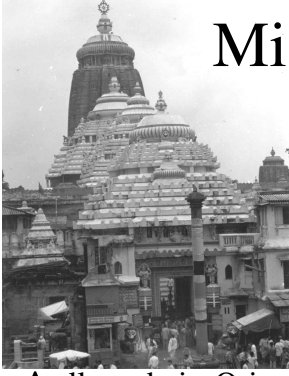




Srikshetra and Sri Jagannath in Gangadhar Mishra's Kosalananda Kavyam



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All roads in Orissa lead to Srikshetra or Puri, the land of the Lord, one of the famous four *dhamas* of India. Like Ramnath of Rameswaram or Dwarakanath of Dwaraka or Badrinath of the Himalayan regions, Sri Jagannath is the presiding deity of Puri. Together, they constitute the four pillars of *dharma* on which India stands. These places in general and Puri in particular, symbolise the cultural matrix of the country, the religious syncretism which is the other name of Hinduism. Puri or *Sankhakshetra* is the melting pot of Buddhism, Jainism, Vaisnavism, Saivism, even Mahimaism which had declared an uncompromising battle against idolatry. Here Sankara, Madhavacharya, Ramanuja, Tulsidas, Tukaram, Sri Chaitanya, Kabir - saints and savants of India had buried their hatchets and propagated their creeds. Srikshetra is eclectic enough, elastic enough and accommodative enough to hold all their mutually conflicting creeds in its all-embracing fold. Even Tagore, the great poet of India, came here, saw the Rathayatra and failed to distinguish the 'ratha' from the 'patha', the chariot from the road, the dancer from the dance as W.B. Yeats would have called it.

Such is Srikshetra, the confluence of all creeds and all cultures, a kind of miniature India.

About four hundred years ago in a brahmin stronghold or *sasan* of Puri, namely Biraramchandrapur, was born Gangadhar Misra of the lineage of great scholars and poets of all-India eminence like Sambhukara and Vidyakara comparable to Bruhaspati, the Guru of the gods. Tracing his birth to such a family of famous scholars, Gangadhar Misra writes in the *Kesalananda Kavyam* :

*Purvam saryasu parvanayaka guruspardhih
samruddhi rasa
Prusthasyakhila sastra tattwa nigama
jnaneika varanidhi
Jatah sambhukarabhidhah Kavivaro
vidyakarastat sutah
Sambhutah kavitalattonnatikarah
varsaprakarsanvitah. (XXI, 64)*

Historian Kedarnath Mohapatra in *Orissa Historical Research Journal*, Vol.I, No.3 presents a brief note on these illustrious scholars of Orissa - Sambhukara and Vidyakara - described as *akhilasastra tattwa nigama jnaneikh varanidhi* and *Kavitalattonnatikarah*. Gangadhar's father, Gopinath, was a Pundit of this family, a dazzling diamond (*Hirankura*) in the midst of precious stones, whose son it was a pleasure to be for Gangadhar (XXI, 65).

We do not know when and why Gangadhar Misra came to Sambalpur and settled down as a Pundit of the Sanskrit Tol at



Balibandha during the reign of Raja Baliara Deva (1650-89). It was here that he wrote *Kosalanandam* or *Kosalanandakavyam* in 1663 (*Kalou Kalachalayuga*) which earned him the epithet "second Sri Harsa" in the hands of Pt. Bauribandhu Nanda. *Kosalanandam* is the third historical *Mahakavya* of the country, the others being *Ramapalacharitam* by Sandhyakara Nandi of Bengal and *Rajatarangini* by Kavana of Kasmir. It deals with the medieval history of South Kosala in general and the history of the Chauhan Rulers of Orissa from Ramai Deva to Baliara Deva in particular. Yet it is shot through and through with the poet's respectful remembrance of Srikshetra and Sri Jagannath.

When Gangadhar wrote *Kosalanandam*, Mukunda Deva (1657-88) was the Gajapati of Puri. The Gajapati traditionally enjoys the 'divine right of Kingship' in the State. He is called the "*Thakura Raja*", the deputy of Sri Jagannath. It is fondly believed to this day that Lord Balabhadra and Lord Jagannath led incognito the *Paikas* of Gajapati Purusottama Deva during his famous Kanchi expedition which brought him victory and princess Padmavati. Thus in the Orissan mind Jagannath and the Gajapati occupy a high reverential place. It is, perhaps, therefore that Pandit Gangadhar Misra in offering prayer to Lord Mukunda (Krsna) pays tribute to Gajapati Mukunda Deva in as many as eight verses in Canto V of the *Kosalanda Kavyam* each of which ends with *Vande Mukunda vilasat charanaravindam*.

