

Gangadhar Meher : A Comparative Figure to Sanskrit Literature

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Gangadhar Meher (August 9, 1862 - April 4, 1924) was born on the day of Sravana Purnima at Barpali, Bargarh District (undivided Sambalpur District) in a Bhulia weaver family. Though he was educated up to 5th Class, he has given a new meaning and glory to Oriya Language and Literature. Dr. Mayadhar Mansingh has high esteem for Gangadhar Meher and in his History of Oriya Literature he has opined "All told, Gangadhar Meher is one of the rarest personalities and poets in the whole range of Oriya Literature". He is popularly known as 'Swabhabakabi' for his excellent poetic character.

Gangadhar and Contemporary Poets

The first Oriya printing typeset was cast in 1836 by the Christian missionaries which made a great revolutions in Oriya literature. Instead of palm leaf inscription. The books were being printed and the periodicals and journals were published. The first Oriya Magazine of 'Bodha Dayini' was published from Balasore in 1861. The main object of this magazine was to promote Oriya literature and to draw attention to the lapses in government policy. The first Oriya paper, 'The Utkal Deepika,' made its appearance in 1866 under the editorship of late Gouri Sankar Ray with the help of late Bichitrananda. The Utkal Deepika carried on a vigorous campaign for bringing all the Oriya-speaking areas under one administration, development of Oriya language and literature and protection of Oriya interests. In 1869 late Bhagavati Charan Das started 'Utkal Subhakari' to propagate Brahmo faith. In the last three and half decades of the 19th century a number of newspapers were published in Oriya. Prominent among them were 'Utkal Deepika', 'Utkal Patra', Utkal Hiteisini from Cuttack, Utkal Darpan and Sambada Vahika' from

Balasore, Sambalpur Hiteisini (30 May, 1889) from Deogarh. The publication of these papers during the last part of the 19th century indicated the desire and the determination of the people of Orissa to uphold the right of freedom of expression and the freedom of the press with a view to ultimately fighting for the freedom of the country from the British rule. But another great help these periodical performed was that they encouraged the modern literature and acted as a media to provide a wide readers range for the writers. The educated intellectuals came in contact with the English Literature and got influenced. Radhanath Ray (1849-1908) is the prime figure, who tried to write his poems with the influence of Western Literature. He wrote Kavyas like Chandrabhaga, Nandikeswari, Usha, Mahajatra, Darbar and Chilika.

Fakir Mohan Senapati (1843-1918), the prime figure of modern Oriya Fiction Prose is the product of that generation. He was considered the Vyasakabi or founder poet of Oriya language. Fakirmohan was born and brought up in the coastal town of Balasore. He grew up to be an administrator in ex-feudatory states. Enraged by the attempts of the Bengalis

to marginalize even replace the Oriya language by Bengali, he took to creative writing rather late. Though he had translated from Sanskrit, wrote poetry, and attempted many forms of literature, he is now known primarily as the father of modern Oriya prose fiction. If either Fakirmohan or his progeny had preserved his short story, "Lachmania" which he had written in the late 1860s, and which was published in the journal Bodhadayini, edited by himself in Balasore, Fakirmohan would have certainly been credited with having pioneered the genre in India. But as ill-luck would have it, except for a bare mention in his autobiography, the story cannot be traced, and thus his "Rebati" (1898) is widely recognized as the first Oriya short story. "Rebati" is the story of a young innocent girl whose desire for education is placed in the context of a conservative society in a backward Orissa village, which is hit by the killer epidemic cholera. His other stories are "Patent Medicine", "Dak Munshi", and "Adharma Bitta". Other than short stories, Fakir Mohan Senapati is also known for his novel Chha Maana Atha Guntha. It is the first Indian novel to deal with the exploitations of landless peasants by the feudal lords. It was written much before the

October Revolution of Russia or much before the emerging of Marxist ideas in India. Gangadhar Meher (1862-1924), Madhusudan Rao, Chintamani Mahanty, Nanda Kishore Bal and Gaurisankar Ray are some of eminent writers and poets of this time.

