequent references to child-marriage. The girl should marry at the age of seven. According to him, she attains puberty at the age of nine. Before she attains puberty, she should be given in marriage. The presence of a young unmarried girl in the house of her father is taken to be inauspicious. She is always a danger to the prestige of the family. She cannot marry according to her own choice.⁹ She should be given in marriage by her parents, though the instances of love-marriage are also available. While giving the daughters in marriage, the parents should take note of the family traditions of the bridegroom. Once a girl is betrothed to somebody, the parents should keep their words. If anybody offers a girl, one should not refuse. It is a sin to sell girls for money. A girl, once betrothed and refused, will have to face miseries. Nobody will be willing to marry her. She may remain unmarried for the whole of her life.

A widow, according to Sarala Dasa has no worldly shame. A man becomes shameless when he is in love with a lady other than his wife. Sarala Dasa has taken note of another type of shameless men in the society of 15th century, known as Tharada. They are too much attached to their wives. They are so shameless that they cook and serve food as well as dress their wives and apply scented oil to their bodies. However, the most striking point is that they offer their wives to other persons.

Marriage: The ceremonies connected with marriage are observed with great mirth and gaiety. The marriage takes place generally in the bride's house. The bridegroom, with his friends and relatives, goes to the house of the bride. Arrangements and decorations are made in both the houses. The decoration includes the cleaning of roads, paintings on the walls and preparing beautiful steps to the house. The young maidens go to collect water from seven houses. On the next day, both the bride and the bridegroom take their bath in it and the marriage ceremony starts¹⁰ For the purpose of performing the marriage ceremony, an elevated ground named as 'Vedi' is prepared. After the marriage, the bride and the bridegroom take 'ghee' and break their fast. After that, the honey-moon night begins and they started a new life.

Birth of a Male Child: The birth of a male child was welcomed with joy. It was said that when a son is born in a family, the father and mother both are saved from the tortures of Yama. A childless father was driven out of the village. If one does not have a child from his wife, he may marry some other girl. If he is unable to produce a child, he has to follow certain rites and rituals. He should visit a sacred place. He should listen to the Ramayana from the beginning to the end. He should purchase a male child from somebody else and should give him in marriage. If he fails in these attempts, he should allow his wife to mix with other

persons. If he does not succeed in his efforts even then, he should give up the idea of getting a child. In that case, he should give the son of his sister in marriage for getting reward in the other world. He should plant trees on the way. In the last resort, to be saved from the tortures of Yama, he should die by jumping in the confluence of the three sacred rivers at Prayaga.

Prostitution: In the society described by Sarala Dasa, there are cases of prostitution as well. The word used for a prostitute is Pramada'. To earn their living, the prostitutes offer their body to persons irrespective of their age and caste. Sarala Dasa has gone a step further. He says that they do not hesitate to offer their body.¹¹ A Brahmin, by coming in contact with a prostitute, loses his caste, religion and everything. There are instances of Brahmin widows having illicit relations with the Shudras. Such girls are driven out from the society. A prostitute is taken as an evil in the society. They are compared with the girls of the Chandal caste.

Food and Drinks: Sarala Dasa has given us a detailed description of the food and drinks of his time. From it we can have an idea of the food and drinks of the rich as well as the commoners. 'Bhata' or boiled rice is taken by the rich and the poor alike. 'Dal' (Pulse) is prepared from Biri and Mung. The word for vegetables is Pariba'. Curry is prepared from uncut and unpressed vegetables together with 'Dais' like Biri (Urid) and Mung. There are two types of food—vegetarian and non-vegetarian. Preparations of vegetables or meat are known as Thaja' and 'Ambila'. The best preparation of food is known as 'Madha Fuli Randhana'. Sometimes it is called 'Sada Rasa Manohi'. Rice can be prepared in eight different varieties.

Besides the daily food, sometimes special dishes are prepared for guests or for invitees. A number of sweets are served in addition to rice, vegetables and 'Dal'. The first thing to be added to the daily food is cake. Five types of cakes can be prepared. The sweets are generally prepared from sugar and milk. Preparations from sugar are known as 'Kanda'. 'Sakara'. The milk preparations are named Khiri, Khirisa, and Payasa. Milk, ghee, curd and honey are also served.

