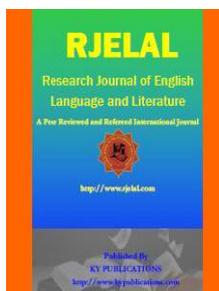




GLOBAL FAMILY: A COSMOPOLITAN OUTLOOK IN THE POETRY OF BHIMA BHOI

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ABSTRACT

This is an article about the whole world conceived as a family by Bhima Bhoi, a tribal Odia saint poet. Coming from the bottom of the society, living life far away from the mainstream could embrace the whole world as his family and is deeply moved by the pathetic display of their sufferings. The poet wants to redeem the whole world, his family, at the cost if his life going to hell. He has unfolded his heart for the cause of the wellbeing of the humanity. He has raised concern for the problems of every living being on the earth. His family constitutes with not only human beings but also the animals, the creatures and above all the insects. His feelings and emotions run high and find place in the form of poetry. His chief objective has been to alleviate the condition of the people.

Key words: family, tribal humanism, hell, salvation, Mahima, man, God, universe

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This paper makes an attempt to find out the concept of a global family that Bhima Bhoi has envisioned in his poetry. Bhima Bhoi, a tribal Odia poet, has unfolded his heart for the cause of the wellbeing of the humanity. He has raised concern for the problems of every living being on the earth. He considers the whole world as his own family. His family constitutes with not only human beings but also the animals, the creatures and above all the insects. He is deeply moved by the sufferings of these beings and prays for their redemption at the cost of his own life. He does not stand the sufferings of any beings on the earth because they are the members of his own cosmic family. His feelings and emotions run high and find place in the form of poetry. His chief objective has been to alleviate the condition of the people. He has achieved it in two ways. First, he has tried to make people conscious through his revolutionary ideas. He has vehemently attacked the social stigmas and blind believes which

are responsible for some sections of people subjugating and inflicting on the other sections of the society. Thereby he has tried for restoring a harmonious bond among the entire humanity. Second, in his mission to herald peace and happiness on the earth he has urged people to come to the fold of a great religion, Mahima Dharma. By accepting this religion all will be treated equally as the children of God. No one will discriminate the other. There would be prevalence of peace and happiness on the earth and all would live like the members of a single family irrespective of caste, creed, race color and geographical boundaries.

Bhoi has embraced the whole world as his family through the bond of humanism. Humanism as an articulated system of thought has been enunciated by different schools of thought with their respective vision on man, God and the universe. Despite the differences in details of their exposition, humanists by and large agree with

regard to the nature of man in relation to the non-human existents. The non-human beings like animals and plants are means to have an instrumental value. They bear an existential value only when they sub-serve the interest of man. But the humanism of Bhima Bhoi does not treat man as an end in relation to non-humans. His vedantic vision makes him think beyond the human species and embrace the non-humans in the sweep. He earnestly prays to Lord as he writes:

... rakha nabakhanda mahi anadi alekha
... raksha kara swami naraloka
... kita patanga jalapoka
... sarana sambhali rakha e jantu jibaku
(Bhajanamala: 1: 17)

(He prays God, the formless, to save not only the human species but also the animals, birds and insects who are the kindred selves of the Lord Himself).

Significantly, Bhima Bhoi never left any room for transcendental ideas. He never wished to lift man to the level of God though he prayed for salvation of one and all. The difference between the animate, man and non-humans is one of degree, not of kind. Therefore, everything becomes an end in itself. Every manifestation is the living expression of God. The spiritualism in the hands of Bhima Bhoi comes to embrace the whole within its ambit and it entails a form of humanism which transcends man while securing the interest of man to the highest possible extent. Here, to say that Bhima Bhoi's humanism transcends man does not imply that it is transcendental – rather it means the removal of ignorance and discovery of the innate divinity present in man. He has wished the salvation of humanity. Salvation for him meant a life bereft of misery and suffering. What he envisions for his fellowmen is the society of men and women who not only share and care for one another but also cherish love for the rest of the creation.

