

**SARALA MAHABARATA: A SYNTHESIS OF LITERATURE, HISTORY
AND GEOGRAPHY**

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In the history of mankind many great men have come and left their imprints in the sands of time but as a pioneer of Odia literature, story writer, social reformer Sarala Das was unique. Sarala Das has created literature based on a rich linguistic tradition, which is evident from the reading of the *Mahabharata*. So, there is no doubt that Sarala Das's literature is based on a solid foundation. By the time Sarala Das composed the *Mahabharata*, the Odia language had become well known. Writers and researchers in the history of Odia literature have stated that Sarala Das's *Mahabharata* is a synthesis of literature, history, and geography. Through intense reading we can trace the synthesis. Sarala Das's *Mahabharata* is rich in tradition, culture, history, and geography. While studying Sarala Das's *Mahabharata*, researchers explored historical facts like the epitome of the name, the state and the war and geographical facts like location of different areas, the rivers, the hills, the lakes, and so on. In ancient times, scholars sought the help of different literature works (Granthas) to estimate history and geography. Although ancient mythological literature and Granthas were not considered as absolute proofs, there is no doubt that contemporary truths and facts were concealed through poetic imagination. So, it is possible to assess the social, cultural and historical sources by using various mythological texts, poems and books. There were many contemporary events recorded in mythological and literary fictions. So many researchers have tried to know the ancient geography and history of Odisha through *Madalapanji* and ancient *Puranas*. But in the composition of the *Puranas*, rather than the traditional enthusiasm and inspiration, the desire to express oneself in the beautiful language was more intense. *Sarala Mahabharata* is basically a literary text, which was born out of the necessity of the challenges and problems of that time. Although Sarala Das composed his poetry following the Sanskrit *Mahabharata*, but his signature of simplicity is very evident in it. This simplicity is due to contemporaneous historical events and geographical descriptions. Contemporaneous history and geography have revealed themselves in the poetry of Sarala Das. Contemporaneous kingdoms, their wars, socio-cultural life, spiritual environment are basic examples of *Sarala Mahabharata*. So, *Sarala Mahabharata* is a combination of literature, history, and geography. Sarala Das appeared at a remarkable time in the history of Odisha and the great epic of Odia *Mahabharata* derived from his writings. A historical, political, and cultural picture of India as a whole has been drawn in it. For his unique interpretation of Odia *Mahabharata*, Sarala Das is not only considered as a poet, but also remembered as a historian and geographer of Odisha.

Sarala's Contemporary India

The political studies of fifteenth century show that the whole northern India was ruled by Muslims. India has been attacked by various rulers for different purposes in different eras. When some rulers were trying to expand their empire, others were attacking India to propagate their own religion. The Hunas invaded and occupied Magadha in the late fifth century. Their kingdom

extended from northwest of India to Malab, Ganges and Yamuna Valley. The kings of Gaud ruled over the north and west of Bengal in the late sixth century. The kingdoms of Kannauj and Moukhari ruled over Doab (the narrow lands in between Ganga and Yamuna) and Sthaneswar, Pushyabhuti and in the east of the Mahendra Giri Mountains (now in Odisha). Prior to the Muslim conquest, India was ruled by the chief rulers of the Moukhari, Pushyabhuti, Chalukya, Pandya, Pallava, Rashtrakut, Chandela, Tomar, Gurjar, Pratihari and Chauhan dynasties. They are basically ruled over the states of Bihar, Bengal, Kaunaj, Rajasthan, Gujarat, Malab, Sinhal, Mysore, Tamil Nādu, Andhra Pradesh Kerala and Odisha. But by the beginning of the eleventh century, Muslims had invaded northern India. At this point, the political situation of India took completely new turn. However, when the Muslims invaded, the states of India were hostile to each other. They did not dare to unite in order to protect themselves. In the meantime, the Muslims were conquered the great states of northern India. In the first part of the eleventh century, India was attacked by Mahmud Ghaznavi. Although he invaded seventeen times, he never tried to establish Muslim empire in India. But he destroyed the Hindu temples and plundered its immense splendour. After the assassination of Mohammad Ghori, his slave Qutbuddin Ibaq (1206 to 1210) established the capital in Lahore, declaring himself to be the independent Sultan of India. Muslim rule began in India from the time of Qutbuddin Ibaq. Poet Sarala Das writes beautifully about all the states, were existed in northern India before the Muslim rule. We can trace the historical and geographical facts from his writing.

ଗୌଡ଼ ଗାର୍ଜନ ତିହୁଡ଼ି ଭୋଗାନ୍ ମହଲାର,
କାମାକ୍ଷି ବଂଗଳା ଆଉ ବେଲବଲିପୁର
କ୍ଷୀର, ମାଳବ ଗଂଜର ପୁଣି ହିଁ ସୌରାଷ୍ଟ୍ର କାଶୀ,
କଉଶିକ କୁବୁଜ ଆଉ ମହାରାଷ୍ଟ୍ର
ଛତ୍ର ବିଛତ୍ର କୋଶଳପୁର ବାରସ୍ୱତୀ,
ନେପାଳ ଅରବିଂଦ ଯେ ରାଜା (ରାଜ୍ୟ) ଗୌଡ଼ ଇତି ।
Gowda Garjan Tihudi Votan Mahlar,
Kamakshi Bangla and Belabalipur
Khira, Malab Gunjar and Saurashtra, Kashi,
Kaushik Kubuj and Maharashtra
Chhatra Bichhatra Koshalpur Baraswati,
Nepala Arabinda je Rajya Gouda iti¹

Dr. Krishnachandra Panigrahi defines the state of *Gaud* as Bangadesh in a narrow sense, while broadly identifying Bangadesh as Saraswat (East Punjab), Kanyakubuj (Ganges Basin) Mithila (North Bihar) and Utkal (North Odisha). He identified Garjanukas Ghazni. India's geographical boundary is the eastern Punjab from Odisha, which Sarala Das calls Gaud, and uses the name Garjan to include the western Punjab and the north-western border. He also referred to the entire foothills of the Himalayas as Tihudi. He describes Kamakshi country as Assam, Bangalaaas East Bengal, Bellabalipura as Mecca, Moumansingh, Nuakhali, Chittagong, then Khiraas Mastya, Malaba as modern Madhya Pradesh's Malla area, Gunjar as Kalinjar, Sourashta as Kathiawada of Gujrat, Kashi as Baranasi, KousikaKubuja as Kanyakubja, Maharashta as Mumbai, Arabindaas Sikkim. Sarala Das has been able to map the geography of northern India

¹ Das, Sarla. Mahabharata, *Udyoga Parva*.

in just six lines. No ancient scripture has such a perfect geographical description. The geographical picture given by *Sarala Das* throughout North India is not a geographical picture of the *Mahabharata* period; it is a geographical picture of the pre-Muslim era of north India.²

The pre-Sarala life was mainly characterized by four geographical boundaries. 1. The Himalayas (Kashmir, Nepal and Assam). 2- Indus Ganges Valley (Sindhu, Malab, Gandhar, Kannauj, Gujarat, Ujayani, Avanti, Ajmer, Chedi, Kamboj, Magadha, Banga, Kalinga etc). 3- Southern coastal areas (Devgiri, Malkhed or Manyaksheta, Batapi or Badami, Kalyani, Vengi, Warangal and Mysore. 4- South coastal areas (Kanchi, Tanjor, Madurai, Malabar, Dwarasamudra, etc.).³ At the time of Muslim rule there was lack of friendship and trust among people. People were fighting and quarrelling all the time. There was no bonding, love and affection among the same family. At that time the main motto was to occupy the power and authority. That's why people never condemned Alauddin Khilji and Muhammad bin Tughlaq for their patricide. Even Qutbuddin Ibaq, Iltutmish and Balban were considered the emperor instead of slave and Razia Begum considered one of the greatest sultans. Whoever won the power, whether male or female, Arab or Persian, Hindu or Afghan, was considered the ruler. No other law was enforced.⁴

In 11th century Mahmud attacked and plundered India 17 times but failed to establish Muslim empire here. The war was like an addiction to the kings of that time. Even the king of Odisha *Kapilendradev* died on horseback during the war.⁵ In 1173, the rulers of the small feudal states of Ghor captured Ghazni. However, Muhammad Ghori invaded and occupied Lahore in 1186. Although he was defeated by the Rajput king of Delhi Prithvirajin 1191, he succeeded to defeat all the Rajputs and conquered the entire Ganga Yamuna Valley in 1192. After his death in 1206 the slave dynasty was founded by Qutbuddin Ibaq in India. After Ibaq's death Iltutmish succeeded him and then his daughter Razia Sultana became the empress. After ascending the throne of Delhi, Razia launched the *Malab* campaign in 1236. Then Naseeruddin and Giyasuddin Balban one by one succeeded Razia. But they did not advance to the conquer the other parts of India. But Allauddin Khilji of the Khilji dynasty captured *Devgiri* in 1296. With the help of his commander-in-chief, *Kafur*, he again occupied *Devgiri*, *Warangal* (present-day Telangana), the capital of Hoysala of *Dwarasamudra*, the epicentre of the Pandya state Madurai and the southern tip of Kanyakumari. After his death his son Qutbuddin or Mubarak Saha sent his army chief Khasar Khan to conquer the South. He conquered Madurai and Telangana and looted large quantities of wealth. Then he killed Mubarak Saha and became the sultan of Delhi. However, Giyasuddin, a ruler of Punjab killed Khasar Khan and established Tughlaq dynasty in Delhi.⁶ After him his son Mohammad bin Tughlaq and then Firoz Tughlaq ascended the throne. Firoz brutally enslaved Hindu and Shia Muslims. After his death Tughlaq dynasty shivered in civil war for the throne. Taking advantage of this, Timur invaded India and plundered Delhi. After Tughlaq the Syed dynasty ruled over Delhi from 1413 to 1451. The three sultanates of the dynasty, Mubarak Shah, Mohammad Shah, and Alam Shah ruled the kingdom, but did not

²Panigarahi, Krishnachandra. *Sarala Sahitya Aitihāsika Chitra*, Prajatantra Press, Cuttack, 1989, p. 101.

³Das, Suryanarayan. *Sarala Mahabharata Rajnaitika Mulyabodh*, Berhampur, 1990 p. 117

⁴Das, Suryanarayan. *Sarala Mahabharata Rajnaitika Mulyabodh*, Berhampur, 1990 p. 117-118.

⁵Panigarahi, Krishnachandra. *Sarala Sahitya Aitihāsika Chitra*, Prajatantra Press, Cuttack, 1989, p. 2.

⁶Chandra, S. *Medieval India: From Sultanat to the Mughals*. 2 vols. Har Anand, New Delhi, 2010, (4th edition).

achieve much. Later, Bahalol Khan, Sikander Shah and Ibrahim Lodi of the Lodi dynasty ruled over Delhi. They were all opportunists and harassed people without giving importance to welfare. So, there was always unrest among the people. As a result, Babur defeated Ibrahim Lodi at Panipath in 1526 and laid the foundations of the Mughal Empire.⁷

Sarala Das was born in the midst of this political crisis in the country. India's political and geographical environment was not good at that time. The vast empire of Kannauj, Kabul, Punjab were destroyed. Smaller states, such as Nepal, Munger, and Konkan were weak. In Delhi, the rule of the weak sultanate regime was disrupted. As a result, many independent states have sprung up. In the southwest of India kingdoms like Bahamani, Gujrat and Vijaynagar and in northern part kingdoms like Kashmir, Mewar and Khandesh were emerged stronger. The Muslim Sultans of Delhi ruled for a short period in South India. Bahmani and Vijay Nagar were known as the most powerful empires in South India. The capital of the Bahmani was Bidar. At the time of Mohammad bin Tughlaq the commander-in-chief of the rebel amirs of south India Abul Muzaffar Allauddin Bahaman established the Bahmani Empire in 1347. This is the beginning of the Bahamian Sultan dynasty. The state stretched from Odisha in the east to the Arabian Sea in the west and from the Tapti River in the north to the Krishna Godavari River in the south. In the south of the Bahamani kingdom a Hindu kingdom named Vijaya Nagar flourished in 1336. Bahmani Empire was completely dismantled in 1528. All the rulers of this empire were oppressive and anti-Hindu. As a result, the Hindus were being persecuted and forced to convert to Islam. Ahmad Shah Bahmania vicious Sunni ruler looted and sacked the city-state of Vijayanagar. He massacred 20 thousand Hindus and organized a huge celebration and feast on that day.⁸ Even though the Bahmani kingdom was a large state, it was not free from imperial interference. As a result, after 1518 the sultanate broke up into five independent kingdoms named as Bijapur, Golkunda, Ahmednagar, Bidar, and Berar. Bijapur was the largest state among them. The Vijayanagara Hindu Empire was always enmity with these five independent states. Similarly, Golkunda was the second largest Sultanate. The Sultans of the QutbSahi dynasty built a huge fort at the top of a hill. Hindus were not persecuted here like in other Muslim empires and they were quite influential. Although Gujarat was in the west of India, it was ruled by prosperous Muslim rulers. Ahmad Shah I was the most famous among the Sultans of Gujarat and he established his capital at Ahmedabad. Ahmed Shah's contribution in making Gujarat a powerful state is undeniable. He successfully fought the Rajputs and received three-fourths of the land from their landlords as a conditional donation. After him, Mahmud Beghar expanded the geographical boundaries of Gujarat during his reign. He occupied the forts of Kutch, Kathiawad and Pindar. During his time, the Portuguese made Gujarat weak by practicing pirates. During the reign of Harihara II (1347-1404), Vijayanagara kingdom included Mahisur, Kannada, Trichinnapalli, Kanjibaram Lordati. Debaraya II extended its geographical boundaries up to Sinhala. After Mallikarjuna, the son of Debaraya II, strife arose in the empire. From the time of Katra Salva Narsingh, the Vijayanagara state was engaged in war for two hundred years, but its geographical boundaries did not change. Not only as a huge Hindu Empire, the city of Vijayanagara was also known everywhere for its governance, literature, and architecture. The king of the empire was called 'Maharaj' but all the power vested on Mantri or

⁷Parida, BishnabCharan. *History of India*, Moscow, 1984, pp. 242-268.