Water is the common drink. Beverages are prepared from cheese, ripe plantains (Amruta Bhandha) and a mixture of curd, milk and sugar. Green coconuts are used as a type of drink, which is scented with camphor.

Before taking their meals, the people offer a portion of it to 'Agni' (fire), Astakula Naga, house deities and ancestors. These offerings are known as 'Chanda'. The water offered to them is known as 'Chalte. Sometimes plantain leaves are used as plates. After taking meals, the people are used to take 'Tambula', 'Bidia' and 'Karpura'.

Bed: A poor man sleeps on the floor. He may spread a cloth on the ground to have better comfort. The rich people use cots with thick and soft quilts. On special occasions, the bed is decorated with flowers, scented with camphor and fitted with a mosquito-net and pillow.

Dress and Ornaments: Sarala Dasa has given us descriptions of dress and ornaments used on special

occasions like marriage and war. Women are very fond of ornaments. After taking bath they comb their hairs and use Sindoor (vermillion) on their foreheads. Before the marriage ceremony of the maid-servants dress the bride to suit the occasion.

The use 'Chapasari' and necklace (mala) on the neck, 'Chudi' on the wrists, 'Bahuti' on the arms, rings on ten fingers, and tinkling 'Nupurs' adorn their ankles. They wear 'Sarhi' and an upper cloth, known as 'Uparana'.

Besides these, Sarala Dasa has also thrown ample light on the dress of a warrior, a Brahmin, a Yogi and a Kirata. A Brahmin wears his cloth in a fashion known as 'Trikachha Basana'. He allows his hairs to hang on the backside of his head (Lambita Juda). His sacred thread and an 'Uttari' cover his shoulders. He keeps the Vedas under his arms. He keeps 'Tridandi', a brass pot shaped as the ear of a cow known as 'Gokarnapatri' and Kushabatu. He carries an umbrella, and a small jar to carry water. He wears a type of shoes known as 'Pandhoi'.

The warrior is dressed gorgeously. He uses hundreds of necklaces on his neck, a number of 'Padakas' with different colours on his chest. On his feet he uses 'Todhara' and 'Nupur'. He wears leather shoes. Yamadadha, 'Bahuti', and 'Tada' are used as arm laces. The headdress of a warrior is known as 'Taga', 'Topara' and 'Mukuta'.¹² He also uses ornaments on his head. To protect his body from the sharp arrows of his enemy, he uses 'Sanju' and 'Senlia'. He arranges his hairs in the shape of a snake (Nagabandha Juda). The earrings are known as 'Noli' and 'Kundala'. In most cases, men and women use the same ornaments. The warrior wears a small cloth named as 'Kachhata'.

A Yogi has matted hairs, ashes on the forehead, earrings made of brass, reddish colour short clothes, known as 'Kaupina', a necklace of 'Rudrakhya' and a thread (Kati Dora) on his waist. The Kiratas are dressed with peacock feathers, the girdle of Gunja fruit, red colour 'chandana' and with a bow.

Beggars in the Society: Sarala Dasa has taken note of six types of beggars in his society. They have been depicted as moving about with their begging bowls. The life of a beggar seems to have been full of miseries. The people give alms miserly as if they are giving gold. Sometimes the bad type of house-wife refuses to give alms and rebukes them. One type of begging is known as 'Chakra Vhiksha' and it is honoured in the society. Nobody refuses them.