In Canto IX Pandit Gangadhar Misra describes Srikshetra, the city of the Gajapati, on the occasion of the marriage of Rama Deva, (the Ramai Deva of "The Jayachandrika" by Prahllad Dubey) with Bhanumati, daughter of

Samara Chandra, brother of Gajapati Rajarajeswara, described as the pavilion of Rajalaxmi, beloved of the wise and a sun to the lotus land of the subjects :

Sriyah salilayatanam manisinam

Priyah rajavarajaraji bhaskarah (VIII, 28)

One whose reputation was the fruit of the tree of principles watered by the cloud of conscience. (ibid, 29)

In Canto IX of *The Kosalananda Kavyam* the picture of Puri or Purusottama kshetra comes alive. It is the city of nectar : *Kshouni sudhakaram puram* (VIII, 28), ornament of the earth : *Purusottama muttarottaram vasudhamandala mandanam param*, whose roads are, at once, narrow and wide, narrow for the movement of elephants and horses, and wide for those who seek the passage is *swargaloka* (V, 2).

And the buildings that stood on both sides were like the nectar-smearred steps to *swarga* (*sopanabhareih sudhojjwaleih*). In fact, the whole city, to the poet's eye, was walled with the nectar produced by the sea (*varunalayothitam*) and passed through the mouth of Lord Visnu (*Visnumukhasitojjhitam*) the nectar that dispelled the fear of death. (V.4)

The *Kshetra Varnana* by Gangadhar Misra includes Lord Yameswara who expels the fear of death (*Yamabhitiha haro*), Lord Visweswara who acknowledges the overlordship of Sri Jagannath (*Visweswara Iswaro gatah*), Lord Lokanath who assumes the role of Bhairava in order to assuage the sufferings of mankind (*Paritokhila soka lokanapahrutau*), Lord Markandeswara who protected saint Markandeya against the onslaughts of the god of death, goddess Vimala who grants prosperity to her devotees, goddess Sarala who stands enshrined on the tongue of



the wise (*sudhiyam sa rasanamadhishtha*) and goddess Mangala who grants *Moksha* the moment one meditates on her, who shares the strength the Anantasayi Vishnu. Visnu and Mangala, *Purusa* and *Prakruti* become indivisible (V.18).

Here lies Muktimandap which distributes '*Moksha*' to mankind (*Asamikshita mukti yuktae*) and the hoary '*Kalpavata*' at the touch of which the whole life-cycle suddenly vanishes. Here is goddess Lakshmi who, though desirous of living in the sea, her father's habitat, is unable to leave the houses of the wise, kept so spick and span for her :

*Sakalat kamalalaya layat Manujanam sudhiyati
nirmalat
Puri chitrita sarga sagara sthiti
chitteve na yatra nirgata.* (V.14)

In such a place sanctified by the gods live men and women who are no less than gods. Gods, men and animals - they all radiate the same light divine : *Naranirjaratiryagantare nahi yatrasti phalaptayentaram* (V.5). The gods have assumed the forms of men to be able to serve Lord Jagannath (*Yatra dharmah surah*). And goddesses, the forms of women, paragons of devastating beauty :

*Yuvalochanachitta sat prusat drudha damani
Monobhavesavah
Vudhadhairyaharah surangana ruchira yatra
varangana janah.* (V.8)

And over this city, beloved of the gods, presides the deity of deities - Lord Jagannath who rises like the cloud to the *chataka* - like eyes of the wise, the very embodiment of delight and the engine of destruction of the pains of the three worlds, Lord Jagannath, decorated with *Dahana* leaves and flowers offered by the gods. A cloud that contains the much-wished showers of rain :

*Sumanasam sumanobhirato vabhau viyati
vrustibhirista ivamvudah.* (V.24)

The poet, however, is not content with describing Lord Jagannath on the '*Ratnasimhasana*'. He must see Him enthroned in the chariot on the occasion of the *Ratha Yatra*.

In Canto XI Ramai Dev comes to see Sri Jagannath seated in full glory in the chariot called Nandighosa on the second day of the bright fortnight of Asadh :

*Putah kshma vasirasistava dhava jayati syandane
nandighose
Sanandam nandanesh samamaraganeirbhagya
bhanji kshanani.* (V.1)

The eyes of the fortunate earthlings are sanctified by the sight of Lord Jagannath installed in the company of the gods in Nandighosa.

