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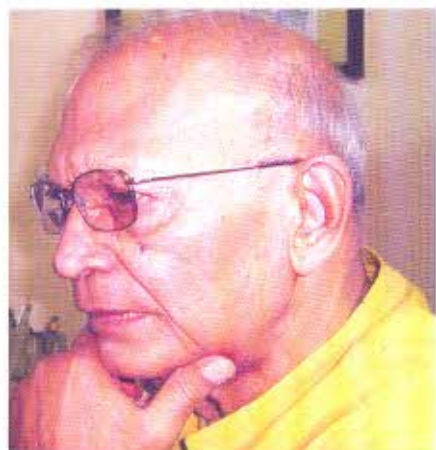


Sahitya Akademi

meet the author

Chandrasekhar Rath





Born on 17 October 1929, Chandrasekhar Rath still stands out among his contemporary writers in Oriya literature for his remarkable background and contributions to diverse literary genres like belleslettres, fiction and poetry. His roots are in the legacy of a traditional Brahmin family providing him with an early exposure to scriptural Sanskrit which is the fount of his pan-Indian thought and philosophy. Degrees in Mathematics and English gave him both precision of expression and a rich sensibility for literatures available through English. His early exposure to Bengali and Hindi literatures, in the original, widened his acquaintance with life and society in the regions adjacent to Orissa. He had, therefore, a fairly well-cultivated mind and a sensibility enriched by the masterpieces of the East and the West when he began to write seriously having already taught English literature for a decade. Painting and sculpting were extra outlets for self-expression giving his images a distinct visual and tactile character both in prose and poetry. This kind of mental and psycho-spiritual preparation

made a difference and earned for him, distinction in all those areas of literature where he chose to express himself.

His childhood was spent in Bolangir, the capital of an ex-princely state in Orissa and the memory of the feudal order of society lingered in him for ever. During that formative period, he heard his father chanting vedic hymns every morning and his mother reciting the Puranas in the quiet hours of the afternoon. This laid the foundation of his Upanishadic studies in later years. He had his schooling in Prithviraj High School, one of the earliest in that part of the country and his graduation from Rajendra College. During those days he made time to do clay-modeling and writing verses at leisure while studying mathematics and literature as an undergraduate.

He left for Lucknow University on a private scholarship to do his post-graduation in English literature under Prof. N. K. Siddhanta, an eminent scholar from Oxford. Acharya Narendra Dev was his vice-chancellor and Dr. S. D. Sharma, who later became the President of India taught him law for LB. Very eventful and variously fruitful was his two years' stint at Lucknow. He read Hindi Literature in original and admired Urdu *shaayari* at *mashaayaraaz*. He had a number of muslim classmates but could never see the face of one of them as she was perpetually clad in *Burkha*. Chandrasekhar Rath left Lucknow way back in 1952 as a color-holder in athletics, representing his *alma-mater* at the national level, and a post graduate in English literature.

That very year he joined as a lecturer in English and continued to serve for 35 years in different capacities in Orissa Education Service till his superannuation in 1987. Students all over the state remember him with love and respect as a teacher par excellence and refer to him as King Lear or Julius Caesar depending upon the text which he taught them.

