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Ecology, Eco-feminism, Eco-mysticism in the plays of North-East India Writing in English.

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Abstract

North- East India comprises of eight different states namely Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim and Tripura having cultural, linguistic and religious diversity. In spite of having all these diversities, these states have many things in common. They share common political, economic or social problems such as the problems on insurgency, separatist movements or social problems such as the problem of insurgency, the issue of rampant corruptions in the bureaucracy. Again, all these states share almost the same natural landscapes. They have hills, mountains, lush green forests with rare flora and fauna, rivers, Valleys, and multiethnic people with vibrant culture and tradition. The ecology of the region has become a dominant theme of the writers of North East India writing in English. Even in vernacular literature also nature occupies a significant place. Writing from North-East India in English celebrates this nature human relationship exploring the tradition culture and heritage of the multiethnic communities of this region. In the present paper I have tried to explore the ecology, eco-mystic, eco-feministic ideologies that have been exploded in the plays of the playwrights of North East India writing in English.

Key Words -Ecology, eco-mysticism, eco-feminism, identity, spiritual.

Objective of the study

Plays written in English from North East, although have attained a remarkable stature, seem to have deprived of proper critical attention in the national level. This proposed study intends to examine critically the plays written in English from this region and to make an attempt to determine their position in the sphere of Indian plays written in English and the canon of eco-politics. Further, It is noteworthy that abundant ecological resources have been pivotal in shaping the aesthetic sensibilities of these playwrights. So studying the plays from this ecological perspective may even help in understanding this beautiful, multicoloured land called the Northeast – a land with a geographical as well as psychological entity.

Methodology

Methodology of investigation will include analysis of primary and secondary source. It will mainly be a text-based reading along with the use of the tenets of eco-criticism and eco-feminism, and identity will be applied for the analysis of the drama written in English from the Northeast India.

Interpretation

Before analyzing the plays respective playwrights of North- East India, my paper deals with the theories of ecology with a brief presentation of concepts.

Ecology is the scientific study of the relationship and interdependence between each and every life form of the environment. The word 'Ecology' has been derived from the Greek words *oikos* and *logos* meaning 'household' and 'knowledge' respectively. The term 'Ecology' was coined by the German biologist Ernst Haeckel in 1869, when he defined it as the science of the relationship of the organisms to the environment. It has developed as a reaction against the practice of isolating creatures and studying them in laboratories. Ecology, in its present connotation, is an umbrella term that is open to the common, everyday discourse of species, ecology ranged freely across many fields, dipping into evolution, behavior, and physiology....(Howarth 1996:73)

Ecological thinking has been there for a long time, but ecology as a principle has developed gradually. The word 'Ecology' is very often used in connection with the 'green' movement. There are a number of philosophical concepts based on ecological principals. "These philosophies use the word 'ecology' in a much looser sense than the scientific. This practice somewhere between seeing culture as manifestation of ecology and using ecology as metaphor for culture is common in eco-criticism" (Kerridge 2006:536)

Eco- mysticism may be defined as ecological mysticism or living ecologically like a mystic's way of life. Mysticism "is the art and science of living ecologically like a mystic's way of life. Mysticism "is the art and science of living perfectly; it is the self- knowledge that subsumes the knowledge of the world. It is quest for and the union with the ultimate reality. It includes both terms in the aforesaid definition like "Absolute", "ultimate reality" are the parts of the cosmos/ecology. So ecological self-knowledge required for the said purpose. The spiritual ecology/creation spirituality is same as Eco-mysticism.

Eco-mysticism/Spiritual ecology has four aspects or it is of four types like: Via Positiva, Via Negativa, Via Creativa and Via Transformativa. Via Positiva is the experience of the Divine in terms of delight, awe, and wonder at being present in the world; it involves the intuition that creation is a blessing, and response of gratitude. Via pain. There two kinds of experiences lead to a rebirth of creativity and it is the Via Creativa that involves identifying new ecological virtues for nature, redefining creation through political action, and making new rituals to celebrate sacred places, times, and being in nature. Via Transformativa is the transformation to an more compassionate society in which all being love one another. (Fox 1998: 228).

Arne Naess, the Norwegian philosopher, is said to the pioneer of this movement Emerging from the sense of global ecological crises Deep Ecology calls for a profound transformation in the traditional ecological paradigm entailing new metaphysical, epistemological, religious, psychological, sociopolitical, and ethical principles, Naess has set principles for Deep ecology (Merchant 2005, 92).

