



Binayak Bandyopadhyay's Sambhabami (A Collection of Bengali Poems): A Postmodern Appraisal

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Abstract— Postmodern literature is considered as a special approach of literature keeping in mind its ideological and stylistic features. As a genre of literature it is not confined within any boundary. Rather it is suggestive of “Zero-boundary”. ‘Postmodern’ is not a time zone or it does signify any particular time. But the postmodern school appeared before us with the intensity of discussion in the decade of 80s of Twentieth Century considering a radical change in sociological perspective. After Second world War the term ‘postmodern’ was applied on several subjects such as literature, art, architect, sociology, philosophy, film, communication and so on. Though it is said that postmodern is not sequel of modern, yet we cannot ignore the concepts of modern while discussing postmodern. In literature the features regarded as postmodern often were applied and are being still applied in poetry. Bengali poetry does not strictly follow the features of European postmodern aspects. It contains its own stylistics devices in reflecting postmodern swing. Binayak Bandyapadhyay, a poet of the “Shunya Dashak” of Bengali poetry is very much experimental in his creative output. His anthology namely “Sambhabami”, published from Signet Press is genuinely regarded as a postmodern discourse of the “Srimad Bhagvad Gita”. In this article I intend to mark the postmodern ethos found in the said anthology of Binayak Bandyapadhyay.



Keywords— Postmodern, stylistic, poetry, Bengali poetry, postmodernism.

In the decade of Eighties of the Twentieth Century two social historians namely Danial Bell and Alain Tauraine pointed out a radical change in social perspective and they called it postmodern effects. According to them this postmodern society depends on two primary concepts – information and knowledge. Some social historians use the term ‘postmodern’ in the aspect of consumerism related to commodity and its excellence in market index. But the term ‘postmodern’ with its concept is not new in literary aspects. Pabitra Sarkar, an eminent educationist and essayist of Bengal in an essay clearly says that as a term ‘postmodern’ is almost one hundred and thirty years old. But the application the term was different then from today’s usage. If we consider that ‘postmodern’ is a sequel term of ‘modern’ then it would be a wrong interpretation. After the end of Second World War the terms ‘postmodern’ and ‘postmodernism’ came into the scenario not only in literature but also in variety of disciplines like

art, architect, sociology, philosophy, communication, film etc. The term ‘postmodernism’ was employed in the Latin-American literary criticism and in the Anglo-American literary debates in the 1930s and 1940s, the main analysis of postmodernism got force in the 1970s.¹ The term postmodern is being applied with different connotations in different decades. Sometimes it refers the desire of unconditional freedom of human beings, sometimes from the perspective of industrial revolution, sometimes as the battle-cry of technology or sometimes as the motif of self-consciousness. We are sure of that it is never understood as a particular movement in literature and postmodern again is not a philosophy. It can again be recognized as hollow or unsubstantial but it is impossible to ignore it

¹ Preda, A. “Postmodernism in Sociology, International Encyclopedia of the Social and Behavioral Sciences”. USA: Elsevier Science Ltd., 2001.

very casually. We can feel the essence of it but we can't be sure of our understanding. When at the end of 19th century Friedrich Nietzsche made a shocking declaration 'God is dead'², the general belief of man got destabilized. Following this the scholars came with many more shocking declarations as death of the author or death of the subject respectively by Roland Barthes and Michel Foucault. These radical approaches are regarded as the shaping influences of postmodern concept.

Postmodernism does never follow any consistent argument and it does even support any limitation in its application. It includes different thinking, different perspectives and considers novelty in every sphere. Postmodernism again does not believe in the segregation of the units of time and it does not even beyond time. The concept of postmodernism believes in application and in the varieties of application. It would really be unjustified if we want to confine postmodern within a single definition. If we come to the genre of poetry in considering the aspects of postmodern, certain ethos can be regarded as follows. Postmodern poetry does not depend on a single subject and it truly ambiguous in nature. But decentralization of subject is its primary focus as we can say 'things fall apart/centre cannot hold'.³ Postmodern poetry is not argumentative in nature and if there is any argument, it should not have any pattern. It is always open-ended both in style and theme. Critics refer it as multi-layered, multi-facet and multi-dimensional. It is with sundry openings to hint out several interpretations. Postmodern poetry does follow any predetermined equation. Rather it is observant of the life and as life proceeds, it tries to understand the proceedings. That is why it is not possible to bracket it within the limitation of any literary movement. We can say that it is a tempo or current of time to follow only. Finally we would really be better to confirm that it is not even idealist in nature and application as if it is not the way that takes us to our home; it is the way that can lead us to any unknown. Modern poetry sometimes emphasizes individualism but in postmodern literature there is no trace of individualism. A postmodern poet is as free as a bird to fly through any track and anything can be the subject of postmodern poetry.

