



# Poeticizing Love: Reliving the Ethics and Aesthetics of Odia-English Love Poetry

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**Abstract**— *Love is the finest of all motifs of poetry. No poetry can attain perfection and sublimity without vindications as well as visitations of love. It is the azure the very touch of which enlivens the idioms of poetry. Indian-English poetry has never sealed its boundaries to keep the angelic spirit of love off from its habitations. On the contrary, it has held its doors wide open to felicitate love at its thresholds. The prime objective of this paper is to shed some critical lights on the trajectory of love and its nuances as they have figured in the Odia-English poetry. While almost all the poets in the Parthenon of Indian-English poetry have been more or less accommodative to love, it is Bibhu Padhi and Dilip Naik who have been the most generous one in rehabilitating love at the habitations of their words. The spotlight has been on love as one seminal motif of the province of poetry under analysis. This paper has endeavoured to map out the aesthetics and ethics of love as depicted in the poetry of the Indian-English poets in general and Bibhu Padhi and Dilip Naik in particular.*



**Keywords**— *Odia Poetry in English, Love, Transcendence, Parthenon, Ethics, and Aesthetics*

## I. INTRODUCTION

Notwithstanding the fact, love as an idea is universal in its appeal and efficacy; ironically it has always remained immensely defiant to defining yardsticks. As a feeling, love is as much endearing as enigmatic. As the noted scholar, PCK Prem has rightly stated in his insightful work *English Poetry in India*

To define love is very difficult. To limit love in a few words is impossible. To speak of love is subjective. It has not only the psychology as the origin or centre but the body and its physiology provide it a solid backdrop giving birth to feelings like sensuousness, sex and sexuality. This automatically leads to various perceptions of love.

Considered by the criterion of quantum alone, no other Odia-English poet with the singular exception of Jayanta Mahapatra, has contributed so much to the province under analysis as Bibhu Padhi has done. Padhi also happened to

be a professor of English literature and in that, of English poetry as well. While reviewing an anthology of poems of Padhi titled *Midnight Diary* (2015), Jayadeep Sarangi, also a Professor of English and noted literary critic, has rightly termed Padhi as an ‘introvert’. It’s a different thing that Padhi’s profession – the profession of a teacher, does demand a man of opposite disposition i.e. a man of great oratorical skill and openness. Whether his mind set of an introvert had had any adverse effect or not on his delivery as a class room teacher, but it certainly has not proved a liability on his passion, or on the way of his imaginative preoccupation. His dispositional trait of self-reflection and narcissism, - narcissism not in its pejorative sense, has helped him fine-tune his mind and pay increasing attention to the inner world of self or psyche, to the fathomless aporia of mind, to the inward gloom rather than to the outer world of bright sun shine. Again as Professor Sarangi has pertinently pointed out in the same review article, Padhi has turned to be predominately a ‘meditative poet’. ‘Poetry for him is’, Sarangi has further observed, ‘an expression of the non grammar of being: a journey beyond

