



THE REFLECTION OF MARGINALIZED COMMUNITIES IN THE WORKS OF JYOTIPRASAD AGARWALA

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ABSTRACT

Jyotiprasad Agarwala was born in 1903 C.E. a period of transition which showed a new era in every aspect of Assam. The 19th century Assamese renaissance had its rays in Jyotiprasad Agarwala's life and being a product of early 20th Century, his social ideas were remolded with the changing needs of the Assamese society. Since the annexation of Assam by the British Government, Assamese society underwent different changes which also had its effect on the cultural and social life of Assam. In such an atmosphere Jyotiprasad Agarwala had stepped forward from his nineteenth century predecessors locating the central theme of his intellectual thinking on humanity, culture and nation. His dream was to work for a progressive Assamese society free from exploitation, poverty and social inequality. He spent far more than he should have for the welfare, and his love for the downtrodden is reflected in many of his lyrics. The reactionary forces understood the power of Jyotiprasad's involvement in popularizing the people's movement. Jyotiprasad's socialistic leanings, love for the common man and hatred of the exploiting class had always been reflected in his poems and lyrics.



KEYWORDS: Marginalised, jyotiprasad, Assam.

INTRODUCTION:

Jyotiprasad Agarwala belonged to a period which heralded a new era that was dawning upon Assam. Born in the transition period (1903 CE), Jyotiprasad Agarwala had the opportunity to ingrain within himself the rays of the 19th century Assamese renaissance with a strong faith in western education and rationalist thinking. Beyond that, (during the period the Assamese attained the consciousness of modern self entity in all aspects of literature, art and culture. Being a product of the age, his social ideas were also remolded with the need of the society. With his new ideas he added a new dimension to the available legacy.

DATA AND METHODOLOGY:

The study is mainly based on both primary as well as secondary data. Primary data mainly the writings of Jyotiprasad Agarwala, writings of Agarwala family, letters to different people by Jyotiprasad Agarwala are consulted in the study and secondary data are collected from different libraries, DHA, State Archive etc. are consulted in the study. An analytical and empirical method has been used in the study.

OBJECTIVES:

The basic objectives of the study are-

1. To give a brief discussion about Marginalised Community.
2. To give an overview of the writings of Jyotiprasad Agarwala
3. To analyze the ideas and place of marginalised class in his writings.

DISCUSSION:

Italian political theorist Antonio Gramsci viewed that “the majority of people accept the values and political sayings which shows their subordination to the ruling elite. According to him, capitalism maintains control not always just through violence and political and economic compulsion, but also ideologically, through a hegemonic culture in which the values of the bourgeoisie became ultimately the ‘common sense’ values of all in the society. Thus a compromising culture developed in which even the working class people identify their own good with the good of the bourgeoisie, and help to maintain the statuesque rather than revolting.”(Chakravarti, Mahadev.,p.84) Those communities are excluded or discriminated from the mainstream of social, economic, educational or cultural life and often face disadvantages, limited access to opportunities and discrimination in life, education, employment etc. They are regarded as marginalised communities.

Marginalised communities are the community deprived of any chances to uplift them from oppression. