

Gangadhar Meher

- 5 poems -

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Gangadhar Meher (9 August 1862 - 4 April 1924)

Gangadhar Meher (Oriya: ଗଙ୍ଗାଦହ ମେହେର ଗଙ୍ଗାଦହ ମେହେର), renowned Oriya poet of 19th century also known as Swabhab Kavi, was a literary Midas, who transformed everything into gold by the alchemic touch of his genius. He was a born poet of delicate charm. His was a clean white style. His poem Bhakti (The Devotion) bears eloquent testimony to the change in religious outlook. He was essentially a poet of intuition and side by side he had a penetrating insight. Though poor in wealth and education, he was very rich in mind and culture. In almost all his writings there is a glimpse of originality.

Childhood

Gangadhar was born in 1862 on the full moon day of Shraavan at Barpali of present day Bargarh district of Orissa. Chaitanya Meher was working as a village Vaidya (Ayurvedic doctor) besides his family profession of weaving. But as he could not maintain his family with the income of these works, he opened a village school and began to teach a few children. Gangadhar Meher could read up to the Middle Vernacular Standard hurdling over diverse disadvantages, and his excessive desire for reading one day dragged him to the field of writing poems.

As a young boy, he heard the Oriya Ramayan composed by Balaram Das and afterwards he himself read it as well as the Oriya Mahabharata by Sarala Das. He also read and mastered a great number of Sanskrit books; of which 'Raghubansam', deserve mention. He had proficiency in Hindi and Bengali. Tulsi Ramayan in Hindi used to be held by him in great respect. He used to read Bengali magazines and newspapers. Gangadhar, in his student life, read Sanskrit.

Gangadhar got himself married at the age of 10. As his father's pecuniary condition was not satisfactory, Gangadhar used to go to school in the morning and help his father in weaving in the afternoon. The poet's weaving was as attractive and beautiful as his poetry. For his clear and beautiful hand writing people used to visit him for writing their documents. The pecuniary condition of the family improved a bit due to his hard labour when to the misfortune of the family, the ancestral house caught fire.

Career

The then Zamindar of Barpali, Lal Nruparaj Singh offered him the post of an Amin (Patwari). Coming to learn of amicable behaviours and good virtues of Gangadhar, the Zamindar promoted him to the post of a Moharir. He continued to serve in the said post and was transferred to Sambalpur, Bijepur and Padmapur and at last transferred to him own native place Barpali

on a salary of Rs. 30/- P.M.

The post was very liberal and magnanimous in his social life. During the last age of his life, the poet organized an All Orissa Social Conference of Meher with a view to uplifting the entire weaver society. Nearly three thousand Meher from different parts of Orissa assembled in the Conference. The poet put up twelve proposals for the reform of the society and all were passed unanimously.

Literary Career

Gangadhar started composing poems from a very tender age. His first writings follow the style and technique of the ancient Oriya writers. His first Kavya (poetic work) was "Rasa-Ratnakara". Then being persuaded by some friends he changed his ways and wrote poems and kavyas in the modern Oriya style. Kabibar Radhanath Ray praised his writing very much. Then Gangadhar Meher produced innumerable writings that have no parallel in point of sweet imaginativeness, in beauty and clarity of language, in the novelty of style, in point of forceful character painting and in the lively description of nature from different angles of vision. His writings are like precious jewels in the store room of Utkal Bharati (Oriya language).

Gangadhar Meher College

In 1949, Sambalpur College in Sambalpur, which had opened in 1944, was renamed Gangadhar Meher College in his honour. In 1992, it instituted the Gangadhar Meher National Award for Poetry which is conferred annually.

Bhakti

I will not call Thee an 'Ocean of Mercy'
O, Lord of all my race!
For what but a dropp is the boundless sea
In Thy infinite Grace?
How could I tell, though wrapped in prayer,
My little beads of rosary
When Thine is a million stars shimmering fair
In effulgent pageantry.
Can I be bold as to bow before Thee
And take off the dust from Thy feet?
When it dazzles and holds the land and sea
And the multitudinous world in it.
Thou that seest all things and art wise
And read our hearts as we
Mayest accept as much of worship as lies
In my breast for Thee.
Even do I feel my heart too small
To enshrine Thee therein
Can a tiny mustard seed hold at all
The mighty Himalayas within?
Whatever I wish to offer Thee is Thine
However humble it is
How could I venture worship One
With things that are His?
Thou art the Lord of all things big and small
And Thy praise all-life sing
Nothing in this world is mine at all
Mine own self including.
But what I am and what have
With hope I surrender to Thee
O, Merciful! into Thy Kingdom of Love
Accept and receive me.

