



Problematic nostalgia and the dynamics of human relationships in Dibyendu Palit's "Alam's Own House"

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Abstract:

In the modern vista of Bengali Literature, Dibyendu Palit pioneers an indelible mark for his literary proficiency, orchestration of languages, during jugglery of words, and brilliant portrayal of contemporary socio-political issues. Wedded with identity crisis, the problematic of uprooting and the issue of resettlement nostalgia gets a nuanced treatment in the story "Alam's Own House". The story seeks to illustrate the impossibility of re-conciliation between the displaced subject and the lost homeland and the consequent persistence of mourning in the displaced consciousness. The story through a critical analysis of Alam's relationship with Raka attempts to explore the dynamics of human relationship in a political world, where the macro cosmic paradigm of the political latency infiltrates into the microcosmic filial and fraternal bonding. Their relationship evolves against the greater political reality of partition and its consequent evolution of homogeneous communities founded on religious similarities. As soon as Alam returns to Anantashekhhar's house, he, the displaced subject realizes the impossibility of reconciling in that interstice called house, which he has so long conjectured to be occupying a paradigm beyond the 'us' and 'them', free from the principles of a community constructed on the politics of inclusion and exclusion. His return perpetuates a dystopia in the consciousness of Alam, for he experiences the change, not just in the realm of the visible socio-empirical but also in the intimate personal.

Keywords:

Migration, exclusivism, displaced, consciousness, deracination, xenophobia, dystopia.

Introduction:

Dibyendu Palit, prominent Bengali author and Sahitya Akademi Awardee pioneers a persuasive distinctive style in the fictional genre. His narratives achieve distinction for his variety of themes, exposure of vast experience and jugglery of artistic diction. He is considered as one of the foremost fiction writers of Paschim Bangla. His insight into the subtle nuances of human nature, his use of physical and psychological details, his keen sense of wit and humor, his sarcasm at hypocrisy, his critical knowledge of history and politics and its objective, aesthetic articulation in the novels and short stories have earned for him an eminent stature in Bangla literature. He is well-known for his experimentations with language and for introducing certain modern idioms. Sometimes profound, sometimes trivial, sometimes arising from experience almost-unknown to us—any event takes on an unexpected and different significance in his story; consonant language, imprecise dialogue and intellectual sensibility become the epitome of perfect literary artifact. His fictions deal with themes from varied perspectives—the relentless suffering of share-croppers, peasants and working-class people, the dehumanizing effects of the religious bigotry, eclipsed condition due to prevalent superstition and dogmatism, the ensuing communal violence, the deterioration of the moral values and the horrible disaster of Bengal partition resulting post-partition anarchy, migration, displaced consciousness, deracination and asphyxiated relationship. His narrative oeuvre has taken a new turn, dressed as new attire from episode to episode, introduced new surprises. Some of his notable works are— “Sheet Grismer Smriti”, “Samparka”, “Anubhab”, “Shreshto Golpo” (Selected Stories), “Dao Kichu Smriti Kichu Apoman”, “Ahoto Arjun” etc.

Problematic Nostalgia:

Wedded with identity crisis, the problematic of uprooting and the issue of re-settlement nostalgia gets a nuanced (subtle) treatment in the story, “Alam’s Own House”. Nostalgia, leitmotif in this story of Bengal Partition has several ramifications. The nostalgia for a lost space can be both romantic and painful, can be an anchor for the self as well as troubled with the recognition of violence. How migration and memory affect the identity of a subject such that the present is always gazed at through the lens of the past. Almost under coercive circumstances of appropriative violence due to post-partition religious exclusivism, Alam’s father emigrated to East-Pakistan, exchanging his house for Anantashkhar’s house in Dacca. Alam stayed back with Sanyal family to finish his studies and during that period he emotionally attached to Raka. Though Alam eventually migrated to Dacca after his father’s death, he regularly exchanged letters with Raka. She gradually became the root of his longing for ‘homeland’-the **nostos to his algia**—the nostalgia-evoking habitus. To the nostalgic Alam, a journey back to Calcutta three years after he left it for Dacca to attend a conference on