⁸Das, Suryanarayan. *Sarala MahabharatarareRajnitikaMulyabodh*, Berhampur, 1990 p. 121.

Mahapradhan. There was a huge national council under the king. Its members were Mahapradhan, Samantha Bhuswami and the merchant community. They were changed every two to three years. Their main job was tax collection. The provinces in the state were divided into districts. A civil servant was appointed for the administration of the district. Land revenue was the king's main income. Amar Nayaks or royal servants used to take nine-tenths of the crops produced by the farmers and give them to the king. They had commercial relations with the Portuguese, and they import horses from them.⁹ According to Krishnachandra Panigarahi, just as King Gangadhar II Devaraya and his son Mallikarjuna were contemporaries, poet Saraladas was also a contemporary of Gajapati Kapileswar and his son Purusottam dev.¹⁰ So, the poet Sarala Das was aware of the conquests of the kingdoms, the system of governance, the mastery of the war journeys of Kapiland Dev and Purusottam dev. So, he has made a beautiful harmony of all these in his *Mahabharata*. Apart from that, the geographical name environment has also been adequately presented in his *Mahabharata*.

Sarala's contemporary Odisha

The ancient geography of Odisha has gone through many evolutions. Over time Odisha's boundaries have changed in terms of geography and historical background. The ability of the administrators and the succession of states have led to the rise and fall of the kingdoms of Kalinga, Utkal, Odra, etc. over time. Odisha was originally known as the land of Utkal or Odra. It is clear from many ancient scriptures and Puranas that the geographical boundaries of ancient Utkala extended from Ganga to Godavari till the middle of the 7th century.¹¹ The fact that the ancient name of Odisha is Utkal, or Kalinga is widely described in Puranas and legends. There is a lot of ancient evidence that for some time Utkala was under Kalinga. The Mahabharata, Raghuvansa, Niladri Mahodaya, Matsya Purana and many foreign visitors had detailed descriptions of the state of ancient Utkala. It is said in Kapil Samhita that

ବର୍ଷାଣାଂ ଭାରତ ଶ୍ରେଷ୍ଠା ଦେଶାମୁକ୍ତଂ ଶୁଭ୍ରତଃ

ଉକ୍ତାସ୍ୟ ସମୋଦେଶା ଦେଶୋ ନାସ୍ତି ମହୀତଳେ ।

‘Barsanang Bharat Shrestha Deshamutkala Shrutah

Utkalasya Samodesha Desho Nasti Mahitale.

According to the ‘Matsya Purana’, the kingdom of Utkala was named after Utkala, the son of Sudyumna, the grandson of Manu. The Mahakabi Kalidasa mentions the Kalinga as Mahodadhipati in his Raghuvamsa. In The Mahayan Buddhist book of Arya Manjusri, the coastal sea of Odisha is called the Kalinga Sea. By the 4th century BC, the name of Kalinga had already established itself as a powerful state. But the name of Odisha was documented in 13th or 14th century.¹² Sarala Das was a contemporary of Suryavamsi Kapilendra Dev. The Ganga dynasty was established in Odisha before Suryavamsi. The borders of Odisha were spread from Ganga to Godavari and for their good governance the Odisha reached the top of extreme excellence in the fields of art, culture, and architecture. The Ganga Empire was divided into different Mahamandals and each Mahamandal was ruled under a Mahaganaka or Mahamandalaka. And all the mandalas were divided into Bhoga, Visaya and villages. During

⁹Sastri, K. A. Nilakanta. *A History of South India*, New Delhi, 1976, (4th edition).

¹⁰Panigarahi, Krishnachandra. *Sarala Sahitya Aitihasya Chitra*, Prajatantra Press, Cuttack, 1989, p. 32.

¹¹Ganguly, D.K. *Historical Geography and Dynastic History of Orissa*, Calcutta, 1975, p.55.