Education: The school is known as 'Chatasali'. From this it can be taken that the student is called 'Chatta'. The teacher is known as 'Guru'. In the Sarala Mahabharata we find three types of Guru. They are 'Bidya Guru', 'Diksha Guru' and 'Kodanda Guru'.¹³ The school sits twice a day i. e. in the morning and in the afternoon. In a school for Kshatriyas the boys learn Sastravidya (science of war) in the morning and the Shastras in the afternoon. A student is desirved to be instructed by only one teacher, and he may presecute his studies to the age of 24 years. A student begins his studies with 'Sriphala', then he learns thirty-four letters, 12 matras, Anuswar and Bisarga. He is expected to Learn 64 languages. Sarala Dasa has enumerated Oriya, Telangi,

Nagari, Darpani, Kanausi, and Gaudi, besides some others as the important languages of India of his days. Students also learn Astrology, Kamasashtra, the Mantras and the Tantras. Sarala Dasa has named a number of other sciences of his period. They are known as 'Uluka Vidya', 'Naganta Vidya', 'Aiswarya Vidya' and 'Undreka Vidya'. The Vidyas can be numbered up to five hundred. The branches of know-ledge can be compared to a forest. Acquisition of know-ledge, according to Sarala Dasa, can never be perfect and complete in one's life.

On the whole, we may conclude that Sarala Dasa was well acquainted with his society. In some recent articles of Dr. K. C. Panigrahi, it has been proved that Sarala Dasa has documented the political history of Orissa under the garb of Mahabharata. However, the description of the contemporary Oriya social life by him is more expressive and detailed, and takes us to a society full of life and blood. Its systematic and thorough study, no doubt, will throw further light on the subject.

Panchashakhas

During Suryavamsi rule in Orissa, more particularly during the reign of Prataprudra Dev, five eminent Vaisnavas poets appeared in the literary firmament of Orissa as bright luminaries and enriched the domain of Oriya literature through their glowing contributions. These five poets cum reformers were closely associated with Sri Chaitanya, the preacher of Radhakrishna cult in Orissa and were deeply influenced by his doctrine of devotional emotionalism. Although they hailed from different parts of Orissa, Puri, the seat of Lord Jagannatha was their meeting meadow where they used to meet at regular interval. Because of conformation to a common faith and close association with each other, these five saint poets in due course of time came to be reckoned as the Panchasakhas. Under the influence of the great master (Sri Chaitanya) they wrote innumerable works on principles of Bhakti and popularized Bhakti movement in Orissa. The Panchsakhas not only enriched the domain of Oriya devotional literature, but also set a new literary trend in the history of Oriya literature and this trend dominated Oriya literature for a long period even after the death of the Panchasakhas till the advent of Riti Age. The Panchasakhas were Balarama Das, Jagannatha Das, Achyutananda Das, Yasovanta Das and Sisu Ananta Das. They represented the religious ideas which always centered round Lord Jagannatha. King Prataprudra Gajapati who too was a follower of Sri Chaitanya is believed to have patronized the Panchasakhas for the propagation of Neo-Vaishnavism and the later popularized the message of this new religious order through their writing composed in simple and appealing languages acceptable to all. Their writings too are based on common characteristics of social reforms. Through their devotional songs, they preached against caste system, unsociability and condemned ritualism. Achyutananda even denounced idolatry and advocated for the worship of void. The Panchasakhas in this way heralded a new age in the history of Oriya literature which came to be termed as the Panchasakhas age and immediately supplanted the Sarala Age.

Medieval Culture Depicted in Balarama Dasa's work

The festivals form a part of the life of a Hindu. He remains busy throughout the year with one or the other of these festivals. His list of holidays and festivals is longer than that of the other nations of the world. The main purpose of these festivals is to awaken the interest of the common people in religious matters. At the same time they give some relief in the monotony of mundane life. The common folk of India are accustomed to observing these various festivals in which they find their best satisfaction.

These festivals can be studied under two different groups. One of these groups is intended to regulate the private life of a person and the other is connected with his public life. The former group is commonly known as fasts (Upavasa) and vigils (Jagarana) and the later is known as fairs (Mela, Melana, Jatra). Balarama Dasa is of opinion that the fairs give an opportunity to the individuals of a society to develop contacts among themselves and also frees him from his past sins.

