



The Aesthetics of Growth of North-eastern Women: Retorts, Representations and Resemblances

Abhilash Kaushik

PhD Research Scholar, Department of English, Cotton University, Guwahati, Assam.

e-mail : abhilashkaushik7@gmail.com

Abstract :

Aesthetics, in all its shades and hues, is always inadvertent and evasive, if not illusive. There are always manifestations and expressions which heighten its sensation, be it in literature or in the poetics of it. Whenever we talk about mankind as such, it can be said that it has always been a glaring testimony to all the kinds of developments witnessed till date beyond geographical demarcations. Historiography has been a vivid proof to all sorts of advents, be it enticing or repelling. The present-day literary scenario across the globe vindicates the staggering progress that women from the North-east have made when it comes to establishing themselves. The so called rise of women in general and women writers in particular from the north-east have well and truly shattered the notion of the North-east to be a relegated land. The various kinds of literary texts have had major impacts on the development of society. They have shaped civilizations, changed political systems and exposed injustice from time to time. On the other hand, the texts also become the repertoire of a detailed preview of human experience, allowing us to connect on basic levels of desires and emotions. The women writers, thus, bring us face to face with different shades of human nature through tragedy and romance, joy and sorrow, in epiphanies and denials, in moments of heroism, conflicts and crises. This paper scrutinises the inherent subtlety of aesthetics which echo the growth of the North-eastern Women. At the same time, the paper, thus, underpins the essential nuances and the associated concealed retorts which inevitably go behind the scene.

Keywords : *Aesthetics, Civilisation, Development, North-Eastern Women, Progress.*

Introduction :

“Writing, because it allows us to represent to ourselves our learning, our ways of making meaning, teaches us the most profound lesson about how we read, write, and use language, about what it means to know” (Zamel 481).

Martin Buber’s notable phrase “hallowing

the profane” both asserts and negates at the same time the poignancy of getting a particular group or a community masked. This very mask can be political, social, forced, self-imposed at times in a particular society. When it is the case with women, and women from an already under focussed geographical location, things become double



strenuous to cope with. Although Buber used the phrase in order to indicate the power of literature to bring to the fore something not generally visible, this phrase becomes aptly significant in the context of this research paper as it carries within itself the immediacy of the topic. Long gone are the days when a geographical land could be just shooed away considering its literary and cultural developments. Every nation, today, has come to its own in terms of projecting its culture, writers and societies without any kind of gender division in a drastic manner. Talking about writers and women, it has to be admitted that the so called backward land, the so called land of terror and insurgency, the so called underprivileged North-east in general, has produced glittering stars in the form of Tamsula Ao, Easterine Kire, Mamang Dai, Jahnabi Barua, Arupa Patangia Kalita, Monalisa Changkija and many others.

Gerda Lerner, the notable feminist critic, defined “feminist writing” as

(1) The awareness of women that they belong to a subordinate group and that, as members of such a group, they have suffered wrongs; (2) The recognition that their subordination is not natural, but societally determined; (3) The development of a sense of sisterhood; (4) the autonomous definition by women of their goals and strategies for changing their condition; and (5) the development of an alternate vision of the future. (274)

The above ideas are very much pivotal for the understanding of the process of development of something called as feminist writing. These ideas are clearly the key foundations on which lean the greater picture of female writings to be

precise. What is significant in the context of North-east is that it has produced writers from every part of it which meant that there is a show on display as far as literariness of the literary texts is concerned. North-eastern places are an amalgamation of different tribes, numerous ethnic religions and culture which make the places at once multifarious and heterogeneous. The texts which emanate out from places like Assam, Nagaland, Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Kohima etc. always carry the flavour and the texture of the people and culture of the North-east to a great extent.

Objectives :

The following objectives will be envisaged for the research work:

- 1) To address the sense of growth of women from the North-east in the current literary and cultural scenario.
- 2) To portray that there are numerous untold resentments and inherent pains which go unnoticed in the final culmination of a startling female writer. To substantiate, writers like Easterine Kire have always focussed on the sense of an individual giving enormous primacy to the self in general.
- 3) To bring to the fore various ramifications of aesthetics and the associated subtlety connecting the rise of North-eastern female writers. This drives home the point that the journey of the rise of the females consists of a serenity, something to be proud of and take enormous pride in.