the physical parameters and social contexts.’ A little earlier in the same article Sarangi has gone on to say ‘Bibhu Padhi’s poems are collage of varied impressions, psychological imprints, and moods. They invoke many lived moments, small acts and psychological views. . . .’ A little later he has further explained ‘The poet’s creativity and imagination are reflected in careful use of metaphors that evoke incessant images of hope and picture of life’s daily course in the readers’ mind.’ Portraits of inner landscape, of the invisible landscape of mind can be availed in abundance from his voluminous poetic album which consists of such collections of poetry as *Painting the House* (1999), *A Wound Elsewhere* (1992), *Going to the Temple* (1988), *Lines from a Legend* (1992), *Games the Heart Must Play* (2002), *Migratory Days* (2011), *Brief Seasons* (2013), *Magic Ritual* (2014), *Selected Poems* (2014) and the one already referred above, *Midnight Diary* (2015). As evidential from above, with Padhi, the domain of Odia poetry in English has undergone enormous expansion both vertically as well as horizontally, in breadth as well as in depth. On thematic front, it has gone many extra miles by penetrating deep into the dark, secret and subterranean realm of mind and earnestly endeavouring to capture some of its subtle nuances in the cryptic clutches of words. With Bibhu Padhi, Odia-English poetry has indeed acquired a new psychological dimension. In spite of the fact that Padhi has taken keen interest in the vagaries of mind, he has also descended to the pulsating chamber of the heart to listen to and grasp its ecstatic beatings. He has never been indifferent to, to use his own expression, ‘the game’ of ‘heart’. The game, the heart has exclusive licence to play is the game of love. As such poets are very prone to the feeling of love. But Padhi has held deep excursions to the passionate province of heart to have the exuberances of the supreme most emotion, ‘love’. Ample evidences of his frequent excursions to the enigmatic affairs of the heart are manifested in the pages of his two collections, *Games the Heart Must Play* and *Brief Seasons*. These two volumes tend to be Bibhu Padhi’s manifesto of love. The lines of the poems included in these two volumes bristle with the fine ripples of that most delicate emotion. Referring to the theme of love of the poems of the first volume, Jayanta Mahapatra, the mentor and patriarchal figure of Odia English poets has aptly stated in his review note on the collection, ‘these are straightforward poems of love in an age of cynicism and technological certainty.’ As to Padhi’s vision of love, Mahapatra has further stated, ‘[h]is vision centres around belief in love, and love becomes his perfect deity for a time that embraces unbelief.’ As a matter of fact, the poems of these two volumes, especially the ones of the latter volume, are love in its best possible verbal

manifestation. Love as a stream of feeling – feeling at its most real, original, authentic and unadulterated, simmers through the lines of Padhi’s love songs and therefore, the lines appeal to the mind and heart of the reader exactly the same way the lover and the ladylove do galvanize one another through their physical presence. In other words, love is at its most alive and intense form and appearance at the habitations of Padhi’s words. Padhi has delineated love the sensuous way Keats has nature. Besides, Bibhu Padhi has perceived love in its true colour and contour, conceived its true posturing and persuasiveness through varying situations. To cite an example, how one soul perspiring May day the lover and the lady love had felt when the latter suddenly came to meet the former. In the love song numbering 9 in *Brief Seasons* Padhi has written

You came to me  
on one of those last days of May,  
when even the soul perspires,  
is restless under  
heat, sunshine and day.  
I recall holding you  
and feeling the first rains  
falling inside me, inside you.

Even on that extremely grueling summer day, the lovers have been caught in the so to say, tsunami of that powerful emotion ‘love’. The feeling was so strong and endearing that the speaker has not forgotten it till today even after a long span. The memory of that loving moment is evenly fresh today in the mind’s eye of the poet. In the last few lines, Padhi has written

Today, when I see  
the May rains once again,  
I still feel those old rains  
falling inside each of us,  
in between me and you,  
. . . .

To cite another example of Padhi’s way of understanding as well as weighing of a small deed in the form of ‘kiss’ in which rides love. In the love song Number 23 in the same collection, the poet has written

I know there are other ways  
of loving than asking for a kiss,  
but a kiss is what everything  
is, is supposed to be –  
a strange game  
of fire and ice, a way of

relocating each other  
 as if for the first time,  
 a mode of transferring  
 all one seems to own  
 to a warmer, more careful owner,  
 a touch that can see  
 and yet is ready to endure  
 all that it begs to see.

Love, the supreme emotion and the magnetic force has here transformed itself to a mode of action or a performance in the form of a 'kiss' and its attendance as 'a touch' has turned out to be the most precious and revelatory experience both to the body and mind. What Eliot has said about 'thought' in the context of Donne holds good to Padhi with regards to 'love'. According to Eliot, 'a thought to John Donne was an experience; it modified his sensibility.'

With Padhi's abode of idiom, the idea of love has taken a sensuous turn and felt as a heightened visible experience. Look at the following lines from his love song number 18 in which he has depicted the ladylove, how she appeared one night.

You were shining all over  
 in the night's mineral dark –  
 each and every part of you,  
 each whisper issued out of you,  
 all the hushed words  
 your kisses showered on me  
 that night, that day.

At that moment when love got embedded in the corporeal frame of the beloved, even the silver luminary, the moon, has appeared deficient in its haze and has had to do with the love emblazoned ladylove to comply with the deficit. The poet has written

What did the moon  
 have to do with you  
 that night, that day?  
 What unseen, precious gift  
 it owed to you?

