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NPTEL ONLINE CERTIFICATION COURSE

Indian Poetry in English

Lecture: 30 Bibhu Padhi

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Introduction

- Born on 16th January, 1951 in Orissa
- Ravenshaw Autonomous College, Cuttack
- Influenced by Pablo Neruda, Giuseppe Ungaretti, Octavio Paz, Cesare Pavese, Salvatore Quasimodo, Emily Dickinson, James Merrill, Whitman, William Statford etc.
- Poet, critic and translator
- Unlike Mahapatra, he is an insider. (A Brahmin) (King, p. 345)



Padhi's Poetry Collections

- *Going to the Temple (New Delhi: Indus, 1988*
- *A Wound Elsewhere (New Delhi: Rupa, 1992)*
- *Lines From A Legend (Leeds, UK: Peepal Tree Press, 1993)*
- *Painting the House (Hyderabad, India: Orient Longman, 1999)*
- *Games the Heart Must Play: A Trilogy in of Love Poems(Bhubaneshwar,: Pen & Ink, 2003)*
- *Living With Lorenzo: Poems on D H Lawrence (Cuttack: Peacock Books, 2003)*
- *Choosing A Place (New Delhi: Gnosis/Authors Press, 2011)*
- *Migratory Days (New Delhi: Authors Press, 2011)*
- *Brief Seasons: 60 love songs (Bhubaneswar, Timepass, 2013)*
- *Magic Ritual (New Delhi: Authors Press, 2014)*
- *Midnight Diary (New Delhi: Authors Press, 2015)*
- *A Friendship With Time (Kolkata: Hornbill Press, 2021)*

Characteristics of Poems

- Orissa in the background
- Spontaneity, use of subtle language
- Amalgamates reality, memory and dream
- Artificiality and verbosity seem to obfuscate his pure intention.
- Environmental degradation

It is raining in Cuttack once again
The rain that arrives so gently
that it can scarcely be heard
through my son's dream songs,
the harsh songs of motor cars
crowding the road. Once
on such afternoon in July,
your limp voice drifted into my room
through the rain…
and I can almost remember
your sweet voice…
in the July of one distant, echoing year.
("Listening through the Rain")

General Themes

- Small society of birds
- Death and Illness
- Anniversaries
- Friends' children
- Lower Middle class perspective of life.
- Society within the small world of Orissa.
- Misunderstanding and wounded friendships.

On Poetic Process

"I wait for a poem to come. Perhaps wait for a title. At some other time the first or the last line. The first line stays with me for a week or so and then it asks me to put itself down on the page. Earlier I used to write my poems in long hand, but now I write it on the computer. Right now I have a title for a poem as well as its first two lines. I think, when I sit down to write, the rest of the poem will follow."

(In an Interview to Mahuya Bhaumik)

Living with Lorenzo

- A collection of 14 poems
- ‘A biography which the Indian poet wanted Lawrence’s biographers to scribble than to write something in colorful language to afflict the departed novelist who strongly believed any relation based on blood to be more powerful than one founded on the dictates of the society.’- Mishra
- Begins with poem "Celebrations“
- The poet questions our modern ways of living and ‘morbid fascination towards glorification’.
- Asks Lorenzo to enter into a camaraderie with him.

“Pigeons”

They embody a consciousness
that shines among light-grey rocks.

In their bodies old stories of flight
repeat themselves, refresh memory.

During the long Indian afternoons
they rest upon our polished floors,

their bodies refracting the warmth
of close contact, their small heads

forming a community of wisdom.
A picture of extreme importance is seen

Contd…

a picture that comprehends everything,
all things contemporary and long past.

But before our eyes gain their fixed look
and our envy its, pale green stare,

they rise up, holy and untouched, to disappear among
a history of mocking wings, in the accepting sky.

“Telephone Poem”

A voice hangs anonymously
between your unspoken words
and my eagerness.

My world breathes
the distance of your face,
endures the weight of

an absence of promises.
Spurts of tentative assurance
are quickly interspersed with

moments of large silence.
A lump in the throat
betrays the silent magic

of waiting without words.
Hastily, I put into your ears
two flat words, "Good night.“

The voice clears.

Going to the Temple Part 1

How shall we begin?
We shall carry
long-thought-out ways
to find a thing,
name a quiet loss.
We shall collect
the milk white flowers
from our doorsteps;
in due time
we shall make them shine
with our morning sicknesses,
prominent headaches.



At the feet of the dark goddess,
we shall make them hold the pains
we've known and endured.
We shall turn our cloud looks
into intelligible forms,
clean total gestures
of fear and of love.
It may not be hard then
to drive all our little efforts
to a reassuring smile,
a cool collected look.

Contd…

Part 2

"Bury all the dead.
Your land will turn beautiful once more.
If you happen to meet a voice
that you do not recognize,
then you must realize
That it is mine.
When you arrive here,
we shall invent a together-hour
to settle our differences
and estimate a new deal.

I shall answer all your
hesitations and fears
with a slight glance,
a mere smile.
A neat, stone-cut look
will complete my ritual of touch."

Contd…

Part 3 & 4

At the crowded entrance
we shall reenact childhoods
that we forget and receive back
repeatedly, remember lost deities.
We've been silent for too long.
Let us seek out our wishes
and arrange them
in their proper
order.
The stones shall hear us
and begin to speak.

Let us wash our hands clean
of the cruel daylight,
wipe the acquired and inherited
meanings off our tired faces.
Inside that darkness
they wouldn't matter anymore.