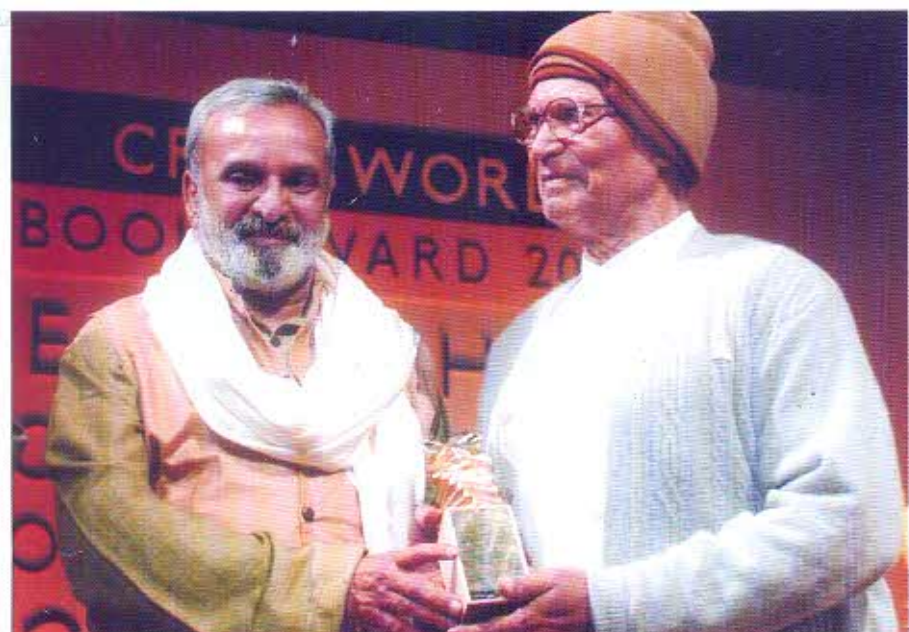
On the specific request of Dr A. N. Khosla, an engineer of outstanding national repute and also the governor of Orissa, Chandrasekhar agreed to go on deputation of DAV College, Titilagarh and raised a non-descript problem-ridden college to an exemplary institution, where even tribal students passed out as university toppers. This earned him commendations from DAV management, Sambalpur University and Government of Orissa. His training in the Navy and Army as a commissioned NCC officer added an edge of discipline to his other values in

college administration applied to man management.

In the course of his service he was posted to various stations where he got the opportunity to observe the distinct dialects of Oriya spoken in different parts of the state. This lent the force of authenticity and richness of expression to the language used by him in his literary works.

For sometime it was difficult for him to choose the appropriate medium of self-expression according to his *swabhava* adopted to his *swadharma*. Even though, he finally chose to take up the pen in preference to the color-brush and the chisel, he never gave up painting and sculpting till date. He believes this to be a commitment to his Creator who bestowed these gifts on him to fulfil the purpose of his life.

He therefore wrote but wrote in English for nearly a decade after his post-graduation. All the stories, essays and reflections hardly saw the light of the day. He believed that the writer fulfils his obligation to



With Professor U. R. Anantha Murthy



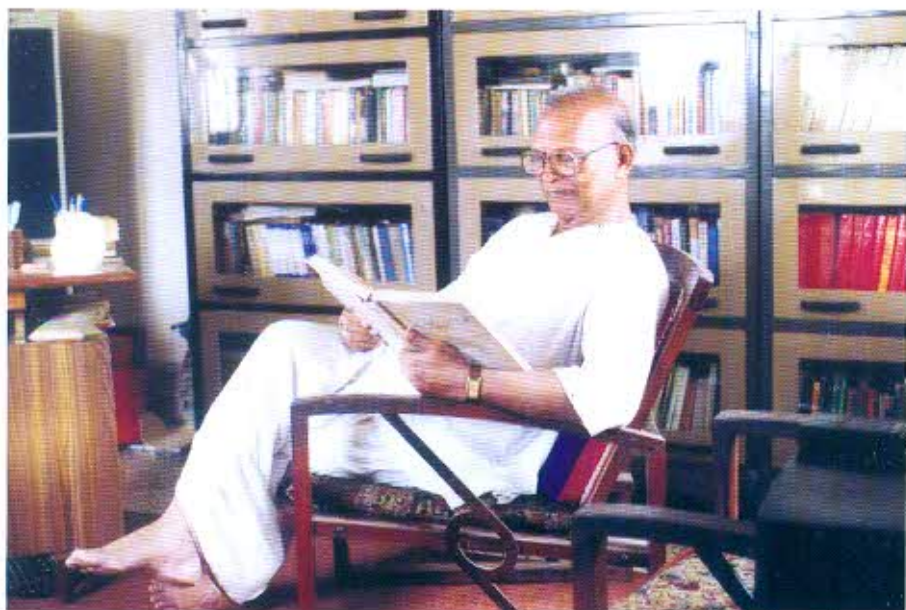
Sahitya Akademi Award 1997, New Delhi being Felicitated by Prof. Gopichand Narang

himself when he lets off his emotions on the pages of a notebook; getting it published is not that essential. That was why his appearance in Oriya literature was delayed by over ten years. He thought that since he was teaching English, the only language he felt comfortable with was English. The truth dawned on him rather late that any creative work is possible only in the mother tongue—the language he is born into. This happened in 1963 and that very year three creative essays in Oriya published in a celebrated magazine fetched him the first literary award.