There is a common belief that a postmodern poet feels a sense of detachment with everything. He is conscious of nothing but out of that nothing the poet signifies something. Postmodern poets do not create any vertically opposite angle in their creation rather establish a relation with meaningful void. In their creation void does not

signifies emptiness rather fulfilled with multiple understanding with indomitable or incalculable aura even in painful existence. But we need to clear here one thing first that postmodern concept of Bengali literature is not very same with the practice of postmodernism in Europe. European postmodern trend in poetry confirmed its absolute detachment from tradition. But in Bengal the poets who experimented and still in the midst of experiment following the courtesies of postmodernism, do not segregate them from the tradition and traditional approach completely. Undoubtedly Bengali literature is greatly influenced by trends and techniques of European literature. So it would not be an exaggeration if we confirm European influences of postmodernism in Bengali literature. But at the same time we need also to confirm that postmodern trends in Bengali literature are really with newness and specialty which do not follow Europe.

In the decades of 20s and 30s of Twentieth Century a new bend was seen in Bengali poetry. But the epithet "modern" or "adhunik" was not then consciously used to signify a literary style with radical difference from traditional style. In Bengali literature decade of 30s is identified as "Kollol Yug" and in the period of "Kollol", "Kalikolom" and "Pragati" the term "adhunik" came to the general preview of literature. Kollol's prime patron was Buddhadev Basu and under his leadership "Kollol" became greatly adventurous to create a new perspective of Bengali literature beyond Rabindra Nath Thakur. This new discourse of Bengali literature is recognized as modern. Buddhadev Basu published an anthology namely "Adhunik Bangla Kobita" but he didn't confirm the definition of "Adhunik". In the very argument regarding adhunik kobita, poet Basu says that adhunik kobita or modern poetry is not a solid material which can be recognized with strict perception. It may be regarded as the voice of revolution, protest, doubt, boredom, adventure and so on. But in it one can find out wonder of truth, ecstasy of life and absolute confidence on the spiritual order of the universe. Actually the words modern or postmodern do not signify any constant meaning. They are relative in nature as well as in meaning. Though "Kollol Group" being a movement in Bengali literature wanted to establish a novel poetic identity by discarding the style and diction of Rabindra Nath Thakur, yet in some poems of Rabindra Nath we can mark the identities of so call modern perspective what is genuinely reflected in Twentieth Century European literature. In the poem of T. S. Eliot namely "Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" we can see the delineation of sordid metropolis⁴. Almost same picture of urbanization is depicted in the poem "Banshi"

² Nietzsche, F. Trans. Walter Kaufman. "The Gay Science". New York: Vintage, 1974.

³ Yeats, W. B. Ed. A Norman Jeffares. "Selected Poems". Calcutta: Radha Publishing House, 1998. P. – 99.

⁴ Jain, Manju. "A Critical Reading of the Selected Poems of T.S.Eliot". New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2001. P. – 45-46

