

Bibhu Padhi: An Intelligent Poet with many Themes and Concerns

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Introduction:

Bibhu Padhi is an intelligent poet with international recognition. He is next only to Jayanta Mahapatra among the Orissan English poets, a poetic flower on the Orissan plant in the garden of Indian English. On the contemporary scenario of Indian English poetry, Padhi is a new signature meriting serious critical attention. Bibhu Padhi constitutes a triumvirate along with Jayanta Mahapatra and the late Niranjan Mohanty — all these three Indian English poets sprouting and springing from the soil of Orissa. They are all rooted deeply in the socio-cultural ethos of Orissa. All these Indian English poets of Orissa obviously stand out ripping through the crowds of several Indian English poets glimmering on the Indian horizon.

On the contemporary scenario of Indian English poetry, Bibhu Padhi is a new signature meriting serious critical attention. Like other prominent voices of contemporary Indian English poets, Bibhu Padhi establishes a recognizable stand. One wonders why Padhi's poetry has not attracted any critical attention so far, despite the fact that his poetry is of a very high order, deservedly meriting a fair and impartial critical evaluation. Padhi's poetry is of a much higher quality than that of many poets. A deep rooted cultural and impersonal reality sustains his significant poetic world. Padhi possesses exceptional poetic qualities as a true Indian English poet, consequential to the postcolonial epoch, its urges and aspirations. He has been specified as inward looking— deeply rooted in cultural and interpersonal realities speaking to the heart in their own universal language. That is why he is compared with great poets like A. K. Ramanujan, Kamala Das, T. S. Eliot, Nissim Ezekiel, R. Parthasarathy, etc. Padhi's poetry is rooted in the native soil and mystic and religious tradition and is very true to its cultural sublimity.

Objectives:

The paper takes up a few key ideas and words from Bibhu Padhi in its attempt to study as well as analyse many themes and concerns his poetry and how he is growing in theme and concerns in recent years. In other words, the paper also makes an attempt to show that poetry of Bibhu Padhi is rooted in the native soil and mystic and religious tradition and is very true to its cultural sublimity.

Methodology:

The paper is analytical in nature. For constituting of the paper, primary as well as secondary sources are used. The primary sources include the original selected works of the poet taken for study. The secondary sources include reference books and other related articles.

Analysis of Study:

Bibhu Padhi is a poet with his background in Orissa in general and as a teacher of English in particular who spent a large part of his teaching career in the P. G. Department of English, Ravenshaw Autonomous College, (now Ravenshaw University), Cuttack, S. C. S. College, Puri and numerous other government colleges. He is the most promising poet after Jayanta Mahapatra and it is a pity that he has not got attention he deserves. He is the author of *Going to the Temple* (1988),

A Wound Elsewhere (1992), *Lines from a Legend* (1993), *Painting the House* (1999), *Games the Heart Must Play: A Trilogy of Love Poems* (2002), and *Living with Lorenzo* (2003), a chapbook of 14 poems on D. H. Lawrence. The thematic range of his poems is very high. Most of his family poems reminded us of Ramanujan's family poems. Padhi makes a 'voyage within' and describes situations, and incidents of day-to-day life which are not only real but authentic. He makes the readers see into the reality of joint-family life and secures the readers' participation. Important poems in this mode which deserves special mention are "The House", "Letter to my Wife" and "Grandmother". In "The House" Padhi tells us, how he is bound to it when his brothers have left for other places:

I've been here since the time
I learnt to know one house from another.
There've been times when I thought
of leaving it altogether, forever.
Perhaps I'll never be able to do so

This poem is reminiscent of A. K. Ramanujan's family poem, "Small Scale-Reflections on a Great House". In the same way Padhi writes in his poem "The House":

Nothing waves here as though chained
to ancestral blemishes never forgiven.
No one visits us, not even my brothers...
...
They now live in large cities,
in rented buildings, government quarters.
I don't blame my father, who put
all that he had served into this house
in the hope his children wouldn't have to seek
other houses.

This poem evokes a sentiment which is genuine, and authentic. The observation is very apt and the tone is conversational befitting the theme. Another poem "Grandmother" reminds us of Kamala Das' "My Grandmother's House". The memory of the grandmother is very poignant and it is associated with events in life, one can never forget. Concern of a grandmother for the grandchildren and other members of the family and children's love for her evoke the atmosphere of a family in its realistic terms. Her warnings:

The care of your child
You will never get another like him.

And the poet's son's affection for her has been described in an authentic manner in the poem "Grandmother":

...I watch my son
kiss her cold breathless hands
in his own small, childish way.