¹²Behra, Dr. K.S. *Glimpses of Orissa's Glorious Past, Indian Geography Congress Souvenir*, 1993. p. 3.

this period, one-sixth of the grain produced was fixed as royal share. The revenue was invested in education, religious activities, road construction and welfare of the people. The society was still dominated by Brahmins, and they were provided with disposable lands in the form of donation. At this time, despite the influence of Shaivism, Shakta and Buddhism in Odisha, the worship of lord Jagannath gained prominence.¹³The long-term rule of the Ganga dynasty tumbled and ended due to the heavy attacks of enemies from all sides of Odisha. Especially the Muslims attack from the north and the weak rule of the last king led to the downfall of the Ganga dynasty. At this juncture Kapilendra dev took over the crown and established Suryavamsi rule in Odisha.

Historical facts are above the stories, legends and hypothetical facts heard during Kapilendra dev's succession to the throne. Some admits that Kapilendra dev was appointed as a minister to the last king of the Ganga dynasty, while others mention that he was an ordinary cavalry soldier.¹⁴Historians have admitted that Kapilendra dev ascended the throne in 1435 AD. This period was a great period of political and cultural development of Odisha. Some critics estimate the period of Sarala Das as earlier than 1435 AD, although there is sufficient documentary evidence that Sarala Das was a contemporary of Kapilendra dev.

Sarala Das's *Mahabharata* not only depicts Kapilendra dev, but also depicts various historical scenes of the reign of Gajapati Purusottam dev (1467-1497). In this regard, Dr. Krishnachandra Panigarahi mentions that *Sarala Mahabharata* also contains historical pictures of the reign of Kapileshwar Dev Gajapati (1435-1467) and Purusottam dev Gajapati (1467-1497). Sarala Das has mentioned the name of Kapileshwar Gajapati in the beginning of the book and the name of Purusottam dev has been revealed as Narbali Narshreshtra Purusottam in *Mahabharata's* "Udyoga Parva". Therefore, there is no room for doubt that *Sarala Mahabharata* was composed during Kapilendra dev and Purusottam dev reign. Various examples of Kapilendra dev's contemporaneous conquests, wars, devolution, and reigns can be found in *Sarala Mahabharata*.¹⁵Sarala Das mentioned in *Mahabharata* that

କଳିକାଳ ଧୂଂସିଣ ଭୋଗେସେ କୋଟି ପୂଜା
ପ୍ରଳମ୍ବିତେ ଖଟଇ ଶ୍ରୀ କପିଳେଶ୍ଵର ମହାରାଜା ।
Kalikal dhwansina bhoge se koti puja

Pralambite khatai shree kapileswar Maharaja. (Adi Parva)

The poet mentions Kapileshwar (Kapilendra dev) in the context of providing information about his birthplace and the abode of Goddess Sarala. There was ample evidence that Kapileswar was Kapilendra dev. Most of the stone inscriptions of Kapilendra dev mentioned the names like Pratap Kapileshwar, Pratap Kapileshwar Deva, Kapileshwarupar Sashan.so, the differences of opinion between the critics regarding the difference between Kapileshwar and Kapilendra dev have been resolved. In *Sarala Das's* epic *Mahabharata*, Kapilendra dev's conquest and the real picture of war were depicted. So, Sarala Das has undoubtedly been accepted as a contemporary of Kapilendra dev. The picture of Kapilendra dev's conquests in the whole of the South India depicted in the *Mahabharata*. Many contemporary historical pictures and events are vividly depicted in it. Kapilendra dev did not come from outside Odisha like other kings before him. He

¹³Das, Suryanarayan. *Sarala MahabharatarareRajnitikaMulyabodh*, Berhampur, 1990 p. 106.

¹⁴Mishra, Krupasindhu. *Utkalaitihasa*, Books and Books, Cuttack, 1979, p. 78

¹⁵Panigarahi, Krishnachandra. *Sarala SahityaraAitihaska Chitra*, Prajatantra Press, Cuutack, 1989, p. 205.

