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Sahitya Akademi

meet the author

Ramachandra Behera





While all along being aware that "Life is vast, mysterious and eternal", Ramachandra Behera feels, "his stories touch upon a negligible thread of it." The life, as we find it depicted in his stories, is full of struggle and his characters are determined to overcome it, to make it bearable, and, if possible, beautiful. That is the mantra of his stories. Behera himself says that his "stories depict the tragedy of man's existential crises—man, surrounded by inexorable forces resulting in his defeat and destruction... That was the premise of my stories... With the passage of time, however, my vision of life and man has undergone changes. I feel amazed at the struggle of man to overcome obstacle."

The shift in Behera's vision of life, from the insurmountable to the surmountable, gets reflected in his stories. The helpless characters doomed to be failures seem to get tastes of success and realize that despite all odds they have managed to live and register growth. In one of his earlier stories "Lust for Life" (1990) the cowherd boy takes up the challenge of his friends to collect an egg from the nest of an open-bill stork

from atop a tall mango tree. But at the end victory turns into defeat as the egg ultimately slips from the knot of his cloth and hits the ground. Contrasted with this, in a story in the later phase of his creative career titled "Gopapura", the mythological allusion to the triumph of life over darkness and dungeon finds resonance in the character of a determined father who ferries his sick child in darkness to a doctor. *Gopapura*, published in 2003, won him Sahitya Akademi award in 2005.

Sketching the characters of such invincible nature became acts of catharsis and wish-fulfillment for Behera as he realized in writing stories after stories that his characters are doing what he could not do in his life. And as for his craft, he feels in his bones that a story is not to be told but narrated so that the intrinsic qualities of the characters, their doggedness, could be built upon sentences after sentences, and this feat could be achieved only through the exploration of possibilities which bridge characters to the nature, however hostile the latter may be. This essence is also felt in his novels, which are rather novellas, which distinguish themselves from his stories by their larger canvasses. And this trait is extended to his radio plays too.

But Behera's fine art of story-writing did not come to him with any degree of success till he joined as a Lecturer in English in Kendrapara College in 1969. All his earlier attempts could be termed as juvenile writing. This narrative aspect of Behera's stories, which sets him apart from his peers, was evinced in his very first published story. After studying English literature at Ravenshaw College and Benaras Hindu University, Behera's mind was vibrant, which only sought appropriate atmosphere for the germination of a story. It happened the day when he, along with his colleagues, who were staying in

single-seated rooms in what was called 'barrack' at that time on the college campus, were talking about the possibility of having independent toilets and kitchens for each of them and thus converting the rooms into small quarters. In a jovial mood, Behera said that in that case the boys in the hostel opposite to the 'barrack' would go for binoculars to catch the precious sights of their wives taking bath. Right then it suddenly occurred to him that the story could be written about an old man with a binocular. After writing the story on such a theme, Behera sent that to *Nabarabi*, published from Calcutta at that time. To his pleasant surprise, there was a letter of acceptance and praise for that story from Kanduri Charan Das, the author whom he has been admiring from his school days. It was not just that. There was a discussion in the office of *Nabarabi* if that story was original. It was finally vetted by Bibhuti Pattanaik for publication. All this happened before the story was published in *Nabarabi* in 1971

Regarding the author's take on his art of writing stories, Behera says that a writer's vision of life is shaped as much by his natural instinct as by his

reading, experience and external world. Yet, no idea is static. Had it been so, he says, there would have been no progress in human civilization. It shifts its ground with the passage of time till one day the author finds himself in cusps of ever-changing currents of life and world.

The success of the first story emboldened Behera to go ahead. Born and brought up in the forest-clad district of Keonjhar in 1945, his sensibility was conditioned by the role nature played in human lives. His workplace, Kendrapara, hardly a town at the time of his joining as a lecturer in English in Kendrapara College in 1969, added further impetus to his creative urge. He retired as the Principal of that College in 2005. Thus, sticking to a particular place excepting his tenure as the President of Odisha Sahitya Academy from 2010 to 2013, which did not demand his everyday presence in Bhubaneswar, Behera knew his locale and milieu too well, which came to be reflected in his stories in various forms. Living in comparative seclusion, shying away from the literary glitterati of the state capital, and honing his art in a lonely



*Receiving Sahitya Akademi Award from Gopi Chand Narang in 2005*



Receiving Vishuva Puraskar from U. R. Ananthamurthy in 1999

pursuit, Ramachandra Behera would agree with the American poet Kay Ryan when she says, "I do not want to be connected to poetry in an easy, fellowshipping way, but I do want to be connected in a way that will earn me the respect of the dead."

