

REFLECTION OF ODISSI MUSIC IN SARALA MAHABHARAT

Dr.Dheeraj Kumar Mohapatra
Associate Professor ,Deptt. of Vocal Music
(Odissi Vocal), Utkal University Of Culture ,Bhubaneswar(Odisha)

ABSTRACT

The Sarala Mahabharata, composed in the 15th century by the eminent poet Sarala Das, is one of the most remarkable literary creations in the history of Odia literature. Though it is based on the ancient Indian epic Mahabharata, Sarala Das did not simply translate the Sanskrit text. Instead, he recreated the epic in a distinctly Odia cultural context, blending the grand narrative with the social life, religious beliefs, artistic traditions, and cultural values of medieval Odisha. As a result, Sarala Mahabharata serves not only as a literary masterpiece but also as an important cultural document that reflects the vibrant artistic life of the region. Among the various aspects of Odishan culture represented in the text, the presence of music stands out prominently, revealing the rich musical fragrance of Odisha during the medieval period. Music has always been deeply rooted in the cultural and spiritual life of Odisha. In Sarala Mahabharata, references to musical practices appear in different contexts such as religious rituals, royal celebrations, social gatherings, and dramatic storytelling. These references provide valuable insights into the musical environment that existed in Odisha during the 15th century. Sarala Das portrays scenes where singers, instrumentalists, and performers participate in various events, suggesting that music was not merely a form of entertainment but an essential part of everyday life. The epic narratives themselves often seem to be shaped in a manner suitable for musical recitation, indicating that storytelling and singing were closely connected in traditional Odia culture.

KEY WORDS: Epic, Odia, Culture ,Sarala, Mahabharat, Spiritual, Jagannath, Text ,Devotion.

One of the most important aspects of the musical fragrance found in Sarala Mahabharata is its strong association with devotion and temple culture. In medieval Odisha, temples functioned as important centers of artistic activity where music, dance, and poetry flourished together. Devotional singing formed an integral part of temple rituals and religious ceremonies. The worship of Lord Jagannath at the sacred Jagannath Temple played a significant role in nurturing these artistic traditions. Musical offerings in the form of devotional songs and ritual performances were regularly presented as a part of temple worship. The atmosphere of devotion and spirituality described in Sarala Mahabharata reflects this long-standing tradition where music served as a medium for expressing religious emotion and spiritual dedication.

The text also hints at the existence of a developed musical structure during that time. Though Sarala Das was primarily a poet, his descriptions suggest familiarity with musical forms, rhythmic patterns, and performance traditions that were prevalent in the society of his time. The presence of singers and musicians in various episodes indicates that professional performers were recognized members of society. These musicians likely used traditional ragas and rhythmic patterns that later became part of the classical framework of Odissi Music.

Another important dimension of the musical culture reflected in Sarala Mahabharata is the use of musical instruments. References to instruments such as the veena, flute, drums, and cymbals indicate the diversity of sound and performance practices that existed in medieval Odisha. Percussion instruments similar to the mardala, which later became the principal percussion instrument of Odissi music, may have accompanied songs and dance performances. The use of such instruments would have created a rich and vibrant musical atmosphere during festivals, ceremonies, and dramatic presentations.

Music in Sarala Mahabharata is also closely linked with dance and dramatic expression. In traditional Odishan culture, music, dance, and literature are inseparable forms of artistic expression. The lyrical quality of Sarala Das's poetry, combined with rhythmic patterns and emotional expression, suggests that many parts of the epic could have been performed in a semi-musical or theatrical style. This integrated artistic tradition later developed into classical forms such as Odissi Dance, where music and dance function together to convey stories from mythology and devotional literature.

Furthermore, the musical fragrance of Odisha in Sarala Mahabharata reflects the broader cultural environment of the region. Festivals, royal events, marriages, and other social occasions were often accompanied by singing and instrumental music. Such descriptions show that music was deeply embedded in the collective life of the community. It served not only religious purposes but also social and emotional ones, bringing people together during moments of joy, celebration, and devotion.

Thus, Sarala Mahabharata provides a vivid glimpse into the musical heritage of medieval Odisha. Through its poetic descriptions and cultural references, the text reveals how music formed an inseparable part of the spiritual, social, and artistic life of the people. The work helps scholars trace the historical roots of Odissi music and understand how the region's musical traditions evolved over time. In this way, the epic preserves the musical fragrance of Odisha, capturing the harmonious blend of devotion, poetry, and performance that has shaped the cultural identity of the region for centuries. The Sarala Mahabharata, composed in the 15th century by the eminent poet Sarala Das, is one of the most remarkable literary creations in the history of Odia literature. Though it is based on the ancient Indian epic Mahabharata, Sarala Das did not simply translate the Sanskrit text. Instead, he recreated the epic in a distinctly Odia cultural context, blending the grand narrative with the social life, religious beliefs, artistic traditions, and cultural values of medieval Odisha. As a result, Sarala Mahabharata serves not only as a literary masterpiece but also as an important cultural document that reflects the vibrant artistic life of the region. Among the various aspects of Odishan culture represented in the text, the presence of music stands out prominently, revealing the rich musical fragrance of Odisha during the medieval period.