was a son of the soil, and it is clear from the stone inscription of Gopinathpur, Odisha.¹⁶At the time of Kapilendra dev's ascension to the throne, some part of Odisha had already been occupied by both internal and external enemies. In 1436 AD at the beginning of his rule he announced a concession on salt duty for the welfare of the people. To counter the attacks of Banga Sultan Ahmad Shah, he appointed Gopinath Mahapatra as a loyal representative and himself tended to threaten various feudal lords. Between 1437 to 1443 AD, he suppressed Gangas of Khemendi, Sailodbhava of Nandpura, Matsya of OBadhi and Bishnubarah of Panchadhara region and extended his empire up to Visakhapatna. As a result, the Reddy kingdom of Rajamahendri was withdrawn from the Sinachal region and the path of Kapilendra dev's southern campaign became smooth. He defeated the Muslims of Banga and Malab in the north and started a campaign against the south kingdoms. In all records related to Kapilendra dev up to 1448 AD, he is described only as Gaudeshwar, so there is no doubt that his southern campaign must have happened after 1448 AD. In 1450 A.D., he was crowned with the title of Kalbargeshwar and Nabakoti Karnata.¹⁷After the death of the king of Vijayanagara Debaraya II, taking advantage of Mallikarjuna's weakness Kapilendra dev conquered Rajamahendri in 1446. Later he appointed Raghudeva Narendra Mahapatra as the administrator of Rajamahendri. In 1448, two administrators of Killing Dandapata, Madhukeswar Sandhivigraha and Mahapatra Shri Sasmal were given the responsibility of managing the Srikurram temple. During this period, Banga's Gaud country was also separated from the Muslim kingdom and came under Kalinga rule. Then Kapilendra dev captured Kondavidu fort in 1454 A.D. and appointed Ganadeva Rautraya as the administrator. He extended his dominion till Krishna-Godavari region. He also captured the Bahmani Empire's Rathakonda, Debarkonda and Warangal and took possession of them under the leadership of his son Hambiranka. In 1458 AD he defeated Bahmani Sultan and occupied the Kalbarg (Gulberg) fort. He captured nine forts in South in that year.

Later, Udayagiri in 1462 AD, Chandragiri state in 1464 AD was included in the empire of Kapilendra dev. Hambirank's son Kumar Kapileswar Mahapatra was appointed as the administrator of Chandragiri, Tiruchillapally, Tiruvarur, Padaibidu, Ushabadi and Viluduand Lamipathi. In the same year 1464 AD, Kapilendra dev came to Puri for the worship of Shri Jagannath. Again in 1466 AD, he marched to the banks of the Krishna to suppress the internal rebellions that arose in the subordinate states of the South. He died there in 1467 AD.¹⁸Kapilendra dev was a good administrator as well as a leader and a lover of Sanskrit.

In 1437 AD, Kapilendra engraved the following declaration in the entrance of Bhubaneswar temple. The vassal kings will work for the benefit of their lord, and they will always be on the right path. They will never commit iniquity. If they behave unjustly towards their lord, they will be expelled from the kingdom and all their property will be confiscated. This announcement was made in the presence of Dharmaguru Basu Mahapatra and Bhubaneswar Mahapatra.¹⁹ During Kapilendra dev reign architecture, literature and social life reached the highest level of excellence. It is known from history that in 1447 AD, Kapilendra dev attacked Reddy kingdom and destroyed Kundabidu fort. We can find this event in the writings of Sarala Das in "Sabha

¹⁶Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal, Vol. XIX, 1901, p. 175.

¹⁷Mahatab, Dr.Harekrushna. *History of Odisha*, (2nd edition), Cuttack Student's Store, Cuttack, 1981, p. 5.

¹⁸Mukherjee, Pavat. *The History of the Gajapati Kings of Orissa*, Kitab Mahal, Cuttack, 1981, pp. 33-97.

¹⁹Mahatab, Dr.Harekrushna, *History of Odisha*, (2ndedition), Cuttack Student's Store, Cuttack, 1981, p. 10-11.

parva” of *Mahabharata*. Here he mentioned Pandu Son Bhima’s westward journey and war with Kundabidu, which took place during Kapilendra dev’s reign. In the matter of Arjuna inviting the kings of different countries for the Rajsavaya Yajna described in the Sarala *Mahabharata*’s Sabha Parva, a glimpse of contemporary history and geography has risen. King Dardasena and Jamagoshta, who were defeated in a war with Arjun, were Humayun and his general Jalal khan. In the *Mahabharata*, Brahmasahi is the Bahmani kingdom and Arungiri is Udayagiri. The story of Kapilendra dev's defeat of Bahmani Sultan is hidden in this context. The Amarchud mountain described in the *Mahabharata* is the Devarkonda fort. PundrikBasudeva, the king of Karbirpur is none other than Mallikarjuna, the king of the Vijayanagar kingdom. According to the Historians point of view that there was a history of the conflict of Gajapati of Odisha with the then king of Vijayanagar in the various quotes of Odia *Mahabharata*. They fought with each other due to the expansion of the kingdom and the Shaiva-Vaishnava conflict. Mallikarjuna the king of Vijayanagar was described as Pundrik Basudeva in the *Mahabharata*. The kings of Vijayanagar were basically Shaivas and the kings of Odisha were devotees of Lord Jagannath or Vishnu. The incident described by Madalapanji also coincides with this incident. In Madala Panji, Kapilendra dev's state victory was mentioned as Kundameru gale 21 ankeMalikakuMaile.²⁰

ସୂର୍ଯ୍ୟବଂଶ ରାଜା ଆଦି କରି ଋତୁପୂର୍ଣ୍ଣ ନୃପତି

ପଶୁ ରାଜାଙ୍କୁ ସେ ଖଟାନ୍ତି ଅନୁକ୍ରମେ

ଗଙ୍ଗ ବଂଶିକ ଯେ ଭୀଷ୍ମ ମହାରଥୁ

ମାଗି ଆଣି ଥାଏ ସେ ଚଳନ୍ତି ପ୍ରତ୍ୟକ୍ଷାଂଶକତି (ଆଦିପର୍ବ/ପୃ.୭୦)

We can trace many historical facts in the Sabha Parva of *Mahabharata*.