Behera's first collection of stories titled *Dwitiya Smasana* marked his arrival. In the title story, confronted with death of one child after another in the family, the father prepares himself for another day. Man's indomitable courage to live in a crippling reality, as is marked here, went on to become the water mark of Behera's stories. After that, fifteen other story collections followed. Some of them are *Omkar Dhwani*, *Asthayi Thikana* and *Gopapura*. Not contented with the limited scope of stories, Behera has written twenty novels. Mentions may be made of such novels as *Abhinayara Paridhi*, 1991, *Manica Ebe Keunthi?*, 2000, *Ratira Sesa Prustha*, 2006 and *Aethi Akasa*, 2012. He has also written as many as twenty plays for All India Radio, Cuttack. His stories and novels have been transmuted into plays and staged at Bhubaneswar and other places as well. The author himself does the script. His stories are included in the school, college and

university syllabi. A selection of his stories titled *Temporary Address and Other Stories*, translated by Rabindra K. Swain, came out from Authorspress, New Delhi, in 2010.

Ramachandra Behera's work has fetched him a number of awards. His major awards include Jhankar (Vishuba Puraskar) in 1981, Sarala Award for *Omkar Dhwani* in 1991, Odisha Sahitya Academy Award for *Abhinayara Paridhi* in 1993, Vishuva Puraskar in 1999, Utkala Sahitya Samaja Puraskar in 2000, Katha Award in 2000, Tarini Pratibha Samman in 2003, Sahitya Akademi Award for *Gopapura* in 2005 and Bharatiya Bhasa Parishad Sadhana Samman in 2009.

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### A Select Bibliography

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#### Collections of Short Stories

*Dwitiya Smasana*, Cuttack: Agradutta, 1976

*Achinna Pruthivi*, Cuttack: Agradutta, 1979

*Abasista Aayusa*, Cuttack: Friends Publishers, 1982

*Omkar Dhwani*, Cuttack: Friends Publishers, 1987

*Banchi Rahiba*, Cuttack: Agradutta, 1990

*Bhagnasara Swapna*, Cuttack: Friends Publishers, 1993

*Mahakavyara Munha*, Cuttack: Vidyapuri, 1996

*Phataa Kaanthara Gacha*, Cuttack: Vidyapuri, 2000

*Ashthayi Thikana*, Cuttack: Friends Publishers, 2002

*Gopapura*, Cuttack: Friends Publishers, 2003

*Sabujimara Paramayu*, Cuttack: Grantha Mandir, 2006

*Bada Mayabi Jiva*, Cuttack: Prachi Sahitya Pratisthana, 2008

*Bata Baikuntha*, Cuttack: Kahani, 2008

*Sibanandara Gita*, Cuttack: Prachi Sahitya Pratisthana, 2009

*Koti Bastra*, Bhubaneswar: Pakshighara, 2012

*Biparjayara Thikana*, Bhubaneswar: Pakshighara, 2015

*Temporary Address and Other Stories*, trans. Rabindra K. Swain, New Delhi: Authorspress, 2010

## Novels

*Abhinayara Paridhi*, Cuttack: Vidyapuri, 1991

*Muktira Ruparekha*, Cuttack: Vidyapuri, 1993

*Dhusara Suryasta*, Cuttack: Vidyapuri, 1996

*Mu Pheriasichi*, Cuttack: Grantha Mandir, 1997

*Manica Ebe Keunthi?* Cuttack: Vidyapuri, 2000

*Duaratapile Bata*, Cuttack: Friends Publishers, 2000

*Kipari Nijaye Nispati*, Cuttack: Friends Publishers, 2002

*Padatalara Maati*, Bhabaneswar: Kadambini, 2003

*Raatira Sesa Prustha*, Bhadrak: Ethena, 2006

*Chinha Achinha*, Cuttack: Agradutta, 2009

*Marichikaara Mahak*, Cuttack: Grantha Mandir, 2009

*Nikhoja Aparadhi*, Cuttack: Prachi Sahitya Pratisthana, 2009

*Eithi Akasha*, Cuttack: Dibyadutta Prakashan, 2012



Receiving Bharatiya Bhasa Parisad Sadhana Samman from Ramakanta Rath in 2009



*Receiving Katha Award from M. T. Vasudevan Nair in 2000*

### Unpublished works

Twenty radio plays (broadcasted on All India Radio, Cuttack)

Ten stage-plays (six of which are awarded)

Stories translated into different regional languages

Stories and novels included in the syllabi of schools, colleges and universities

Three collections of critical essays

1991 First novel titled *Abhinayara Paridhi* published

1991 Sarala Puraskar

1993 Odisha Sahitya Academy Award

2005 Sahitya Akademi Award

2005 Retired as Principal, Kendrapara College

2009 Vishuva Puraskar

2009 Bharatiya Bhasa Parishad Sadhana Samman

2010-2013 President, Odisha Sahitya Academy

### A Chronology

1945 Born at Bahartipura, Ghatagaon, Kendujhar

1962 Passed Matriculation

1967 Passed B.A.

1969 Passed M.A. in English Literature

1969 Joined Kendrapara College as a Lecturer

1971 First story published

1976 First book of stories titled *Dwitiya Smasana* published

1986 Awarded Ph.D. degree



*Receiving Odisha Sahitya Academy Award from J. B. Patnaik in 1997*