The poet expresses, despite his profound scholarship, his inability to describe this *Ghosa Yatra* which, he feels, it is humanly impossible to see, hear and narrate in its totality. (V.2).

Nandighosa here both destroys and creates darkness, it dispels the darkness of ignorance that envelops the three worlds, the darkness that a thousand rays of the sun are unable to remove. Simultaneously, it kicks a cloud of dust which darkens the earth so much so that the *Chakravakas* and the owls mistake the day for the night. And delight :

*Chakra dvandvasya kantim srujati harati na
sribharam kausikasya* (V.3)

Blinded by the dust, the gods stand motionless and still in the sky, while down below, countless devotees, afraid of sin and eager for salvation, rush towards Nandighosa (V.6). The dust rises from the earth far into the sky. The dust which was lying low on the



limited road will now play freely, happily in the boundless sky. Or, report to the sun-god the story of Lord Govinda's slow movement :

*Kimvopendrakrutam samasta charitam
vijnapayanti nijam
Sri Govinda satanga mandagamane
sa kasyapam kasapi. (V. 8).*

The dust has removed the distinction between the earth and the sky. In the hazy, dusty world, the boundaries are blurred. All the ten quarters have become one. It appears the all-compassionate Lord has drawn his devotees, eager to witness His *Gundicha Yatra*, from different, distant directions by means of the all-encompassing dust (*raja bhareiriha disoharat*). The dust has made the sky and the sea look like the earth (*rajobhareiramvaram bhuvasthalamivaparam kimukrutam nava sagaram*). It has put Sri Jagannath in doubt. so Nandighosa goes slow, uncertain of the terrain it traverses. Now it stops, and now it starts :

*Sthalikrutamiti kshanam na chalati kshamasagaro
Harikshanaparah kshanam chalati
neti bhuyah purah. (V.11)*

Withdrawing the minds of the saints from the world, Sri Jagannath slowly advances (*Jagadisware chalati mandamamvodharo*). The Lord has been compared with the cloud on three counts : His appearance, His movement, and third, the blessings of rain or the rain of blessings. He contains and carries. The wheel-tracks on the wide road resemble the milky way in the sky :

Pruthvinemi padat vibhati nitaram simantini niraja (V.9)

The people, washed with the dust, stand clean of their sins. The horizons are sweetened with the scented breeze that blows (*surabhibhik dikchakramoditam*). With the dust kicked off the earth, the wheel tracks resemble the '*simanta*' of the lady Earth. There

is no dust on the road. No sorrow on earth. Clean road. Clean minds.

The dust which filled the sky and the earth in the beginning and turned day into night, the road into the sky and the wheel-tracks into the galaxy has suddenly disappeared, the dust that once covered and concealed even the galaxy. In a highly alliterative verse that closes Canto X, Ramai Deva Offers his prayer to Lord Vamana near the chariot (*Drustwa tam devadevam sapadi rathagatam vamanam danavarim*). When the whole milky way was submerged in the dust raised by the wheels and the feet of a hundred thousand pilgrims : *pankilakasagange (X, 50)*.

And the chariot of Lord Jagannath moves slowly, very slowly in Canto XI, carrying the Lord with His imperial retinue (*Bhudeveir bhuri deveih sakala naravareirbhra taravadhya madhye*). The poet wonders how the earth is able to bear this tremendous pressure. Sesanaga or Vasuki, he concludes, must have spread his thousand hoods to support the earth (V.4). Nandighosa rattles on slowly, electrifying the earth, submerging the virtuous in the sea of delight :

Nimajjayati sajjananavani mandalam mandayan. (V.13)

Consigning the insect-like pride of the demons into the fire (*darpam patangaspadam*), manifesting the energy of the gods in the form of the light of the sun (*patangaprabham*). Nandighosa rattles on like the Mandara mountain churning the sea :

*Mandreiryena payah payodhimathane
prithvidharam mandaram
Manthanam kalayan kalau vijayate
Srinandighosa swaneih. (V.7)*

Ratha Yatra is *Ghosa Yatra*. A festival of sound. Sounds of all kinds, sounds of music



and dance, debates and discussions, rattling wheels and neighing horses and trumpeting elephants. What Pandit Gangadhar Misra speaks in another context in another canto may be said of the world of cacophony the Ratha Yatra generated :

*Kwachinmuda vadijaneiralavali
Kwachit vipanchi swaramandaloghanam
Kwachinnivaddha swaratantrika kwachit
Kwachit pinaki prachurescha puspakah.
Tatan pratitam na ghaneirghanam ghanam
Manoharei sausiraraji nihswaneih
Nadat paranadhha bharena sausiram
Karindra sad vrunghi tadesa murchhitam. (XII, 13, 15)*