ଯଦନିକ ବୋଲି ଯେବଣ ରାଜବର

ତେଲଂଗ ସେନ ନୃପତି ବ୍ରାହ୍ମଣ ଅବତାର

ଯଦନିକ ନୃପତି ସେ ସଂଗ୍ରାମେ ଶକତି (ସଭାପର୍ବ)

Kapilendra dev's title of Navkoti Karnat Adhiswara is also mentioned in Banaparva as ‘ନବକୋଟି କର୍ଣ୍ଣାଟର ଅଟଳ ସେ ଭୋଗୀ’ (ବନପର୍ବ ପୃ.୫୨) ‘Navakoti Karnatar Atai Se Vogii’ (Banaparva p. 52).

As Sarala Das's period was included in the reign of both Kapilendra and Purusottam, the *Sarala Mahabharata* also depicts the victory of Purusottam (Narbali). Most of Sarala Das's life span was spent during the reign of Purusottam. It is proved from the records that Purusottam dev ascended the throne in 1467 AD after the death of Kapilendra dev. There are many debates among historians regarding Purusottam dev’s succession, although there is no doubt that he was one of the sons of Kapilendra dev.²¹ There have been various diplomacy and conspiracies in the dynasties throughout the ages to get the royal throne. There are many examples of this in the Purana scriptures as well. However, despite all this, there is no doubt that Purusottam dev became the king of Odisha as Kapilendra dev’s successor. After Kapilendra dev's death the Kanchi king Salva Narasingh started his campaign to capture Udayagiri in 1468. To save the kingdom Purusottam dev started his south campaign and defeated Salva Narasimha. In this context, the legend of Kachhi-Kaveri war and Padmavati story is notable. Apart from this battle of Kanchhi, the invasion of the Bahmani kingdom by Purusottam dev is also very significant. There were frequent wars, defeats, and internecine struggles within the rulers of the Bahmani

²⁰Mohanty, Artaballava, Madala Panji, Prchi Samiti, Friends Publisher, Cuttack, 1940, p. 44.

²¹Mahatab, Dr.Harekrushna.*History of Odisha*, (2nd edition), Cuttack Student’s Store, Cuttack, 1981, p. 20.

kingdom. Purusottam *dev* was defeated by Bahmani in the early stage, but later he occupied the middle regions of Godavari and Krishna River and Kondabidu by expelling the Bahmanis. Then in 1489 he also conquered Guntur district of Vijayanagar and Kachchi.²² Like Kapilendra dev, Purusottam dev was also a devotee of literature and religion. His reign was often marked by many wars and conflicts, but above all he showed respect for the national character and glory of Odisha.²³ In summary Sarala Das's contemporary historical and political picture of Odisha was full of struggle. The king of that time was worshiped as a symbol of national pride. Poets, scholars, Brahmins were highly praised in the courts of the kings. Although Sarala Das was not a court poet, he was associated with the court. Some critics have also portrayed him as a good soldier of the Utkal army. The contemporary political and socio-cultural picture of Odisha is drawn in the poetry of Sarala Das, enriched by direct experiences and feelings. That is why no one has any hesitation in considering Sarala Das as a historian of Odisha. In *Sarala Mahabharata*, one must be amazed to see the direct and indirect description of contemporary kings, countries, and wars.

Arjuna Vijaya Kale se Salura rajye
Veer Tamak nishane dhola adi baje (Svaparva p-154)
Udayagiri Bolina parbata gotea
Se parbate bije kale jai dhananjaya (Svaparva p. 155)
Setharuu prayan kale Partha Birbar
Vijaya Mandala bole ekai nagar (Svaparva p. 15).
ଅର୍ଜୁନ ବିଜୟ କାଳେ ସେ ଶାଲୁର ରାଜ୍ୟେ
ବୀର ତମକ ନିଶାନ ଭୋଲ ଆଦି ବାଜେ । (ସଭାପର୍ବ ପୃ-୧୫୪)
ଉଦୟଗିରି ବୋଲିଣ ପର୍ବତ ଗୋଟିଏ
ସେ ପର୍ବତେ ବିଜେ କଲେ ଯାଇ ଧନଞ୍ଜୟ । (ସଭାପର୍ବ ପୃ-୧୫୫)
ସେଠାରୁ ପ୍ରୟାଗ କଲେ ପାର୍ଥ ବୀରବର
ବିଜୟ ମଣ୍ଡଳ ବୋଲି ଏକଇ ନଗର (ସଭାପର୍ବ ପୃ-୧୫)