by Rabindra Nath Thakur⁵. So from decades of 30s a drastic change was seen in poetic diction and poetic style of Bengali poets and it was started with Jatindra Nath Sengupta, Mohitlal Majumdar, Jibananda Dash, Amiyo Chakraborty, Bishnu Dey, Dinesh Dash, Subhas Mukhopadhyay, Sukanta Bhattacharyay, Ajit Dutta and many more. They all contributed uniqueness in Bengali poetry and matured it. Beside this Bengali poetry in its journey to be modern and postmodern has gone through different social, political and economical swings like independence, partition, refugee problem, Bangladesh War of 71s, Naxalite Movement etc. These are working sometimes as background or sometimes as foreground of Bengali poetry after independence. In the period of post 71s poets like Ranajit Das, Tushar Chowdhury, Prasun Bandyopadhyay, Mridul Dasgupta, Bishwanath Garai, Kalikrishna Guha, Shyamal Kanti Das, Shankar Chakraborty, Krishna Basu, Joy Goswami, Subodh Sarkar, Bibhas Roy Chowdhury, Nilotpol Gupta have taken the responsibility of Bengali poetry and are still sound and solid in their creative journey. After that we stepped in the period of 90s and “Shunyo Dashak” of Bengali poetry. Binayak Bandyopadhyay as a poet belongs to this very period and still his pen is very much active with vigour, spirit and innovation in creative output.

Bengali poetry of 90s carries the marks of a new social perspective. This is the age of the new statement of globalization and the poets of this era were well aware of the radical changes life due to the effects of globalization. Their poems are marked with these social changes. Soft cadence of poetry was heard no more. The poets did not try to write good poetry rather they tried to write sensible or cerebral poetry. They thought that the cry of writing good poetry made poetic journey stagnant. No revelation is seen rather repetition is visible only. And even the poetry was then charged with unnecessary complicity and suffering from non-attention from the readers. The poets of that period accepted those hindrances with patience and started to build a new journey of poetic dictions of their own and in this making they didn't ask for easy popularity. Rather they waited for sensible readers and got success to build up the group of genuine readers of poetry. Binayak Bandyopadhyay was born in Kolkata in 1976. His father Late Paresh Nath Bandyopadhyay was a renowned Sanskrit pundit and their family came from the then East Bengal as refugee during partition. But his mother Gouri Bandyopadhyay came of the famous royal family of Muluti, a temple-township in the border of West Bengal and Jharkhand. Binayak's journey as a poet started when he was still in school. His literary drive is multi-facet

(Poetry, Novel, Short Stories, Essays) and he is a regular contributor in the leading magazines, news-papers and journals of West Bengal. His collections of poetry include “Cherechi Sob Osombhober Ashsa”, “Daracchi Dorjar Baire”, “Jototuku Mene Nite Paro”, “Rickshaw Noyto Rupkotha”, “Haoya Jake Koreche Ferar”, “Joler Bhitor Aguner Moto”, “Sambhabami”, “Premer Kobita” etc. A study of his poetry reveals a gradual evolution of his art and genius. A number of major themes run through his poetry gaining in depth and intensity with successive volume that have been published. Binayak being a poet is highly metaphysical and always there is a urge to transcend, to rise, and to travel beyond simply physical. But at the same time he is a devoted lover and to him mere physical love is sinful. That is why his poetry enjoys the passion beyond sex. Sometimes it is significant to note that nowhere is there any indication of poet's fall a prey to putrid love. On the contrary, he is trying invariably to feel the nature of real love.

Binayak Bandyopadhyay as a poet is truly metaphysical. In his poems he deals with spiritual aspect of human life. But the greatness of Binayak as a poet lies in the fact that in his poetry he is constantly bringing together opposite concept and trying to reunite and synchronize them. The actual spring of artistic tension in his poetry is between his invasive philosophic obsession and a persistent awareness of the ties stemming from the immediate locale. Postmodern poetry deems in new interpretation age-old impressions and it craves to throw new light even religious and spiritual perception. Postmodern texts trusts in deconstruction of dictionary meaning of myths and legend and desires to apply that with innovative contexts and settings. Binayak Bandyopadhyay is an excellent artist in doing so. The two polarities in his poetry, therefore, are life as pilgrimage, an endeavor-concerning a movement missing from home – and life in the concrete milieu of reality which he is associated by knots of the society. The collection of poems namely “Sambhabami” our present concern is absolutely postmodern from this angle. The first edition of “Sambhabami” was published by Signet Press in 2021 and got the attention of the readers immediately. The second edition of it is now in the market and still relishing the enthusiasm of the readers. The title of the anthology is taken from the part known as ‘Renunciation of Action in Knowledge’ (4.7-8) of the “Srimad Bhagavad Gita”:

*Whenever, O descendant of
Bharata, there is decline of
Dharma, and rise of Adharma, then
I embody myself.*

*For the protection of the
good, for the destruction of the*

⁵ Ayab, Abu Saiyad. “Adhunikata o Rabindranath”. Kolkata: Deys Publishing, 1968.