Thus the sounds of conch-shells, horns, flutes, *damvarus*, *vinas*, *mahuris*, etc. filled the earth and the sky. They surpassed the thunder in the sky and the trumpets of elephants on earth. In the midst of all this and in the midst of Indra and *Gandharvas*, Sri Jagannath has started the *Ghosa Yatra* from Nilachala to Gundicha *mandap* with the object of bringing salvation to mankind entangled in the ways of the world :

*Bhavavdhou drudham majjatam sajjananam
Mude yanalilam samichchhanagachchhat. (X, 17)*

And into the fray have tumbled the angels of heaven like Rambha, Menaka, Manjughosa, Sukesha for the entertainment of the Lord (*anandakandam mukundam*). Here is a congregation of the devotees singing the glory of God and there, a conference of scholars discussing the *Vedas* and *Upanisad*, *Yoga Sastras* and *Smruti Sastras*. Here the '*Bhatas*' recite the eulogy of the great and there, poets of eminence sing their self-composed songs in praise of the Creator :

*Kwachid bhavya kavyanuraktah kavindra
Stuvantah paramanandakandam mukundam
mudambhodhimadhye rasajnam manojnam
Manomajjayanto drudham sajjananam. (V.23)*

Here, some devotees outargue the obstinate atheists, asserting, God exists and to see Him is to be relieved of the fear of death : *Rathetu Vamanam drustwa Punarjanmam na vidyate*. While there, a mischievous rider goads the elephant into the crowd and laughs :

*Kwachitcharana varana nanayanto
Hasanto vadanto janam hasayantah. (V.24)*

Thus the *Gundicha Yatra* begins and ends. This description of this *Yatra* is one of the earliest in any *Mahakavya* written in Sanskrit. There are some exaggerations and omissions in the description. Exaggeration or *atisayokti* is an art in which pundits and poets of our great Sanskrit literary tradition were past masters. It is an *alankara* or figure of speech in which poets like Magha and Sri Harsa frequently indulge. Pandit Gangadhar Misra is the proud inheritor of this great tradition. So he thinks it proper to dislodge the gods and *gandharvas* from their heavenly abode and make them participate in this grand annual festival of Orissa. he makes them descend in human garb on earth in order to be able to offer their services to the Lord, as if, they stood deprived of this opportunity in heaven. (XI, 17)

'*Suranganas*' have turned '*varanganas*' here at Srikshetra :

surangana ruchira yatra varangana janah (IX, 8).

As though, Srikshetra is free from irreligious people speaking an indecent tongue which, in course of time, has become a part of 'Puri Boli'. As though, some '*varanganas*' are not '*varanganas*'. Here as elsewhere, while describing the Gajapati's palace in Canto XII, the poet exclaims :

*Tata stutam tena nrupasya mandiram
Kimeindiram vanditumiswaranarah
Ihati mauni kalasesa esa yat
Sahasra masyani dadhat krutarthitah. (61)*



How can an ordinary mortal describe this *nrupasya mandiram*, the abode of Laxmi, which Vasuki, the snake of snakes, with his thousand faces cannot? A palace is a palace, big and beautiful, like any other '*nrupasya mandiram*' which cannot baffle description by a poet so eloquent like Gangadhar Misra. Looking at Srikshetra in Canto IX, the poet says, since its description defeats the imagination of gifted scholars, it must have been built by Viswakarma (*Khachitam charitam suvedhasa*), a city that frightens and prevents the entry of death in Canto XIX: *pariharanti parabhava sankaya haripuram yadi neti sa samanah*.

There are hyperboles, too, in the description of the Ratha Yatra, The visualisation of night in the day, the vision of the galaxy on the *Badadanda*, the accompaniment of the gods with Sri Jagannath, the dance of angels etc. are a part of this art. Such a divine festival deserves description only by Surapati or Indra. The poet finds his consciousness overwhelmed:

*Karomi vada kim nutim jadamatih vibho samprati
Pratikshanamatistutim surapati stanoti kshiteh.* (XI, 13).

