



BALARAM DASA'S WRITINGS: A REFLECTION OF THE HUMANISM AND SOCIAL PROTEST IN MEDIEVAL ODISHA

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ABSTRACT

In the historical process medieval Odisha occupies a significant strand points. From the political history it is revealed that medieval Odisha is not much remarkable and far reaching in its approach and interpretation. It is because the existing practices against the social justice, liberty and freedom of the people. As a result this period has been marked by social and cultural protest movement in medieval Odisha. Some scholars of both national and colonial bent of thoughts like, A.K. Mishra, B.K.Mallik, H.S.Pattanaik, Jagabandhu Singh, have divergently argued the period as the Bhakti Movement in medieval Odisha. Particularly the colonial historians like W.W. Hunter, J.Beams, L.S.SO' Malley have treated the period as the medieval renaissance and the nationalist historians have coined the period as socio-cultural protest movement. Balam Das's Laxmipuram occupies its momentum and treated as the first hand source material to reconstruct the social history of medieval Odisha. Besides its acute impact on the society and culture is the thrust area of study. This research paper has been developed keeping in view of some primary objectives. The prime objectives of this study are, how does the *Laxmi Puran* , the brain child of Balam Das play an important role to bring reforms in the field of rights, social recognition, social dogmas , casteism, and position of women in medieval Odisha. The second objective deals with how Laxmi the wife of Sree Jagannatha started a new tradition in the *Jagannatha triad* on the basis of egalitarian theory. Thirdly, the author has tried to give a very critique interpretation on the various aspects of *Laxmipuram*.

Key-words: strand, revealed, renaissance, colonial, acute, reconstruct, egalitarian

In the historical journey, the history of the social protest movement first sparked in the 6th century B.C. by two socio-religious reformers like Gautam Buddha and Mahavir Jain. It is evident from the Buddhist texts as well as from the Jaina texts such as the *Tripitakas*, *Jataka stories*, *Harivamsa Puran*, *Harivadriya vriti*, *Cylonies Chronicle* and many more literature¹. The same movement was again started in medieval period under the Panchasakhas against the existing social order, class and caste rigidity. The Panchasakhas otherwise known as five comrades, five branches of a tree and five *sikhas* above all the socio-religious reformers who wanted to reform and purify the society cutting across the establishment of all the monastic order, all the sectarian feelings and the caste hierarchy². They were Atibadi Jagannath Dasa, Balaram Dasa, Achyutanada Dasa, Jasobanta Dasa, and Sisu Ananta Dasa. The striking feature of this movement was the Panchasakhs who were from different castes like the *Brahmin*, the *Sudra* etc. In the medieval Odisha the first reform was started among the Panchasakhas as a result Atibadi Jagannath Dasa changed his original title Dash to *Dasa*. *Dasa* means servant. It was a stepping stone to the social protest movement in medieval Odisha.³

Among the Panchasakhas, Balaram Dasa was a literature and a great scholar in Sanskrit literature. It is evident from different his literary contributions. Different sources provide that medieval Odisaha was not educationally sound and stable. To look upon the educational condition of the people of medieval Odisha the Panchasakhas particularly, Balarama Dasa wrote a series of literary works in regional language with very simple words without any sophistication style. To fulfill the millions of grievances Balaram Dasa wrote a series of literary works. It helped to enrich medieval literature. The writings of Balarama Dasa were *Ramayan* popularly known as *Jagamohan Ramayan* otherwise known as *Dandi Ramayan*, *Vedantasar Gita*, *Gupta Gita*, *Mrugunui struti*, *Laxmi Pauran*, *Suanga*, *Kanta koili*, *Srima Koili*, *Brahmnda Bhugola*, *Karna Dana*, *Bhaba Samudra*, *Saptanga Yogasara Gita*, *Veda parikrama*, *Bata Abakasha*, *AmaraKosha Gita*, *Pralambasura Gita*, *Udhaba Gita*, *KamalaLochana Chautisha*, *Hanumana Chautisha*, *Baramasa Koili*, *Kanta Koili* and many more. The most valuable writing of Balaram Dasa is the *Laxmi Puran*. The historians of Odisa with national bent of thought like B.K.Mallik, has pointed out the *Laxmi Puran* of Balaram Dasa was a crusade against casteism, untouchability, social injustice and women empowerment.⁴ The *Laxmi Puran* was an instrument to establish social equality, social order and both casteless and classless society. In the *Laxmi Pauran* Balaram Dasa has very nicely described how Goddess Laxmi, the wife of Sree Jaganatha played an important role to establish egalitarian society. This is the civilizational theory of Spengler that “history repeats itself”. For the first time again after the *Rig veda* the concept of egalitarianism was established in Medieval Odishan society particular in Sree mandira. It was the epitome of Unity in Diversity. The unity in diversity today is one of the cardinal principles of Indian culture as well as reflected the Constitution of India.

