

A brief note on Dr. Gayatribala Panda's poetry and story collections

Gayatribala Panda, with eight immaculately distinguished collections, is a respectable name among the younger generation Odia poets. No, she does not celebrate the politically correct feminist strength; she does not applaud feminine modesty, she rather transcends her idiom as a woman poet. Her poetry invariably celebrates the sad symptoms of her time, though her view of life does not entail any early personal frustrations; she has experienced a reality very closely and quite beneath her age: the sad life of the downtrodden who is 'born' unfortunate. Yet, her poems never degenerate into clichéd statements of pessimism. It is unbelievable that there is rarely a smirk of hope in Gayatribala's poems, and yet the reader never feels laden with the burden of transgression as a participant. In her introspective anthologies, every utterance is weighed. She rears well her skeptical worldview, blends rather brilliantly her creativity with the utterly stark reality around her, and the reader in the end is treated to sheer beautiful poetry that transcends the trite and the ephemeral.

The anguish of a woman, social injustices and inequalities are the most dominant theme of her poetry. Her language is eloquent but simple, making it appealing both to the masses and the intelligentsia. She is an extremely sensitive poet whose keen social concern and vision of realism take on the dimension of a rebellion. Contemporary social reality forms the basis of her poetry. While she represents the cruelty and heartlessness she experiences in society with extraordinary frankness, she also constructs the unexplored territories of feminine consciousness through powerful symbols and images. What makes her a unique voice is her originality in the use of images and poetic diction. Rigorous selection of only the most telling detail from a plethora of themes and issues often form the basic material of her writing. Implicating them through history and myths is her hallmark. Her poems appear simple, but the simplicity achieved the hard way, with painstaking artistry. Her tone is clear and articulation discreet. An unusual fusion of rapture and contemplation, revolt and pity, her poetry is a constant search for the reality and truth of human life beyond its horror, boredom and ugliness.

Gayatribala's endeavour as the moral voice of an India of economic inequalities, social and cultural devastations, where morals are loosening cannot be ignored.

Aahata Pratishruti (Bruised Promises), 2001:

This maiden collection of poetry appeared when the poet was twenty-four. The collection does not endorse the predictable thematic obsessions of a young poet pushing her first anthology: love, relationships, romanticism..., and instead is an exercise in the sublime. The poet treads somber ground: revolt against the pervading poverty and helplessness, in particular the poverty and destitution in Odisha, her state. So the collection in a sense celebrates the poet's allegiance to her land and language, the foremost responsibility of a creative artist. The collection, with some highly disturbing pieces almost behaved prophetic for Gayatri's poetic career – that she has volcanic creativity, and is there to stay in the literary circuit of Odisha. She faces the ugliest reality around her, and does not build herself an illusion to seek solace. Another feather in the crown was, the collection had been brought out by a mainstream publishing house.

Aspashta Ishwara (Indistinct God), 2002:

In this collection, brought out by Odisha Sahitya Academi, the poet consolidates as a serious poet who is both unmindful of and detached to the playfulness her youth demands of her. The collection betrays the same mellowness of the poet in acknowledging the realities of depravity and deprivation in the here-and-now and in the terrain beyond: the social and political evils of mankind like terrorism, dowry-death, transgression in governance, exploitation, rape, female foeticide... The collection carries a few poems that mourn the fading basis of spiritualism in mankind. Obviously, the poet looks upon the tenacity of the Hindu way of life and its value system as a liberating agent of the pervading gloom. Some of the pieces experiment with simplicity and lyricism in structure.

Anayatta (Beyond control), 2006:

An anthology of fifty-three poems, Ananyatta, quests love amid the inevitability of its absence in the world the poetic-self inhabits. Almost each poem in the collection underscores the hedonistic indulgence of mankind, and the consequent evils. An extension of the previous anthology, the poems build on a central theme: the collective tragedy of mankind in our times. The poet's command over her canvas and idiom looks complete.