Those who have seen this famous car festival with hundreds of thousands of men, women and children watching from the housetops, filling and spilling the roads, raising their hands and their voices in worshipful gestures as the chariot moves, crying and praying and singing and dancing and clapping can know what it is. It is indeed indescribable. Therefore, when the poet observes in Canto XI that only Indra with his thousand eyes, Vasuki with his uncountable faces and Mrutyunjaya Siva with his limitless longevity can respectively see, narrate and hear this Yatra, we willingly suspend our disbelief:

*Enam sarvasuparvanayaka iha
srinandighosotsavam
Drastum hrustamanah sahasra
nayaneirnanyosti saktah punah
Enam stetumananta eva vadaneirak-
alpamalpam punah
Srotum dhwantamaharnisam sa bhagavanah
jivitah sankarah.* (V.2)

The vision of this *yatra* exceeds the range, depth and dimension of even the television.

The poet has given little space to Balabhadra and Subhadra. Nandighosa eclipses the importance of Taladhwaaja and Devadalana, Chariots of Balabhadra and Subhadra. And in this, he seems to share the concentration of the viewers on Lord Jagannath in Nandighosa whose imposing beauty leaves even Lord Nilakantha *Kunthakantha*, Visnu, spell-bound and distinguished poets, dumbfounded. *Kanthastambhitah vaspavrutikalusaschinta jadam darsanam*, Kalidasa might have said.

This reader, however, feels that Balabhadra and Subhadra, elder brother and younger sister to Jagannath, deserve a little more space and a little more attention. Out of 27 verses devoted to the description of the *yatra*, only two for Balabhadra and Subhadra, appear inadequate. Another significant omission, besides '*Pahandi*', is '*Chhera panhara*', the Gajapati clearing the passage with a broomstick of gold for the three chariots to launch their *yatra*. '*Chhera Panhara*' is associated with the historic Kanchi expedition of the Gajapati where the military generals were figures no less than Balabhadra and Jagannath.

But with these omissions and commissions, Gangadhar Misra has shown ample originality and scholarship in the



description of the *yatra*. In the eyes of the poet, the *Ratha Yatra* at once destroys darkness and creates it; it destroys the darkness of ignorance (*Ajnana dhwantakutam*) and creates the darkness of dust (XI, 3). It makes the gods shut their eyes - the sun and moon - in the cloud of dust but makes humans press forward to see the Lord with their eyes wide open (XI, 6). The Lord, who is too difficult even for Narada to approach, comes within the easy reach of mortals : *Parananda rupah pareirnaradadyeirapapyo naranam tadarchcha paranam* (XI, 16). Nilachaladhama, the seat of Lord Jagannath, is empty, while Gundicha *Mandap* which is usually silent, is full : *Sunyatwamatra nanu Sapta dinani yasmat nilachala parigruhe paripurnata cha.* (XI, 14). The *yatra* brings joy to Subhadra but sorrow to Laxmi (XI, 27).

The reference to the elephant in verse 24 lends a touch of realism to the Car festival. An elephant is a common phenomenon during the *Ratha Yatra*, partly because it is said to be the *vahana* or vehicle of goddess Laxmi and partly because Sri Jagannath is sometimes compared with a *tusker* (*pravala matta varana*). And here is an elephant with a rider who goads this huge animal into the heavy crowd only to create a humour of situation. To the watchful eye of the poet, the elephant which is elevating is also diverting. This elephant is quite different from its war-mongering, ear-shaking, trunk-lifting counterparts described in Canto XII :

*Vichitra nanayasa varminorano
Ddhatah prabhinnaschala karna satkarah
Muhuh ksharantah karasikarotkaran
Virejurugrah parito mahagajah.* (V.17)

The *Ratha Yatra* not only brings Sri Jagannath from the splendid height of the '*Ratnasimhasana*' to the road where Tom, Dick

and Harry walk, it makes Him one among them. The barrier between the divine and the human is lifted. Earth and heaven become indistinguishable.

Goddess Mahalaxmi, termented with 'repining restlessness' caused by Sri Jagannath's departure, visits the Gundicha *mandap* on the day known as 'Hera Panchami' to see how the Lord fares in her absence and she stands stock still. Sri Jagannath finds it quite hard to break the deadlock; He coaxes and cajoles Laxmi to abandon her icy silence. He fails to understand why Laxmi does not smile, does not speak, does not exchange glances. He asks her attendants to help initiate a dialogue :

*Vrute kinchidanaksharam tava sakhi saswat
samabhasita
No jane vada kim nidanamadhuna premnosti
kidrug gatih.* (V. 28)

