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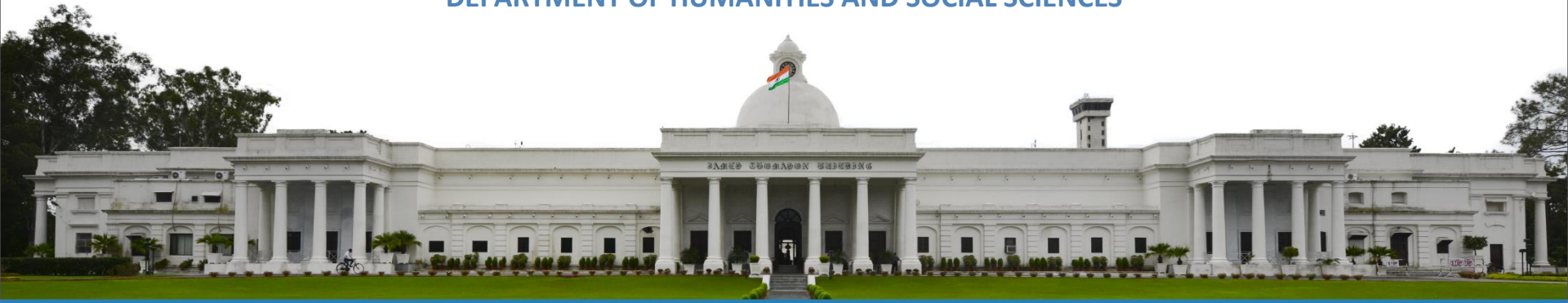
NPTEL ONLINE CERTIFICATION COURSE

Indian Poetry in English

Lecture 28: Niranjan Mohanty

BINOD MISHRA

DEPARTMENT OF HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES



Impressionism

- The impressionists were a school of painters whose painting has transitory effects of lights.
- Fleeting moments from a subjective point of view.
- Perception of the spectator.
- Claude Monet, Vincent van Gogh and Renoir
- Vague meaning as a literary term.



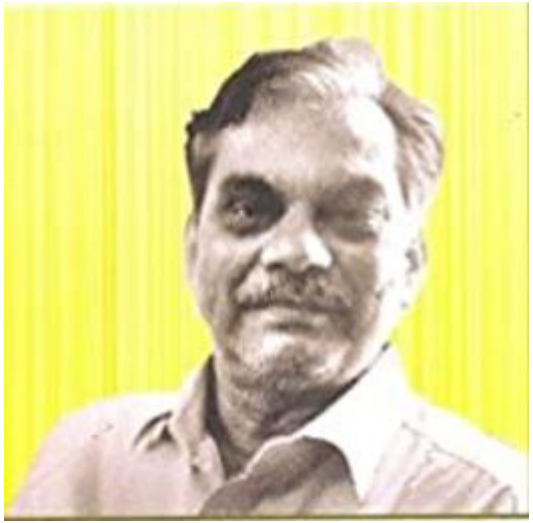
Claude Monet, *Impression, soleil levant*
(Impression, Sunrise)

Features of Impressionistic Writings

- Symbolism.
- Expression of inner-life.
- Feelings, sensations and emotions.
- Subjective point of view of reality.
- Joseph Conrad, James Joyce, and Henry James.
- The style leaves the readers to muse upon the suggested meaning of the poem.
- Some Indian Poets: Niranjan Mohanty, Charu Sheel Singh, Bibhu Padhi, Gopi Kottoor

Niranjan Mohanty (1953-2008)

- ✓ Born on 12th April, 1953 in Calcutta
- ✓ Watched a series of deaths in his family.
- ✓ Early education in Orissa, started as a lecturer in Aska Science College, Orissa, joined Vishwa Bharati, Shantiniketan in 1999.
- ✓ Left for heavenly abode in 2008.
- ✓ 'Human to the core'
- ✓ Steeped in the native folklore, natural beauties and superstitions.
- ✓ Translated from Oriya and Bengali into English and Bengali into Oriya.



Introduction to the Poet

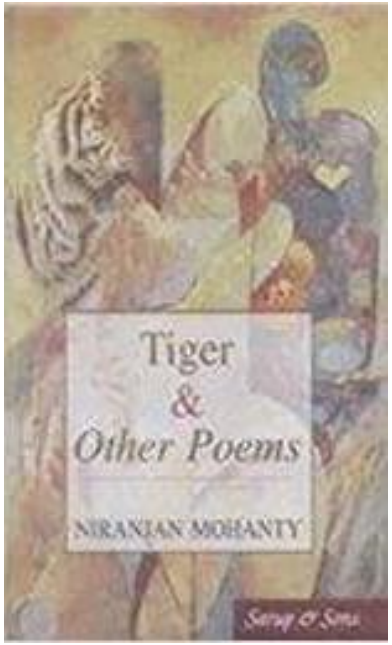
"Merely to be human
Is the gist, is the theme song
Of my life, of my poetry" (*Rain*)



- Deeply rooted in his tradition and culture.
- Defiantly raises voice against the corrupt and those who practice chicanery.
- Shares a certain relation with God where he can honestly express his despair.