*wicked, and for the establishment of
dharma, I come into being in every
age.*⁶

The word 'Sambhabami' means 'presence' and in the said shloka of the "Bhagavad Gita", Lord Krishna assures Arjuna, the descendant of Bharata that whenever there will be trouble and the rise of the wicked, he would come surely to protect the good. So this is not only a simple word but also the confidence of entire Bharat believes in the presence of almighty. By believing this we feel the assurance of life. Binayak as a poet very sensibly exercises the word as title of the said anthology which actually delineates the topsy-turvy as well as chaotic situation of modern life. So the word is applied here with a sense of deconstruction. Following the trend of postmodern poetry Binayak Bandyopadhyay in "Sambhabami" strives to place the essence and discourse of the "Srimad Bhagavad Gita" on the very practice contemporary man and society. From this aspect we can say that it is a retold of the "Srimad Bhagavad Gita".

Before going to the discussion, one thing we need to clear that it is not written from atheist view point. Rather the poet holds a firm confidence on the sayings of that great text. Amidst the chaos he intends to rise on the cosmos in keeping absolute confidence on the "Srimad Bhagavad Gita". Already we have mentioned postmodern poetry intends to signify a hidden philosophic quest and in this way "Sambhabami" is genuinely postmodern. Binayak Bandyopadhyay took almost seven years to compose eighteen poems contained in this collection. After the publication readers were overwhelmed considering the synthesis of the "Gita" with our day to day life and the readers' enthusiasm regarding the collection remains same. The poet crafts a synthesis of the "Yoga" of the "Gita" with his observation of modern life. The "Gita" is not only religious text but also it is taken as the ultimate education of life given to Third Pandava, Arjuna by Lord Krishna before the starting of the Battle Kurukhestra. In postmodern poetry the poet does not believe in any limitation of thought and he even does not want to establish any particular idealism. Rather he intends for directionless journey in which readers may signify their directions. Following that the poet of "Sambhabami" effortlessly fuses the image of "Krishnarjuna" with the hunger, Chameleon the famous Chinath with god. Here we can see depiction of personal cry tinged with universal agony. Binayak comes out with novel tone and tune in this anthology leaving his safe zone as the poet. Postmodernism cries for limitless self-deconstruction and

⁶ Swarupananda, Swami. Trans. "Srimad Bhagavad Gita". Kolkata: Advaita Ashrama, 1909. P. – 90-91.

in the very texture of "Sambhabami" very often we, as the readers encounter that notion. The first poem of the collection titled as "Bishad" embodies sundry startling images such as:

How French-fries mixes with bread

Hay into idol

Body at copulation

Why not me, my lord,

(জেভাবে আলুভাজা মেশে রুটিতে

খড় মেশে প্রতিমায়

শরির মেশে সঙ্গমে

আমি কেন মিশতে পারছি না প্রভু⁷)

The reader gets surprise to witness the smartness of comparison which conveys something beyond the dictionary meaning of the words. Binayak being a postmodern poet builds his own poetic dictions which look fresh and fit enough to complement the sponge in this world. Even the great characters of age-old epic are delineated in such ways that astonish us. They almost seem to us as common men with simple attitudes. But the expression is again stroked with a sense of crisis and depression:

**Direct me the place, where the soil would
not ask for blood**

**Direct me the bed, lying on which
Chitrangada would ask for performance**

Direct me the seat,

**Where Duryodhana would
pass a cigar to me?**

(কোথায় গিয়ে দাঁড়ালে মাটি রক্ত চাইবে না,

কোথায় শুলে, চিত্রাঙ্গদা পারফরমেন্স চাইবে
না,

কোথায় বসলে,

দুর্যোধনও একটা সিগারেট এগিয়ে দিতে
পারবে?)⁸)

In another poem namely "Sangkhya" the poet consigns one of the great philosophies of the "Gita" with very casual run of life and this really amazes us:

**It is not that I have never existed,
nor thou nor these kings. Nor is it**

⁷ Bandyopadhyay, Binayak. "Sambhabami". Kolkata: Signet Press, 2021. P. – 10.