I do not know. Tell me the way out. Tell me where love leads. The Omniscient does not know that the path of love does never run smooth ! And who can tell Him ? How deeply human is this reaction ! How pathetically moving ! Acknowledging her right to anger, the Lord reminds her of the hoary bond between them since the churning of the seas and tells her the reason why He came down to the *Mandap* - to be among men and gods who need Him so much : *disamihamaheswareih suranarei nareseh pareih* (V. 30). And to this, it is the female attendants who responds. The Lord, they allege, should not have left the repining Laxmi and the *Ratnamandap* whose enchanting beauty makes poets wax eloquent :

*Ititi savidhe vadanya hamitindira te sama
Game yuganiva kshipat kshanamanalpa
kalpamdinam.* (V.31)

Mahalaxmi leaves Gundicha *Mandap* but not before doing a symbolic damage to



Nandighosa. She cuts a piece of wood from the chariot and steals into the night. This episode which unveils the human side of the story, however, does not find a place in the *Kavya*.

The '*Bahuda Yatra*' or return journey on the tenth day of the bright fortnight of *Asadh* begins and ends. The dialogue at the Lion's Gate of Srimandira is another important episode of the *yatra* which uncovers the divine face human. The Lion's Gate is shut from within. *Dwastha dwaram vighataya*, open the gate, shouts the Lord, clad in robes of gold ("*sunavesa*" as they say in popular parlance) seated in the ringing chariot and surrounded by gods and men :

*Jatah kanchana kanta kanti ruchire chelei
sunabhau chala
Chchakre charudhare prasarini chalad ghante
kwanatkinkinau
Nana lasya vilasa hasamuditei daiveirnrurdeveih
pareih
Paureih samvruta iditah pathirathe
sthitwetyuvacha chyutah* (V.35)

Who are you (*Ko asi*). To this, the Lord replies, I'm Ramanatha : *Nathoramayah* (husband of Rama or Maya). But why should Maya's husband come to see Laxmi ? Who is Laxmi to Him ? The Lord says, "Laxmi is my life, she is in my heart". If Laxmi was in His heart, why should He come searching for her here :

*Dwastha dwaram vighataya vahih ko asi
nathoramayah
Mayanathah punariha bhavan kinnu Laxmim
didrukshuh
Ka Laxmiste pratinidhirasau jivitasypihrudya
Vakshasthaivam yadinubhavatah katra jata
didruksha.* (V. 36)

Where is the cool touch of the sea, the liquid lucidity of the looks of Payodhitanya in her words, wonders the Lord. This is a piece of rare repartee which is deliberately designed

to put Laxmi above Narayana in intelligence. The lord is clean outwitted. He submits :

*Ratnakara suta Laxmih trailakeswaravallabha
Datavyamiha kim tubhyam madrute varavarenini.*
(V. 38)

Thus ends the *Ratha Yatra*, the festival of sound, in the silence of submission the festival of sound generated by gods and men and trumpets (*naranam suranam chakolahalam kavilam*) which could not be drowned even by the breezy discussions of the pundits. (V.26)

The *mahakavya* ends with a prayer by a proud progeny of Ramai Dev and the patron of the poet, Baliara Deva. The language suddenly loses the heavy weight of ornaments and assumes a simplicity befitting the prayer. Raja Baliara Deva, after visiting the Mahodadhi full of ships (*potakulakulam*) and waves, mighty like his war-horses (*taranga turanga kulavilam nija valam cha saman varunalayam*), the Markandeya *sarovara Indradyumna sarovara*, Kalpavata, the Narasimha temple, etc., stands near the *Garuda stambha* and pours forth his heart in a language so simple, so sincere, so soulful. The most devoted of your saints, observes the Raja, quote the *Vedas* to prove that you have no form, how can I, so lowly, venture to keep you in my heart :

*Hare pare yasya drusornagochare
muniswara rupamidam santanam
Vidhaya vade nigamasya sadara
ayena tasya sthitaranta bhatite* (XVIII, 68).

The Lord is to him what wealth is to the poor, the moon to the sea and God to the *Sadhaka* :

*Nidhimiva dhanamindumivamvudhi
Harimivatmani Yogayutah sudhih* (XIX, 3).

And then he bends his knees, folds his hands and prays. The prayer is so moving and so



musical that quite a few verses need be quoted for the reader to understand the deft artistry of the poet and the depth of his prayer :

*Janusa stanapana vilasi vayo
vigatam rajasam kutukena samam
Prativesi janeih swajane rajani
divasam virasam vigatam twaparen* (XX, 1)

My childhood reared on the breasts of my mother passed off, playing on the sand and my youth in the pleasant company of my neighbours.

