



Literature, An Impelling Force: Disclosing The Complications Concerning Moral And Spiritual Decay, Violence, Discrimination And Disparities In The Poem “During Easter” By Robin S. Ngangom.

Mehjubin Haque

M.A. in English,

Sikkim University, Gangtok.

Abstract: This paper endeavors to study the hypocrisy and hollowness predominant among most of the people of the present day society, by critically analyzing the poem “During Easter” by Robin S. Ngangom, one of the significant and seminal writers of North-East India. This paper aims to explore how through literature, Robin S. Ngangom, or the writers in general, give utterance to and brings to the forefront the serious and complex issues of our society. Literature, acting like an incentive and an impelling force, not only offers people the representation and apprehension of different complexities of people across the globe but at the same time possesses the ability to change or alter the ways and behavior of humans. It holds the capability to bend the human mind towards great ideas and philosophies, making them better human beings. This paper endeavors to disclose the problems related to erosion of human values, declining moral and spiritual values, violence, discrimination at the religious level as well as the great disparity existing between religion and human beings through the poem “During Easter” by Robin S. Ngangom.

Keywords: degradation, hollowness, disparity, hypocrisy, impelling, violence, discrimination

Introduction:

The contemporary Indian poet from the North East of Assam, Robin S. Ngangom, is one such eminent and distinguished writer, who, through his poetries not only provides representation of the challenging and complex problems of his native land, but also aims to bring to the forefront and criticize the underlying satire of the contemporary society and the ways of the world. Apart from depicting the problematic political relationship, Ngangom in his poetry give utterance to all his indignant attacks, raising his voice on themes related to spiritual and moral degradation, growing materialism, disparities between modern man and religion and the prevalence of violence in his native hills. This paper aims to shed light to the 21st Century society's hollowness and hypocrisy; the false make-believe of goodness and virtue be it in terms of humanity, morality or religion. Ngangom gives a poignant expressing to this 'crisis' the people of his native land, as well as the people of the entire globe is suffering today, in the select poem for analysis "During Easter".

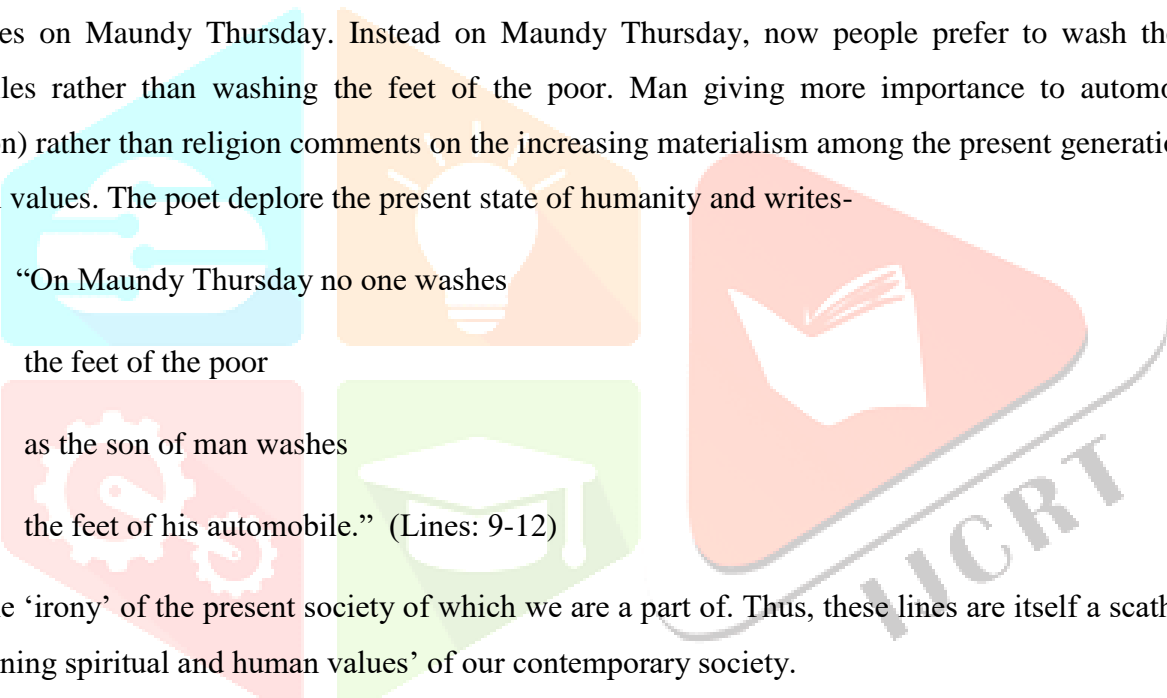
A religious festival is not just a festival for one person or the people of a particular area. It is for everyone, in other words, the entire humanity. Since the dawn of time, the people of every religion are witnessed celebrating the religious festivals, commemorating all the great saints, or the great ideals, morals, logic and values behind the festivals. However, we see a lot of anomalies these days. The way people used to celebrate all the festivals before was way more different and significant in nature than the people celebrating the same festivals in the present society of 21st Century. Robin S. Ngangom's poem "During Easter" deals with this aberration. In the poem, the poet, comparing and contrasting the present era to that of the golden period of past, vividly describes the activities visible to his eyes and the environment around him during the holy week of Easter. The poet chastises the present society by throwing light and giving utterance to the problems concerning moral and spiritual decay, violence, disparities and discriminations at various levels, by foregrounding the rituals and ceremonies of the pious festival of Easter in the poem.

