



Interview with an Eminent Lyricist, Mitrabhanu Gauntia

Dr. Akshaya Kumar Panda

After writing the Sambalpuri-Kosali Lyric ‘Rangabati’ the lyricist Mitrabhanu Gountia had never imagined that one day it would bring him international reputation. Now-a-days, it has become usual for people of Odisha, Chhatisgarh, Madhyapradesh and West Bengal to play the song during the processions of marriage ceremonies, idol immersions or the victories of political parties.

The song was broadcast for the first time on the first Wednesday i.e. on 4th May, 1978 by All India Radio, Sambalpur in its special programme “SURMALIKA” (a monthly new Sambalpuri song programme) under the music composition of Prabhudatta Pradhan, and was sung by Jitendriya Haripal and Kumari Krishna Patel. After its improbable popularity, a record manufacturing company of Kolkata (the then Calcutta) Ltd. (INRECO), recorded the song, but the disc release was delayed because of some legal dispute and finally released in 1979. The song got official recognition as it was played in the tableau of Odisha as a part of the celebration of the Republic Day of India in New Delhi in 2007.

In the meantime, Jitendriya Haripal (the male singer) and Mitrabhanu Gountia (the lyricist himself) have been awarded “Padmashree” (the

4th highest civilian award) by Indian Government and Kumari Krishna Patel (the female Singer) has been awarded D. Lit. by Utkal University of Culture, Bhubaneswar, Odisha. The Telugu version of ‘Rangabati’ has been included in V.N. Aditya’s popular Telugu film Sri Ram in 2002 and the song is featured in Bollywood Movie *Koun Kitne Pani Mein*, directed by Nila Madhaba Panda.

Because of the sensuous sonority, ‘Rangabati’ has become popular in foreign countries also. It has been broadcast several times on Radio Moscow and B.B.C. London. The Korean girls also tapped their feet to the tune of ‘Rangabati’ during the 7th World Water Forum at Daegu, Gyeongbuk, South Korea in 2015. The noted singer Sankar Mahadevan also sang ‘Rangabati’ at the inaugural Ceremony of the 22nd Asian Athletic Championship held at the Kalinga Stadium, Bhubaneswar in 2017. Because of unprecedented popularity of the song, the native village of the lyricist, Mitrabhanu Gountia “Bilung” has been renamed as ‘Rangabati Bilung’ by Government of Odisha after getting the no-objection from the Department of Home Affairs, Government of India.

Padamashree Mitra Bhanu Gountia, the lyricist of the song ‘Rangabati’ answers questions



posed to him by Dr. Akshaya Kumar Panda, Associate Professor of English- cum - Principal, Utkalmani Gopabandhu Mahavidyalaya, Khamar, in the District of Angul, Odisha. Dr. Panda happened to be an approved artist of All India Radio, Sambalpur also.

Q.1. By profession you are a teacher. How and when did you start writing Sambalpuri Lyrics ?

Ans. As there was no school in our village I could not have read. But, being the eldest son of gountia (revenue village collector & head of the village, under a princely state) as per the desire of the king of Bamra, I was educated at any cost. Hence I was taught by a private tutor, appointed by my grandfather, when there was no scope for imparting formal education in my native village.

After completion of class – III in 1953, I had to appear a written test for admission in to class – IV at Saletikra U.P. school of my maternal grandparents village Saletikra (now in the District of Bargarh). Buddharaya Gountia, my maternal grandfather, was a writer of ‘Leela Natak’ (a performing art, organized by the local theatrical group). Having been inspired by my grandfather, I also tried to write lyrics secretly because of my shyness. However, my shyness disappeared by the occurrence of an event. For publication in our school Magazine *PRABAHA* our class teacher Kumarmani Choudhury invited writings from students. He imposed on us to write and contribute one article each. In this way a period of one month elapsed and one day Choudhury Sir got angry and asked us to write something and show to him on the spot. Finding no other way out, I showed him three of my writings, already kept in my pocket, trembling with fear and shyness. He went through them attentively and showed high appreciation. Those three

writings were: an essay entitled Pariksha Chinta (Exam. worries) two poems entitled ‘Masa O Odasha Kali’ (The quarrel between mosquito and bug) and ‘Golak Dhanda’ (The Riddles). To my good fortune, all these were published in our school magazine ‘*PRABAHA*’. It is a matter of regret that these writings are not with me now. Besides, I have lost two poems, written, when I was a student of class – X entitled “Rutu Rani Jebe Hasidie (when the spring smiles), Mama Bhaunira Khili Khili Hasa” (Mama Sister’s Loud Laugh) which were brought out in the then children’s Magazines of Odisha. I repent now, for not preserving them with care. Starting from children’s literature, I was also devoting time in writing Odissi, (classical lyric of Odisha) Chhanda (a short narrative song, continuously without repeating the first stanza), ‘Champu- Kavya’ (Admixture of both prose and poem) and devotional songs of Odia literature in my youth. However, this explanation is just a prelude to your original question.