Mohanty's Poetry Collections

- *Silencing the Words (*1977)
- *Oh! This Bloody Game!* (1988)
- *Prayers to Lord Jagannatha* (1994)
- *On Touching you and Other Poems* (1999)
- *Life Lines* (1999)
- *Krishna* (2003)
- *A House of Rains* (2008)'
- *Tiger and Other Poems* (2008)



Mohanty's Mind and Art

- Poetry as cleansing of the self
- Conflict between the body and the soul
- Cultural Crisis and Complexities of human relationship
- Loneliness , struggle and contemporary issues
- Reminds readers of medieval devotional poetry

" Writing poems, I have passionately believed that unless the words are dipped in the river of love, they refuse to be famed, refused to resonate with new meanings, they refuse to boil like rice in an earthen pot put on the hearth. It is because of their fulfilling dance and that the poem begins to assume its being; it begins to breathe and whisper." (*A House of Rains*)

Characteristics of Mohanty's Poems

- Ugliness of the society: crying children, hopeless widows, beggars, lepers, girls who are being raped to death, tortured women, suicide, dowry, unemployment and various other social issues.
- Ironic: reflecting at the deteriorating conditions of humanity.
- Contemporary society in true colors
- Celebrating womanhood
- Postcolonial Consciousness
- Blends Tradition with Modernity
- Poet of the common man

Silencing the Words

- Fourteen poems full of intellectuality, symbolisms
- Influences of Jayanta Mahapatra
- Packed with obscure images

"In winter nights
Idle whisperings
Behind the blanket
Bring you more close to me.
Words have already melted
in the shaft of mercury light.
Few months later
We were blessed."

Rumors
like air-borne diseases
relate many words,
words many truths.
An ally of light and shade
Reforming your beauty, frosts
of night have chilled your passion.
Your complaint against
Rumors begets disaffection.
Silence is God.

Oh! This Bloody Game

- ✓ Fifty two poems comprising the complexities of life
- ✓ Loneliness, obsession with death and suffering
- ✓ Picture of contemporary reality

“ But I have chosen to be lonely
For loneliness has its secret roots of bliss,
Secret nests of joy.
How am I to know what flows within,
What makes me myself, what saps my song
If I’m not alone.” (05)

I’ve grown expert in wooing
women,
teasing children, mocking at
saints
as clumsy as politicians. I mate
cross-legged with that
prostitute
who sings hosanna for me
under the kadamba tree. (38)

Krishna

- Krishna is not a God but a God in human form.
- Famous poem that focuses upon the relationship of man and woman as an immaculate togetherness.
- Presents Radha as mighty before Krishna, someone who nurtures love.
- Raises voice against the atrocities which Radha face.
- Draws a connection between womanhood and nature.
- Metaphysical abstractions.

Contd…

- Attributing human qualities to Krishna
- Woman's predicament in a patriarchal society
- Depiction of love in all manifestations

"As long as we pursue this game,
Heart and soul together, you are yourself
I, myself, no one loses no one gains.

This game is my cradle, my alphabet-book,
The geometry of my wound
My hospital, my extinguishable pyre."(38)

Some more lines from *Krishna*

I know it's your love that outweighs mine
I'm a mere sprig of grass, you a mighty oak
I, a withered twig, you a lofty tree

Whose leaf-fringed legends would take me
Centuries to celebrate through the slender
Hollow of my flamboyant flute.



Contd…

Time and again I assume human form
To purify what is divine in me.
Time and again, I'm born on the earth

To taste the sweetness of corn or rice
That are grown between the vale
Of your bee-hunting breasts.

I know that
I'm in a burning paradox. I'm insignia
Of all that is paradoxical. And that is why
I need you so earnestly, so urgently.

That's why I hope to become a silent part
of your body so that the sting
of my own ambivalence wont haunt me
as it does
now
I wish I could ripen with your love…

Even if I were not born as Krishna
And you as Radha, I would have remained
Yours faithfully, yours. Do names matter?
Can you tell me the name of the bird that sits
And sings in the cage of your body?
Where do the names go, where do the words go
When body becomes a mere shadow? (54)

Perhaps so long as you treat me
As divine, abstract, distant, dizzy
I can't get answers to all my questions.
I can't solve the riddle, the mystery
Of my problems as long as I'm not
Born in human form on the earth. (64)

Contd…

My fair lady, I'm human
My needs are human too.
Whatever
I possess or dispossess is
human.
In whatever form I love you
I remain human, you are
The acme of my human need,
my dear. (71)

Rain

- ‘Rain is a part of Orissa landscape.’
- Relates it to his identity.
- Nostalgically reminds him of the cremated grounds
- Multiple voices of rain in his poems



I never go to temples, I envy
those who go. How nicely they go pious
ringing the bells, swaying holy flowers!
Perhaps it’s fear---
The gist of my existence. (Rains 74)

“Kalahandi”

Like light’s limpid leap into the pool
of darkness, this sudden awareness
of a place or face makes one drown
in the rising waters of the sea of nothingness.