The little virtue I had earned through *sat sang* in my previous life has been, O Lord, destroyed by the enemies within (V.2)

*Vayasiti pare milite nrupate
rataye hata sanmatina krutina
Vahudhapi sudha vihitam duritam
hitamatmana iswarato na krutam* (V.3)

On coming of age, I was given the throne. Yet how ungratefully I abjured the contact of the virtuous and indulged in meaningless, sinful deeds and did nothing for my self-improvement.

Though it is useless now to recall, let me confess, Lord, to the evils I have done. I have, for sheer enjoyment, felt the presence of *Chamara* in women's hair (*Chikuresu Cha Chamarata*) the moon, decking Siva's head, on their faces, the god-desiring nectar on their lips (*adharemaralabhya sudhadhikata*), the beauty of the sun-lit hills on their breasts (*Kuchayoh Kanakachala manjulata*), of coral on their feet and the fruit of my past good deeds on their smiles (V.4-5).

I have sometimes wasted money on my stomach, O God, indulged in tirade against saints, exhibited my ability in deceit in religious conferences in order to please my children, my brothers and my friends. (V.6).

*Madamoha paro divasam vivaso
Kshipamindriya lalanaya kshanadam
Pramada pramadanana samstavano
hatadhira vasah sayane na tatah* (V.7)

I have wasted my days in painted pleasures and my nights in the adoration of women's lotus-faces, but neither in sleep nor in wakefulness did I get peace of mind.

Dictated by my blind mind, the distorted faces of my children, brothers and wives appeared to me, Lord, to be everything and I laid waste my days and my years. (V.8).

Busy in my efforts to multiply the stock of elephants and horses and cattle, (*gajavajigavamabhilasa*). O Lord, my youth passed and now has come this ridiculous age *galite palite yuvahasa pada milita* (V.9).

O Madhusudana ! What is the use of blaming the evil deeds now that age has descended ? The right time and the high birth have been wasted. I made no efforts to realize them. (V.12)

Now that I have grown old, what can I accomplish ? My birth has become fruitless. I am now inert. My voice trembles. My hearing is impaired. My senses are exhausted and effate (V.13).

Endowed with this best of births in the sea of life, O Lord, I could not recognize within me the jewel, *Kamadhenu*, which I slaughtered with the help of the *Indriyas* or senses (V.15).

O Kesava ! Entangled in worldliness and wondering restlessly in the jungle of births, I forget the existence of this *Kamadhenu* so close to me. O Madhusudana ! Though you had bestowed on me, out of kindness, this human life earned with the *punya* of my previous lives, I could not understand its worth :



*Tava pada yugarchana punya chayeih
na kruta suphala madhusudana sa. (V.17)*

*Yadiyam narakantaka dhiramate
Krupaya karuna varunalayate
Janitanuja nurjanani jatharat
Jani tasyas pada palitam bhavatat. (V.23)*

O Destroyer of Hell ! O Sea of Mercy !
birth and old age are but your kind creation. O
Cause of creation ! What else should I long
for, if in this rare human existence I am drawn
to your red lotus-feet ? (V.24)

Like the dust helplessly driven by the
wind : *pavanena yatha vivasani rajamsi*
(V.25). Dust again, the dust which the wheels
of Nandighosa had raised.

The prayer continues into Canto XXI
which closes this *Mahakavya*, the prayer to
the One who stands like a witness in the cavity
of consciousness and spreads like the sky
(*akasavat ghata matan patukuta samstah*),
One, the beauty of whose smile excels that of
the moon, *Kunda* and *Mandara* flowers, who
stands still but creates myriad worlds like
bubbles on the foam-crested waves.

*Phenormi vudvud vadamvu na indu kunda
Mandara vrunda ruchinandita susmitesa (XXI, 10).*

The Raja implores Lord Jagannath to
extinguish in him the fire of anger fanned by
inconsience which consumes the love for
scriptural discourses like a bundle of dry grass.

*Sastrarthalochana samindhana satrunagni
Krodho viveka pavanahita bhuridipatih. (XXI, 4)*

to uncover the Maya that conceals the calm
wisdom of great saints,

*Maya vrunoti mahati krutinamagamyā
Dhwantam cha kantamapi santamanoka kirttim. (XXI, 5)*

to wake in him the child so that he can search
for Him within,

Kayasamstham

Twamikshata sisuriva priyavastu suptah. (XXI, 7)

to create with the dust of his feet *bhakti* or
devotion that grows like a *Kalpalata* or creeper
that heals all woes on the Tree of *Viveka* or
conscience (XXI, 11),

to bless him with the feeling that looks upon
the enemy as if he is a part of his flesh (*vairisu
suteswiva*) so that he will no more reappear in
the womb of the mother which is but a bed of
death.