Padhi's themes range over nature and petty creature, loss and absence, silence and serenity, the personal and the impersonal, the religious and the social, the political and the metaphysical. But whatever his themes, there is a profound hermit — like reflectiveness

reigning supreme, holding the reader hypnotized. His poetry is rooted in the Indian socio-cultural heritage in general and the ethos of Orissa in particular. Padhi is rooted in his soil, is at ease with the medium. He does not try to consciously build his culture, but culture shapes his concerns. He uses English words outside the boundary of English society. He does not nourish the notion of a foreign or illusory audience. That is the reason why he is capable of transcending territorial, ethnic and political limitations in order to come to terms with the larger issues of life. His vision abstracts and personalizes the essence of issues, however culture-specific and local they may be. Lack of expatriate experience allows poets like Padhi to be more universal and multi-directional.

Padhi's first collection *Going to the Temple* contains some very Oriya poetry in English and the landscape as well as the rituals of everyday life infuse the poems. Places like Cuttack, Puri, Bhubaneswar, Chilka Lake, Gopalur and the river Mahanadi, the Orissan rain and the scenes and surroundings recur in Padhi's poetry. Like Jayanata Mahapatra, Padhi has written about the mystic fascination of Puri. How a devotee is hogged to this place very often he becomes unable to know:

Look how you reached this place—
almost without trouble and hardly any tears.
You must know that God who
resides here, has the sea's patience.

In the same poem about the devotee's activity at the temple, the poet suggests his persona:

Keep the priests away, weep like a child.
I'm sure, the long—lost god
shall appear behind your tears,
ready for compromise.

This religious faith is inherent in the Oriya devotees. Weeping like a child at the sanctuary, brings a peace to the devotee, and it is believed that the kindest God appears to relieve the grief of the devotee as many legends go with this temple culture. Padhi has also Mahapatra's way of addressing him relations like Mother, Grandfather, Father, etc. His poem entitled "Grandmother" reminds us of Kamala Das "My Grandmother's Home". The memory of grandmother is very poignant and it is associated with events in life, one can never forget. Concern of a grandmother for the grandchild and other members of the family and children's love for her evoke the atmosphere of a family in its realistic terms. Padhi's poems entitled "Konarka" reminiscences the old legends and faiths that are alive in the Oriya culture.

A Wound Elsewhere like the other collections of Padhi is a set of recurrence of images like rain, father, son, wife, home, grandmother, Cuttack, flood in Orissa and the like. The poet sees how things happen day after day and how life passes through them and thus Padhi simply observes the process of happening. "The House" is a good nostalgic poem revealing his rootedness in the house built by his father and his inability to snap all emotional ties with his father. The poet writes:

I don't blame with my father, who put
all that he had saved into this house
in the hope his children wouldn't have to seek
other houses.

In *A Wound Elsewhere*, the poetic brilliance lies with the subtlety of inward-looking of the indeterminate experience of the poet. His poetic thoughts have taken the root

from his own physical and psychic world. The social and cultural complexes have shaped the poetic force. Like all other Indian poets writing in English, Padhi develops the passion for own native land searching for his roots like his predecessor Jayanata Mahapatra who develops a philosophy brooding over guilt and conflict of larger humanity and on socio-cultural bonhomie. Padhi handles the same with the very trivial accounts of his own for a glorified poetic progress.

Referring to his mode of writing the publishers' note on his *Lines from a Legend's* reveals, "Bibhu Padhi's poem takes place within the framework of his home, the ancient Orissan town of Cuttack and the round of births and deaths within the circle of family and friends. The poems bring alive this world with an extraordinary intensity, investing the everyday with visionary depth. In this collection, his visionary mode undergoes a change. The sense of despair and tragedy pervades the visionary world of Padhi and most of the poems of this collection depict the loss, decay, death, perversion and melancholy. In this collection, we find Padhi in the world of Philip Larkin. The first poem here starts with summer. But the heart does not open:

The heart hides behind every
casual knock at the door.
waits for enduring visitants.

In yet another poem on summer, there is acceptance and awareness of nature:

As the summer wind sails over my body,
it makes me its own.

Padhi's *Painting the House*, like the previous books, is inward-looking and deeply rooted in cultural and impersonal realities. The visuals of summer afternoons, the ruins of the sun temple of Konark, the memories of the dream town Cuttack are reconstructed and revised, and the connections are retraced. Everyday experience and age-old myths and legends get their shape in visionary exploration of the real or surreal form of feeling. The poems like "In the Temple", "Diwali", "Annual Invitation to the Dead", "Konarka" celebrate the Oriya cultural and legendary realities:

A smell of burnt wicks fills
the marbled courtyard.
the Goddess's face can hardly be seen
behind the veil of smoke
and loud singing and raised hands...
here, my words drifting sluggishly
in the stagnant air, until they reach
her threshold of innocence and familiarity.

A trilogy of love poems, *Games the Heart Must Play* takes the reader to yet another subjective world where the speaking voice of the narrator assumes a father-like personality. Padhi's volume is built upon love as the central image that flows and glides with such earnestness that it refuses any formulaic categorization. In an age of disbelief and machine, Padhi seems to champion that love can bring panacea for the wounded and the depraved. He consciously records his own disenchantment with the world where nothing remains constant or incorruptible the first love poem "Dream children" deals with the poet's relationship with children in general, the second love

poem “Today” treats the man-woman relationship and time as the forth dimension, and the third love poem, “Daughter” concerns the poet’s relationship with daughter in general. All the three love poems are essentially exploratory in nature, couched in the most delicate and elegant terms.

