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## From the North East of India: The Poet Rajendra Bhandari

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### **Abstract:**

*Just as mainstream India has produced many poets the North Eastern part of India also is witness to an abundance in poetry. Poets of the North- East of India wrote both in their own tongue as well as in English, sometimes they themselves brought about a trans creation of their own works. Whether it is Robin Ngangom from Meghalaya, or Mamang Dai from Arunachal, Temsula Ao from Nagaland or Rajendra Bhandari from Sikkim. They expressed not only their way of life, their modest and humble experiences living amidst the hills and the valleys, sometimes resounding with the life giving rain and thunder showers and sometimes resounding with the bullet sound of disgruntled fellow humans. One can sense a feeling of insecurity, self confidence, love for the past peaceful days, a tolerance for the present upheavals in their poetry.*

*Rajendra Bhandari is a prolific poet from the hills at the foot of the mighty Khachendzonga. His poetry moves from satire to nostalgia, from celebration of life to spirituality, from the outer forces and beauty of nature to the mentality of men and manners. He has published a number of poems and is a renowned poet not only in the North East, Bengal and various places in India but also in Nepal. Bhandari's poems deal with the crisis identity of a small town individual. His clear streams, the thunder, the raging storm in the poem 'The Chrysanthemum danced out the windy night' all symbolize the towering forces of nature that rages within man also .The inner conflict, the urge to be accepted, the search for love, the quest for freedom are some of the themes found in the poems of Bhandari*

Dr Rajendra Bhandari is a prolific poet from the hills of Sikkim tucked within the lush and beautiful arms of the mighty Khachendzonga. He has been writing poems in Nepali for the past four decades. His poems are translated by him as well as some good friends of the poet from the region who could well understand the sensitivity of the expressions and express them as well as the poet himself. His poetry varies from satire to nostalgia, from celebrating life to spirituality, from the outer forces and beauty of nature to the mentality of men and manners. He has published a number of poems and is a renowned poet not only in the North East, Bengal and various places in India but also in Nepal. Bhandari's poems deal with the identity crisis of a small town individual. His clear streams, the thunder, the raging storm in his poetry all symbolizes the towering forces of nature that rages within man also. The inner conflict, the urge to be accepted, the search for love, the quest for freedom are some of the themes found in the poems of Bhandari.

The poetry of Bhandari can be seen to be replete with a number of intertextual inferences from both within and without. That he is a poet whose works stand out, because of their rich literary connotations can be understood from his substantial works. His works express the influence of the lush and bountiful hills, singing brooks and the mighty and sacred Kanchangdzonga, they express the poet's deep study of the human society; the influence of man upon nature and vice versa; his poems also express the deep spiritual relation between man and nature,; the harmony between human society and the universe as a whole; his poems also philosophises and lashes out at the wrong doings and happenings; his poems are an ultimate expression of the mysteries of life and humanity.

In his Interview given to Anuradha Subramaniam *Global in Gangtok* Rajendra Bhandari speaks of being influenced not only by Pablo Neruda, AimeCesaire and Wole Soyinka but also by the works of JayantaMahapatra and Keki N Daruwala.

Bhandari's poetry are influenced by the rich Nepali folk literature, the history and geography of the nepali society dwelling in the hills of Darjeeling and Sikkim. His poems voice the Upanishads and the Vedas and their influence on man and society as a whole. Bhandari's poetry are an expression of myths which form an important part of every society and every community. Myths and their prevailing influence in the day to day life of an individual form a substantial part of Bhandari's works.

The ancient and the classical writers never failed to inspire and infuse the works of Bhandari with symbols, concepts, ideas and even source. One finds a number of references to historical events in his poetry.

His poetry is infused with the spiritual aspect of life. He is a mystic at times, going into a trance where he tries to become one with the Universe. He converses with the inner being which can be seen to be present in all humans but felt and understood only by the mystic creator. There is nothing that can be experienced without the touch of an inner inside that which is considered to be the inner self or the I which is there inside every individual. In his poem *The Expanding Universe* he is pained at the prospect of losing his childhood, and this realization makes him understand that he is a part of larger whole. He is just a miniscule part of a big cosmos. Bhandari

expresses the concept that we are all following a tradition of living life. We all are a part of a larger tradition. He compares life to a HawanKunda (sacrificial pyre where fruits, honey and wooden goods are put and the Gods are invoked ) where he is a small part of the sacrificial ingredient.

*The Expanding Universe* also brings about a strong impact on the relation of man with the universe. The world is a Maya and we are all part of this. Nothing is constant, nothing is still, everything is moving and this movement is taking a person farther and farther away from what he was. With birth exists death . The life of a human on this earth is just a tiny fragment of larger things happening in the Universe. The poet is very profound when he expresses the ever widening, ever expanding gap between the speaker and the life led by him. His infancy, childhood, youth all are getting further and further away. As he is growing older and older the distance seems to be growing more and more. He says that everything seems to be eluding everything just like the past seems to be eluding an old man. The Gap widens, the poet uses metaphor of house and place to explain his age and this life. He is standing at the threshold of life where he finds that he is nearer to the cemetery than his own house.

JahanMahUbhiyekochhutyahabaata

Gharbhandachihaannajikparchha. (164)

From where I stand

The graveyard is nearer than my home.

The poet remembers his childhood friends and the fact that some have died jolts him and the realization dawns on him that he is also not immortal. The poem ends with the thought that in this elusive world of Maya, everything is running away from everything

Aafeidekhitaadabhairahechhaaphei

AakashdekhibhagirahechhaAkash. (165)

All escapes all

.....  
And I, from myself

The sky from the Sky.