.... *Krutanta*

Vasanta talpa janani jatharaya neiti (XXI, 15)

Which reminds the reader of Sankara's oft-
quoted line : *punarapi janamam, punarapi
maranam, punarapi janani jathare sayanam.*

The power of this heart-rending prayer,
which Tennyson would say rises 'like a
fountain of fresh water in the sea' in the 'man-
in-God' mingles with 'God-in-man', makes the
Lord appear in the dream of Raja Baliara Deva,
exhorting him to consider *chit* or
consciousness separate from the body so that
with this knowledge he will realize the futility
of worldly life and with this realization see
the beatific vision of the Creator seated like a
mountain on the multifoliate lotus of the heart
radiating the light of a million suns and moons :

*Dehat pruthak saditi chittamavetya nunam
Santim prayati trunavat parikalpya lokan.
Tatrachale prakata rupamananta bhanu
Chandrodayam padamavapsyasi pankajastham. (XXI, 35)*

The Raja prostrates before the Lord :
Tam deva deva madhura saranan vrajami.
Rises and leaves Sriksheetra with this death-
conquering consciousness. If after the Raja's
realization, we still cling to the 'way of all
flesh', woe to mankind, says the poet in
Canto XX :



*Asare samsare manuja janurasadana vudhah
Katham re kamsare ratana patutam dragudatatha
Vijanantohantah kimapi na krutantat paribhavam
Hrusikanam modam kimapi ratimanto vidadhatah
(V. 26)*

How is it, the poet asks, O you pundits !
Knowing fully well the torments of death, you
are still immersed in the world of the senses !
Born with this fruitful human life into this
unsubstantial world, how is it that you do not
sing the glory of Srikrishna.

Srikrishna merges with Sri Jagannath. As
it happens in the works of almost all Vaisnavite
poets. The *Mahakavya* that began with the
Mangalacharana to Srikrishna ends with his
identification with Sri Jagannath :

*Sitamsu vimva prativimvitananam
Marut lalat kekikalapa sekham
Visana vamsiswana tusta gokulam
Bhajami pitamvara mamvuda prabham. (I, 1)*

I Sing a glory of Lord Krishna, yellow-
robed, cloud-like Krishna with his face comely
like the moon, his peacock-feathers wavering
in the wind and his sweet flute filling the
maidens of Gokula with tremendous
excitement.

The prayer of Baliara Deva is the prayer
of poet Gangadhar Misra. It is the prayer of
everyman. It rings in every heart. It echoes
through the corridors of time. If after this, the
poet thinks his poetry to be inadequate and
immature, who is going to believe him ? In
verse 28 of Canto XX, the poet feels that
goddess Saraswati after enjoying the pleasures
of Kalidasa's ornate world was dissatisfied
with the teste of this new, novice poetry and,
therefore, withdrew from him the skill of
composition :

*Matarbharati Kalidasa rasanamasadya lilavati"
Nanalankruti riti niti rachana daksheika*

*lilakaram
Tat him dina navina madrusa nrunam
bhrantiyagata lajjita
Jihwama pratibhasi nasi vachasam tat kausale
karanam*

But the poet does not deserve this self-
pity. He is with Kalidasa and Sri Harsa and
all the great poets of Sanskrit literature. Keats,
the famous Romantic, wrote in one of his letters
: I wish to be with Shakespeare. And Arnold
observed in another age, in another time. He
is, he is with Shakespeare. And Middleton
Murray wrote two volumes on this poet who
died in his early twenties and titled them *Keats
and Shakespeare*. Gangadhar, too, was with
Kalidasa, and it is a pity that such a highly
accomplished poet has gone undiscussed by
the critics of our times.

Gangadhar Misra along with his patron
Baliara Deva withdrew from Srikrishetra so
dear to his heart into Sambalpur and into
Sonepur where he settled down at Khandapali
(the '*Khandakshetra*' of the Somavamsi Copper
plate) a revenue-free village donated by the
Raja with a pair of *Kundalas* in recognition of
Kosalanandam which was first published in
the Utkal Sahitya Press, Cuttack by
Birmirodaya Singh Deo, Maharaja, Sonepur
in 1929. Today when the bell rings in the
ancient Jagannath temple of Khandahata
(Khandapali of *Kosalanandam*), we remember
poet Gangadhar Misra with awe and
reverence.

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