Materials and Methods :

The research is planned to be based on the following methods:



- 1) The research is primarily based on qualitative approach. It focuses on the general critical analysis of the development of the female writers from the North-east.
- 2) The research is descriptive in design. So, the descriptive outlook paved the way for bringing to the fore the objectives of the research.

Discussion :

The function of literature, in general, has always been one pertaining to the reflections of the people. Various literary texts have very vividly asserted themselves to be the carriers of the inherent intricacies of a particular society. As a perfect evidence, we have witnessed the fact that in the moments of utter misery, desperation, helplessness, tribulations, distress and agony, literature has always functioned as a loving, soothing comforter allaying our fears, anxieties, apprehensions, panics, confusions and dread caused by man-made or natural crises threatening the existence of human life. Ken Hyland defines the very act of writing as an “abstract, socially recognized ways of using language” (21). This definition reinforces the idea of aesthetics which is inherent in the process of writing. The numerous multifaceted literary texts which are written by the women from the North east very truly contain that sense of abstract flavour from various localities, tribes, cultures, etc. There is always the smooth flow of ideas which render an individual unconscious in terms of getting deeply immersed into a particular text thereby bringing in the aesthetics of a particular text.

Grewal and Caplan, in *Scattered Hegemonies*, very pertinently remarked regarding

the importance of different feminist associations making attempts in order to dismantle different so called constructed power structures by the male-dominated society in the following manner, “If feminist movements cannot understand the dynamics of these material conditions, they will be unable to construct an effective opposition to current economic and cultural hegemonies that are taking new global forms” (17). The North-eastern women, through their sheer rise to the forefront in the modern day literary circle, have not only perfectly dismantled the various labels of being ‘timid,’ ‘backward,’ ‘underdeveloped’ but also reinforced the view of global equality irrespective of gender to a great extent. There was a time when writing from the north-east was considered as a very important achievement as it was more often than not, a place associated with riots and conflicts. In such a context, different kinds of writing from the women of the land is surely an achievement of highest stature and magnitude. This might as well be an understatement because there is never any dearth of talent in the North-eastern lands. The lack of exposure, the so called push that sort of instils a kind of spark in an individual and the most important requisite of being recognised for a particular effort were the attributes that were visibly missing.

The rise of the North-eastern women has significantly helped in establishing something called as the writing by the females and also it has nullified the very process of representation which is generally associated with writing in a derogatory manner. In relation to women, it is more often than not the case that they get represented by males which then, sort of relegate the inherent immediacy of the very process of writing. Whenever a particular group



tries to represent its counterpart, there is inevitably the unseen presence of a sheer power-play which posits the other group to be somewhat inferior. This simultaneously helps in establishing the dominance of the presenter and at the same time, presents the represented group to be struggling to make a mark in the mainstream arena. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, the stalwart in the field of postcolonial studies, remarks in a very significant manner in the following lines regarding the duality of the process of representation of a particular group by the other- "Two senses of representation are being run together: representation as 'speaking for,' as in politics, and representation as 're-presentation,' as in art or philosophy" (Spivak 28).

In the words of Ray B. West, "... it is best to view modern criticism as a house with many rooms, its occupants living in an uneasy but on the whole respectful relationship to each other. . . it is impossible and misleading to see it as a fixed belief or an organised crusade" (117). This apt remark by West drives home the point that criticism has emerged to be one of the diversified affairs of the modern day world with its branches being spread out in a drastic and all-encompassing manner. The women, from the North-east, as well have also very succinctly formed a part of the so called groove of modern day critical literary circle. Writers like Easterine Kire and texts like *Mari and When the River Sleeps* have earned tremendous repute of international significance. In such a context, what becomes of paramount importance is the delineation of the inherent process of analysis of the rise of the North-eastern women at a remarkable rate. It is not that the women from the North-east have suddenly emerged out of nowhere. There has

always been relentless toil and otherwise unseen strenuous efforts which has given way to the final product of the rise.

