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Sahitya Akademi

meet the author

Indra Bahadur Rai





Born on 3 February 1927 at Balason in West Bengal, Indra Bahadur Rai is regarded as one of the chief architects of modern Nepali literature. Along with his friends Bairagi Kaila and Ishvar Ballav, he shook the Nepali literary world in the sixties of the last century with the 'Tesro ayam' (The third dimensional) movement. Rai wrote that the new literature would aim at 'uplifting man in his totality'. Many critics initially thought that the dimensional writing was no more than a literary fad. But the idea had a theoretical base, which did not make it a pretension but aimed at depicting the wholeness of human experience. Rai approaches literature with a rare seriousness and profundity of thoughts.

Rai has made a great impact on Nepali literature both by his creative and critical writings. Primarily renowned for his short stories and a novel he is also an equally distinguished essayist and critic. In 2002 he brought out a play. He was awarded the Sahitya Akademi award in Nepali literature in 1976 for his book *Nepali Upanyaska Adharharu* (The Bases of Nepali

Novels), a critical study of the theoretical bases of Nepali novels. Here he analyses the works and classifies them into different literary and philosophical categories. What makes Rai a distinguished man of letters is his serious and deep involvement in literature, his constant experiment with latest literary theories and vast erudition. 'Rai', as Michael Hutt says in his *Himalayan Voice: An Introduction to Modern Nepali Literature* (California 1991) 'is one of the most original and influential Nepali writers to have appeared in recent years.'

Rai began writing stories from the mid-fifties of the last century. His earlier stories collected in *Bipana Katipaya* (1960) are written in a realistic style. Gradually, he seems to have realized that what he and his contemporaries were writing were only two-dimensional. Some of the important stories in this volume are 'Raatbhari huri chalyo' (The storm raged nightlong), 'Jai bhaekai euta katha' (The paramour: a story that actually happened) and 'Ghosh Babu' which is a story of a Bengali gentleman who made the Darjeeling hill his home. Proficient use of the Indian variant of the Nepali language adds to their liveliness.

Rai's second collection of stories *Kathastha* has two sections – *katha* (stories) and *astha* (faith). In the latter part he propounds his theory of living totally and writing totality. 'Man has not only eyes, ears and mind', he writes, 'he is a mass of sensory organs, heart and cerebrum; each sentence that will be written should hence aim

at grasping and uplifting man in his totality or completeness'. Rai evolves his own linguistic/stylistic devices to avoid the hindrances otherwise created by traditional linguistic mediums. His new stories seek to intensify our awareness of 'Reality'. His new stories show that each of our experience is fluid. When we try to express an experience in language we tend to solidify our impressions and a confusion is created between our feeling, the experience and the object (thing) in itself and the words which express the object. To steer clear of the deception of the old-school linguistic expression and to present the experience itself in its raw actuality, without being mantled by our emotions, meanings or prejudices, Rai derives heavily from the language of painting and music and one can also discern the endorsements that are found in eastern philosophy and modern physics. Each story of his has to be delved into and probed to find its different layers.

His novel *Aja Ramita Chha* (There Is a Fair Today, 1964) is remarkable for its presentation of the Nepali middle class of Darjeeling, but he believes that ultimately it is the success of the labour movement in the tea gardens of Darjeeling district that will fashion the future of the Nepalese nation.

In due course of time Rai's dimensional writing 'Ayamek Lekhan' developed into what he describes as 'Leela Lekhan'. A striking example of this came out in Rai's *Kata-Putaliko Mon* (The Puppet's Mind), 1989, which contains his *leeladrishti* (leela vision). In it Rai has reproduced a famous Nepali short story 'Paralko ago' (The hayfire) in his leela version, thus making this story his too. Dr Ghanashyam Nepal and Dr Jas Yonjan have very succinctly and well said, "(One) can see the all-pervading operation of Leela in all aspect of human activities. The concept of Leela defines human beings moved about by the semi-forces



Sri Rai inaugurating India-Nepal literary conference at Dhangari with Indian and Nepalese ambassadors.



Sri Rai receiving Agam Singh Giri Literary Award from Sikkim's Chief Minister Pawan Chamling, while Smt. Rai looks on.

— social, economic, political, psychological, historical, religious, national, and what not — operating upon our need to live and survive. A realisation akin to Rai's concept of Leela is increasingly being confirmed by modern science, philosophy, psychology and linguistic theories." But men, in their

delusion, consider themselves to be the knower and the doer.

Rai's *Kata-Putaliko Mon* defies pigeonholing into any genre. He has preferred to simply call it a 'work' (kriti). His play *Pahenlo Din* (Yellow Day) expounds Leela Bodh (Leela Comprehension) in a greatly richer way.



Sri Rai with Nepalese Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba, writer Manjushri Thapa and her parents during the release of her novel at Kathmandu



Sri Rai with celebrated Nepali writers in a literary function

A Select Bibliography

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BHANUBHAKTAKA KRITI;
ADHYAYANHARU, Nepali
Sahitya Parishad, 1971

A Chronology

1927 Born in Balason,
Kurseong, Dist. Darjeeling,
W.B.

1950-80 Taught at Turnbull
High School and St. Joseph's
College, Darjeeling

1961 Founder Secretary,
Nepali Sarkari Bhasa
Manyata Samiti, Darjeeling

1965-70 Elected as Vice-
Chairman, Darjeeling
Municipality

1968 Post-graduation in English
from North Bengal University

1977 First Nepali writer to
receive the Sahitya Akademi
Award

1978-88 Executive Member,
Sahitya Akademi

1981-82 President of All India
Nepali Bhasa Samiti and led
the movement for
constitutional recognition of
Nepali language

1996 Jagadamba Sri Puraskar
for his outstanding
contribution towards the
development of the Nepali
language

1997 Agam Singh Giri Smriti
Puraskar for life-time
contribution towards the
development of Nepali
literature

2000 Asharani Nirman
Puraskar for his life-time
contribution to the
development of Nepali
language, literature and
culture

2002 Bhanubhakta Puraskar
for his life-time contribution
to Nepali language and
literature
Bhupalman Singh Karki
Puraskar

2004 Was conferred upon the
degree of D.Lit by the North
Bengal University

The Nirman Publication of
Sikkim brought out the
complete works of Rai, *Indra
Sampurna*, in five volumes.



Sri Rai releasing a journal published by Shiv Kumar Memorial Akademi at Kurseong