Discussion:

The poem opens with the poet comparing the season of winter to that of an old man, who has no sense of time and place. Just like an old man who finds it difficult to accept the change and thus refuses to move ahead in time, in the same way, the poet says that, the season of winter too is obstinate and is languishing in the streets. It is only after the cruel season of winter people are blessed with the rejuvenating and life giving season of spring. But winter is still languishing in the streets and its presence can be felt all around. Everything changes with the passing of time. The group of stars forming different patterns, which in other words we call constellation, naturally changes; along with the cherries turning red while the season changes. But it seems like winter has decided to forcefully stay somewhere in the street. Here the poet seems to be emphasizing upon the fact that change is inevitable, be it a positive or a negative one.

In the second stanza, the poet provides a hint of the ‘erosion of human values’ in the contemporary society. He witnesses that the “streets are only half-emptied”, it is not fully deserted. It is the holy week of Easter, the oldest festival of paramount significance in Christianity commemorating the resurrection of Jesus Christ after his crucifixion. But the people around him did not visit the church to watch the resurrection of Christ, which holds a very significant meaning and is also the central premise in the Christian faith. Thus the poet bemoans that only few people went to participate and be a part of such a pious and holy ceremony of Easter.

In the third stanza the poet throws light to the ‘moral and spiritual decay’ he witness around him. He talks about ‘Maundy Thursday’, also called as ‘Holy Thursday’. It is the Thursday observed in the Christian Church before Easter, as a commemoration of the last supper of Jesus Christ with his twelve Apostles (disciples), along with the foot washing ceremony where the Apostle’s feet were washed by Christ himself. However, in the contemporary society the poet does not see anyone interested or taking part in the church in any of these religious ceremonies on Maundy Thursday. Instead on Maundy Thursday, now people prefer to wash the feet of their automobiles rather than washing the feet of the poor. Man giving more importance to automobile (material possession) rather than religion comments on the increasing materialism among the present generation and the loss of human values. The poet deplore the present state of humanity and writes-



“On Maundy Thursday no one washes
the feet of the poor
as the son of man washes
the feet of his automobile.” (Lines: 9-12)

This is the ‘irony’ of the present society of which we are a part of. Thus, these lines are itself a scathing remark on the ‘declining spiritual and human values’ of our contemporary society.

In the next stanza the poet offers a hint of the ‘violence’ prevalent in his society. He says that we humans, who are “flesh and blood”, are merely celebrating a meaningless life, deriving pleasures from sin, trivial activities, and material possessions. Moreover, the people of the present society, in the so-called rat race of power and position, also actively participate in violence and bloodshed. In the name of war, heroism, power and position people are mercilessly killing one another. The sky has been a witness to all these human dramas and it seems even the sky is sick and tired now. It is feeling drowsy and at the same time is shedding tears out of sheer helplessness. The very pain of these cruel and brutal dramas seems to have turned its raindrops acidic, bitter and unpleasant in smell and taste. Moreover, in this same stanza Ngangom ridicules the moral standards of the people of his native hills by throwing light to the ‘hypocrisy’ of the contemporary society. He talks about the ‘Thanksgiving ceremony’ observed during Easter Week, in which since time immemorial the traditional ritual has been to express gratitude to god for all the mercy, peace, prosperity, bless, in short for all the divine blessings He has bestowed upon

mankind. In this ceremony people thank god for all the good harvests, good health, happiness, peace, or in other words, for all the goodness bestowed upon them the preceding year. Apart from this it has been a ritual on this day to forgive each other, and after forgiving and forgetting yesterday's resentment and ill will, people start a fresh new life. But in the contemporary society things are antithetical. There is no such divine invocation, benediction or any kind of expression of gratitude which people expresses to god memorializing this ceremony. Nor the poet could ascertain among his people the tender feeling of forgiveness for their family members, friends and relatives. Robin Ngangom, by displaying this contemptuous behavior, points to the fact that ceremonies have become just a formal show now with no essence, values or feelings associated with them. It seems that people are not at all thankful to god for anything in this modern world. People are emotionally dead. Thus, it points towards the hollow life modern people are dealing with these days, and it compels the poet to cogitate how these people are still alive among this hypocrisy and grave atrocity. This is something very shocking to the poet.