friendship between divided Nations seems incomplete without a visit to his natal home and a meeting with Raka. Estranged past Calcutta appears to him unfamiliar, which is but an essential prerogative of a metropolitan space, which to use George Simmel's phrase is subject to 'swift and continuous shift'. Alam, our returning Native, is a displaced subject. Unlike the metropolitan subject, he is susceptible to change and the miniatures of change constantly subject him to reconciliation with the lived space that is still fertile in his memory. Within the materiality of return, the displaced agency of Alam realizes that although the names of places are still fresh and the habitual signifiers registered in his memory, seducing him to cherish the ideal of homeland (C.I.T Road, Maniktala, Narkeldanga), the signified have changed. Calcutta, his homeland, has changed. The journey back home is flooded with memories and saturated with nostalgia. Alam reaches his house to find it architecturally unchanged but soon realizes the extended boundaries of home; those surpluses and mnemonics which sublimate home in memory into a volatile fertile locale called homeland, have altered. Hence, the kathalichampa tree, which has once been an integral component of the house, has now been replaced by a sweet shop naming 'Madhur'. Standing in front of the close gate for a while even after the taxi has left, Alam recalls his Baba wearing a phatua over a checked lungi—hued red beard covering his checks and chin standing at the window upstairs. Drawing back to himself, Alam realizes his emotional nostalgic overtone. Inside the house, Alam also notices the absence of his great-grandfather's oil painting, which in the words of the omniscient narrator, was "that piece of history (which) had effortlessly sailed into Alam's mind as he scattered the loose dry soil at Baba's grave in a Dhaka cemetery". His return perpetuates a dystopia in the consciousness of Alam, for he experiences the change, not just in the realm of the visible socio-empirical but also in the intimate personal. The family of Anantashekhhar appear strangers to him, while it is the absence of Raka which provides Alam the confirmation that the house has been derided of its trans-political possibility. The politics and its binaries of black and white, friend and antagonist, the familiar and the strange have now crept in to the house. Raka's 'resistance' written in her letter becomes a souvenir of the fragmented love life of Alam and Raka. The absence of those tokens of past which have so long sanctified Alam's 'Home' in the fissures of memory and the deracinated love for Raka compel Alam to subject to consciousness into the ritual of unlearning and thus Alam's reconciliation with the impossibility of return begins.

Research Through Innovation

Dynamics of human relationship: -

The prominent Bengali writer Dibyendu Palit's short story "Alam's Own House" seeks to illustrate the impossibility of re-conciliation between the displaced subject and the lost homeland and the consequent persistence of mourning in the displaced consciousness. The story explores the paradigm of return from diverse perspectives and subsequently seeks to substantiate return as an empty performative, which the displaced subject can only rehearse, thereby cherishing only a possibility of return, a return which ultimately remains un-

materialized. In the story returning is conceived as an endeavor without essence, where the telos of the desired return is never arrived at, and consequently prompting ennui of dystopia in the displaced subject. Raka is a central to Alam's consciousness as his home is. The story, through a critical analysis of Alam's relationship with Raka, attempts to explore the dynamics of human relationship in a political world, where the macrocosmic paradigm of the political latently infiltrates into the *microcosmic filial and fraternal bonding*. Alam's relationship with Raka emerges as a point of departure in the story. Their relationship evolves against the greater political reality of Partition and its consequent evolution of homogeneous communities founded on religious similarities. Alam does not accompany his family to Bangladesh, owing to his impending final year M.A examination and is treated as a member of the Anantashkhar household, who had exchanged their house in Dacca with Alam's father. Alam thus starts living in the house with Anantashkhar's family and the house starts evolving as a site of resistance, a sanctified microcosm which is insulated from the ideologies of the macrocosmic. The dramatic description of Alam and Raka, witnessing the decadent city parched in the flames of riot, seems to indulge the final possibilities of resistance that the sanctified vision of a human world can offer to the political. The influence of an over powering political world cannot be ignored for long. Alam eventually migrates to Dacca (Home)', yet nurtures the possibility of returning to his 'Homeland', which he has secretly cherished as not merely a nostalgia-evoking habitus, but also as an *Elene Vitale* space which has the possibility to subvert and surpass the social spectrum of ideology. The sanctity of the house for Alam does not just rest in being an archive and repertoire of his childhood and youth; for him it is also the space which resists the dominant xenophobic tendencies in the politics. It has lingered in Alam's memory as a promise and a possibility of reconciliation between a Hindu woman and a Muslim man, an Indian and a Pakistan—turned—Bangladeshi. Alam soon realizes the impossibility of reconciliation. His return perpetuates a dystopia in the consciousness of Alam, for he experiences the change, not just in the realm of the visible socio-empirical but also in the intimate personal. The family of Anantashkhar appear strangers to him, while it is the absence of Raka which provides Alam the confirmation that the house has been derided of its trans-political possibility. The politics and its binaries of black and white, friend and enemy, the familiar and the strange have now crept into the house. Anantashkhar declares to the returning Alam: ***"But water and oil can never mix"***. Raka fails to transcend the limits of her lived experience as a refugee, displaced by the shadow lines segregating between the 'us' and 'them', the friend and foe. The essence of transcendence is more relevant to her. A letter from her becomes a souvenir of the fragmented love life of Alam and Raka. His love is asphyxiated and deracinated. These final words of Raka compel Alam to reconcile with the continuity of immanence a historical burden which he realizes he can never be said. The sovereign twin Nations formulated by Partition and divided on the basis of religion, have, in the long run, managed to penetrate into the more sanctified dictums of the personal.

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