



## **Mohanty and His Faith in *Prayers To Lord Jagannatha***

**Neelam K. Sharma**

Dept. of Eng., G.S.P.G. College,

Surjannagar (Moradabad)

### ***Abstract***

*The Present paper is to search the staunch faith of the poet Mohanty in the Lord Jagannatha in his master piece poem Prayers to Lord Jagannatha. He has shown his faith in the poem Prayers to Lord Jagannatha. Here, the poet has also presented his ideas as a human being. This religious poem establishes Mohanty not only a devotee of the Lord Jagannatha, but also a human being making attempts for the welfare of the humanity.*

**Key words:** Mohanty, Faith, Lord, Jagannatha.

### **INTRODUCTION**

Tear me apart Jarasandha- like:

On either part of my tormented trunk

you shall discover your honeyed name.

(Prayers To lord Jagannatha 88)

The aforesaid lines from a part of Niranjana Mohanti's famous poem *Prayers To lord Jagannatha*. Niranjana Mohanti (1953-2008) is a poet recognized, not only in India, but also abroad. His belief in Indian culture is deep-rooted and his faith in his religion is staunch, particularly in Orissan deities, that reflects in his poetry. He has penned many collections of poems. *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), *Tiger And Other Poems* (2008) and *A House Of Rains* (2008), are his 8 poetic collections. Among all anthologies of Mohanti, *Prayers to Lord Jagannatha* is his master-

Piece creation. Though, the poem after being reviewed by many critics, is a poem with religious and devotional elements, yet *Prayers To Lord Jagannatha* is a poem of moral and ethics, caring for human values.

But from the very plain reading of the poem, we feel that it reflects

Mohanty's staunch faith is his Almighty. He is a true devotee. Chambial in this regard opines: "Mohanty's faith undergoes transformation and swings more and more towards the *Lord Jagannatha* to such an extent that he becomes a true devotee, a recluse for whom the Lord is the only saviour and source (Chambial, 49). The poet frankly affirms that sincerity of his prayers stating: "For these are not prayers merely:/ these are hymns of the heart" (165).

Previously, so many poets have shown their devotion to God. I quote the name of Stephen Gill, who, in his magnum opus *The Flame* shows his deep faith in the divine flame, which is the very symbol of the Almighty. Now-a-days, on the part of so many authors, sincere efforts are being made for the welfare of humanity. Sudhir K. Arora, an eminent critic has laboured much in searching the depth of the poetry of Stephen Gill and Mohanty. And by the grace of God, his painstaking efforts flourished and the result is so many great books from the pen of this great man. He has also made a comparative study between Stephen Gill's *The Flame* and Niranjana Mohanty's *Prayers to Lord Jagannatha*, that shows the faith of these two celebrities: Stephen Gill begins his magnum opus with the invocation to the Flame. A sense of appreciation for the flame is deep rooted in his heart. To him, the Flame is "the imperishable harmony that reaps unparalleled prosperity" (*The Flame* 32). He has a strong longing "to sip the invigorating wine of fruitful returns" (*Ibid*)/ from the chalice of her peace. The flame becomes an end as she is nirvana is herself and also the means that will lead to nirvana which certainly helps "in restraining relentless brutalities (*The Flame*33). The poet in Gill with a sense of gratitude for the Flame seems to be calm while invoking her. Quite contrary to Gill, the poet in Mohanty seems to be angry with Lord Jagannatha and so begins his poem in a very abrupt manner. He asks Lord jagannatha: "*oh lord of the universe,/ Burn my breath before I pray;* (prayers1).

Here, we experience that the poet makes a question to the lord whether He is really ashamed of his ugliness. Undoubtedly, in the poem at this juncture, he is angry but on the other hand, in a corner of his heart, he has deep love for his Lord. He feels himself foolish in

chiding the Almighty. This gesture of his faith reminds us of the lines of the poem ‘*On His Blindness*’:

*But patience to prevent*

*That murmur soon replies.....*

In-fact, that anger strengthens his enthusiasm to the service of God. In this regard, R.K. Singh writes: “*Prayers to Lord Jagannatha* is an exercise in mediation, devotion, exploration and celebration of humanity and divinity at the same time”. (Singh 63) Mohanty’s approach to life in *Prayers to Lord Jagannatha* is quite positive. It is his belief in Lord Jaggannatha that he longs for loving all and growing tolerant: So much so that I grow tolerant of everything, and love every thing and I learn to embrace thing as they are (168). The way he Prays to Lord Jaganatha is Miltonic. Milton was a puritan and also his faith in God was staunch. A puritan is a person who has a deep faith in God, and every part of the activities of his/ her life is under the effect of the action of the Almighty.