Part 4

I don't know how I can make it.
Perhaps I'll run down
the large steps to her smile
and make it my own.

“A Sense of Place”

The place we look for is not
the place we should be travelling to.

The place that we know as our own
isn't the one that has stayed with us.

The place we've been led to
isn't one that we might call our own.

The sun shines otherwise than
in geography, the air smells old;

Contd…

the light moves slow, is slight, falling
at the place where the heart is believed to be.

We wait, but nothing shows that might've recalled.
in a clear way a breath lost among night and time

not long ago.
A place

of our own, a dream of living
fulfilled by all our dreams of acting.

Contd…

What hope is still alive that might
carry us towards the desired place?

A familiar name, a fond act of remembering
a place we might know and recognize?

The place we've been led to by blind hands
couldn't be one that we might call our own.

The place we look for is not: the place
we should be travelling to.

Games The Heart Must Play(2002)

- Trilogy of love poems
- “Dream Children,” “ Today” &“Daughter”
- A picture of present and past
- Consumerist culture
- Longing for love and life

But then, the erratic rains
Had started falling, and we were
Required back elsewhere.
We walked back, your umbrella
Offering me my much needed-shelter. (70)

What right have we over
The sprawling desert of humanity?
What right have we to add
To our own deserts
Of the heart and the mind,
when we already know
that we couldn’t possibly help
a single seed grow
into its own tree?
(*Games The Heart Must Play,15*)

Migratory Days (2011)

- A travel diary of three places: Hyderabad, Trivandrum and Calcutta
- Travel used as a metaphor
- Conflict between mind and matter
- Displacement brings humans closer
- All of us are moving towards an uncertainty

Leaving is dying, if
Dying is what we are told it is.
And hence, I couldn't just leave.
"I am leaving. Let us be happy
though , for we all are leaving
anyway, for a better place,
But shall be here again
and sooner than you think." (38)

“What the Doctor Said”

"It is usual at this age, this time .
of the year. He must not miss
A single dose, it is the accuracy.

Which matters much. Otherwise,
there is every chance that it will
return at this time every year.“

The doctor called each of us in,
separately-. my cousin, his wife,
me, as if there was a story in each of us,
as if trying to fathom the effect of what
happened in each of us, what we thought
of it. And then all three of us.

"He has improved, remarkably,
faster than I had thought or imagined
and it is a good sign for the future.

But you must bear in mind
that there's someone with you who is
as important as you are, someone

Contd…

who even now, is hardly capable
taking good care of himself
someone who, needs love and care.

I struggled to pray for him
but the words had left me
a long rime ago, long before

I arrived at Prasanthi Nagar.
Words may not be true,
are in fact not, and they could

Will be mistaken for
other words, other thoughts
or plans for the year.

Brief Seasons (2013)

All the watches of the world
were faster at least by
half-a-day that day.
I don't know from which of us
the long wish came---
the wish to know
one feels to find
all the watches stopping,
forgetting their very own
time and place. (Song No. 12)

Love is where blood is---
blood issuing out of blood,
dissolving into blood.
Love is where our gods are,
supporting one another,
enjoying each other's company.
Love is where blood is,
has to be. (Song No. 26)

Contd…

Today, looking at
your absent photograph,
I begin to wonder
if the woman I am looking at
is still you.
Please do not come between
your pictures and me.
Why does one have to change?
Why do we have to grow?
(Song No. 49)

The heart remembers.
Remembers yesterday, what
happened, what didn't,
what could've happened.
it struggles to figure out
what might happen
if today were somewhere absorbed
by a much stronger yesterday.
The heart remembers
other places, still other places
that are so different from
those other places,
the countless rooms in which
it has spent its brooding time
until this room, this day.

(Song No. 60)

Midnight Diary(2015)

If indeed all time were one time
and ours, you might venture forth,
claim things to your conscience's way.
But no, that is not true at all;
there still remain a whole lot of things
to be taken care of in the midst of
other absences, and you need to know
how frail can be our human efforts
to sort out all that we have had already
or going to have in their natural order .

(from "There is always room for Excuses")

But I know I can't decide on anything,
having been here for so many years,
always worried over letting my house

On rent, finding a willing companion
for sharing the night air trembling with
lost friends and enemies, children and wives
.
Fathers and mothers, the earth's
mean, immeasurable history
of heartless consumers and landlords.

Again the night is thick with memories.
and I need someone to be with me
to share my own worthless vanities.

("Perhaps This is What I Need")

Views on Padhi's Poetry

- "Bibhu Padhi is a fine poet. His poetry is often heart-drenched, but always philosophically sublime." (Thayil)
- "Often his poems are a parody of his own manner." (King, p.345)
- "Mahapatra retreats into some mood and Padhi recalls a time when they could speak without being falsely polite. It is this small society of births, deaths, anniversaries, illnesses, misunderstandings, wounded friendships, friends' children, within the small world of Orissa that eventually emerges from Padhi's poems and which make his poetic world different from Mahapatra." (King, p.346)
- "Less densely structured and more transparent than the poetry of Mahapatra, Padhi's verse is equally saturated with cogitation." (Naik, p. 177)

“I’m yet to learn how to arrange my words
in an order acceptable to men or God.
On the far horizon in the north, behind
a solitary tree, a cloud remains
entangled among ancient branches,
hardly caring to know that
there is a land here, waiting for rain.” (“Waiting for Rain”)

Thank You

Works Consulted

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The photos used in this ppt have been taken from peepletreepress https://www.peepaltreepress.com/authors/bibhu-padhi