He is very much shocked by the madness of the modern mind. Though God has bestowed on men the power of reason and wisdom they do not utilize it. They are blind to their activities. A man who has humanity can really understand the words of Bhima Bhoi. He laments:

Chakshyu thai kana buddhi thai bana

Batula heleni samaste he
Je heba manusya
janiba abasya
Bujhai kahuchhi jete he
(Bhajanamala: 1: 66)

(People with eyes are no better than blind and people with intellect are directionless – therefore he feels that the essence of life is to be truly human). His concern for fellow human beings does not stem from a theoretical conviction of unity but from the innermost core of his heart. Devaluation of values, desperate religious practices, and social discrimination deeply move him. He asks his followers to save the earth and its creations in this Kali Yuga. He prays:

Je aba achha bhagata sambhali
rakha jagata
bhane Bhima kandha
pruthvi banchao ekalikale
(Bhajanamala: 1: 37)

(He urges his followers (of Mahima Dharma) to save the earth from the imminent ruin of this present age).

He also prays to God to salvage man from moral degeneration. He propagates the purification of human heart and mind. He knows pretty well that some human beings inflict suffering on others. It is because of their narrow and vested interests they harm others by the weapons of hypocrisy and duplicity. He writes:

sambhala tumara
jagata bhagata edharmare je achhanti,
kahari manare
chhanda maya na pasu
nirmala kara mati
(Stutichintamani: Boli: 97: 19)

(He wishes that all people should rise above duplicity and hypocrisy and have a pristine character).

Bhima Bhoi frames a human bond by preaching religious discourse on the concept of the formlessness of God, the Void. He believes in the omnipresence of God. Every object is sacred and every place is holy. Forgetting this, the ignorant undertake long pilgrimage with the hope for salvation. One need not go outside to realize Him. He has to turn the mind within. God can be served

not by sacramental offerings, rites and rituals in the temples but by serving the creation because the created world is none other than the manifestation of own His Self. If one looks for God over and above his manifestations, he is bound to be disappointed. One becomes enlightened when one realizes divinity in everything. This conception can help people to expand their vision and bind them together with much sublimity and humanity.

His surging love for his fellowmen makes him appear as a non-compromising crusader against social discrimination. Hinduism in its decadent form was instrumental in dividing people on cast-line. The sense of innate superiority and inferiority led to inhuman exploitation of the so-called low by the so-called high. Religious obscurantism coupled with the diseased social outlook heightened the suffering of the common man. Brahminism in its degenerate form floated views and doctrines which made people feel that God is prerogative of the select few. Scriptures were interpreted in accordance with the convenience of the so-called upper class. Bhima Bhoi wanted to bring home the spirit of unity by fostering the vedantic ideals through his writings. He vehemently objected these inhuman forces and went to any extent to set them right. Humanism is beyond any distinction of caste, creed and color. It inculcates the cultivation of the cardinal values like love, non-violence, compassion etc. It makes a bond between man and man and man with the rest of the creation particularly the living beings. According to Bhima Bhoi the distinction of caste is man-made and does not enjoy the sanction of the scriptures. The human virtues like love, compassion, sympathy, empathy and forbearance are the cementing force to keep the diverse people together.

A man cannot claim to be a human by merely possessing a human form. One has to have an awakened rationality in conscience in order to be truly human. According to him the human values do not pertain to the well-being of the human species only but to disclose the real sublimity of human awareness. It is the values that bear the characteristic stamp of human reason. It enables man to think beyond himself and see the diversity as the multiple expression of the One. He earnestly pleads God to incorporate the sense of reason and

consciousness in all living beings permeated in every nook and cranny of the world. The poet aspires for the celebration of the manifestation of divine devotion in every living being. The tone is evident when he prays:

ekoisipura chauda
bhuvana jeunthare
jehuchhanti,
sabu ghate prabhu
hetu cheta dia
uthu alekha bhagati.
(Stutichintamani: Boli: 24:08)

(He prays the Lord to cause rational awakening in one and all so that there can be efflorescence of universal love).

Thus it can be seen how the humanism of Bhima Bhoi stands distinguished from other forms of humanism. A secular humanist assumes man to be the highest reality and the human values are by the man and for the man. There is explicit rejection of the transcendental and the absolute autonomy is accorded to man who is the creator of his own world and a system of values. Macquarrie writes:

“There is no higher being than man himself, so man must create his own values, set his own standards and goals, and work out his own salvation. There is nothing transcending man’s own power and intelligence, so he cannot look for any support from beyond himself, though, he need not submit himself to any judgment beyond his own or that of his society.” (48)