Padhi’s *Living with Lorenzo* captures an imagined relationship between the poet and the celebrity writer and poet D. H. Lawrence. It also creates an atmosphere and an ambience with which the poet intends to try to fathom life in its variety, richness and totality. Padhi exhibits his rare insight of imagination to discover the unextinguished desires of the great artist D. H. Lawrence whose influence can be found in many works of Padhi. Making Lawrence his confident, Padhi also addresses the common people’s confrontation between their self and society. He holds an edge over his fellow poets in the use of their words, style and association with readers. His peep in the past, his love for Nature, economy of words and his simplicity bring him close to his reader’s heart.

Padhi’s greatness as a poet lies in the simplicity of expression, use of subtle language without impairing the meaning and the poetic flow. The natural flow of his verse ensures spontaneity, which the veterans of poetry call a pre-requisite quality. His themes are based on the time, place and ethos of our time. But in their rendering, a sense of crisis such as cultural, political, ideological faced by the world today becomes fused with a distinctly developed style of Padhi’s own. His style is reminiscent of A. K. Ramanujan, and his rhythms and themes are as appealing as those of Jayanta Mahapatra. Traditional and humanistic in approach, Padhi seems to have discovered the universal of histories and cultures.

The increased perception of social life has become a subject-matter in modern Indian English poetry. Poets like Ezekiel, Parthasarathy, Ramanujan, Mahapatra and Kamala Das etc. sustain the significant value of daily life remaining in closeness with it. All these poets reflect the daily life with the perception of native reality. In relation to the question of roots or identity that is found as an aspect of postcolonial literature, these poets including Padhi in recent poetry brood over the significant of place and community they belong. This can also be considered as an important means of establishing the identity of a poet. A poet’s response to the landscape of his country, his sense of tradition and many other factors go together to make him assume an identity of his own. Padhi deals with his surrounding as a significant aspect of his poetry. It appears that he just collects the splintered shreds of Oriya life in ruin, constructs it, gives it a soul and presents it to the readers to recognise their own forgotten self and identity. He has been deeply rooted in cultural and interpersonal realities speaking to the heart of their own universal language.

One of the most striking qualities of Padhi lies in his rich and profound imagination when he sketches lean trees bending into one another in an act of love embracing during nights to avoid the envious eyes of mankind. Such an imagination is not commonly found in modern day poets for whom poetry is utter realization of split and damages, collapse and construction in a world fighting for mere survival. Poetry for Padhi means more than survival and it is survival with a cause. It is the cause to live a life not with a choked feeling but with the ability and the chivalry to express what the heart longs for, the body feels and the spirit cleanses. His poems offer a universal appeal and bring to light his deep reverence for his culture and the legacy of past.

Like Jayanta Mahapatra's poetry, Padhi is also strewn with pain and ran, ruin and rot, heat and humidity, wind and whisper, dust and crust, sun and stars, trees and forest, leaves and griefs, birds and insects, river and sea, devoid of any deep metaphoric reverberations. His poetry is powerful universal; for a genuinely universal poet must, first of all, be the poet of a specific part of the universe. In Padhi's case, it is Orissa, in which he is deeply rooted. Paradoxically, only the truly local is the truly universal, the local inspiration being an imperative positive source of poetry. And the positive act vital to Padhi has been to uncover or discover his locale self, for his universal self is inevitably and invariably inherent in the local and the provincial. Padhi's greatness as a poet lies in the simplicity of expression, use of subtle language without inspiring the meaning and the poetic flow. The natural flow of his verse ensures spontaneity, which the veterans of poetry call a pre-requisite quality. His themes are based on the time, place and ethos of our time. But in their rendering, a sense of crisis such as cultural, political, ideological faced by the world today becomes fused with a distinctly developed style of Padhi's own. Padhi's style is reminiscent of A. K. Ramanujan, and his rhythms and themes are as appealing as those of Jayanta Mahapatra.

Conclusion:

Padhi maintains clarity both of tone and theme in his poetry. He truly represents Orissa both of past and present and shows the spirit of Orissa which is the guiding-force of Oriya life. Padhi's poems, otherwise, are a kind of reconstruction of Oriya life. It appears that he just collects the splintered shreds of Oriya life in ruin, constructs it, gives it a soul and presents it to the readers to recognize their own forgotten self and identity. Culture, homeland and past memories haunt him frequently. Both modern and postmodern poet, he is a poet of many themes and concerns. He has been influenced by poets like Jayanta Mahapatra, Thomas Hardy and Philip Larkin. His poetry is rooted in the native soil and mystic and religious tradition and is very true to its cultural sublimity.

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