Thick-ribbed, thick-necked mountains stare
everywhere like grandparents. Patches
of unkind cloud lie along the floor
of the sky like used hospital linen.

Contd…

At the cold touch of the wind in winter,
at the bite of furnace-bright summer
the tongues go here impotent. Their voices,
herons stuck up in the knotted water-plants.

What is the use of such a landscape
whose inscapes burn and turn into ashes?
What am I going to do with them?
What am I going to do about them?

Characteristics of “Kalahandi”

- Exploring a cultural landscape
- Unfavourable conditions heightened by meteorological imageries
- The geographical legacy of the place.
- Clinical imageries to suggest withering.
- Rhetorical ending: How can one contribute?
- ‘Nature plays a foe’



Prayers to Lord Jagannatha

Teach me how to sharpen my belief
and polish the stone of my faith
in the essence of a human heart. (25)

What knowledge, what wisdom , what power
made my mother's tongue so sharp, so humble
so human and so bright?
With what vision were those saint poets
of my tribe born? What courage had they
to tame the words of deep metaphors?
Perhaps language is a river now
where I can swim and float anyway I like
only to get a feel that I'm part of the tribe. (37)

Often when cornered by grief,

I light incense sticks at day's end,

Closing my eyes and standing still.. (78)

Are we born to demolish mosques and temples?

Rob the deities of their robes?

What else is cruelty, oh lord? (111)

Contd…

It's true that nothing possesses me
So madly, so deeply, so neatly
As does the rotundity of your eyes, oh lord! (78)

Let's mutually agree to exchange
Our positions: You come down to earth
And I fly to your throne bearing all mirth. (66)

Let's sort out our follies and differences
So that you being wise become a fool
I being an idiot, become a wisdom pool.(79)

Tiger and Other Poems

- A metaphor expressing myriad things, an obsession
- Faiths, natural bounties, beliefs and superstitions
- A many-fold reality, an existential force
- Meditative and symbolic
- Symbol of beauty, power, dominance and fake authority

" the tiger wakes us to the infirmities
of our bones, the marrow within bones."

Contd…

“ I collect pebbles of my dreams
To drop them one by one
Into the earthen pitcher of your being
So that the margin of your love
Would rise to quench my thirst.” (Escaping into You, 10)

Who can disown whom?
Neither I, the tiger,
Nor the tiger, myself.
This is perhaps, the only thing
Common between ourselves,
The point where we meet.
As though , it were a zone
Where all else looks insipid,
Shadow-like, insignificant. (The Tiger & I)

This is not yet the new year,
Yet, I can see a new tiger
Moving into the mosque,
Staining and tainting the flower
That blooms in every heart.

I see it approaching….
Towards Sankatmochan temple
Causing cries, echoes of heart-rending cries
Which redden waves of the Ganges
And silence voices of other woes
Between one darkness and another.
(“The New Tiger”)

“This Tiger Has No Meaning”

“This tiger has no meaning…
It draws me closer to dreams
of becoming a nameless bird, someday.
It makes me accept that I’ve a right
to perpetuate my dreams
and to know how seasons come and go
how moments ripen between yes and no,
how aloes of my love lave the dale
in the unintended absence of the tiger.”

Views of Contemporary Poets and Critics on Mohanty

- Whether it is *Life lines* or his last collection *Tiger and Other Poems*, Mohanty remains a poet of the common people. His germinative powers border on a poetic mythology which just falls short of an Aurobindo or Tagore. (Charusheel Singh)

- His poems draw critical attention , as they are crafted out of his intimates experiences of life. Though there is no display of any influence of the masters of poetry in the past, yet his poems are not as simple as they seem to any common reader. (D.C. Chambial)

Mohanty's Estimate as a Poet

- Mohanty blends tradition with modernity.
- His poetic world comprises religion, culture, social mores and customs.
- He makes use of his fertile imagination and images to portray the contemporary reality.
- Truly Indian to the core but a post-colonial poet who hides to mean and means to hide.
- Mohanty educates and entertains and his word play has a magical effect.

Summing up

I'm bound by karma and dharma.
I believe in fate. I believe in
horoscope and palmistry.

And at times I'm superstitious,
although I dissected bellies and brains
of toads and cockroaches, earthworms.

That superstition compelled me
to keep you away from my 13th
sequence. (*Prayers to Lord Jagannath*, Sec.XIV,II, 19-27.)

Thank You

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