Thereupon, in the final three lines, the ladylove has eventually transmigrated herself to the moon. Padhi has written,

At that time you were the moon  
 that had been, until then,  
 so, so far away.

As a matter of fact, with Padhi, Odia poetry in English has thus entered into that mysterious zone where the 'strange game/of fire and ice' is played. By entering into that enigmatic field, the ambit of Odia poetry in English has undergone further expansion and side by side, it has been added with one more dimension. The other Odia English poet in whose hands this dimension implying 'the game of heart' and the 'strange game/of fire and ice' has grown stronger and appeared more striking is Dr. Dilip Naik. Dr. Naik has three books of poems to his credit and they form a kind of sequel specifically the second book titled *By Inference* (2014) tends to be a sequel to his first one *You I Could Hold* (2013). The poems of these two collections most like the ones of Padhi's *Games the Heart Must Play* and *Brief Seasons* are love poems.

If love has been accorded the berth of a 'deity' by Bibhu Padhi, it has not been accorded any less sanctified position either by Dilip Naik. The latter one, Naik, has elevated love, or more appropriately, restored love to its ordinary paradisiac realm. Notwithstanding the fact, his province of poetry is not totally alien to sublunary love; it is more pervaded with its counter countenance. Whatever its facets and to whatever degree be it sensuous or sublime, love has remained the nucleus of Dilip Naik's poetry. Most of his poetry rotates around one and only gravitational centre that is love. In other words, love has been the central motif of his poetry. Therefore, this paper looks deeply into every tissue of his poetry to arrive at an understanding of Naik's expression of love. Naik does not depart from the conventional narration of love but he narrates love with difference. Love has no convention. It is not historically conditioned. It is quintessentially the same from the day of its origin. Neither time nor language corrupts it. Love never sheds its newness. It is not subject to any season's arbitration. In its repetition it does not get reduced to a cliché. Dilip Naik is neither the first nor the final poet on love but his understanding of love makes a marked difference. He writes in an idiom which is quite new in comparison to the conventionality. The essential ambiguity of his poetry rests on the fact that in his sacrifice lies a passionate desire for renewal. This paper concentrates its critical attention on Naik's intense articulation of love in his poetry. The difference of Naik's poetry lies in the depth of his words and expressions. His poetry never appears distant to the readers. It is too engaging and truthful that readers do lose themselves in his lines. His words are alive with feelings. His words have revelatory power and express with all liveliness his nostalgia and anguish. Dilip Naik said in one of his lectures, "A broken heart is a real heart." He seems here more Yeatsian. Poetry is life for the broken but art for the successful. Dilip Naik does not write poetry for any academic honour. He writes it as poetry

needs him to. Words flow through him as wind through trees. Poetry chose him not he. Therefore, Dr. Bhima Charan Nayak quite aptly writes in his famous essay “Love Ethics of Dilip Naik”, “Dr. Dilip Naik is a teacher by profession and a poet in passion”.

A close-up view of Naik’s poetic canvas reveals it to have been pervaded by, to use his own words, ‘the matrices of love’ and these matrices have been dressed in and decorated with true ‘contours and colours’ of love. The poetic trajectory of Naik displays ‘love’ as its governing motif and this motif has been discernible at three different sites: sentient, psychic or cerebral, and philological. The first one does indeed lay the foundation for the next two. The inaugural plane has been the expositional one and shortest in duration, during which the persona has been by chance, gifted to have just a taste of this divine feast that too, only for once and for a short while. Referring to this precious and providential gift, the ladylove, Naik has written

you the gift of chance  
given as a libation  
given for once.

The lines of a dedicatory poem, dedicated to Harel Skaat, do in fact; explain what the ladylove has been to the poet. As he has written in the poem

in you the boundless life of pure feeling  
ranges from hymn to elegy  
you are the serenade of the ever evening  
and the exalted octave of agony (italic added).