Balarama Dasa, in his monumental work, Jagamohana Ramayana, refers to many of these Hindu festivals prevalent in Orissa during his age. Though the origin of many of these festivals is difficult to ascertain, Balarama Dasa has tried his best to give them a mythological colour. He believes that Sri Rama, is an incarnation of Jagannatha, the main and popular deity of Orissa. In order to popularise Sri Rama the poet has attempted to include some of these popular festivals in the story of Sri Rama. So naturally the main events of Sri Rama's life have been rejoiced in the same manner and on the same date as the festivals of Sri Jagannatha at Puri. In this connection the poet has mentioned festivals of Sri Jagannatha like the Bahuda Dasami, Hari Sayana Ekadasi and Ratha Yatra.

Bahuda Dasami- It falls on the 10th lunar day in the bright fortnight of Ashadha. On this day Jagannatha returns from the temple of Gundicha and enters his main temple. According to Balarama Dasa, Sri Rama entered Ayodhya on this very day.¹⁴

Hari Sayana Ekadasi- it falls on the next day of Bahuda Dasami. On their return to the temple, the three images are placed on the throne at night, represented by small golden idols and are put to bed for four months. Balarama Dasa has chosen two occasions from Sri Rama's life to describe this festival.¹⁵ This was the day of coronation of Sri Rama on the throne of Ayodhya and on this day Sri Rama as Narayan commenced his sleep upon the ocean of milk. Wilkins, giving his remarks on this festival, holds that this being the rainy season, travelling is most difficult and the professional pilgrims remain in the monasteries. This day is generally observed with feasting and rejoicing.

Ratha Yatra- the famous Car Festival of Jagannatha falls on the second day of the waxing moon of Ashadha. According to Balarama Dasa, this day commemorates the day of Sri Rama's return from Lanka.¹⁶ Balarama Dasa mentions some of these festivals as a model of Hindu life. A person, in order to become a devoted Hindu, is required to observe some of the important Hindu festivals. Vibhisana, the rakshasa King of Lanka, became in his later ages a

devotee of Sri Rama and began to respect the Hindu mode of life. Sri Rama advises him to observe some Hindu festivals like the Siva Chaturdasi (in the honour of Siva), Aswina Shukla Navarni (in the honour of Durga), Magha Saptami (a festival celebrated near the Sun temple of Konarka in the honour of Surya); all Ekadasis and the twelve Sankranties. Though no special day of the week is sacred to the Hindus as Friday is to the Muslims and Sunday to the Christians, Sri Rama advises Vibhisana to observe Saturdays, Mondays and Thursdays with special care. On Saturdays one should put on black clothes. A man becomes liberated by observing these festivals. The other festivals referred to by Balarama Dasa are Ashoka-Astami, Rishi-Panchami, Sudasa Brata and Baka Panchaka.

Ashoka-Astami- This festival is observed at Bhubaneswar as a rival ceremony to the Car Festival of Puri. It falls on the 8th lunar day in the bright fortnight of Chaitra. On this day a substitute of Siva is carried to a temple of Rama with great pomp where it remains for a few days. Another reason of the sacredness of this day is given in the Ramayana of Balarama Dasa. According to this poet, the Ashoka tree removes the difficulties of a person. Sita, when confined by Ravana, took eight buds of this tree with water, in order to be free from her calamities. In some other works it is said that this day is sacred, because Sita offered some Ashoka leaves to Siva in order to induce him to assist her to rejoin her Lord.

Rishi Panchami- It falls on the fifth day of the month of Bhadra. In the hills it is called Rikhi or Biruri Panchami. Commonly it is known as Naga-Panchami. The word Rikhi means snake or Naga and Rikhesvara has now become a title of Siva as lord of the Nagas, a form in which he is represented as surrounded by serpents and crowned with a chaplet of hooded snakes. Balarama Dasa has mistaken this word "Rikhi" as "Rishi". So naturally he names the festival as Rishi Panchami. The story of Sudraka Rishi of the Ramayana has been connected with this festival. According to Ramayana Dasa the festival commemorates the day on which Sri Rama killed this Rishi.

Sudasa Brata- A Thursday which falls on the tenth lunar day of the bright fortnight of any month becomes a lucky day. The married women of Orissa observe a fast on this day in order to bring prosperity to their husbands. Balarama Dasa has tried to include this popular festival of Orissa in his Ramayana on three occasions. In his Ramayana Dasaratha begins the performance of sacrifice to get a son on this day. The rites of piercing the ears of Sri Rama, occurred on such a lucky day. On this day, again Sri Rama, after killing Ravana, entered the city of Ayodhya.