All india Radio, Sambalpur centre was established on 26 May, 1963 and its authority invited writings in Sambalpuri from the local lyricists. The words of an eminent poet of Odisha Gangadhar Meher “Uchcha heba pain Kara Jebe asha, uchcha kara age nija matru bhasa” meaning – “if you want to become great in future first make your mother tongue great” had inspired me a lot. From that day onwards, I fully focused my attention on writing lyrics, radio-plays, poetic-plays, musical-features in my own mother-tongue i.e. Sambalpuri and that practice is still continuing.

Q.2. Could you please say in brief regarding the origin, growth and development of your master piece ‘Rangabati’, please ?

Ans. I am born in a village called “Bilung” in Bamra block of Sambalpur District where ninety percent



population belong to scheduled tribe such as 'Kisan', 'Munda', 'Khadia', 'Oram' and 'Gauda'. So, it is obvious on my part to have been deeply influenced by the culture and tradition of the people with whom I live. I personally join their all socio-cultural programmes, enjoy their open-minded dance and songs. I have also closely seen the customs of marriages like udulia (eloped marriage), ghicha biha (marriage in a forcible manner) sindur biha (arranged marriage celebrated by putting vermillion on the forehead of the bride) prevailing in their community. As per custom, a newly married bride must come to our house to seek the blessings of my father (head man of the village) before leaving for her in-laws house. Such girl has spent her childhood and adolescent days in our village in playing humo (a traditional rural game of girls) and singing 'sajani' and 'galara' (traditional Sambalpuri folk songs) with joyous mood while working in the field.

A tribal girl, in the midst of her youth searches for a mate. She chooses a strong and stout youth as her male partner who is efficient and strong to work in the field. The youth, who is capable of ploughing in the field, sowing seeds, manuring, digging the soil and levelling it, making the ridge around the field, closing the breach and rain-cuts of the field at the time and reaping corn, etc. The lyric 'Rangabati' has been written under the shadow of such tribal culture and tradition. 'Rangabati' is not only one lyric. It is a sequel song of the previous two songs of the same programme broadcast for the first time on radio. Most of the listeners do not know this. The song was broadcast on each Wednesday of May, 1978 in a special monthly programme entitled "Surmalika" prepared by All India Radio,

Sambalpur Centre. As per the programme, three songs used to be broadcast one after another.

The first solo song was meant for singing by a female voice, the second, by a male and the third one a duet by both male and female voices. But unfortunately during disc recording, these three songs were not recorded all together serially. Only the last duet was recorded, ignoring the previous two solo songs (by male & female voice) and as a result, original sequence of the song has become incoherent and obscure.

Firstly, the financial condition of the tribal family is usually not good. Earlier, I have told, regarding how a tribal girl chooses her own match, when she attains the age of adolescence, so also the hero of 'Rangabati' has passionately thought of a beautiful girl as his match. Emotionally thinking about her he has slept and seen her in the dreams in his chalkuria (thatched hut). While in deep sleep he has met a beautiful girl (like laxmi) in his dreams.

The girl is reluctant to come near him because she cannot take a decision unless or until she knows him well. In their tradition, after marriage also a tribal girl goes for another, if she discovers impotency in her male partner. But here, the beautiful girl has chosen him as her perfect match, who has come in her dream. She has decorated his Chhechri Khat (torn- rope-woven bedstead) with gold lace. The young boy has searched for his dream girl.

The first line of the male singer :

Nain baja aru ghunguru Jhumuru
Jhumura ankhi Jhankigala.
Jhum Jhum Jhum jhumurare
Jhum Jhuma Jhum Jhumkabala"
Jhumura ankhin jhanaki gala re -

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The first line of the female singer:

“Jhuma rani Jhumi Jhumi
Kala Jhim Jhim jhim rati
Besi dela dihen jhiki miki sajo
Sapane galin muin mati.”

