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DIASPORIC ELEMENTS IN ROBIN S. NGANGOM'S POETRY

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Abstract:

Robin S. Ngangom endeavors to project the humble and simple aspects of his native place and people in his thought provoking poems. It seems that he is concerned with the subdued fears in the face of youth of his place. He laments about the rich cultural heritage and past glory of his home place in simple diction. The testimony of this lamentation is witnessed in his celebrated poems such as 'A Poem for Mother', 'Poem for Joseph' and 'The Strange Affair'. The poet expresses the pathetic conditions of his homeland in a nostalgic tone. He seems to maintain a love-hate relationship with his region. His soul longs for the root but when he realizes the ground reality of his native state Manipur, he tries to escape from it. This paper is a humble attempt to show how Ngangom, despite having a comfortable life at distanced place, longs for his root and is apologetic towards his motherland because he is just a mute spectator to the never ending suffering of his native place.

Keywords: Lamentation, subdued, motherland, nostalgic, longing etc

The subject matter of this research paper has been analyzed in the perspective of diasporic theory using analytical method. This paper will be helpful in understanding diasporic consciousness in the writings of authors hailing from North-East region of the country. The term 'Diaspora' refers to the displaced people or communities who have been dislocated from their original place through migration, immigration or for better livelihood. So, it implies that 'Diaspora' is a dislocation from said geographical location of inhabitation and relocation in another territory. Diasporic literature is concerned with the image of native place where Diaspora occurs.

Stuart Hall in his seminal book Cultural Identity and Diaspora observes that the displacement creates a difficult concept of negotiation between keenness for native land and nostalgia. Homi Bhabha is of the opinion that the diasporic writers portray such characters "who

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have suffered the sentence of history, subjugation, domination, diaspora and displacement that we learn our most enduring lessons for living and thinking” (Bhabha 78). Contemporary Indian diasporic write rare concerned with ethnic cultural, political conflicts which give new orientation to the already existing constructs of the West and the East. The main features of diasporic writing are its preoccupation with place, displacement and myth of identity.

John Hartly observes that diasporic people are those who have distanced themselves from the homeland as refugee or people in search of better work. The sense of dislocation is accompanied by the longing for the former native place and continuous allegiance to the culture left behind while staying within the place of work. The same characteristic feature is emphasized in Imaginary Homeland, “sometimes we feel that we straddle two cultures and other times that we fall between two stools” (Rushdie 15).

Diasporic elements are vividly reflected in Ngangom’s poetry. In his critical article ‘Poetry in the Time of Terror’, he observes: “Manipur, my native place in Northeast India,, is in a state of anarchy and my poetry springs from the cruel contradictions of the land” (Poetry in the Time of Terror 168). The study has been descriptive, interpretative and explanatory. The paper attempts to find out Robin S. Ngangom’s longing for native land in spite of having a settled life at his work place. Ngangom has emerged as one of the outstanding Indian English poet from North-Eastern part of the country. He has to his credit three books of poetry namely Words and Silence (1988), Time Crossroads (1994) and The Desire of Roots (2006). He is of the view that poetry should amuse us, make us think and it must heal the heart of people. He feels that contemporary events have made the North-East poetry unique. Robin S. Ngangom’s poetry primarily focuses on the diasporic themes realistically and convincingly.

For the sake of livelihood Ngangom makes Meghalaya his second home and in unequivocal terms he reveals how he is warmly accepted by this place after his flee from native state, Manipur. Ngangom in his pioneer poem ‘A Poem for Mother’ pays his rich tribute to his biological mother and motherland. He honestly expresses how his soul cries for his native place that he has left behind ten years ago. His memory of his mother and birthplace and its representation is poignant and deeply moving in this poem:

Palem Apokpi, mother who gave birth to me,
to be a man how I hated leaving home
ten years ago. Now these hills
have grown on me.

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But I'm still your painfully shy son
With a ravenous appetite,
the boy who lost many teeth after
emptying your larder. (1-8)

Ngangom is deeply rooted in Meiti culture. Whenever he delves deep into the world of nostalgia of his homeland, he is pushed back to reality, he mulls about the present day of affair of his state. He is sometimes scared with the image of black marketer and child prostitutes which eventually leads him to his refusal to come back to his original place. Memories associated with this feeling of footlessness and homelessness often makes their presence felt in Ngangom's poems. The words 'Palem Apokpi' in poem 'A Poem for Mother' means a mother who gives birth, raises and nurtures a child in the poet's native language Meiti. The poem is not only a heartfelt tribute to his biological mother but also his love for motherland he has left behind.

I know you work your fingers to the bone
As all mothers do, for unmarried sons,
Ageing husband and liberated daughters-in-law.
Worried about us, for a long time (22-25)

The remembrance of the ageing mother who looked after him in his boyhood and her everlasting toil is also manifested in the present political and economic crisis of Manipur where all types of developments have come to standstill due to rampant corruption. The poem turns out to be a sincere apology from a son who would not give back anything in return to his birth place and mother.

I'm sorry palem
I've inherited nothing
of your stable ways or culinary skills.
Forgive me for all your dreams
of peace during your ramnant days
I turned out to be a small man
with small dreams, living a small life (36-42)

Ngangom experiences alienation due to his inability to go back home and the entry of outsiders in both Manipur and Meghalaya causing a threat to old values of the land. In one of his poems 'Poem for Joseph', he clearly reveals how he lacks a sense of belonging to his birth place

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and how the place itself tends to have deserted him also. The poet is a victim of ethnic cleansing who has been forcibly evicted and extradited from his roots.

It is never too late to come home

But I need a homeland

Where I can recognize myself

Just a map or even a tree or a stone

to mark a spot I could return to

like a passing animal

even when there's nothing to return for (1-7)

The homeland is a symbol of identity for the poet. The poet mulls to return to his place though his return may be late due to unavoidable circumstances. He cannot resist his inner urge of coming back to his native place even knowing the fact that it has been divested due to political turmoil and insurgency. He experiences a sense of insecurity that crept into his native place. He speaks with a nostalgic longing to return to his homeland.

It's true

That in my native land,

Children have crawled out of burrows

They had gouged under hard beds.

Long after the grownups had fled and

Roofs came apart

Like charred heads (8-14)

The poet names this representative sufferer after the Biblical character Joseph, who moved away from home. The condition of imposed exile is painful in his desperate bid to return to the lost homeland: this character frantically seeks homeland where he could recognize himself "even when there is nothing to return for" (07).

Robin S. Ngangom attempts to highlights the benign and simple aspects of his homeland and people through his poetry. He also mourns for the past glory that has crumbled with the passing of time. The poet is physically away from his native place but the events and memories haunt him at all times. There is no escape from this reality; it is like a prison that will chase him and make him a captive. The physical distance from his home compels him to dive deeper into pessimism as he observes the degeration of the birth place and his people.

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