Baka Panchaka- This festival begins on the 10th lunar day in the bright fortnight of the month of Kartika and continues to the full moon day of the month. It is commonly believed that even a crane does not take fish on these days.

According to Balarama Dasa on this day, Sri Rama gives blessings to the crane that in the rainy season, he will get his food through his better half. Originally, the festival perhaps commemorates the date of the fish incarnation of Vishnu (Matsya Avatara)

These festivals, described in the foregoing pages, are sufficient to give a picture of some important Hindu festivals prevalent in Orissa during the 16th century A.D.

Jagannath Das

Second in order of seniority, among the Panchasakhas was Jagannatha Das a celebrated Vaisnavas and a great scholar both in Sanskrit and Oriya. He was born on Radhastami day at Kapilesvarapur, a village near Puri to Purana Panda Bhagabana Dash and Padmavati.¹⁷ His Father used to read Puranas before the assembly of devotees in the temple of Lord Jagannatha and after the death of his father Jagannatha Das took up this profession. Having realized the problem faced by the illiterate people to understand religious literatures written in Sanskrit, he translated Bhagavata in Oriya Language. Although he has to his credit a good number of works like Krishna Bhakti Kalpalata, Nitya Gupta Chintamani, Upanasataka, Niladri Sataka. Jagannatha Charita Sarani etc, yet he is greatly memorized as the author of Oriya Bhagabata, which is based on Sanskrit Srimad Bhagavata Purana, but is not an exact translation of it. Written in soft, sonorous and rhythmic couplets, touching the souls of millions of people for centuries, it served as the only visible banner of Oriya's existence as a distinct culture.

This monumental masterpiece is composed in such a simple and charming language that it is understood and admired by all classes of readers. Certain verse of this Bhagavata has become so proverbial, that they are cited on all occasions by the people throughout Orissa. There is not a single Oriya village, where Jagannatha Das's Bhagavata is not daily worshipped and recited. This Bhagavata is almost a bible to the people of Orissa, and it still enjoys the same popularity in Orissa, as Ramcharit Manas does in North India.¹⁸ He too has made a glowing contribution to the realm of Oriya devotional literature through his immortal works like Bedhparikrama, Brahma Gita, Kaliyadalana, Gajaa Nistarana, and Darubrahma Gita Panchbhuta Gita. These works have left behind a distinct style in Oriya, which for their chastity, elegance and distinct style in Oriya, which for their chastity, elegance and dignity still remains inimitable. The greatest credit of Jagannatha Das lies in the fact that by a judicious combination of Sanskrit and local words, he created the first standard language of Orissa, which is being followed even now and induced all classes of people to learn vernacular language. Sri Chaitanya called him "atibadi" or the "Very Great".¹⁹ The Bengali Vaishnavas were enraged at the title of "atibadi" to Jagannatha Dasa. He was therefore a national poet par excellence, like Tulsi Das in Hindi and kural in Tamil.

Achyutananda Das

Achyutananda the poet philosopher was born in 1482 at Tilakana, on the bank of river Chitrotpala in the district of Cuttack. He was the son of Dinabandhu Khuntia and probably belonged to milkman caste. His original name was Agani and Sundarananda, but later on he came to be known as Achyutananda. At the time of his meeting with Srichaitanya he was a young lad. There after he stayed at home for eleven years and then preceded to Puri, where he