1. Rejection of man in environment image in favour of the relational, total field image.
2. Biospherical egalitarianism.
3. Principles of diversity and symbiosis.
4. Anti- class posture.
5. Fight against pollution and resource depletion.
6. Complexity, not complication.
7. Local autonomy and decentralization (ibidem: 92)

Ramchandra Guha is another philosopher of the principle of deep ecology.

Human Ecology is based on the premise that human population has to negotiate and share space with other species in order to maintain the ecological equilibrium.

The term Eco - Criticism is said to be used for the first time by us critic William Rucker in his essay *Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Eco criticism* in 1978. Also known as eco poetics environmental literary criticism or green cultural studies, Eco- criticism or ecological criticism is the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment". (Glottfelty and From 1996 : Xviii). It is based on the connection between human culture and the entire ecosphere.

The theoretical concepts discussed above have been applied the plays of North- East India writing in English. The playwrights of North-East India has writer quite a good number of plays in their own vernacular languages. Some of these plays have been translated into English and these have shown how successfully this literary genre has been explored by these play wrights. This plays of these writers are a show case of the ecology, myths, legends, eco- mysticism of their region, which marks their rootedness to their tradition and culture, this ever being a part of the corpus of Indian drama, these make them essentially northeastern playwrights, Ecology offers to them an identity of their own, an identity which is legitimate and powerful and unique.

Among the play wrights from North-East India writing in English, Ratan Thiyam is a name to be reckoned with. In fact Manipur has a rich theatre tradition. The introduction of western education in Manipur during the last quarter of the 19th century also influenced the advent of a new group of playwrights such as Lairenmagum. Ibungohal Singh (1983-1955), Hijan, Angahal (1894-1943) etc, But it was Ratan Thiyam in whose hand Manipuri theatre has achieved a new dimension. He has set up chorus Repertory Theatre in 1976 that has immasely contributed to the development of Manipuri theatre,

Ecological concerns are strongly voiced in Ratan Thiyams, plays.

The traditional myths and legedens, folklores, was, terrorisms, ecological concerns are dominant themes of Thiyamis plays. The plays of Ratan Thiyam Present a remarkable juxtaposition of traditionalism and demands that a remorseless technological world takes on all of us. And through the presentation of opposites and conflicts, he puts across the clear message that unless mankind resists war, halts the rat race of a frenetic existence and reverses the destruction of the only planet that we have is only doom in store for us. Thiyam himself says

“The human race has come a long way, especially due to technological advancements, but in the course of our development, we have somehow lost touch with our emotions. The more we become advanced, the more our society is forgetting its traditions, roots and the importance of human relationship (Thiyam 2008 : III-12)

Thiyam's plays in *Manipur Trilogy* are *wahoudok* (prologue), *Hey Nungshibi prithivi* (My Earth, My level) and *Chinglonn Mapan Tampak Ama* (Nine, Hills one Valley) *wahoudok* is a play with four scenes that tells the Mete traditional myths regarding the creation in four episodes. The birth of the universe, the creation of living beings. In the play Thiyam tries to justify the need of practicing traditional values as it is the tradition, culture and age old values that enable human wings to fight against the hazards of so-called modernization, In an interview with kavita Nagpal and Geeti Sen, Thiyam says about the importance of tradition, “it is by the use of tradition that you try to drive away the civil factors: (Sen 2006:242).

Ecology of the region is mentioned in *wahoudok* in many times, people have been reminded of the beauty and bounty of Nature number of times The narrator in the play says

“See how beautiful is the earth/green, black, saffron and while colored / Ranges of hills,” (Thiyam 2008:4)

Thiyam speaks of the entire ecology of the earth: He speaks about the oceans, the green forests, the varied flora and fauna of earth. But this beautiful earth is under threat. Human being's exploitation has brought on ecological imbalance.