[Translated by Dr. Keshab Ch. Meher]

Gangadhar Meher

Extracts from Canto-IV of English Version of Tapasvini

Auspiciously came
Usha, the blooming lotus-eyed dame,
in her heart cherishing keenly
thirst for a vision
of the virtuous Janaki.
Bearing dew-pearls as presentation
in her hands of leafage,
standing forward
in the outer courtyard
of Sita's cottage,
in cuckoo's tone spake she:
"O Chaste Lady!
Deign to give your sight;
Dawned the night." (1)

The saffron costume
of auroral shine,
flowers' smiling bloom
and tranquil mien
make a room
in the mind to presume:
Some goddess of Yoga reaching the place,
by sweet words giving solace
calls to render relief
from pangs of grief.
From heaven on earth as if
has descended to bestow a new life. (2)

Musical tune Zephyr sang swinging,
Black Bee played on lute charming.
By Usha's bidding, in dance
rapt remained Fragrance.
Kumbhatua bird as a royal bard
began to eulogize forward.
As the panegyrist premier
Kalinga bird appeared there
and spake in voice gracefully sweet:
"Wake please,
O Queen of the empire of chaste ladies!
Dawned the night." (3)

The Vedic lore chanted by ascetics there
reverberated the darksome penance-grove.
Transcending the sphere
the high OM sound raised above.
From the lute of Sarasvati, the Speech-Goddess,
the tune jingling,
giving hearty propitiation
to Vishnu, the Lord of heaven,
as if could find own access
into the ears of Ananta, the Serpent-King.
By and by, the forest bore

brightness more and more.
With the incantation-power
energy as if increased further. (4)

The celebrate hermitess
ascetic-maid Anukampa
meantime came near Sita
and with sonorous words spake:
"O Vaidehi! please wake.
The delicate-limbed Usha
has now come here.
Giving thy sight duly gratify her.
Placing you once in lap, Tamasa
has awaited to attain happiness." (5)

From her bed got up Sita,
the devoted wife,
on the board of her mind perforated
by inner grief,
portraying the heroic image
of King Rama, like Sun's reflection
in the dew-dropp rested
in the heart of Lotus-maid.
Extending salutation
at the feet of Anukampa,
humble homage
at Usha's feet, she paid. (6)

With admiration
Sita addressed her:
"In this world, thou art harbinger
of the rising of Sun,
the darkness-dispeller.
Thy tender feet compile brilliance.
To them I consign with firm aspiration.
O Ye fond of fair fragrance!
On my lord, King Raghu's scion,
auspiciousness kindly confer." (7)

With heart eagerly restless
at the end of the night,
Tamasa, the hermitage-hostess,
limpid-limbed
and sacred-streamed,
strewing on the yard flowers pleasant,
sprinkling water fragrant,
kindling auspicious Lucifer-lamp bright,
with her fish-eyes frequently gazing thus
was awaiting Sita's arrival gracious. (8)

Accompanied by Anukampa that moment,
Sita, the jewel among the chaste,

highly applauded in the world by the overflow
of endless endearment
rendered by hermit-maidens, in haste,
from the hermitage went to the river-flow.
Her on own lap Tamasa placed,
with the wave-hands lovingly embraced. (9)

In her tone sweet as ambrosia
expressed amply complacent Tamasa:
"Daughter dearest! In my mind
never was the hope that Sita, the necklace
of the heart of Royal Wealth-goddess
would fondly find
my lap as a sporting place
by forsaking the kingly pleasure-seekingness.
In this world, people all
solely because of your noble self will call
me very fortunate one
with words of appreciation. (10)

Wandering over several woods wide,
never wavering astray
by illusion of any gorge,
surmounting many an impediment
in my life limpid,
never deeming darkness
as a distress,
never thinking light
to be a delight,
for a remote way
ahead I've continued to forge
with my head humbly bent.
Gratifying every bank-dweller
with offering of water,
fruitfulness of my birth
I'm realizing worth. (11)