Sarala Das paints a picture of the political history of the entire Odisha in the context of Arjuna's victory over many kingdoms through Rajsavaya Yanjya. Evidence of this can be found in the names of Salu, Udayagiri and Vijay Nagar.

The Role of Sarala Mahabharata in the Tradition of Geography

The antiquity of geography is like the primitiveness of man. The necessity of geography is indispensable for human environment, social security, food, shelter, and habitation. Since time immemorial humans have been concerned about the geography of their surroundings.

Sarala Das was not originally a geographer, nor did he have the opportunity to study geography. However, many historical and geographical facts were depicted directly and indirectly in *Sarala Mahabharata*. The unique talent of portraying *Mahabharata*'s characters in their contemporary historical and geographical background in terms of stories and events made Sarala Das exceptional from others. The geographical picture of India and Odisha was vividly depicted in it. The history of Odisha was depicted in a living geography in it. It will remain a national treasure

²²Mahatab, Dr.Harekrushna. *History of Odisha*, (2nd edition), Cuttack Student's Store, Cuttack, 1981, p. 24.

²³Panigarahi, Krishnachandra. *History of Orissa*, Kitab Mahal, Cuttack, 1981, p. 259.

of Odisha for ages.²⁴The book contains the names of ancient countries, states, cities, places of pilgrimage, rivers, hills, lakes, etc. Since many places have been eroded over time, it may be difficult to identify them now. However, the names of many places have been slightly misplaced, although historians and researchers have managed to identify them.

Some of the stanza names are retrieved below.

Name as described in *Sarala Mahabharata*, changed name

Odarashtra	Odisha
Banarashi	Banasir, Bidanasi Cuttack
Kankavati Nagar	Kankapurof JhankadPragana
Jankherpur	Jhankad
Yamuna Nagar	Modern Jonpur
Ujjani Nagar	Ujjain
<i>Kannauj</i>	Konaj
Kanchi	Kanjibaram
Chora Mandala	Chola Desha
Jajmandala	Jajpur
Kundi Nagar	Kundabidu Fort

Despite all the descriptions of geographical and historical places in *Sarla Mahabharata*, there were few names the geographical location of which is difficult to determine. They may be fictional like Hiranyak, Padmadala, Khanjan, Anuhar, Bhimavar, Nilachakor, Arani, Kundal, Sursiddhaetc. The names of many rivers described in the *Sarala Mahabharata* are also indicative of Sarala Das's geographical knowledge. They are the Ganga, Gomti, Narmada, Baitarani, Kaveri, Chandrabhaga, Reba, Ganduki, Brahmani, Ratanchira, Bakangi, Kharsuan, Mahanadi etc. Sarala Das has also mentioned some fictitious rivers name like Mekhali, Hira, Gauri, Gautami, Kanaya, Vaseni, Adyabari, Vijaya, Gupta, Haraidyan, Andhuni etc. Similarly, the names of hills are one of the geographical features of *Sarala Mahabharata*. These are Maninag, Bindhya, Dhabli, Reivatik, Mahendra, Panchadhara, Kapilas etc. Like fictional rivers he also described fictional mountains in his *Mahabharata* such as Surnashak, Nag, Bidnag, Sundar, Madandhar, Anu, Tiran, Kurangi, Shabad, Udak etc.

Sarala Das's literary interpretation was enriched by historical and geographical consciousness. His success in interweaving with eyewitness accounts and selective introduction of contemporary history establishes him as a gifted poet. *Sarala Mahabharata* is originally a Puranic text and literature plays a very vital role. Sarala was a polymath scholar and experienced. He composed the *Mahabharata*, inspired by his national language and culture. As a result, the *Mahabharata* is a triple genre of literature, history, and geography. The role of *Sarala Mahabharata* is important in the tradition of geography. Although not a purely geographical text, it contains geographical data. There is no doubt that despite the lack of geographical knowledge and opportunity, Sarala Das's scientific perspective and extraordinary application of geographical knowledge have made him known as a successful geographer.

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²⁴Mohanty, Dr. Bansidhara. *Odia Sahityaraltihasa*, (4th edition), Friends' Publishers, Cuttack, 2020.p. 232.

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