The nature and characteristic of *Laxmi Puran* of Balaram Dasa is a literary piece written in a poetic order. Every sentence is written with fourteen letters. Two lines make a poetic *Pada*. Its purpose was for easy remembrance of the illiterate people of the medieval Odisha. Two lines make a poetic *pada*. For example

Namaste kamala mago sagara dulani

Namaste Namaste Laxmi Vishnu nka gharani

Tora daya bale mago daridra janara

*Huai achala vita janai Kubera.*⁵

The language of the *Laxmipurana* is very simple and adorable. There is no found of any difficulties to understand its meaning, nature and approach. As a social protest movement it is described in a form of political expression that seek to bring about the social and political change by influencing the knowledge, attitudes and behavior of the public or the policies of an organization or the institution. The concept of social protest in the history of mankind started from the later Vedic period by two rationalist thinkers Gautam Buddha, Mahavir Jain in ancient times. Passing through the time as history repeats itself in 19th century the social protest was again launched by the modern thinkers like Raja Ramohan Ray, Vivekanda, Dayananda Saraswati, Ramakrushnasa Paramhansa, Sarada Devi, Virasalinga Puntulu, Iswar Chandra Vidyasagara, Mahatma Jyotibha Phule against so called social disorder, dogmatic interpretation of social norms, blind believes, caste complexities and social inequality. The social protest in medieval society was reflected in *Laxmi Puran* in a poetic manner.

Ehi rupe MahaLaxmi Dekhi kari Gale

Chandal sahire jai prabesh hoile.

Sriya chandaluni Nagra bahare ta ghara

Tahar mahima je deva nku agochara.

Namaste Namaste mago harinka gharani

Muhin chhara hinajati na janai puni.

Chandal sahire ghara puni chandaluni.

Joga bale Balaram ekatha janile

Dakikari sriharinku emanta kahile.

Dekha dekha Kanhei to bharija achar

*Ubhahoi achhi jai Chandaluni ghara.*⁶

The above stanza speaks about how far Laxmi has been appeared before Shriya Chandaluni, Chandal by caste cutting across the tradition, the principles of Sree Mandira. Here elder brother Balaram

explains about Laxmi's arrival at a house of a *chandal* community who consists the *Sudra* order the lowest strata as far as *Varna* system is concerned. Generally the *Sudras* in medieval Odisha were treated as untouchables. As untouchables they were remained in outside of the village. The practice even today is continued in the rural areas of Odisha. The *Sudras* particularly the *Hadis*, *Kandarar*, *Domas*, *fisherman* and *washermen* are living at the end of the villages. So the Panchasakhas, particularly Balarama Dasa through *Lami Puran* protested the caste prejudices and tried to establish social justice. Simultaneously Laxmi without taking bath enters to Sree Mandira. In the words of Balaram, Sree Jgannatha ordered to Laxmi to leave Sree Mandira. It is because the arrival of Laxmi before Shirya was a great blunder for her. As a result goddess Laxmi decided to leave Sree Mandira, Sree Jagannatha and Balabhadra. The following stanza speaks about the caste structure of the medieval Odisah.

Jaa Laxmi thumbhare go au karya nahi

Dhikara bhahut kale mote badabhai.

Hadi dware thiba Laxmi thiba panadware

*Snana nakari pasucha deula bhitare.*⁷

Ultimately, Goddess Laxmi left the Sree Mandira, *roshaghara*, (Kitchen of Sree Jagannatha) husband Sree Jagannatha and elder brother Balarama. To promote the concept of women empowerment Balarama Dasa in *Laxmi puran* highlights the term *Stridharma* or *patibratadharm*. Every woman's final goal is to sacrifice everything for her husband and family members. The *Laxmi puran* of Balaram Dasa provides social, political and economic justice to the women in the male dominated society. It is mentioned in the following stanza

Sabadhan hei suna brahmanda gosain

Laxmidevi kahuchhanti prabhu mukha chanhi

Mohatule au jeun bharija aniba

Ei sabu alankara tahanku je deba

Munhi jauachhi hina arakhita hoi

Moha abhisap ghenah prabhubhabagrahi

Sate jadi surya Chandra honti atajata

Tumbhanku arna na milu ahe Jagannatha

Bara barasha jae tumbhe Daridra hoiba

Arna bastra jala je tumbhanku namiliba

Muhin chandaluni jebe tekidevi arna

Bhojana kariba tebe kaliyaganjan.