In his poem *Dyer's Jallianwala* one finds Bhandari reiterating the statement that in the History of colonial India Dyer had brought about a massacre of innocents popularly known as the JallianwalaBagh massacre. Dyer was convicted having being proven guilty as the main culprit behind the inhuman and barbaric act. The poet says that in today's contemporary society there are a number of Dyers. Dyers can be seen lurking in every nooks and corners in every walk of life in our society. Bhandari's Dyer is a more accomplished villain in the sense that he can never be found to be guilty even though he is corrupt. He is morally degraded. He is a manipulator and most significantly he wears the mask of a leader, of a benevolent member of the society. He wears the garb of a person who can never be expected to be involved in any kind of wrong doing. Bhandari's Dyer is not only morally corrupt; he is also a sexual predator and exploiter of humanity. He is the ultimate wolf in a sheep's clothing. The poet ruefully expresses Dyer doesn't shoot nowadays/ and yet many an unarmed Indian/ are sacrificed to his appetite every day.

Folk literature is one of the main sources of literature, especially for Indian writings in English. Folk literature does not only express the culture and the tradition of the past of a particular community or society, but it also expresses the changes, the growth and development seen and felt in any community of any society.

In the same manner Oral literature which has come down to us in the form of songs, rhymes, lullabies, religious hymns also tells us the way of life, the day to day activities of the people in the past. The days and nights, their source of entertainment, the faith and beliefs, the livelihood and relationships, love, romance, patriotism etc. all find expression in folk literature. In a way Folk literature for many communities and societies are the main source of information of their rich and glorious past.

Rajendra Bhandari in his poetry delves into the Nepali folk songs, folk beliefs, traditions and culture. He does not in any way limit himself to understanding and re shaping the folk songs into his poems, but with the help of his understanding of these folk songs and poetry gives a definite and more concrete shape to his view of the past.

The reference to religion like Buddhism and Jainism in his works. Bhandari quotes the Vedas and the Upanishads freely in his works like. Bhandari's poetry are always a reflection of Nature and one gets to see an intertextual play of ecology.

His poetry is remarkably immersed in mysticism and myth and with the social and political upheavals. He expresses his deep resentment towards the injustice and the growing, widening gap between the haves and the have-nots. The loss of values, cultural and social is another aspect that he explores through his poems. He celebrates solitude and also cries out at extreme loneliness. He longs for a companion, and one gets to experience a spiritual quest in his poetry. There is a quest for fulfillment, for completion as one can gather in his poems like *BhitraKohiChha (Is someone inside?)*. This is an allusion to the Buddhist and the Hindu concept of life after death, the philosophy of the Soul looking for another body for another birth. The soul arrives at place weather beaten, tired and unable to go any further. It is seeking solace and when it sees a dwelling place it tries to enter there to belong there. Oh! Isn't it the house I was searching?/Let me knock it-/ 'Is someone inside?'

The soul now is free, free from all earthly bindings, earthly ties and all the things that bound it previously. It has left behind all of that to start freshly a new life a new journey a new life. It has lived a full life, full of good and bad things alike. But without a dwelling it is empty, it needs an identity, a place to inhabit so the poet exclaims: Oh, how empty am I/ Empty/ Just empty like the sky. (6)

In *Raatbhari Godavari hawaasanghanachirahyuo (The chrysanthemum danced out the windy night)*, the poet expresses the eternal struggle of men towards the forces of Nature (both within and without) which is so important to maintain an ecological balance. Ecology, in the form of the poets love for nature, his love for the purity of Nature, his awe at the forces of Nature all find expression in his poetry.

One can see a Shellyean spirit on the move in many of his works. The rule of Nature which begins after destruction is very vivid in his work like *Chrysanthamum* and *Quiet Chaos*. In the *Chrysanthamum* the raging storm is that of the mind, the bursting forth of human emotions and frustrations, the urge to let go yet restrain. Whole night the mind struggles and fights, there is a raving and ranting as experienced by Shakespeare's *Lear*. It also reminds us of John Donne's *Holy Sonnet*. In Bhandari's *Chrysanthamum*, early morning, after the thunder and storm the poet finds that although his verandah was slightly damaged, the grains in the paddy field had started sprouting. A message that amidst all turmoil life goes on. Creation and destruction go together in this poem. Something is destroyed so that something new takes birth. The image of Shelley's West wind as a destroyer and a preserver comes to one's mind when Bhandari writes:

In the poem *The Quiet chaos* the poet finds solace only in the quietness in nature, compared to the chaotic life in the modern contemporary world. The life of a modern man is full of complexities, full of the restlessness, the squalor, the din and bustle and the never ending quest for something which keeps on eluding mankind always.

The poet wants the solitude which only Nature can provide, he wants to be taken in by nature, and he knows that only Nature can provide to him the freedom from this chaotic and mundane life of this world.

There is no respite from chaos, only chaos can control chaos. He concludes his poem *Quiet Chaos* with :

In the midst of chaos

Chaos itself sits quiet.

To sum up, the concept of intertextuality brings to focus the influence of the work of one writer or poet upon another. Intertextuality is a broad concept that encompasses within its fold all that goes into making a work of art, whether it is poetry, fine arts or drama. In literature specially one can see the influence, reference allusions etc to History, Geography, philosophy, myth, culture tradition, religion etc. All texts are read in the context of any one of these concepts. There is nothing that cannot or has not been a source of influence to one poem or the other. One gets to see this very harmonious conglomeration of a variety of intertextual elements in the poems of Rajendra Bhandari: right from mythical elements to Vedic to Historical to contemporary poets ,writers and the contemporary society as a whole.

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