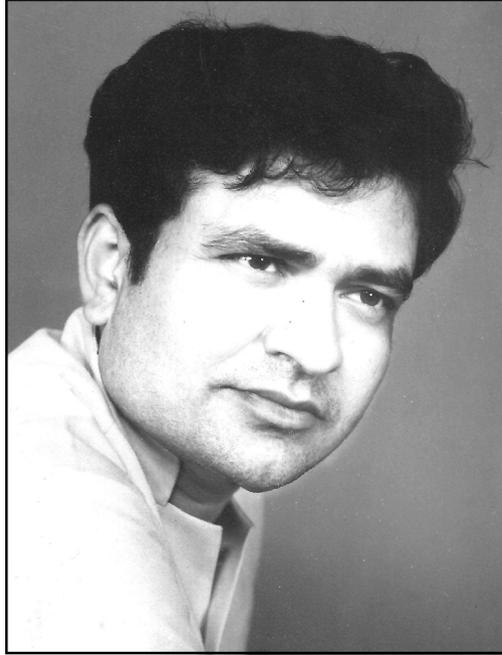


THE TRUE POSTCOLONIAL
A Tribute To Ananta Charan Sukla (1942-2020)

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In the death of Ananta Charan Sukla – he passed away in his Cuttack residence on 30 September, aged 78 – Odisha lost an English Professor who was the exact opposite of the image we normally entertain of an English teacher. His choice attire was the traditional Indian dhoti and panjabi in spotless white. Sanskrit was his muse. And he worshipped at the altar of comparative literature and aesthetics.

Thus Sukla was a systematic assault on the very notion of an English teacher that we in India have been taught to harbour. As such, he was far more deserving of the honour 'postcolonial' than many so-called Indian teachers of English who have not been able to break out of the prison of English and of the Western ideas and ideologies that are routinely conveyed through it. For what is postcoloniality if it is not an assertion of one's independence through the pursuit of one's local cultural originality? In Sukla's case the latter referred to the glorious tradition of Sanskrit poetics and aesthetics.

Yet Sukla was an English teacher who rose through the ranks to become a Professor. He was qualified in every way for this professional role, having earned his M.A. in three subjects (English, Philosophy, and Sanskrit) and Ph.D. from Jadavpur University. It is at Sambalpur University that he spent the greater part of his professional life. But right from the beginning he was intent on using English as a means to an end. That end was the opening up of the traditional study of Eng Lit to the full force and glare of comparison involving art, painting, music, aesthetics and philosophy. The breadth of his vision and approach was amply evident in the doctoral thesis that Sukla wrote for Jadavpur University. The thesis was on the concept of imitation in Greek and Indian aesthetics. People in the traditional field of English studies are bound to be nonplussed by the discipline-shattering ambition of this study. But not Sukla who not only took the concept head on, but undertook a comparison across cultures of the concept of imitation in Greek theory and 'anukarana' (mimesis) in Indian theory.

This was only the beginning of a glittering scholarly career which birthed many seminal works of comparative aesthetics. Some of these are *Art and Representation*, *Art and Experience*, *Art and Essence*, *Art and Expression*, *Fiction and Art*, and *Imagination and Art*. Each one of these is an attempt to explore the foundational nature of aesthetic experience as diversely manifested in different artistic forms. The comment of one of the leading contemporary philosophers of art, Charles Altieri, on his book *Fiction and Art* is noteworthy: "Fictionality in his hands ... became an ontological term for analyzing the kinds of referential status possessed by various kinds of imagining – from mathematics to mythology."

Altieri uses the word 'capacious' to describe Sukla's intellect. It is surely true. It is only a 'capacious' mind that can conceive of a journal like JCLA (Journal of Comparative Literature and Aesthetics) that Sukla founded in 1978 in a remote place called Burla and sustained it over forty two years without either financial or institutional support. But what a treasure it is! And what a monument it is to a person's intellectual endeavour!

Sukla has gone the way of all mortals. But his works remain. Now that the knowledge of our own literature, culture and tradition is at such a premium, the legacies of the man will also explain.