

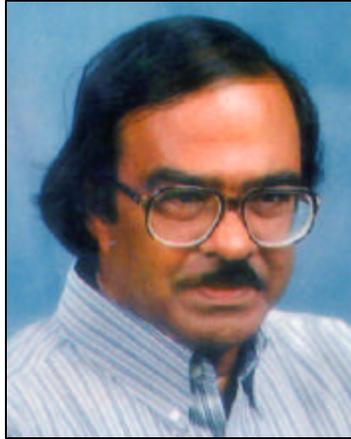
# A Literary Critic Wins Sahitya Akademi Award, 2004

(Prof. Prafulla Kumar Mohanty)

*Gurukalyan Mahapatra*

A teacher-scholar and a literary critic, Prof. Prafulla Kumar Mohanty, has won the prestigious Central Sahitya Akademi Award of 2004 from Orissa, for his book 'Bharatiya Samskruti O' Bhagabat Gita' (Indian Culture and Bhagabat Geeta). Last year the same award also went to another Oriya literary critic Prof. J.M. Mohanty. Really a strange similarity that both are retired English Professors. Both of them use to write in Oriya and English languages. Besides, there is another critic with the same name. He is Dr. Prafulla Kumar Mohanty. Despite strong resemblance in the name, title and literary achievements, there are also some differences. Prof. Mohanty was an English teacher in government colleges but the other was an Oriya teacher in privately managed colleges who got his Ph.D on Fakir Mohan Senapati. But I know both of them as literary critics.

In retrospect, I remind my association with the celebrity around twenty four years back. Winner of the Sahitya Akademi Award, Dr. Prafulla Kumar Mohanty's literary personality really impressed me. At that time I was a member of the working committee of



the Sarala Sahitya Samsad, a leading literary organisation of Orissa, named after the famous Sarala Das the father of Oriya literature. We members were contemplating that Sarala Mahabharat's interesting stories should be retold by the famous authors and published. Accordingly we compiled the stories in Oriya which was edited by Prof. Pathani Pattnaik, the former President of Orissa Sahitya Akademi. But most of the members again decided to go for the English translation, which I thought was stupendous. Hardly there was four months time. Each members felt that poet Sarala Das's work should be circulated widely and they insisted on me

as well as on Samsad's Secretary, Er. Prabhakar Swain to materialise the task of translation. Subsequently, we tried a lot with some well-known translators. But they declined. So both of us came down to Bhubaneswar and requested Prof. Prafulla Kumar Mohanty for translating Sarala stories into English within a month or so. By that time, he was the Vice-chairman of Higher Secondary Council (also known as Plus two Council) At first he was reluctant. But when he heard of

the sacred purpose of popularising Oriya literature abroad, he accepted it. We both were extremely happy that after a month of hard work, our plan finally worked. Subsequently, Vikash, a well known publishing house in New Delhi, published the stories from Sarala Mahabharat in time which was released in our annual function.

Prof. Mohanty has got atleast fourteen books to his credit. When asked about his reactions to this award, he said, 'I am neither happy nor unhappy, you know me well.' He has written three Oriya books which contain literary criticism, out of which the Bharatiya Samskruti O' Bhagabat Geeta (Indian Culture and Bhagabat Geeta) won the Sahitya Akademi Award recently. The other two books are '*Biraha O' Anya Bibhaba Mane'* and *Kichhi Akas Kichhi Mati*.

Prof. Mohanty of course has written poems, stories and plays in Oriya, but is known as a critic in our literary circle. His literary criticism is unique and distinguishable from others. His style and critical analysis today attract the readers. You can find and appreciate some of his critical writings in which present derives its meaning from its relationship with the past. In the present life process and living amidst clash between the past and present

situations are also reflected in his writings. So also, the interaction of the tradition, culture or the social change captures his imagination, which is conspicuous in his criticisms. In one of his essays (Gandhi's Bharat) Prof. Mohanty concludes that Gandhiji seems more relevant today. In his another critical essays on Oriya periodicals, he narrates the problems and remedies.

#### About the Award Winning Book

Satabdira Shesha Ankare Bharatiya Samskruti & Bhagabat Geeta (Indian Culture in the last part of the century & Bhagabat Geeta) which owned Sahitya Akademi Award recently is a unique creation. Here he compares with erudition the cultural and spiritual ethos of East and West and subsequently justifies East's significance. The author promises of the eternal life not in heaven but in earth itself in the new millennium like an eternal optimist. So at the outset he boasts of being an Indian who stands firmly on his mother land's cultural and spiritual tradition to present his ideas blissfully. Both his erudition and bizzare experience is found in his philosophical essay book of 233 pages. The well known artist and the writer Dr. Dinanath Pathy's cover page art and Gyanajuga publication's production, no doubt has made this book attractive, but this book is adjudged as one of the progenitors of modernity in Oriya language and literature of the new generation. This book first appeared in the new year of 2000 A.D. The Bhagabat Geeta, the holy scripture of Hindus have been interpreted differently, really a meaty book of this century.

Prof. Mohanty, however, voluntarily retired from the post of Professorship in English in Ravenshaw College in 1997 to join the profession of journalism. He would have retired in 1998, but he retired one year earlier. Both of us worked together in a news paper. He did edit the weekly one and I was looking after the news in the

daily. I was contributing articles and news stories for the weekly whenever he told. I requested him for articles to be published in the daily. Both of us left the newspaper establishment for personal reasons. But we have been writing for our language and literature. He devoted most of his time in reading and writing. The critical appreciation and analytical pursuit made him a powerful writer both in Oriya and English.

He is a good translator. His assiduous translation works have been praised. Well

known play wright Manoranjan Das's famous play 'Katha Ghoda' has been translated by him into English as the 'Wooden Horse.' He has also translated from English to Oriya, 'The History of Kannada Literature' which has been published by the Central Sahitya Akademi.

Prof. Mohanty is also a creative writer. He has a short story collection, titled, Shesa Apekha (The Final Waiting). Besides, his three plays are Kala Janha (The Block Moon), Mala Akash (the Dead Sky) and the Saraga Sanyasi (Affectionate Saint).

His English books include, (1) *Religion, Democracy and Other Reflections* (Reflective Essays), (2) *The Joys of Poetry* (Criticism) and *Quite Flows the Mahanadi* (translation of award winning Oriya short stories, published by Orissa Sahitya Akademi). He is also writer of two educational essay books i.e. Festivals of Orissa and the Communication Skill.

Prof. Mohanty has also translated the famous Oriya classic of Gangadhar Meher's poetry 'Kichaka Badha' as 'End of Kichak' which has been published by Sambalpur University.

Prof. Mohanty's latest publication is a criticism i.e. Nidaghare Kabi (Sun-baked Poet) is equally a powerful book which reflects the post-modern era in a different way. Its first chapter deals with the unique language of the post-independence Oriya poetry. Its last chapter is also interesting. A full-fledged criticism of Gopinath Mohanty's popular novel 'Laya Bilaya' justifies that even this vernacular novel excels the world famous novels Moby Dick and The Old Man and the Sea in many ways.

Guru Kalyan Mohapatra is a Freelance Journalist and lives at D-10/5, Unit-8, Bhubaneswar-12.



*Managing Director, Orissa Power Generation Corporation handing over a dividend cheque of Rs 31 Crore 25 Lakh to Hon'ble Chief Minister Shri Naveen Patnaik at Secretariat as share of State Government on 29-12-2004.*