“In the race of civilization, in the passage of time, grudge among nations have become very frequent, Killing and wanton murder arresting and kidnapping would happen mare frequently, never of wars and devastations would reverberate in all the four directions and eight corners” (ibidem 38-3). But to create a peaceful planet in which all creatures can live peacefully this should be stooped as “there is no paradise better than earth (ibeidem: 42)

The eco mystical tone is well heard in this play, the varied colored hills, the clouds, different kinds of trees, flowers fruits and different species of animal's words and insects are mentioned. Along with human beings all these are integral part of the ecological web. Mutual love, respect and dependence is must in order to maintain the eco logical balance. The is what eco- Mysticism tells. This is the ways of living a mystic way of life. Spiritual Ecology advocates the growth of an ethical sense that enables human beings feelan empathy with nature to observe closely its mysteries and to act for its preservation. Which is a manifestation of this eco mystical spirit

The second play in Thiyam's *Trilogy* is *Hey Nungsibi Prithibi*. It also powerfully raises the ecological concerns. The play addresses that important global issue of how terrorism leads to environmental degradation. Wars, battles, and the armed exercises of nations for attaining superiority have polluted the planet. Apart from doing manifold harms to human civilization, these should be stopped in order to create a peaceful planet in which all creatures can live peacefully. This is the matter of deep ecology which supports rejection of man's anthropocentric approach in favour of eco-critical approach.

It can also be studied from an eco-feministic viewpoint. Women and nature are presented as synonymous. Both are exploited and degraded. Both are exploited and devastated by wars and one of the women characters speaks of the pathetic condition of women.

War, You have made us prostitutes.

War, you have made us prisoners.

War, you have made us bonded slaves.

.... ..

Women and children are fed to war ...

The epic of the Earth and voluminous

Chapters of thousands of pages would not be

Sufficient to describe the woes and sufferings

Of women alone." (ibidem 73).

The last play in Thiyam's *Trilogy* '*Chinglon Mapan Tampak Ama*' (Nine Hills, One Valley) also expresses the ecological concern in a powerful dramatic voice. The 'Chant' at the begging of the play reflects myths and legends of Manipur. Once the place enriched with the bounties of nature. But the ecological balance has been disturbed. The land has now become a cursed land where, people's minds are divided, all are irritated (ibidem 88).

The play also can be studied from eco-feministic view point. Both nature and Women are the innocent victims of terror and war waged by the patriarchal society all around the globe. And in the play it is the women, the mothers, the sentinels of tradition who play a pivotal role in restoring order in the society.

Another Manipuri play Wright is Athokpam Tomchau, His play *Bus Stop* portrays the Modern predicament that is full of cut throat politics, meaningless rat races, rampant corruptions in all levels, and so on, The ecological crises posed by the changing values in the name of modernization is well depicted in the play.

It is the end of the earth, the end; There is

War between the progenies of Darwin, the

Situation is worsened! It is terrible! What

Shall we do now if the flames of war engulf us? (ibidem 72)

A Note of Eco mysticism is heard when living peacefully together with environment is emphasized in the play:

.....Light up the pine torches, pick up the fallen

grains one flesh of lightening and you'll see

stray coins on the flour. This mud house might

fall when it so desires. But do not stop decorating

the same, with new ornaments. (ibidem 73)

The play reiterates the need to develop a new environmental ethics that can restore peace and harmony.

The condition of your environment has

charmed you, it protects, promotes, threatens

And destroy;.....

Taking a stand within the silent zone of.

Your heart just stands forth with a plan. (ibidem 76)

Ecological concern is one of the dominant features of the writings of plays of North-Eastern playwrights writing in English. One such playwright from Assam Ganesh Gogoi (1907-1937) is an eminent Assamese playwright and poet. His '*Sakunir Protisodh*' (Revenge of Shakuni) is a remarkable play in the history of Assamese drama for its unique treatment of the subject matter. The play can also be studied from ecofeministic ideologies. Eco-feminism believes that both nature as well as women has been exploited and

treated as a passive object by the patriarchal society. Women have been without a 'space' in all ages of human history. A close study of the play *Revenge of Shakuni* opens up many such issues that strengthen this claims of the ecofeminists. There are three main female characters in the play –Gandhari, queen of Hastinapur and wife of Dhritarashtra, Padmaa, wife of Karna and Draupadi, wife of the pandaves. That they are marginalized on many occasions can be seen even in Mahabharata. Draupadi had married to the five brothers of the Pandavas where her consent was never asked for. But she was a wise lady who surely had a say of her own. Her wisdom can be seen when she is encouraging Arjuna with her wise words, "This accidental defeat can't demoralize our force. It right prevails; it the judgment of right and wrong is the prevailing order, then the greedy Duryodhana will definitely meet with a faithful end." (Gogoi 2006 : 134)

During the battle of Kurukshetra, Draupadi has a mental disturbance, this trauma has been expressed with the help of images from the world of nature:

Why do I feel something ominous?