Mohanty, as a devotional poet, stresses on the need of salvation and redemption of the soul. As Sudhiir K Arora writes: No doubt the poem begins eccentrically but ends with his wish to become a prayer. For Mohanty, prayer assumes the shape of a medium, a bridge that can connect him to God and people. Mohanty’s faith undergoes a passion that makes the people of Orissa the devotees of the Lord not only, but also spell-bound. Mark the excerpt for the love of the devotees for Lord Jagannatha:

Oh Lord, on wide avenue of your love,  
Your devotees, your blind disciples  
dance like waves, not knowing exactly  
What vibrates, what stirs the air,  
The water, the fire and the throbbing ether,  
An unknown madness makes them fragrant.(prayers 85)

Mohanty’s approach to life under the blessing of the Lord Jagannatha, is optimistic. Faith in Lord Jagannatha gives him strength to lead life optimistically and blissfully.

Rajendra kumar Mahanty writes in this connection: “Culture of Lord Jagannatha always takes a positive view of life. It does not attend to pessimistic thought of grief, suffering and death. It recommends strong faith in divine.” (Orissa Review, Dec-2005, 28-29)

His faith never makes distinction between the rich and the poor. He prays to his Lord to shower his grace over all the people of the world. His belief in Lord Jagannatha is so strong that it looks to be a very intimate relation of the poet with the Almighty. In this closeness, he never hesitates to make queries to his Lord:

Is the breaking of temple or mosque

the insignia of our victory?

Is killing men, women, Children

the almanac of our bravery?

Does the pride of our race

lie in root, larceny, lewdness?

Does the glory of my tricolour

Rest in the sordid legacy

Of lacerating other's ecstasy (Prayers 112)

Mohanty's respect is not for his religion, but for all religions. Lord Jagannatha is not only the Lord of the Hindus, but also the God of the entire humanity. (Orissa Review, December-2005, 32)

In India and abroad India, Lord Jagannatha is Known as Lord Vishnu too, the one of the trinity- Brammha, Vishnu, Mahesh. The first one is the generator, the middle one, the operator and the third is the destroyer. Because Lord Jagannatha is the very symbol of operation, he supports and operates the people so all the devotees of Lord Jagannatha are tolerant, cosmopolitan, spreader of love and preacher of peace and spirituality.

After having relished the poem, one can feel that Mohanty might have studied Hindu Vedas, puranas and the Geeta, the Ramayan. Because what he sings in his Prayers to *Lord Jagannatha*, at first sight, it looks that the poet is under the influence of the various incarnations and forms of Vishnu. Jagannatha is the other name of Lord Vishnu. His other incarnations are- Kachha, Vaman, Narsimha, Varaha, Parashurama, Lord Rama and Krishna etc.

In *shrimadbhagvadgita*, Lord Krishna, the incarnation of Lord Vishnu, preaches the lesson of the immortality of the soul, expansion of love and tolerance and ethics and teaches Arjuna:

*Nainam Chhindanti sastrani nainam dahati pavakah. na chainam kledayan Achhedo'y amadahyo' yamakledyo shosheyat sloshay marauth high sarvgatha sthanaurcal yan sthanaracal yan somatenatha.* And he also instructs him that while Dharma is harassed on this earth, he takes birth to protect and expand Dharma: *Karmanyevadhikarsate ma phalesu kadachana ma Karmphalhetutubhurma te sango stwakarmani.*

Post-modernist study of *Prayers to Lord Jagannatha*:

The title *Prayers to Lord Jagannatha* beguiles the reader who hopes simply and naively to unearth the prayer-motif, but soon he realizes that the volume is more than what mere prayers can contain. Even the critics are misled by its title and wrongly consider it a poem of devotion in the service of *Lord Jagannatha*. No doubt, the poem is oriented in the devotional poetic tradition of Orissa with Salabega, Bhakti charm and Baldeva Rath as the most pioneering voices. And Dr. Sudhir K. Arora, an esteemed critic and scholar in this regard opines:

Critics are often misled by the nature of *Prayers to Lord Jagannatha* which seems to be prayers from one angle but when these are studied from another angle, they turn out to be something different. The whole poem allows the poet to be honest to himself. Only a poet of rare insight can do this in order to comprehend and capture the rich nuances of life as a whole." This is a postmodern trait that no interpretation is final. The poet affirms nothing is particular, nor does he negate anything as though to appropriate the flux of life and mortality. Plurality of approaches, when applied, becomes the right way to understand the text. To see

the text from one point of view will be only a partiality. Let me quote some of the excerpts that mislead not only the reader but also the critics in forming an impression of traditional religious poem. The following excerpt demonstrates how the poet regrets for chiding Lord:

“I was foolish, oh my patient Lord,

Chiding you day and night

Hood me with your umbrella when it rains.”(20)

In the aforesaid lines, We feel that the poet is highly emotional asking God for his love and grace even in the adverse days of his life. Mohanty, in my opinion, is not the poet at least of Orissa, but of the whole India, because, he with his religious faith always thinks of the welfare of humanity, redemption of the soul, the connection between the devotee and God. His faith is supreme and firm as he takes the name of Jagannatha when he wakes and also ends his day with his name. “your name begins and ends my day’ (106) Once again, he asks for forgiveness:

“I ask for unconditional forgiveness.

you were a swing; I had a joy-ride.

Swinging and swinging, I became a swing. (155)

Perhaps, it is the divine impact of some of the religious scriptures of the Hindus, in which all powerful deities have been glorified. The gesture in which the poet sings the glory of Lord Jagannatha, can also be seen in the Ramayan. It is the Ramayana where Hanuman like devotee, a passionate one, tears his chest and shows that *Lord Rama and goddess Sita* reside in the temple of his heart:

Tear me apart Jarasandha- like:

On either part of my tormented trunk

You shall discover your honeyed name.

*Prayers to Lord Jagannatha (88).*

Being a poet of India, it has been the habit of Mohanty to connect his poems to Indian religious myths. For instance, *Krishna*, a long poem (2003) is something different because of ascription of the human qualities to Krishna, the Hindu deity. It is not a simple exposure of Krishna's love for Radha, it is much more than that. In *Prayers to Lord Jagannatha*, as he is purely a poet of divine cult, while in *Krishna*, his approach to divinity is distinctive, as he has attributed some human qualities to Krishna, The Hindu deity. But through the concept of Indian spirituality, he has been successful to immortalize love between Radha & Krishna (human beings). By doing so, he also reminds his readers of the love between Lord Krishna and his beloved Radha (Hindu deities). Sudhir K. Arora, in this regard writes: "In this long poem *Krishna*, Krishna is the narrator, who opens his heart felt feeling for Radha as a human being and thus, signifies his faith in woman. A woman as understood by the man in Krishna as the core subject of Krishna and its feminist reading opens fresh avenues or interpretations which can be helpful in making an assessment of the poet's own approach towards feminism, (Celebrating Womanhood: A feminist Reading of Niranjana Mohanty's *Krishna*).

Summing up, Niranjana Mohanty's *Prayers to Lord Jagannatha* is a poem not only by a poet but also by a man who has his deep faith in the Almighty. Moreover, this is a poem not written for one province or culture, rather it is a divine poem penned with the intention for the welfare and redemption of the whole mankind.

While going through "*Prayers to Lord Jagannatha*, we also meet some auto biographical touches, as the poet himself calls him "superstitious" in spite of dissecting the "bellies and brains of toads and cockroaches, earthworms (143). This superstition compelled him "to keep you away from my 13th/sequence. He considers No.13 unlucky for him. It is his blind faith is his Lord that he does so and talks to Him as his own friend, very much familiar with him:

It's true that nothing possesses me So madly, so deeply so neatly as does the rotundity of your eyes , Oh lord (prayers78). This poem shows him really a humanist, an ideologist, a caretaker of the humanity and that's why, *Prayers to Lord Jagannatha* has been universally applauded and acknowledged.

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