meet the author

Soubhagyakumar Misra
At college Misra met the celebrated modern Odia poet Guruprasad Mohanty who had a deep impact not only on the young poet's writings but also on his personality. Mohanty introduced him to Eliot's works, especially to The Waste Land. To a seventeen year old, Eliot was tough, but Misra somehow loved the imagery and rhythm of the great poem. Later in his M.A. class, Misra studied the poem more rigorously and became acquainted with Eliot's poetics.

Soubhagyakumar Misra served as a Lecturer in English in Ravenshaw College, Cuttack and B.J.B College, Bhubaneswar before he left for Berhampur University. He joined Berhampur University as a Reader and then became a Professor and retired as such in 2001. Dr Misra has always enjoyed the reputation of being a very competent teacher of English and American Literature.

Author of several collections of poetry Soubhagyakumar Misra shot into fame in the 1970s as an authentic poetic voice in Odia literature. His readers never failed to note the sincerity of his utterances, and looked upon him as one of the leading figures in Odia poetry. Over the years he has perfected a style that is at once simple and complex, which his followers have tried to imitate without much success.

Atmanepadi, his first collection of poems, was published in 1965 and was followed by Madhya-padalopi in 1970. In one of the
poems of the latter collection, the poet announces that his world is now much larger than what it was before. In fact the world depicted in his poetry is full of people, animals, birds, and inanimate objects, which are transformed into images of lasting beauty:

(a) Three months after, again,
The bony consciousness
Leaps like a new-born heifer in the sun...

("Three Months After")

(b) Your village
A bit of flesh
At the tip of the
River's bayonet...

("Near the Tamarind Tree")

(c) The last sun stopped near him
For a moment,
Put off all the lights and left
Like the watchman
Of an empty bungalow...

("Picnic at Taptapani")

In his later works, there are several pieces which contain only a series of images each and the poet establishes no link between them. The reader is left with the task of deciphering their meaning. Moreover, short narratives, comprising very ordinary incidents, are incorporated into many of his poems. Ultimately, the narratives assume an unanticipated significance. The narrator remains a detached observer throughout.

This method invests Misra's language with a certain degree of concreteness and familiarity and as such the poems are eminently accessible. In a poem called "Genda", the Odia Bhagabata and several other images, are put together, rather playfully. Misra often understates his serious concerns as a poet and he treats the poem as a play of words. He pokes fun at himself and at all his experiences.

If one asks him what his themes are, Soubhagya Misra would invariably smile and say that he does not write essays, he writes poems. It often appears that the most important theme of his poetry is poetry itself. But he is no aesthete. In his third and fourth collections of poems, Nai Pancha (A Swim in the River, 1973) and Andha Mahumachhi (The Blind Bee, 1977), the title poems propose the theme of total immersion in experience. The speaker in the first poem says, "What else is left on the land?"
Come, let’s jump into the river waters”. The second poem urges the bee to suck honey from everything, from flowers as well as from leprous wounds, for honey is to be found everywhere. Good and bad, beautiful and ugly, right and wrong etc are philosophical categories which are summarily rejected by the poet. Moreover, the two poems in question are replete with images of suffering:

Insane old father wakes and falls asleep
and wakes again.
In the thick mist of his obscene shouts,
mother grows older and older still,
weeping tears with the corner of her saree.
(“Andha Mahumachhi”)
And I realize that after a while
all of us will fall asleep, and sleek time
will crawl across like a snake by our feet.
The buds on the nearby plants will blossom forth into multi-petaled flowers,
and a number of flickering lanterns
will look all about the empty fields
for the white horse and its rider,
the blind zemindar missing for several centuries.
(“Andha Mahumachhi”)

Since our search for truth will have to be continued for ever, the only source of solace for us is the immediate present, with all its pain and suffering. Sukadeva Jena is waiting for his death; Bhanumati for her bus; the speaker in “Group Photo” tries to revive his past through a group photo but fails to recognize his own face.

Soubhagya Misra’s poetry does not say that suffering is the last word, the only reality for us to grapple with, although a profoundly tragic sense of life permeates the entire body of his work. Neither is he a poet of overt affirmation. If at all a message is to be extracted from him, it is this: Live life to the fullest. He will say this again with a smile, with a note of irony in his voice, though.

Misra has participated in a number of national and international literary programmes such as Valmiki World Poetry Festival, New Delhi (1985), Vaghartha World Poetry Festival, Bhopal (1989), Kavita-1993, New Delhi (1993), Medinipur Kavita Uschhab, Medinipur (2000), etc.
He has represented India and Odisha (so far the only Odia) at Iowa University, USA, on the International Writing Programme. He has also participated in a Kavisandhi programme organized by the Central Sahitya Akademi in 2001.

**A Select Bibliography**

Atmanepadi, Grantha Mandir, Poetry in Odia Cuttack, 1965
Madhyapadalopi, 1970
Nai Panhara, (A Swim in the River), 1973

Andha Mahumachhi (The Blind Bee), 1977
Bajrayana, 1979
Dwa Supana (Two Birds), 1984
Manikarnika, 1990

Anyatra (Elsewhere), Lucky Publications, Berhampur, 1994

Soubhagyakumar Misra Kavya Sambhar, Vol-II, 1996
Soubhagyakumar Misra Kavya Sambhar, Vol-III, 2009

Charachara (The Moving and the Still), Arya Prakashan, Cuttack 1999

Ujjaini, 2005

Matrasparsha, (Paschima Publications, Bhubaneswar-2009)
(All the other titles were published by Friends' Publishers, Cuttack)

**In English Translation:**