⁸

The above stanza speaks about how does Goddess Laxmi in a deep mourning give a curse to Sree Jagannatha and Balabhadra. Finally she left Sree Mandira, all the jewelry, the *ratna palanka* and the

comfortable life. From three kilometers away of Sree Mandira Goddess Laxmi with support of Biswakarma constructed a house with all sorts of amidst. With curse of Laxmi both Sree Jagannatha and Balabhadra spent twelve years in hardship and miseries. They moved from house to house in search of food. In their journey they have faced so many troubles, listened many vulgar words from the people. It is evident from the Laxmi Puran. They were very poorly treated by the commons. It is because of the upper caste dominance. At last they have reached at Laxmi's house for their survival. The explanation says about women empowerment. As history repeats itself the concept of women empowerment is traced back to the *Rig vedic* society in Indian context in general and medieval Odisha in particular.

After a long time Sree Jagannatha committed before Goddess Laxmi to obey the instruction of her as a social protest and to establish a caste and caste less society in medieval Odisha. Later on Sri Krishna Chaitanya has accelerated the process of social protest through *Namasankirtana*.. The following stanza highlights the social protest in a very meaningful manner.

Chandalu Brahman jae khiakhoi hebe

Samaste khaina hasta jale na dhoibe.

Hadirahastu Brahman chhadei khaibe

Brahman khai hastaku mundare pochhibe

Anna khai sarbe munde pochhuthibe hasta

Tebe bada deulaku jibi Jagannatha.⁹

In the history of the Panchasakha literature it is mentioned that the Panchasakhas are belong to five *Sampradaya* such as *Nimananda*, *Vishnuswami*, *Atibadi Madhwa* and *Ramananda*. The above *Sampradaya* was related to Achyutananda Dasa, Yasobanta Dasa, Jagannatha Dasa, Balarama Dasa, Ananta Dasa. Balaram Dasa in his poetic work like *Virat Gita* has mentioned about the concept Void in place of Puja and rituals. In the medieval Odisha the caste supremacy was reached at the pinnacle as far as the social structure is concerned. Regarding the concept of Sunya or Void he has mentioned in *Virat Gita*

Sunya Purusha Sunya Dehi

Sunya re Brahma Sina thai¹⁰

Similarly in *Brahmanda Bhugola* Balaram Dasa described the practice of worship is secondary the primary one is the bhakti and humanism. Therefore he has tried to purify the body mind and soul of the people of the medieval Odisha through *Brahmanda Bhugola*. The following stanza reveals that

Jekale more Sunya Rupa

Emante gala Koti Kalpa

Brahmand more Garbhe Hoi

Rahili Brahma rupa hoi¹¹

As far as humanism is concerned Balarama Dasa vehemently criticized the existing class and caste order. Hari Dasa was a Sudra by order. He was ill treated by the upper caste in the society. To break down the caste rigidity and complexities Balaram dasa could able to recite the Vedanta Tatwa or the Vedanta philosophy in the mouth of Hari Dasa. In the following stanza

Boile Hri Dasa Suna

Vedanta Sastra Bujhaina

Vipra nku Kaha Gnyana Bata

*Chhadu Ehankara Kapata.*¹²

The writings of Balarama Dasa in Particular and the Panchasakhas in general are the reflection of the liberal Humanism in the connotation like *Bahujana Hitaya and Bhaujana Sukhaya.*¹³

From the aforesaid discussion it is traced out that the presence of modern nation state or in the concept of Westphalia order, women also constitute half of the strength of the sovereignty. It is because of the social movements occurred in the pages of history from time to time. The *Laxmi puran* even today is highly adored in the nook and corner of Odisha. It is more pompous in the month of *Margashira* where the people of Odisha have celebrated a great festive occasion called *Manabasa* irrespective of castes, creed, colour above all the sectarian feelings. The *Laxmi puran* of Balarama Dasa not only highlights the social protest and caste prejudices but also depicts the responsibilities of women in the society as well as the notions of women empowerment. Many historians have been pointed out that the *Laxmi puran* is the way of women liberation. Therefore, the teachings and the morals of *Laxmi puran* bears a watermark in the social-cultural history of medieval Odisha.

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