After this he never looked back. The essays he wrote were considered a class by themselves. Invariably they contained a solid core of original thought, mostly Upanishadic, but in the treatment, approach and presentation they had the simplicity, charm and glitter of poetic prose to entice the reader

to unwittingly lap up the serious content with a finer sense of wonder and joy. Belleslettres were written earlier in Oriya but mostly to provide some intellectual entertainment but the personal essays of Chandrasekhar made a distinct departure. He has ten volumes of such essays till date. He has got the Odisha Sahitya Akademi Award and other recognitions for his achievement in creating this new genre of essays.

There is a seamless change over from one genre to another as Chandrasekhar took to story writing while continuing to write his essays. He says that every form has its own identity and all that can be told in a short story cannot be expressed in an essay. He has lots of different worlds of experience demanding adequate outlets for manifestation. His essays were good and original with a lot of potential but not good enough to hold the stuff of stories. He smoothly passed on to the



field of stories and has twelve volumes to his credit published so far. This has fetched him the highest state literary award, the Sarala Award, and the Sahitya Akademi Award.

He has just three novels and, as rightly assessed by critics, they form a trilogy of a thesis, antithesis and synthesis. One is the story of hoary traditions and time honoured values of life, the other exposes the total absence of values in a world of darkness, while the third is a transcendence of values to superhuman heights. They seem to represent the past, the present and the future of mankind in the Indian perspective. The first novel in its English rendition has won the Hutch Crossword Book Award whereas the second has got the Akademi Award of the state.

All discerning readers, while appreciating the poetic prose used by Sri Rath in his fiction and non-fiction, feel that he is intrinsically a poet though he chose to employ the format of poetry rather late. The two

anthologies of poems bear enough evidence of mature poetry noticed by connoisseurs.

Two unclassified works deserve special mention. One is *Rathasaptaka* which is sheer emotional profound poetry in prose laced with scriptural erudition woven around Lord Jagannatha and the Car festival. This has been translated into Bengali by the Sahitya Akademi, Kolkata. The other is a record of reflections and meditations in the form of a diary called *Pathachakra Diary*. This is inspired by Sri Aurobindo and his integral yoga with which Sri Rath is associated for nearly half a century.

Chandrasekhar has translated the commentary of Acharya Shankara on the Bhagwad Gita into Oriya, awaiting publication. He has also rendered Richard Bach's Jonathan Livingston Seagull into Oriya as *Sagara Vihanga*.

Sabutharu Dirgharati, the award winning collection of short stories by Chandrasekhar Rath,

provides interestingly absorbing glimpses of rural Orissa. For its freshness, imagery, symbols and metaphors, its sensitive identification with the human suffering and its apt use of local idiom, and nuances, the work is regarded as a genuine contribution to the Indian short story in Oriya.

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A Chronology

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|---------|--|
| 1929 | Born in Orissa |
| 1952 | M. A in English from Lucknow University and joined Orissa Education Service as a lecturer at Khaliko College, Brahmapur. |
| 1953 | Married at the age of 24. |
| 1958-63 | Training in the Navy and Army as a commissioned NCC officer. |
| 1963 | Received Prajatantra Vishuva Award (Essays) |
| 1967 | First novel, <i>Yantrarudha</i> , published. |
| 1970-75 | Taught at DAV College, Titilagarh. |
| 1975-78 | Served as Secretary, Text Book Bureau. |
| 1980 | Received Odisha Sahitya Akademi Award (Novel). |
| 1981 | Received Sarala Award (Stories). |
| 1987 | Retired as Deputy DPL. |
| 1997 | Received Sahitya Akademi Award for his collection of Short Stories, <i>Sabutharu Dirgharati</i> . |
| 1999 | Literary tour to USA and Canada. |
| 2004 | Received Hutch Crossword Book Award for <i>Yantrarudha</i> (Astride the Wheel). |