As far as the aesthetics of the growth of the North-eastern women is concerned, history provides ample evidence of the fact that there was not much to show for in the broader corpus of writing by the women from the North-east in the days gone by. But, with the advent of both time and development in the North-eastern region, there has been significant growth both in terms of female writers and literary texts. On one side, if there is the linear flow of thoughts and ideas in any novel or an article painting a sheer canvas of culture and tribe, then, on the other side, there is also the equal captivating representation of the multifaceted nuances of either the genius of the writer or the intricacies of the history of the land as such. The very fact that the different writings tend to hinge on whatever is present in front of the readers in the form of the society or the people more than anything really fictitious in nature makes the texts all the more gripping in nature. There is, then, an attractive display of linguistic play and rhetorical shrewdness which are on show which yet again heightens the inherent delicate thread of aesthetics. Rhetoric, in its rudimentary sense, according to Dawson is, "the art and study on the use of language with persuasive effect in any given field; as such, rhetoric connotes the art of trickery, a way of masquerading qualities and obscuring information" (11).

Discourse, in the context of an academic praxis, is second to none considering its use and prevalence. A lot of discursive practices of writings have made their presence felt in the modern day



world which have their inherent pros and cons. The rise of the North-eastern women to the fore at a rapid pace has, albeit slowly, widened the very idea of discourse to be all-inclusive in the current academic scenario. The nuances of the development of the North-eastern women very well find a place in the present debates and discussions of discursive circles which itself is a giant leap considering growth and development. In relation to the importance of discourse, Wittgenstein makes a very valid point in the following manner,

One thinks that one is tracing the outline of the thing's nature over and over again, and one is merely tracing round the frame through which we look at it. A picture held us captive. And we could not get outside it, for it lay in our language and language seemed to repeat it to us inexorably. (49)

Moving a step ahead, it can be stated that appropriation becomes a significant term in the field of discursive studies. To put theoretically, this term is an indispensable organ of Post-colonial studies. Every discursive writing very well contains the traces of "perspectives" be it social, institutional or authorial. So, self-expression gets curbed in the process of aligning with the social norms. The remark by Bruce Herzberg in this very context greatly substantiates the idea. He opines, "Use of the term discourse community testifies to the increasingly common assumption that discourse operates within conventions defined by communities, be they academic disciplines or social groups" (1).

Captivatingly enough, the presence of inherent differences between various women writers from the North-east makes them all the more enticing in their journey to establishing themselves.

If there is on one side Temsula Ao, who, through her mesmerising poems, has impressed every individual, there is also Jahnabi Barua on the other side, who, through her engulfing short stories, has showcased the different dimensions of the society and the native customs. Thus, the adherence to numerous categories of writing by these women from the North-east has clearly been an illustration of the attribute of vitality which these writers possess. There is, on the way, a whole new dimension of different ideas and meaning coming together which gets formed and counter-formed in the process of reading as the great Pramod K. Nayar would happily state, "We never arrive, we only travel along the path of meaning- making" (39).

Results :

As this particular research is not based on any kind of quantitative data, facts and statistical numbers, it does not consist of any kind of mathematical result to be proved and shown. However, there are also some glaring results in this research as well which are of tremendous importance. These results are basically the reiterations of the inherent aims and ideas of this research to trace the basic journey of the rise of the North-eastern women to the fore. One of the primary results which this research contains in it is that the basic journey of the rise of the women writers from the North-east is a greater testament to the changing scenario of the females in general of these places. As a proud Assamese, I can state that the position of the female writers in the present period is one of sheer respect and repute which would make the heart of any North-eastern swell with pride.

It is needless to say that the staggering growth of the women from the North-east in the current



scenario has been one of its kind which has definitely endured hardships of the highest magnitudes. So, another vital result which becomes evident in this regard is the presence of uncountable retorts and resentments on their way to becoming some of the most popular faces of the present academic scenario. The retorts and resentments could very well be the results of either the relegated state of the women or the result of the different kinds of the process of discrimination in the societies which basically acted according to the dictates of the male members. In the words of the Aboriginal Australian writer, Melissa Lukashenko, "... while feminism is a global movement with potential global applicability, political, regional and ethno-cultural factors can mean that feminist ideology is not appropriate for indigenous women" (21).