The society very often falls prey to infightings and wars which take a heavy toll of human life. For the sake of victory the conquerors have waded through the bloodshed. Timur, Nadir, Hitler and Mussolini are the examples who have sacrificed the innocent human beings to quench their thirst for victory. But the Bhima Bhois take the sufferings of others unto themselves and feel the pain in their own heart. He is prepared to prevent bloodshed at the cost of his own life. He wants to act like Dadhichi to get rid of the sufferings of the common people. His chief motto is the welfare of the whole world. He fails to stand the very sight of suffering of any living being. Starting from his birth to his last breath he has been the worst victim of misfortune. He wants the upliftment of the common

destitute. He has no hesitation in sacrificing his life for the redemption of the whole mankind. So he experiences heart rendering agony when he comes across any suffering being. His deep agony finds classic expression when he prays God that he is no more able to withstand the suffering of beings around him. He writes:

praninka arata
dukha apramita
dekhu dekhu keba sahu
mo jivana pachhe
narke padithau
jagata uddhara heu
(Stutichintamani: 27: 07)

(Let my soul go to hell but let the universe be redeemed because the suffering of beings all around cannot be withstood).

Bhima Bhoi believes in the concept of 'vasudheiva kutumbakam'(the whole world is a family). He treats the world as his own family. He loves the whole universe. The extraordinariness of him is that his love is not just confined to mankind. It includes animals, creatures and insects. The way he pleads people to love the living beings is not only unique in Odia literature but any other literature of the whole world. To him, the world is full of divinity. It manifests equally in every place. The presence is all pervasive both in animate and inanimate. God as a principle has no discrimination. It exists with a Brahmin and also with a Sudra. It is present in an elephant as well as in a vermin equally. He writes:

Sthabaru jangama
kitaru patanga
Chahin dele anusari
Sakala ghatare
puri samanare
Nohe sana bada kari.
(Stutichintamani: Boli: 15:01)

(God is equally all pervasive in animate and inanimate objects. So no one is superior or inferior to the other).

Bhima Bhoi propagated Mahima dharma. It is a new belief. The other name of Mahima dharma is manabika dharma – a religion based on humanism. The chief characteristic trait of this religion is "the welfare of all the living beings". He has looked at the world from the humanitarian

perspectives. He has tried to meet the minimal requirements of the human beings. He has also emphasized on the metamorphosis of the whole social system. His poetry reveals his vision of life – a life which is the receptacle of spontaneous human emotions, feelings and sensitivities.

The notion of salvation is thought in terms of liberation from degenerate, exploitative socio-religious system and establishment of the humanity on the ideals of universal love and co-existence. He talks of collective salvation which is paramount to an extent that he would prefer collective liberation even at the cost of his own salvation. Similar view point is professed by Swami Vivekananda when having been deeply moved by the exploitation and suffering of his compatriots writes in a letter to his western friend:

"I have lost all wish for my salvation ... May I be born again and again and suffer thousands of miseries, so that I may worship the only God that exists, the only God I believe in, is the sum total of all souls – and above all, my God the wicked, my God the miserable, my God the poor of all races, of all species is the object of my worship." (qtd. in Panigrahi, 68)

This shows how the vedantic convictions inevitably manifest in form of socialistic thinking. Bhima Bhoi, being a true vedantin cannot but embrace a form of social activism. Bhima Bhoi does not obviously acknowledge a hiatus between theory and practice, for to know is to do and doing presupposes that one knows. There need not be any attempt to bridge the gap between theory and practice because there is hardly any gap. The vision of unity of all existence entails a life of action and a life to live and let live. One can find a striking similarity of the views of Vivekananda when he says:

"When a man has reached the highest, when he sees neither man nor woman, neither sex nor creed, nor color nor birth nor any of these differentiations but goes beyond and finds that divinity which is the real essence behind every human being then only he has reached the universal brotherhood and that man only is the vedantist." (Vivekananda, *What Religion Is*, 49)

The humanistic ideal of Bhima Bhoi is not based on secular morality but on spiritual values. The spiritual humanism, therefore, obviates the evils of materialism on the one hand and supernaturalism on the other. The conception of the society, according to Bhima Bhoi, does not rest on the reality of man and human interest but on the essential identity of all existence. It is a vision of spiritual community where the well-being of the rest and man being the most rationally developed ought to shoulder the responsibility of taking care of the rest of the creation. The all-embracing love emanating from vision of unity led him to empathize for all. The feeling of oneness transcends the opposition between altruism and egoism consummating in the urge for service to one and all.

What Bhima Bhoi envisions for his fellowmen is the society of men and women who not only share and care for one another but also show love for the rest of the creation. This can only be possible by the bond of humanism which can unite the entire world into a family.

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