As a matter of fact, in this extremely brief but blissful phase, the protagonist of Naik’s saga of love has undergone ‘the boundless life of pure feeling.’ Paradoxical may it sound but it’s true, the moment of love in this sentient stage has been brief but ‘boundless’. As the above cited lines testify, the mood in this short sojourn ‘ranges from hymn to elegy’ and the poetry that the poet has harvested in the last stage of his love-lorne life has been a concert of hymns and elegies and of ‘the exalted octave of agony’ inextricably tinged ‘in the permanence of melancholy.’ The finished products of Naik’s poetic endeavor, or better, of his playing the language game, have been hymns and elegies with intonations of melancholy. But these products have undergone a prolonged churning process, a process of rumination and intense reflection in the ruffled realm of poet’s mind, memory and imagination during the intermediary stage before they have been finally delivered. Here Naik’s creative process is in close proximity with the famous one of Wordsworth according

to which poetry is ‘spontaneous overflow of powerful feeling recollected in tranquillity.’ As a matter of fact, the poetic moment with both Wordsworth and Naik, and for that matter with many other poet as well, has been a moment of re-living of the original experience. The original experience which is embedded in its objective correlatives, to use Eliot’s famous expression, and felt in conjunction with its material stimulants, is lost afterwards and the poet is left only with its fossils, its traces and its faint, with its ghost or the blurred and spectral being. But the initial feelings have been so powerful and persuasive that the poet has never come out of it. What on the other hand they try to do is to recapture and re-live the initial but lost moments in the deep, dark and invisible world of his/her phantasmagoria. The love-ridden lines of Naik are evincive of a prolonged trouble torn afterlife – life after the beloved, the chance begotten gift, has been withdrawn from him and withdrawn once and for all. It is a life held in captivity at the altar of ladylove. It is a life of lifetime enthrallment with the lost moment. The ladylove has transmuted to, to use his own words, ‘an abstract blood’ that incessantly ‘flows in’ him and has turned again, ‘a destiny of consciousness.’ In the poem “The Sickness of Thinking You” in *By Inference* the poet has pronounced

I can still think you,  
untiring, interested endlessly,  
even though we can’t meet outside,  
it flows in me, an abstract blood,  
the wonder of still thinking you –  
a destiny of consciousness.

The beloved has thus abstracted to ‘a destiny of consciousness’ never to part with the poet-lover. Referring to her in another poem titled “A Hymn”, Naik has reiterated

you who are nothing in the language of  
things,  
pure as impossibility,  
you are the beloved I can’t live with  
or live without.

Men are creatures of memory, of consciousness. They are inextricably dogged with this all throughout their life. In so far as Naik’s ways with and attitude towards his beloved are concerned, as he has proclaimed it in his poem “Are You Really Impossible” That’s how I live –

myth-making, picturing, narrating you,  
for you are the bread of my imagination,  
you are all I do.



As a matter of fact, the poems of Dilip Naik have been versified narratives of love. As to his attitude to love and ladylove, ladylove has been his idol or his deity and love his worship. In the earlier cited poem “A Hymn”, he has asserted

like a marble statue  
you have no blood.  
Like an idol  
you can't answer.  
But you alone deserve my worship.

The beloved to Naik is a goddess, love is worship and on that account, something sacred, sanctimonious and at once a religious experience. The songs that depict that divine experience happen to be ‘prayers’ in form and nature, and the poet, the singer is a dedicated devotee, a priest, a worshipper reciting those devotional lines in elegiac tone. To put in another way, the songs which eulogize such feelings are ‘hymns’. Accordingly Naik has aptly termed his poems as ‘elegiac hymns’ tempered ‘in the permanence of melancholy’. Here it is worth mentioning that insofar as the matter of poeticizing love is concerned, Dilip Naik is undoubtedly the greatest poet in Odia English poetry for the terrain of his poetry is pervaded by one and only motif, love. As he has recorded it in another of his seminal song titled “This Lifelong Conversation”, he has intermittently held himself in ‘Lifelong conversation with’ his silent goddess. As he has put it

This lifelong conversation with you is  
the only life I've really lived.

The matter of fact with Dilip Naik's poetry indeed has been, his songs have invariably remained a prolonged series of interior monologues the speaker of which is constantly seen in lifetime dialogue with his beloved, or with his ‘central other’. He is seen ever and anon loitering in the corridors of his beloved's shrine.

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