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While in sleep, the tribal girl has seen the lover approaching towards her. Nida Mausi (The angel of sleep) has decorated her with glittering ornaments. At this moment a handsome youth looking like prince has come to her riding on a winged horse. The girl now dreams of riding with the much awaited prince-like youth on the winged horse. She is overwhelmed with joy listening to ‘dulduli baja’ (a traditional folk rhythm of percussion instruments) When the fairies of heaven have greeted her with hulhuli (forming hulu hulu sound by horizontal movements of tongue by Odia women in auspicious occasions) and prepared to bid her farewell with bridal dress, her dream has come to an end. She has questioned to herself “who will bring me my dream prince with whom I was immersed in a dream” ?

The last song of the programme is “Rangabati re rangabati” has been listened by all and has been being listened to till date. The youth has, at first sight, requested his ladylove to speak something with a smile. She has bowed down her face with shyness. The king and the queen of the dream world are now extremely happy to have been bound in the single thread of a garland. They have expressed their happiness becoming wife and husband. The long cherished desire has been fulfilled. They have fructified their relationship and tied their bond of love with depth and intensity. Thereafter, as true Indians, they have aspired to rebuild the nation. They also wish to carry on the legacy of Bharat and Odisha (their own state) to create a new

utopia. They also wish that their such noble deeds shall be imprinted in the holy inscriptions like *The Geeta* and *Puranas* for ages.

Yes, very often people ask me why I have chosen the word ‘Rangabati’ for this lyric. In our Western Odisha, many girls are named after the suffix bati such as ‘Kalabati’, ‘Tarabati’, ‘Rasabati’ and ‘Nurabati’ but in case of this lyric the word ‘Rangabati’ has spontaneously originated from my pen. Apart from this, I have also written numerous songs having the title like ‘Rasabati’, ‘Mayabati’ and ‘Kalabati’ which have been broadcast time and again by all India Radio.

On the other hand the persons who have listened to my these three songs, ask me sometimes, “Gountia Babu, why don’t you write another lyric equivalent to ‘Rangabati’ ? My humble answer will be to them like this that “I openly submit that this ‘Rangabati lyric’ has been written only by the blessings of Maa Samaleswari (The presiding deity of Sambalpur) and Shree Jagannath (The Lord of the Universe).

Q.3. What is your opinion on the present and future position of Sambalpuri lyrics ?

Ans. Folk song is the source of all kinds of literary forms. Our Sambalpuri was alive in its language, folk songs, folk-tales, jokes and proverbs when expected numbers of poets and litterateurs were not writing in it. It is a good symptom that these days poets and litterateurs are committed to this creative pursuits. There are so many Samalpuri-lyric poets in Western Odisha. Many more collections of Sambalpuri lyrics are also available here. Some of them have already been published and others, yet to be published. As the stock of vocabulary of the language will be enriched and developed, so also the language will be enriched after publication of all writings in book forms.



Q.4. How do you envisage the future of Sambalpuri-Kosali Language ?

Ans. The future of this language is very bright. Besides lyric poems, long narrative poems like *The Ramayan* and *The Mahabharata* (epics) have already been written in this language. Many short narrative poems, essays, novels, plays, One-act-Plays, poetic plays, short-stories, children's literature are being written continuously. Hence the writers are now working hard to enrich the language by writing on all its literary forms with dedications. The grammar and dictionaries of this language also have already been published. Hence it is easy to contemplate how a great future of this language waiting ahead.

Q.5. What is your message to the lyricists, writers and the vocal artists of the upcoming generation ?

Ans. I am an ardent worshipper of my mother tongue and have dedicated my life to the cause of Sambalpuri native literature. In this context I always show my obstinacy. Such stubbornness you will not only find in me alone, but also it exists

in each and every poet and writer of the soil. Such tendency fully prevails in the very culture and tradition of Western Odisha. We vouch with determination and toil hard to achieve the goal. By means of this avowal nature we have enabled our literature grow, develop so rapidly and reach the summit. As the purity of a piece of gold is tested by means of touchstone, so also the quality of a person is known when we mix and converse with him. We always work with positive attitude and strong determination. Consistent perseverance is the key to success. People of Western Odisha are born with this nature and I hope, the language of my native tongue will persuade us to proceed ahead. We also resort to all fair means in achieving the end causing no harm to anyone.

Jai Jagannath, Jai Maa Samaleswari.

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