From the view-points
of all those attributes, my compeers
are Mandakini and Godavari;
still both have enhanced glory
by earning the imperishable opulence
of your holy foot-prints,
also your physical fragrance that confers
deity's divine excellence.
To acquire those I had inner thirst;
Bereft thereof I was mentally accurst. (12)

Many a noble deed
I had done indeed.
Dharma betimes brought you therefore,
after discerning the earnest yearning

of my heart's core.
Unattainable wealth I've got.
Heartful complacence
I'll enjoy hence
by addressing and caressing
your sacred self on my lap everyday.
Aroma of your limbs will purge away
my life's all the blot. (13)

Hérons and flamingoes
roaming in rows,
cranes as well as sheldrakes couple-wise,
all these sportive players
of my lap beside me will reside for ever,
taking heartfelt drinks of my water
sanctified by ablution of your sacred body.
Singing your glory under the guise
of dulcet indistinct warbling-melody
immensely they'll be pleasing my ears. (14)

To acquire sanctity
in touch with the body
of the devoted spouse,
flowers detached from creeper-house,
leaping and leaping
from remote regions,
will be rushing by floating forward
and will be moving
oft in your close proximity.
With your feet, O Compassionate Lady!
in my water during ablutions
them you'll never discard. (15)

Stepping on my banks, My dear!
you'll kindly meander
on pretext, presenting supernal splendour.
Earning this, the sylvan trees
will cheerfully bear
the pride of deities;
also peace they'll grant.
In the foliage, sure,
will remain perpetually pure
the lustres, rosy, darkish and elegant." (16)

Sita replied:
"Like the water of coconut
sweet is this limpid water;
nay, nay, not water, but
mother's milk real,
flowing as the stream ambrosial,
from the mountain-breast
for Sita, the dead-like daughter.

Oh! In this land, you're indeed
my mother dearest
incarnate as Tamasa having a heart
riven by my severe smart. (17)

Pierced by crack
has been your back;
the other side is seen.
Despite this, to delight the daughter,
opening the eyes of affections
you fondle and flatter
with the design
of words, lovingly sweet.
Effusive thanks, O Mother benign!
Sandy your heart has been
for the harsh heat
of my afflictions. (18)

Blemished by the vision
of denizens in King Rama's empire,
Sita, ever-exiled, will ably stand
in your opinion
to sanctify in the world entire,
all the beings, movable
as well as immovable,
by virtue of own devotion to husband.
Mother verily knows
her daughter's sorrows.
A burnt-faced daughter
looks moon-faced in the eyes of mother. (19)

Your banks have been, of course,
my permanent recourse.
In your serene lotus-feet
my hope finds a firm seat.
She, for whom, O My Darling!
the movable and the immovable ones
all turned nothing,
has her mother's lap solely present
as the vast treasure of her endearment
in the mundane regions.
Having own gem-wombed mother
why would she seek shelter another? " (20)

[Translated By Dr. Harekrishna Meher]

Gangadhar Meher

River Tamasa : Philosophy of Life

Wandering over several woods wide,
never wavering astray
by illusion of any gorge,
surmounting many an impediment
in my life limpid,
never deeming darkness
as a distress,
never thinking light
to be a delight,
for a remote way
ahead I've continued to forge
with my head humbly bent.
Gratifying every bank-dweller
with offering of water,
fruitfulness of my birth
I'm realizing worth.

[Translated from original Oriya epic-poem 'Tapasvini' By Dr. Harekrishna Meher]

Gangadhar Meher

Sita-Ram Ka Dampatya Prem

Gangadhar Meher

The Ambrosial

Verily I'm a drop
of the ocean of nectar.
Shunning the ocean I had risen up
in the firmament afar.
Coming down now
I've joined the ambrosial flow
and towards the ocean
ahead I'm in motion.
If I evaporate therein
on the way by the heat of sin,
in the form of dew later on
I'll descend below.
With the nectarean immortal flow,
I'll mingle in the ocean.

[Translated from original Oriya Poem 'Amrutamaya' By Dr. Harekrishna Meher]

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