The above statement by Lukashenko very well sort of critically analyses the inherent predicaments which women from diverse cultural and racial background generally face. As a place of numerous ethnic, cultural and racial groups, the places of North-east have always been diverse in nature. In such a scenario, the adherence to a specific set of norms and prescribed guidelines to be labelled as "feminist ideology" could really appear to be something far-fetched. However, the presence of a veritable picture of ethnicity and racial colours alongside the presence of different kinds of female writers having their own set of geographical differences is another significant result which can be inferred from this research. This can also be attributed to the fact that the women living in the North-eastern regions never really need to follow any kind of strict dictate in order to keep the confined within the four walls of the house. Issues

related to sanctity, chastity etc. do not glaringly find a place in societies either of the Assamese or of the Nagas, for that matter which would keep them veiled and masked. There are numerous vegetable vendors, road-side workers and labourers, common household maids etc. who are seen in a rampant manner out in the open in the North-eastern lands. This liberty, in some way or the other, very easily paves the way for the writers of the North-east to curve out their own path of liberation.

Conclusion :

A success story to be easily proud of, the rise of the women from the North-eastern has put all the debates to rest that North-east has always been dominated by male writers like Aruni Kashyap, Ranju Hazarika, Robin S Ngangom etc. Delicate touch, be it in a text or in any kind of development, is always captivating and pleasing to the eye and the rise of the female North-eastern writer greatly reiterates this delicacy. There is a sense of aesthetic beauty in the entire journey of the rise of the females, a kind of beauty which is not forced upon but rather, it has been curved out and being placed in the literary vicinity with sheer attractiveness and enticing posture by themselves. One can as if feel the literary rise of the female North-eastern writers with the kind of texts and articles they produce which epitomise the soft flow of ideas without any kind of coarseness which might disturb the attainment of aesthetic pleasure to a great extent.

Moreover, what really makes the rise of the female North-eastern writers even more interesting is that these writers have very easily brushed aside the various ideas and connotations which are generally seen in the general understanding of



North-east. As goes without saying, the various ideas and the perceptions of the people are generally based on self-schemas which are again coloured by bogus and untrue understandings. This very idea has been well-remarked by the notable Mizorami activist, Margaret Chalthantluangi Zama in the lines below:

The term “North East” is a geographical, linguistic and ethnic stereotyping that clubs together these often misconstrued, misjudged and misunderstood eight states ... in the northeastern geographical periphery of the Indian union ... The

northeastern region, which accounts for 7.8 per cent of the total land space of the country, is different from the rest of India in almost every way — be it in terms of culture, tradition, language and ethnicity or of history, physicality, cuisine, dress and indeed, the very cosmology and ethos of life of the people here. This diversity is further reflected within the region itself— each state, and indeed, even each small region within the states, has its own distinct tradition, lore, music, myths, language and even cuisine, though separated by only a few kilometers in physical terms. (7-8)

Works cited :

- Bruce. H. “The Politics of Discourse Communities.” Paper presented at the CCC Convention. New Orleans, La, 1986.
- Dawson, P. “The Rhetoric and Bureaucracy of Quality Management : A Totally Questionable Method?” *Personnel Review*, Vol. 27, No. 1, 1998, pp. 5-19. doi:10.1108/00483489810368521
- Grewal, Inderpal, Caren Kaplan. *Scattered Hegemonies: Postmodernity and Transnational Feminist Practices*. University of Minnesota, 1994.
- Hyland, K. “Genre-based pedagogies: A social response to process.” *Journal of Second Language Writing*, Vol.12, No. 3, 2003, pp. 17-29.
- Lerner, Gerder. *The Creation of Feminist Consciousness: From the Middle Ages to Eighteen-Seventy*, OUP, 1993, pp. 274-275.
- Lucashenko, M. “No other truth? Aboriginal women and Australian Feminism.” *Social Alternatives*, Vol. 12, No. 4, 1994, pp. 21.
- Nayar, Pramod K. *Contemporary Literary and Cultural Theory: From Structuralism to Ecocriticism*. Pearson Education India, 2009.
- Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty, “Can the Subaltern Speak?” *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*. Ed. Cary Nelson. United States, University of Illinois Press, 1988, pp. 271-313.
- West, Ray. ed., *Essays in Modern Literary Criticism*, New York, Greenwood Press, 1952, pp. 117.
- Wittgenstein, L. *Philosophical Investigations*. New York, Macmillan, 1958.
- Zama, Margaret C. (ed.). *The Heart of the Matter*. Katha, 2004.
- Zamel, V. “Writing one’s Way into Reading.” In *TESOL Quarterly*, Vol. 26, No. 3, 1992, pp. 481.