My heart is trembling

Why is the melody doleful?

Why is melancholy echoing all around?

Why is the air heavy with
a strange, doleful tune?

The autumn dew
that sits on plantain leaves

Instead of glinting ---

why do they appear as tears? (ibidem: 134)

Gandhari, mother of the Kauravas, has also been going through such mental traumas. But she is never listened to with serious attention, neither by her husband Dhritarashtra nor by her son Duryodhana, the representative of the patriarchy.

Arun Sarma is another major Assamese playwright of North –East India who has a distinct voice as a dramatist. His famous plays like *Ahar*, *Nibaran Bhattacharya* and *The Wolf* has been translated into many Indian languages and they have been included in the volume of hundred best Indian plays compiled by Sahitya Akademi.

Findings

The analyses of the plays of the playwrights of North east India writing in English shows that these playwrights celebrate ecological glory of North east India with a keen ecological awareness. Although ethnically is the chief concern as they hail from various group, mountains, hills, valleys as well as aesthetic sensibilities communal violence and insurgency are also of the dominant and recurring themes in their works. Ecological concerns are strongly voiced in the plays of Ratan Thiyam, The plays of Ratan Thiyam.

"Present a remarkable juxtaposition of traditionalism and the demands that a remarkable technological world takes on all of us. And through presentation of opposites and conflicts he puts across the clear message that unless mankind resist war, halts the rat race of a frenetic existences and reverses the destruction of the only planet that we have, there is only doom is in store for us..... His lament of the diverse ways in which we have destroyed or perverted the world of today is heard against the backdrop of angst presences in the Mythical world of Manipuri deities and damsel, of mother's wise men. In the ultimate analysis, his plays represent the victory of abiding traditional values over the present world traditional values over the present world of wars, conflicts, violence, greed and equity (Bez boruah 2008 1).

The plays in English from North- east India celebrates the human –nature relationship exploring the tradition, culture and heritage of the multi-ethnic communities of the region. These plays besides talking about contemporary socio- political problems, seriously raise ecological issues. There is glorification of nature, and also deep concern for ecological degradation. Because these playwrights believe that it is a threat not only to the environment alone, but also to the very identity of the indigenous tribes. Such consciousness for the degradation of nature is seen in the following lines of Ratan Thiyam's play (Nine Hills, One Valley),

“Peepul tree was on fire, dead bondies were floating in a row in the river...”(Thiyam 87).

Eco- mystical ideas have been well explored by Thiyam in his plays. His play *My Earth , My Love* unfolds the dark pages of the history of human kind. Wars, battles and armed exercises of nation for attaining superiority have polluted the planet. They have been posing a threat to the very existence of the earth.

But in order to live in a perfectly ecological way, new ethics is to be developed in which anthropocentrism should give way to eco-centrism .This is the primary concept of eco-mysticism and this was Thiyam tries to express in this plays.

Conclusion

The writing in English from India's North-east are the first generation of writers. They have attained a legitimate and powerful voice by articulating senses and sentiments and by focusing on some core issues of the region. feature of the seven north- eastern states, each small community or linguistic group has responded through its oral or written communication to the encounters with the majoritarian cultures from either mainland India or from outside the borders of the country, in its own distinctive manner. Besides issues like identity crisis, search for roots, self-assertion or claims for political space, it is the ecology of the region and an ecological concern that predominantly seem to unite these multi-ethnic writers in a common platform. These writers celebrate the ecological glory of Northeast with a keen ecological a wariness. They seem to use ecological, in a conscious way, as a tool for acquiring an identity, an identity which is unique, legitimate and powerful one.

From this study it seen that the creative works of the play wrights of North- East India has world of possibilities. This study of the plays writing in English shows that it has all the power to go on is its creative journey with all vigor and vitality, These plays has greatly contributed to the corpus of North- East Plays Writing in English. It is hoped that it will be more enriched with both quality and quantity and will go infusing new ideas, themes and techniques and style. These plays writing in English from Indian's North East will always be relevant and will remain of great significance in reinventing the North East India as well India as a whole.

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