In the next stanza, the poet, affronting 'the contemporary society' spells out the activities which, in other words, are its predominant trends. The poet, attacking the growing materialism elucidates 'what now happens on Easter Sunday'. The poet mockingly suggests his readers to imitate these hollow people and walk along with them through the streets or simply stand on the "public square" like the ancient immobile sculptures, just like they do on Easter Sunday after spending their entire money on bottles of wine and alcohol. By the phrase: "and laugh at the son of man who anoints his car", the poet shows his deep disgust and denunciation concerning the aberrations around him. He advocates his readers to laugh jeeringly at their own fellow brothers, "the son of man who anoints his car" on the pious day of Easter. During religious ceremonies generally on Easter Sunday, the god and goddess, great priests or saints are 'anointed', which means putting, or spreading or sprinkling or dabbing oil or milk over the head or body of a person or an object, which is a universal practice all over the world, and a great gesture of showing honor and respect. However, the irony of the present situation is that now on Easter Sunday instead of going back to the roots and commemorating this same ritual, "the son of man" (humans) anoints their car. Humans prefer to embrocate their automobile rather than performing the same activity for a religious ceremony. The poet writes-

"On Easter Sunday walk in the wind

that lingers in your hair, or

stand immobile like a grey carving

in the public square

after squandering your last rupee on a bottle

and laugh

at the son of man who anoints his car." (Lines: 22-28).

This shows the poet's way of denouncing, ridiculing and deriding these people, their ways and actions, and the evident anomalies.

In the concluding stanza we get the impression that the poet is cognizant about the problem of the dwindling and deteriorating moral, spiritual and religious values among the people of his native land. As their soul is enslaved and possessed by evil, hence, the poet is of the opinion that it will be challenging for them to perceive the righteousness and feel the spiritual and divine religious ceremonies and rituals of the sacred church as well. Perhaps due to this the church sermons and religious hymns too will appeal to them as something "haunted" and "ghostly", rather than peaceful and divine. Nevertheless the poet makes an appeal to his fellow people to come to the church, hold the "paschal candle", and exhibit jot or tittle empathy and concern by entreating Christ for mercy, at least "for the sorrow of the woman" who has been extruded from 'a holy church'. Therefore, the poet through these last two lines attempts to expose the disparity and discrimination prevailing not only among the people outside the boundaries of church but also among the people working inside the church; in other words, among the religious authorities, in the religious institution, at the religious level. Thus we see there is discrimination not only at the gender level but also at the religious level in present day society, which is ridiculously pathetic and deplorable. The poem is written in simple and lucid language but it has powerful and thought-provoking images. Therefore, through this poem Robin S. Ngangom has successfully depicted the inadmissible acts, contentious issues as well as the bitter and grim reality of the present society. His form of criticizing and way of actuating the readers mind towards self-correction is indirect; nevertheless the poem has the power to impel the wise and the rational to question their own moral standards and immoral activities.

Conclusion:

"Write hard and clear about what hurts" says Ernest Hemingway, the celebrated American writer. Because until and unless we give expression to our problems by boldly confessing them, neither will we be able to get rid of that problem nor will any remedy be procurable to us. Robin S. Ngangom's poems are mostly autobiographical and deeply embedded with his own personal experiences. Apart from his humanitarian principles and altruism, his criticism concerning the changing world, lost values, socio-political turmoil, moral degradation, violence in his native land and the discrimination and disparities he too has faced in his life also find utterance in his works of poetry. Literature is such a platform where we can express what hurts us. It is a platform where not only we can learn, understand, reflect and have our own understanding of the world around us but at the same time it offers the possibility and opportunity to acquire the vast experiences of the innumerable representation of experiences of the characters, as well as the writers' personal experiences. Thus, along with one's own knowledge and experience, the plurality of experiences propelled to the forefront and highlighted through literature acts like a powerful stimulus in the development and improvement of strong ethical, spiritual and other values in humans. A great mind has the capability to steer and bend people's intellect towards their own great ideas and theories. This is what gives literature the impressions of an impelling force; an incentive and an important driving force impelling towards the

growth and development of the young minds of our nation, and by and large, the people across the globe. By adopting different ways of writing and representing the emotions and complications of so many people caught in altogether different situations, the writers not only give literature the power to disseminate everlasting knowledge and indispensable experiences but concurrently also work towards the growth and development of human values. The poem “During Easter” unmask the readers the present hollow society and the emotionally dead people caught in the web of materialism, violence and hypocrisy. Therefore, we can conclude that Robin S. Ngangom through the poetry selected for analysis has strongly addressed the grave and serious problem concerning moral and spiritual decay, violence, discreteness and discrimination on various levels not only of his native land, but by and large, of the present society in addition.

Works Cited:

- Doley, Sarat Kumar. “Interpreting the Images of Decay and Unrest in Robin Ngangom’s poetry.” *IJELR*, vol.2, no.3, 2015, pp.527-530.
- Hazarika, Sanjoy. “Kallika: The Unveiling of Literature from India’s North East”, *The Book Review*, vol.21, no.4, April 1997, pp. 23-24.
- Mishra, Tilotama. Ed. Introduction. *The Oxford Anthology of Writings from North-East India: Poetry and Essays*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2011.pp. 13-32.
- Ngangom, Robin S. and Kynpham S Nongkynrih. “During Easter”, *Dancing Earth: An Anthology of Poetry from North-East India*. New Delhi: Penguin Books, 2009, pp. 200-201.
- Nongkynrih, Kynpham S. and Robin S. Ngangom. *Anthology of Contemporary Poetry from the Northeast*. NEHU, Shillong, 2003.