Literatures of Poet Gangadhar

He has written his poetry in such a manner that it attracts and gladdens the hearts of all literature-loving people. His poetic creations include 'Tapasvini', 'Pranaya Ballari', 'Kichaka Badha', 'Indumati', 'Utkala Lakshmi', 'Ayodhya Drushya', 'Kabita Kallola', 'Bharati Bhabana', 'Arghya Thali', 'Kabita Mala', 'Krushaka Sangita', 'Kumara Janmotsav', 'Bhakti Upahar', 'Padmini' etc. "Tapasvini Kavya" is his masterpiece and it has been translated into English, Hindi and Sanskrit.

Gangadhar is widely known as a Poet of nature (Prakruti Kabi). He is regarded as a great illustrious poet and maker of Indian Literature for his value-based writings on Indian culture. His poetry can be classified into lyrics, devotional, patriotic, reformatory, ethical, agricultural, elegy and narration of nature. His prose works include 'Atma Jeevani', 'Shri Nruparaj

Singh', 'Purana Kabi Fakir Mohan', 'Swargiya Kasinath Panda', 'Eha ki Pruthibira Sabda', 'Sikshita, Asikshita o Sikshabhimani' etc.

The popularity of the literary creation of Gangadhar Meher are due to narration of the beauty of the nature just like Kabibara Radhanath Ray. It is unique. Gangadhar is widely known as poet of nature, can be compared with poet Shelly, Byron and Keats. Gangadhar was the messenger of Upendra Bhanja's style and ideals. His popularity is not accidental. There are many reasons behind this. Just like Kabi Samrat Upendra Bhanja, his poetries are replete with high ornamental words, unique composition style, using in befitting cases simile and metaphor and appropriate words. His poetries are sonorous of rhythm of words and languages. He is rated as a great poet in Indian Literature. Died on April 4, 1924. His poetries can be divided into lyrics, devotional, patriotic, reformatory, ethical, agricultural, elegy, and narration of nature.

In 1949, Sambalpur College in Sambalpur, which had (opened in 1944) was renamed Gangadhar Meher College in his honour. Since 1999, the college has been called Gangadhar Meher College (Autonomous). In

1992, Sambalpur University instituted the Gangadhar Meher National Award for Poetry which is conferred annually.

Poet Gangadhar Meher is influenced by Bhavabhuti

In the verses of Kâlidâsa, 'Tapas' (penance) is clearly meant for Sîtâ in the later part of her life. Gangâdhara happens to take the word 'Tapasvi' from Kâlidâsa and has used it as 'Tapasvinî' in feminine gender for Sîtâ. Moreover, the poet in the Preface of *Tapasvinî* kâvya mentions: "The main purpose of this book is to elucidate how Sîtâ strengthened and heightened more and more, her devotion-to-husband (pati-bhakti) by deeming exile as her own misfortune and how she as a 'Tapasvinî' elapsed time by rendering her forest-dwelling into penitential austerity beneficial to her husband." (9) The poet further expresses his hope that the wise readers would once unveil the memory's curtain portrayed with the brilliant impeccable and sacred character of Sîtâ of their own hearts and would render uplift of the hearts of women.

Gangâdhara is very distinct and doubtless in his writing. Sîtâ is the heroine of this epic poem that analyses the social condition of a married woman and contends to give

appropriate honour and status even after separation from her husband. Tapasvinî mainly treats of the plight of Sîtâ's later life, yet the entire story of Râmâyana has been recounted contextually. So in this perspective, this Kâvya may be regarded as a 'Miniature Râmâyana' in Oriya literature. Just as Râmâyana is named after King Râma with depiction of his life-deeds, so in a greater sense Tapasvinî Kâvya may be construed as a 'Sîtâyana', as it prominently features the sublime character of Sîtâ in the entire story.

