

Dr. Mahatab's Contribution to Children's Literature and Welfare

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Dr. Harekrushna Mahatab is an architect of the Modern Orissa and his achievements as a freedom fighter, Legislator, Historian and Litterateur are outstanding. During Freedom Struggle, he made immense sacrifices and after Independence, he was one of the makers of the destiny of Orissa. Besides his significant contribution in the literary field, his organising ability was extraordinary. That is why, Prajatantra Prachar Samiti set up in 1947 has not only survived for more than five decades through various odds and adversities, but has brought about a kind of revolution in the literary and cultural life of the orissan people.

Dr. Mahatab, in his editorial to 'Jhankar', April, 1986 aptly recollected, "My dream was to create a new era in various fields of Orissa and to awaken new hopes and ambitions, so that we can boast of the greatness of Orissa. With strong determination as pointed out by Swami Vivekananda and Mahatma Gandhi in the past, we established Prajatantra Prachar Samiti in 1947 and went ahead without caring the hurdles in the way." He initiated a lot of



programmes for creating confidence among the people of Orissa and among all the programmes, the literary and cultural activities got the priority. He initially started Prajatantra as a weekly and then daily in which a page was devoted to writings for children and by children with the banner "Meena Bazar". This Meena Bazar created new hopes and aspirations among the children of Orissa by promoting their reading habit and literary interest.

He was himself an eminent writer of the stories for children. Although he was pre-occupied with multifarious socio-political activities, he could find out some time for writing for children. He realised that suitable children's literature would improve the cognitive and emotional development of children. That is why, he wrote stories and essays for children at times which were brought out in the Meena Bazar and other journals. It is very heartening to note that all stories scattered here and there, were compiled and published in two books called 'Vishnu Purana Bhitiri Katha' (Internal Affairs in the Abode of Vishnu) and 'Shri Ganeshanka Patha Padha' (study of Shri

Ganesh). In these stories, the language, style and psychological presentation are appropriate to the children and are highly appreciated by them.

The former book is first in the series entitled "Kakanka Kahani-I" (Uncle's Stories, Part-I) published in 1989. The title of the book was given after the last story given in the book. This book consists of 3 such stories and the last one starts like this "Nobody knows where God is. But, he must have been very old. When the world was created by him, he was very young. He wanted to play again and created three Gods - Brahma, Vishnu and Maheswar. He asked Brahma, 'You create the Universe'. He told Vishnu, 'You see that the world is well maintained' and advised Maheswar to destroy the same if it does not function well. "Then he narrated how the man became ambitious and his dreams became endless. All this created a lot of problems for Vishnu. Dr. Mahtab has said, Man's hopes knows no bounds. If man is left in the Heaven, his hopes cannot be satisfied. Hence, all this became too difficult to be managed. Once he became very much worried and told God, I cannot control this man any longer. They will surpass me and can go ahead. Now, let me get rid of this responsibility. I can not manage any more."

In this context, God advised Vishnu to have two wives : One of them is Laxmi, Goddess of Wealth and another is Saraswati, Goddess of Wisdom. Now, those who will want wealth, Laxmi will take care of them and those who will be interested in learning, they can be satisfied by Saraswati. Vishnu did accordingly and was happy for some time, but Laxmi and Saraswati started quarreling and difficulty arose in the human society on account of rivalry between these two wives. Man is

very clever and he manages to take advantage of the situation. They acquire wisdom from Goddess Saraswati and with the help of wisdom, acquire wealth. The clever story writer has pointed out the instances of rich Western Countries like England, and U.S.A. Once Vishnu asked his wives, "You can not cope up with the cleverness of the man. You live together without involving yourselves in rivalry. Otherwise this will bring shame to our family." Thus, with light humour the author has made this story very interesting as well as enlightening for children.

The caption of another story is "Foolish Ram Prasad", in which Mahtab has tried to show how Viswambar being a very good student has received scholarship, whereas Ram Prasad being stupid only depended on worshipping goddess and medicant, has got plucked. Another story was "Naka Kata Babaji" (Noseless Babaji) in which the story-writer has, as in the previous story tried to teach a lesson by showing the uselessness of the superstitions as existing in the society. He has criticised the society in a very interesting way for the wrong practices being followed by the simple people.

Similarly, there are stories like "Adventure of a Child" in which a boy has gone in an artificial satellite to the space and also has landed on the Moon. He has spent one year visiting various planets and showing various wonderful feats to the people there. He has also cleverly returned to the Earth after taking a number of photographs which have been published in different newspapers. Interestingly, the story-writer has not given any name to the boy. Giving its reason he has said, "Till now, no such boy has been born. But he must come one day." Thus, the writer has hoped

that in future, children will be more adventurous and can travel in the space. In another story, the writer has shown depicted how Indra was selected for ruling the Heaven for good management and giving everybody his due.

In the second book entitled "Study of Shri Ganesh" under the "Kakanka Kahani (Uncle's Stories) Series-II". This book consists of seven stories and has been named after the title of the last story in the same. In this story, the writer has described a mythological anecdote in an interesting manner. The two sons of Mahadev were Kartik and Ganesh. The former was very healthy and handsome, but not interested in study. On the other hand, Ganesh was ugly and dwarf but very much meritorious in his study. Kartik became a warrior and Ganesh a good scholar. Since Ganesh was educated working hard in his study, he knows how children study in their own way. Ganesh likes good boys and dislikes naughty ones, who adopt malpractices in the examination neglecting their studies. Thus, Mahtab has tried to advise children to be particular in their studies. Another story is "Raja Bujha" (king's judgement). The writer has punished the king who has neglected his duties of looking after his subjects. In another story, "Musa Benga Sangat" (Friendship between a Mouse and a Frog), Mahadev has shown how a third person takes advantage of mis-understanding between two. In another story "Kukura Languada Banka" (Bending of the dog's tail), the writer has depicted how a child called 'Biswamvar' has dreamed to be a wealthy man and getting a boon from satan has troubled himself. Showing his agony a saint has advised, "You did not work hard and

wanted to earn money in foul way. That is why, you faced the difficulty". But, inspite of his advice, the boy has not corrected himself and suffered a lot due to his bad habit.

In this compilation, there are some other stories, most of which are quite interesting. But in one story, "Chheli-Machha Kali" (Quarrel between a goat and a fish), the author has used a political incident which may not be appealing to children due to its political references. But most of the stories are quite appropriate to children in respect to its language and style, humour and satire.

To conclude, Dr. Mahatab has shown love and affection towards young people and has tried his best to develop suitable literature for them. Therefore, his own writings and his efforts in organising "Meena Bazar" in an effective way has been encouraging children to read and write themselves. Thus, he has developed healthy reading habit among children and creating prospective writers in the coming generations.

References :

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