

CHAPTER – V

Special Features in Tagore and Northeast Indian Poets

The works of Rabindranath Tagore and the representative poets of Northeast India can be categorized under the postcolonial and postcolonial literature because of their concerns of suffering under the colonial powers and their fond nostalgic memories of past cultures and traditions where the said poets have sought repose. Environmentalism, ecocentrism and anthropocentrism have been contested spaces of concern where the poetical works of Tagore and the poets of Northeast can be situated for discussion and analysis.

The chief concerns of postcolonialism are the experiences of exclusion, ‘othering’, hybridity, mimicry, woes of subalternity and resistance under colonial power centres. It can be addressed through the historical, political, cultural, and textual ramifications of the colonial encounter between the west and the non-West, dating from the sixteenth century to the present day (Boehmer 2006: 340). It critically scrutinizes the colonial relationship undercutting the myths of power, the race classifications, and the imagery of subordination in the colonial discourse. Postcolonial literature believes that one’s identity is rooted in one’s own tradition. Hence it explores traditional value system in quest for personal, racial or cultural identity. This exploration as well as the dismantling of the myths of power, subordination, race, or gender classifications add a strong dimension to postcolonial/postcolonial writing and it becomes a powerful tool for resistance as well as identity, self-assertion and self-definition. For this self-definition of the colonized people, and to obtain a space and a place for them, postcolonial literature seeks to reconstruct the past even by recreating history.

Postcolonial ecological writing is a resistance against the colonial aggression on nature and the rampant destruction of the natural world. Under the mask of development and progress, there has been terrible onslaught of the colonial agenda of exploring and exploiting nature and

devastating the natural superstructure. All the colonies, including India, have a long history of this experience.

‘Postcolonial’ is a theorizing of the ecological and postcolonial concerns to address the issues of ecocide derived from the current contexts of the marginalization of Nature, waste colonialism, environmental racism, discriminatory intellectual property rights, ecocidal globalizing scientific technology and the absence of Nature as a category in the theorizing of postcolonialism (Nayar 1999:71). The term ‘Postcolonial’ is a portmanteau word derived from the combination of the words ‘postcolonial’ and ‘ecological’.

Deep ecology is a significant constituent of postcolonial thought. As we depend on the Mother Earth for our various needs like (i) survival needs (food, shelter, health), (ii) security needs (protection from danger), (iii) belonging (social needs-love, friendship) (iv) self-esteem (ego needs-recognition, status) and (v) self-actualisation (creativity, fulfillment of potential) (ibidem 77), we must protect our eternal abode and honour her.

Rabindranath Tagore reflected the postcolonial and postecological aspects of writing in the sense that his poetry is basically reflection of the greatness of Indian Nature, the mystic ways of life and Nature, deep spirituality, love of motherland, indigenous religious saga and several other cultural and political realities of his homeland. He was a poet, prophet, propagator of human values, revolutionary of new ideas and radical thinker. He was passionate preacher of religion of love and hardwork. He was worshipper of Nature, freedom of thought and speech and motherland. In his poetry, he proved himself as a Deep ecologist, spiritual ecologist, eco-mystic, ecofeminist and hence he has been a strong source of inspiration for all ecological writers and mostly the writers of North East India. He is one amongst the fifty major environmental thinkers of the World.

The Northeast part of India being a biodiversity hotspot has been famous for its natural glory from time immemorial. Nature has a significant place in Indian traditional values. It has been worshipped and revered since time immemorial. Basic Indian ethos teaches to be

compassionate to nature and to be in complete harmony with it. It propagates the idea that human beings and nature share a bond of mutual understanding, respect and inter-dependence. It is interesting to note that traditional Hindu beliefs associate various birds and animals to different gods and goddesses, and thus attributing those birds and animals a position of respect and reverence. People have been worshipping nature mystifying its presence and entity. The malevolent aspect of nature has been a source of human woe and wonder since the dawn of human civilization.

Indian traditional belief reflects reverence for both the biotic and abiotic elements of the natural world suggesting ecoconsciousness in traditional values. The cultural ethos of various tribes of Northeast India is also reflective of the spirit of reverence for the world of nature. In the folk narratives of Tripura, Burasa, the god of woods and forest is worshipped; while the Sikkimese myths of Creation believe that the earth was created by Itbu-moo or It-moo, who they believe is the Great Mother Creator (Sen 2006: 12-17).

Each province of Northeast has multiple myths and mysteries relating to nature and there are many nature gods and goddesses whose greatness and roles in human life are depicted in the mythologies and various epics/ religious texts. Reverence for nature is reflected in people's worship of the natural objects like the Sun, trees, rocks, rivers, fire or various animals. People worshipped those forces and natural agencies from which they were benefited by getting energy and life force. It was reciprocity, a way of showing gratitude to the benevolent nature. This is the very concept of Deep Ecology and this has been practised with all sanctity and sincerity in Indian society since time immemorial.

The Indian scriptures written thousands of years ago speak of the preservation of nature, environment and the entire ecosystem. The Indian scriptures, which are said to be the repositories of Indian philosophy, speak of preservation of environment and thus to maintain the ecological balance. The Hindu scriptures, such as the Vedas, the Upanishadas and the Puranas are abundant with hymns glorifying and worshipping the environment. The ecological concern found in these scriptures written thousands of years ago testify the traditional Indian attitude towards environment.

This concern for environment and the ecological awareness in these ancient literatures are amazing that reflect the Indian consciousness towards environment conservation. In the Vedas, there are a number of beautiful hymns dealing with environment and the need to protect it with all its purity. This is a holistic view of the universe as well as the entire ecosystem that reflects the traditional Indian values, concept and awareness for the environment and the ecology. Then the British came and there started a new history in India. The colonial gaze of profit and prosperity has started exploiting nature. In the name of progress and development, nature was made to degenerate to the deepest extent. The age-old values regarding nature and its sanctity were shaken of which the colonized people had to be mute spectators. They were the 'other' compelled to live in the periphery and whose voice was obviously unheard.

The poets of Northeast India are comparable with Rabindranath Tagore in the following aspects:

- (i) Rabindranath Tagore had a good relation with the Northeast India and a part of the region was under the administration of his Zamindari for sometime and he frequently visited Tripura and the East Bengal was attached with North East at that time. Like Manipur myths and legends being incorporated in the works of Sri Aurobindo, the same were also incorporated in his works.
- (ii) The poets of Northeast of the post-colonial era have reflected the myths, realities, history and ecological glory of the region.
- (iii) As romantics, the poets of various ethnic communities have done justice to their ethos, ambitions, aspirations and pains of past and present.
- (iv) They have been the singers of sagas of their tribes exposing the the identities of their own and thereby establishing their glories.

- (v) They have been quite prophetic of their future and eulogizers of their past upholding their pristine saga.

People gradually started sensing the loss of nature as an aftermath of colonialism. They began to suffer due to the ecological imbalance. Population growth, environmental pollution and resource depletion have posed great threats to human civilization. To cope with the changing scenario in the environment, people started undertaking various projects like plantation, resource management, etc. This is what basically Shallow Ecology is all about. It is predominantly a postcolonial concept.

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