Music has always been deeply rooted in the cultural and spiritual life of Odisha. In Sarala Mahabharata, references to musical practices appear in different contexts such as religious rituals, royal celebrations, social gatherings, and dramatic storytelling. These references provide valuable insights into the musical environment that existed in Odisha during the 15th century. Sarala Das portrays scenes where singers, instrumentalists, and performers participate in various events, suggesting that music was not merely a form of entertainment but an essential part of everyday life. The epic narratives themselves often seem to be shaped in a manner suitable for musical recitation, indicating that storytelling and singing were closely connected in traditional Odia culture.

One of the most important aspects of the musical fragrance found in Sarala Mahabharata is its strong association with devotion and temple culture. In medieval Odisha, temples functioned as important centers of artistic activity where music, dance, and poetry flourished together. Devotional singing formed an integral part of temple rituals and religious ceremonies. The worship of Lord Jagannath at the sacred Jagannath Temple played a significant role in nurturing these artistic traditions. Musical offerings in the form of devotional songs and ritual performances were regularly presented as a part of temple worship. The atmosphere of devotion and spirituality described in Sarala Mahabharata reflects this long-standing tradition where music served as a medium for expressing religious emotion and spiritual dedication.

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principal percussion instrument of Odissi music, may have accompanied songs and dance performances. The use of such instruments would have created a rich and vibrant musical atmosphere during festivals, ceremonies, and dramatic presentations.

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Below are some important ragas associated with the musical tradition reflected in Sarala Mahabharata and medieval Odishan music:

Kalasa is one of the ragas mentioned in connection with Sarala Das's period. It is associated with poetic compositions such as Chautisha and was popular among earlier poets. Sarala Das refers to Kalasa while describing the recitation of Vedic hymns and poetic singing, indicating that this raga was already well known in Odisha's musical culture.

Gurjari was an important raga used in devotional and lyrical compositions in Odisha. It was often connected with romantic and devotional sentiments and was performed during festivals and religious occasions.

Vasanta is a seasonal raga associated with spring. It was traditionally sung during festivals between Sri Panchami and Vishnu Sayana. Its presence in the Odishan musical tradition shows the relationship between ragas and seasonal celebrations.

Ramakeri is an ancient raga used widely in Odissi musical compositions. It evokes a solemn and devotional mood and has been used by many Odia poet-composers through the centuries.

Karnata is another raga associated with early Odissi musical traditions. It reflects the influence of both regional and pan-Indian musical systems.

Desakhya was a melodic form used in classical and devotional music of Odisha and was often performed in lyrical compositions.

Malava Gouda is an old raga connected with classical and temple music traditions of eastern India.

Bibhasa was used for devotional and expressive musical compositions and formed part of the early raga repertoire in Odisha.

The ragas mentioned in or associated with the musical environment of Sarala Mahabharata demonstrate that Odisha already possessed a rich and organized musical tradition during the 15th century. The use of ragas such as Kalasa, Gurjari, Vasanta, Ramakeri, Karnata, Desakhya, Malava Gouda, and Bibhasa indicates the existence of a melodic system connected with temple rituals, poetic recitation, and festival performances. These ragas later became important components in the development of classical Odissi music. Thus, Sarala Mahabharata not only preserves the epic narrative but also provides valuable clues about the early raga tradition and the musical heritage of Odisha. The Sarala Mahabharata written by Sarala Das, several references indicate the presence of a developed musical culture in medieval Odisha. Although the text is mainly a literary epic, it reflects the musical environment of the time through mentions of ragas, singing traditions, and performance practices. These ragas represent early forms of the melodic system that later became part of Odissi Music.

Sarala Mahabharata is one of the most significant works in Odia literature. Composed in the 15th century by Sarala Das, it is a regional adaptation of the Sanskrit epic Mahabharata. While narrating the heroic stories of the Kuru dynasty, Sarala Das infused the epic with local Odia culture, language, folklore, and musical traditions. One notable aspect of this adaptation is the reflection of Talas (rhythmic patterns) which reveal the deep connection between literature and performing arts in medieval Odisha.

In Odishan cultural tradition, tala plays a vital role in music, dance, and recitation. The rhythmic structure embedded in Sarala Mahabharata suggests that the text was not only meant for reading but also for oral performance, singing, and dramatic narration. The poet often used rhythmic arrangements and poetic meters that resemble traditional talas used in Odia musical practices. This indicates that Sarala Das consciously blended literary narrative with musical rhythm, making the epic accessible and engaging for common people.

Thus, the presence of talas in Sarala Mahabharata highlights the interaction between literature, music, and performance traditions in medieval Odisha. Studying these rhythmic reflections helps us understand how the epic functioned as a living cultural text within the oral and musical heritage of the region. Sarala Mahabharata is one of the most significant works in Odia literature. Composed in the 15th century by Sarala Das, it is a regional adaptation of the Sanskrit epic Mahabharata. While narrating the heroic stories of the Kuru dynasty, Sarala Das infused the epic with local Odia culture, language, folklore, and musical traditions. One notable aspect of this adaptation is the reflection of Talas (rhythmic patterns) which reveal the deep connection between literature and performing arts in medieval Odisha.

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