

Classic Poetry Series

Salabega
- poems -

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Salabega(1607/1608 -)

Salabega (Oriya: ??????) was an Oriyan religious poet of India in the early 17th century.

Salabega occupies a permanent position among the devotional poets of Orissa who devoted his life for lord jagannath. He lived in the first half of the 17th century. Nilamani Mishra, who has written a comprehensive account of the poet and his works, determines the birth of Salabega between circa AD 1607-1608. Salabega was the son of the Mugual subedar, Lalbeg, His father on one of his military excursions came across a young widowed brahmin widow taking bath at Dandamukundapur. Fascinated by her youthful beauty, Lalbeg forcibly took her away and made her his wife. Salabega was their only son.

As soon as he was old enough, Salabega took up fighting in his father's campaigns. Once he was severely wounded in battle. Battling for life he accepted the advice of his mother, he chanted the holy name of Lord Krishna and was cured miraculously. Feeling greatly indebted to Lord Krishna he tried to know more about Hinduism. From his mother he came to know that Lord Jagannath is incarnation of Lord Krishna. Amazed and thrilled he went to Puri but was refused entrance into the temple of Jagannath due to his Muslim birth. Thereafter he went on foot to Vrindavana wherein he lived the life of an ascetic in the association of sadhus reciting bhajans in honour of Lord Sri Krishna. After one year in Vraja(Vrindavana), he returned to Puri desiring to see the Ratha yatra festival of Lord Jagannath, but on the way he suddenly fell ill. Feeling helpless and realising that he would not reach Puri in time to see the Ratha yatra festival, he offered prayers to Lord Jagannath petitioning Him to wait until he arrived. On the day of the return Cart festival, Nandighosa, the cart of Lord Jagannath, did not move until Salabega's arrival. The place where the cart remained stationary to give darshana to Salabega was later used by Salabega for composing his many bhajans in honour of Lord jagannath. His body was cremated there after his death. The Samadhi of this great devotee is still standing on the Grand road in Puri near Balagandi. In honour of him every year during the cart festival, the cart of lord Jagannath stays for a while near his Samadhi.

The poet identified Jagannath completely with Sri Krishna. His bhajans are still popular among the devotees of Lord Jagannath. Salabega composed numerous devotional songs but not all of them have survived. Most of his compositions are prayers and hymns to Lord jagannath and Krishna. A good number of these deal with the romantic dalliance of Krishna with the gopis and Radha, while a few are inspired by the vatsalya ras, the sweet, motherly feeling Yashoda had for child

Krishna. His deep devotion has intensity and passion, outstanding even in the devotional literature of the Bhakti era. Although the poet was denied entry into the temple, his descriptions of the inner compound and the sanctum are among the most detailed and accurate in the devotional literature of Orissa. His song 'Ahe Neelagiri...' is perhaps the best description of Bedha Parikrama, or the prescribed circumambulation of the Srimandira. Many of the historical events of the period are recounted in his songs. The poet refers, with deep anguish, to the depredations of the marauders in their attacks on Puri and the repeated attempts to loot and desecrate the Srimandira. This frequently necessitated shifting the deities outside the main sanctum and the poet gives graphic details in the song 'Kene gheni jaucchha jagannatha nku...

Aahe Nila Shaila; Prabal matta Varan
mo aarata nalinee bana ku kara dalana!
Gajaraja chinta kala thai ghora jalena,
Chakra peshi nakra nashi, uddhrile aapana!
Ghorabane mrugini ku padithila kashana,
Kede bada beepatti ru kariaccha tarana.
Kurusabha tale suni Draupadi ra janana,
Koti bastra dei hele lajja kala barana!
Ravana ra bhai Bivishana gala saran,
Saran sambhali tanku, Lanke kala raajana.
Prahlada pita se je bada dushta daruna,
Stambha ru bahari taku bidarila takhana.
Kahe Salabega hina jaati re me jabana,
Sriranga charan tale karuachhi janana.

Kene Gheni Jaucchha Jagannatha Nku...

Salabega