Gaan (Village), 2008:

The anthology, as is subsumed in its captioning, critiques nostalgia and stands apart from the earlier collections. The poet reminisces her early memories, largely revolving round a village life; the most impactful time of one's existence. Though there is no escape from the pervasive pessimism of the poet. In fact the nostalgia of the poetic-self looks misplaced in the changing times; a connect with the past cannot be worked out either. However, the pessimism does not glare at you; it blends with the realism that the poems portray. All the numbers in the anthology are titled 'Gaan', accentuating a structural point.

Jetiki dishuchi akasha (Whatever of the sky is visible), 2011:

There is less of revolt in the poems in this anthology. The poet appears composed in her introspection, which restores a sense of self esteem in her. Time rather tries to offer solutions to the issues she has often been involved. Emotion overrides the intellectual dilemma that often accompanied the poetic self in its quest for the ultimate truth. Also, a strong sense of history echoes in many of the poems in the anthology. Perhaps, the poet uses history as a defense to tide over the evil symptoms of her time.

Aakhi naain Kaana naain(No eye no ear), 2013:

The poems in the collection elegantly juxtapose statements of intense resistance and empathy. With a wide thematic spectrum on a large range of issues – a political system defeated in its purpose, the actual issues plaguing the forest communities, dalits and other classes at the margins, displacement, sensitive subjects of moral decadence, religion and gender – the collection testifies to the poet's discerning introspection and creative realization in its aesthetic pronouncement. The poems are grounded in tradition, yet challenge it with a rare courage, particularly its sacrosanct labels of 'truth' and 'conviction'. With sharp irony, the poems tear into current human predicaments, systems and situations that suffocate us and eventually, the dwindling existence of mankind. Each of the twenty-four poems in the collection, symbolic and denotative, raises a convincing toast to the triumph of humanism.

E Raatira Jete Tara(The Stars of this Night), 2014:

In this collection of eighty-four pieces reality does not present itself in starkness; a carefully crafted idiom, lexis and artistry of the poet shroud it lifting to blissful aesthetics and leaving the reader dazed. A number of poems concern woman – her courage to defy stereotypes about her existence; her bold avowal of her love, her celebration of sense of freedom escaping a hurt, like a butterfly from inside a suffocating cocoon. The poet, as always, is careful and committed to her thematic and structural worlds: simple yet intense imagery; flawless, expert manner of presentation and the poetic-self endorsing finer, expanding sensibilities that are passionate. The poems are also noted for the controlled, precise presentations, a rare maturity in weaving of lexis, compactness of configuration, visual richness, and so on.

Bagha(Tiger):

The latest collection Bagha(Tiger) is an anthology of poems. There is a primordial fear for tiger in every man. The poems in the anthology are based on the perception that there could be an invisible tiger in every human being and that the tigerish feelings in man could be as fierce. As a matter of fact, the difference between the man and a tiger appears as thin as a dot. Man can turn into a tiger any moment, in any circumstance. It is a state of mind that makes one a tiger. Tiger is not a myth, it is rather a projection of an unfathomable mystery- of a primeval ferocity moving in the darkness of a jungle of the mind.

- **Dr. Lipuspa Nayak**, critic and translator.

Bisarjana (Immersion) – Short story collection:

The portrayal of rural Odisha in the stories testifies to Gayatribala Panda's talent in the art; the characters turn alive with her incising vision. The stories carry the author's philosophy of life, amid its misery and compassion. The subject of child psychology and child labour is a major concern in many stories. The stories are readable and humble; leading the reader along the collective incompleteness, chaos and ugliness to the realities and ultimate truth of life. This writer is a champion celebrator of life in its myriad possibilities. The collection, like *Gaan* (Village) – her poetry collection, will affect the readers, I am sure.

-**Dr. Bibhuti Patnaik**, (Eminent litterateur, Novelist), Odisha Sahitya Akademi Award winner, former convener of Odia Advisory Board of Sahitya Akademi.