was initiated into monkish faith. He settled down finally at Nemala near Asuresvar in the district of Cuttack, where he composed his literary works. According to Artaballava Mohanty is recorded to have written one lakhs treatise in Oriya verses of different kinds. He wrote 36 Samhitas, 78 Gitas, 27 Vamsanucharitas, 12 Ujavamsas, 100 Malika's, some koilies, Chautisa, Tikas, Gujjaris and Bhajanas. He was the most active reformer and in his Malikas or prophecies, he predicted the degradation of the Brahmanas to the level of Sudras and equality among all beings. He vehemently attacked the Brahmanic rituals and warned them for their rigid dogmatism. His Harivamsa written in seven volumes is almost an original work, holding the framework of Sanskrit model. This work highlighted the social status and social consciousness of the cowherds in Orissa by describing the life story Lord Krishna. His Sunya Samhita is a master piece of Oriya literature in which he gave a distinct shape to the theory of void. He also wrote Kaivarta Gita for the fisherman and Gopalanka Ogala for the milkman community. His other important works include the Avatara Samhita, Nirakara Samhita, Astagujari, Brahmavidya, Guru Bhakti Gita etc.

Yasovanta Das

Yasovanta was the son of Jaggu Mallick and Rekha Devi of village Adanga in the present Jagatasinghpur district and was born in year 1487 AD. His father was a small king belonging to Kshatriya Caste. He wrote number of works on devotional literature like Prema Bhakti, Brahma Gita Siva Swarodaya etc. But he is chiefly remembered for his ballad Tika Govinda Chandra which is Bible for the Natha mendicants of Orissa.

Sisuananta Das

Ananta Das who was another distinguished members of Panchasakha born in Balipatna village, near Bhubaneswara, in 1488. His father's name was Kapila, and his mother's name was Gaura Devi.²⁰ He enriched the realm of Oriya literature by writing a number of works like Artha tarini Bhakti, Muktidayaka Gita, Anakarasabada, Garuda Kesava Chautisa, Mantra Chandrika, Pinda Brahmada Gita Chumbaka Malika etc. In his Bhajana's he advised the people to recite the name of Guru, instead of engrossing the earthly pleasure of the life. Of other poets of eminence who flourished during Suryavamsi period, mention may be made of Kavi Arjuna Das, the author of Kalpalata and Rama Vibha, Narasimha Sena the author of Parimala, and Vishnu Dasa the author of Kalpalata. Likewise, a few Bratakathasor votive tales like Samantha Bratakatha and Neigala Chauthi Katha are believed to have been composed during Suryavamsi period. These prose tales centered round the worship of Lord Siva and his symbols.

The other poets of eminence who flourished during the concluding part of the period. Understudy mention may be made of Kavi Arjuna Das the author of Kalpalata and Rama vivah, Narasimha Sena the author of Parimaia and Vishnu Dasa the author of Kalpana.

Conclusion

The conclusion synthesizes how the voices of ordinary Odishan people reveal a tapestry of social life, family

structures, gender roles, and domestic practices that shaped broader cultural norms and resilience in the medieval period. Almost all the important sastric works were written in Sanskrit before the 12th century. The royal patronage and influence helped the Sanskrit literature to get nourished. In latter years, the state of the king started to diminish, and with the decline of the power of the kings, the classical Sanskrit language also began to lose its worth in the vast tract of the country. For some time, Odishan Sanskrit literature got retarded, and Oriya turned to Sanskrit and became the queen of the languages in Orissa. During the last twenty years of the 12th century, Jayadeva enlivened the same Sanskrit literature by his literary skill. He presented the mystic philosophy of the Gita-Govinda by means of songs to the ordinary masses in an appreciable manner. In Songs of Gita-Govinda and in Purnacharita, Prachina Odisha-Charita Jayadeva makes a mention of previous Kavis. Medieval Oriya literature emerges from ancient Odishan literature, which has a rich tradition of Jain and Buddhist epics, secular poetic achievements, unique drama, and prose literature. In the 12th century, under the influence of Jayadeva and others, Oriya literature reached its zenith. A unique combination of Baisnab, Saivite, Sakta, Buddhism, and Jainism created more vitality in Odishan literature. The Vaishnavas smeared themselves with red-coloured sandal, and on that account, they used to be called Kesharis. They venerated Lord Shiva as a guardian friend and called themselves 'Saivite Vaishnavas'. Further, the Sakta rites playing upon various tantras began to be observed by the Saivites and Vaishnavite of Orissa. The Sakta influence upon Sri Vaishnavism is clearly visible in the images of Lord Jagannatha.

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