⁸ Bandyopadhyay, Binayak. "Sambhabami". Kolkata: Signet Press, 2021. P. – 11.

that we shall cease to exist in the future.⁹

Whether you played kabadi in the last birth

Whether you will cricket in the next birth

Regarding that

Why do you think amidst this football match?

(তুমি আগের জন্মে কবাদি খেলছিলে

কি পরের জন্মে ক্রিকেট খেলবে

তাই নিয়ে

এই ফুটবল ম্যাচের মধ্যে ভাবছ কেন?)¹⁰

This striking analogy between the philosophy of the “Gita” and common aspect of life is highly confusing in nature. Actually postmodern literature desire to do so and even does not want to allow reader to draw to a final conclusion. The perception is open-ended here. Another example from the poem “Dashachakra” in “Sambhabami” will fix it. ‘Dashachakra’ is referred as the multiple images of god. Here in referring the features of “Aditya”, the poet again comes with striking metaphors:

Of twelve Adityas I am the lost noble

Of publishers I am Battala

Of fourty-nine Winds I am the current of Election,

Of stars I am the star of Bollywood,

(দ্বাদশ আদিত্যের মধ্যে আমি চুরি যাওয়া নোবেল

প্রকাশকগণের মধ্যে আমি বট তলা

উনপঞ্চাশ বায়ুর মধ্যে ভোটের হাওয়া,

নক্ষত্রগণের মধ্যে বলিউডের তারকা,)¹¹

Society and its present milieu are the central metaphors in Binayak’s poetry. Binayak Bandyopadhyay is a poet who lives in this country and is committed to the environment of this country. There is always an encounter with myth, legend and spirituality in Binayak’s poetry. He is a poet

who hopes for a sensible and sound future and according to him this could only be attended being very honest and sincere to our grand past. The poet’s personal and familial conflicts and frustrations are constantly related to the Indian intellectual and social environment. Following this the individual and particular is generalized and universalized in his poems. “Sambhabami” is not an exception to it. The concreteness and precision are two important characteristics of postmodern poetry. Binayak Bandyopadhyay in “Sambhabami” achieves these by the use of telling vivid and visual imagery. In his poems image is not the spring-board behind the composition, but working as the driving force to transcend these as universal. When in the poem the poet says:

I am the fire spreading in the intestine

Being physic diluted in the tantra

(আমিই তো আগুন হয়ে ছড়িয়ে আছি অন্ত্রে

শরীর হয়ে মিশে আছি তন্ত্রে)¹²

We become spellbound being realized the essence of spirituality as well as practicality reflected in these lines. Following the trend of postmodern practices the poet strives to go ahead of the common connotation of words and phrases and composes his journey significant for all types of readers and for ages to come. Again the poet ultimately surrenders to love because the love can only be the panacea amidst the crisis and disorientation:

From Kurukhhestra to Kolkata

The enmity between men ends with death

Why not the love?

(কুরুক্ষেত্র থেকে কলকাতা

মানুষের সঙ্গে মানুষের শত্রুতা মৃত্যুতেই ফুরিয়ে যায়;

ভালোবাসা ফুরোয় না কেন?)¹³

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⁹ Swarupanda, Swami. Trans. “Srimad Bhagavad Gita”. Kolkata: Advaita Ashrama, 1909. P. – 31.

¹⁰ Bandopadhyay, Binayak. “Sambhabami”. Kolkata: Signet Press, 2021. P.-14.

¹¹ Bandopadhyay, Binayak. “Sambhabami”. Kolkata: Signet Press, 2021. P. - 46.

¹² Bandopadhyay, Binayak. “Sambhabami”. Kolkata: Signet Press, 2021. P.- 67.

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