Poetic Style :

Tapasvinî, as the masterpiece of Gangâdhara Meher, enjoys an outstanding position in the arena of language and literature. The desideratum of the poet in composing this kâvya was mainly to fill in the gap of a character of devoted chaste wife flourished with Indian culture, in the domain of Oriya literature and to establish the language of Orissa with its epical excellence. Befitting the modern taste, the poet has utilized different nine melodious metres (Chaturdasâkshara, Râmakeri, Bangalâûri, Chokhi, Rasakulyâ, Kalahamsa-Kedâra, Kedâra-Kâmodî, Nata-Vânî and Kalyâna-Paditâla), collaborating the old metres with the modern ones.

Musical melody, grace of diction, serenity, rhythmic eloquence, lucidity with emotional touch and sweetness of meaning are the remarkable features of this epic poem. Various figures of speech such as alliteration, simile, metaphor, imagery and the like also find proper and praiseworthy places in this literary work. There occurs no verbosity or stiffness of speech. Predominance of meaning and sentiments is greatly appreciable. Words of Gangâdhara are pleasantly intelligible and imbued with emotions. So this Kâvya has become unhesitatingly attractive and appealing...

In Classical Sanskrit Literature, Bhavabhûti is the first poet and dramatist who advocated and elucidated the Sentiment of Pathos (Karuna Rasa) in a separate style and presented it as the original source of all sentiments. (14)... Poet Gangâdhara is influenced by Bhavabhûti. In Tapasvinî, the excellence of Pathos begins from the outset. Though other emotions are accessories in the middle, sentiment of Pathos is prominent. The poet has avoided to end the kâvya in a tragic description and made the ending comically happy, depicting Sîtâ's union with King Râma even in a dream state. Apropos filial affections of Sîtâ for her twin sons (Canto-X),

also that of Anukampâ and River Tamasâ (Canto-IV) and as well as of Godâvarî (Canto-VIII), Vâtsalya Rasa is contextually blended in this Kâvya.

Kâlidâsa's words are mostly indicative or suggestive of sentiments, while like Bhavabhûti's, appropriate words of Gangâdhara are mostly expressive and directly appealing to the hearts of the readers. In comparison to other sentiments, Pathos directly touches the core of heart and Gangâdhara has successfully portrayed the sentiment that leaves an ever-lasting impression in the mind... Gangâdhara vividly and exhaustively delineates the beautiful facets of Nature. With his poetic insight, he sees human feelings, conscious life and internal beauty in her. Nature imbibes her comely, gracious, fierce, tranquil and auspicious forms in various contexts.

Gangâdhara is a prolific painter of Nature. Depiction of Dame Ushâ (Dawn) in Canto-IV is most popular all over Orissa. Here Nature honours Sîtâ as an esteemed Queen and offers all the royal formalities of worship. Dawn, the blooming lotus-eyed lady, cherishing hearty desire to behold Sîtâ and bringing presentations of dew-pearls in her hands of leafage,

stands in the outer courtyard of the hermitage and in cuckoo's voice speaks to grace her with Sîtâ's benign sight. The retinues of Dame Dawn perform their duties to wake up Sîtâ...

Philosophy of Life :

The ideology of Bhavabhûti along with the naturality of Vâlmîki and Kâlidâsa are intertwined in the poem of Gangâdhara. The quintessence of poet's philosophy of life has been contextually reflected in Tapasvinî. Forbearance, theistic trend, noble endeavours for the attainment of goal and high aspiration are signified in his work. He believes in both deed and destiny, but never adheres to pessimism. For instance, life of fortitude, benevolence and polite activities is indicated in Canto-IV...

G a n g â d h a r a ' s humanistic approach of reaching the destination through incessant practice is traced here. Simplicity, modesty, purity, harmlessness and noble services are the gem-like features of his work and life. Whatever may be the obstacle, the poet's optimistic insight pervades the realm of life. "Simple living and high thinking" is his view-point both literary and empirical. In spite of negative attitude of some fault-finders in social life, one should patiently and courageously go

ahead to establish one's own goodness and virtues valuable to others.

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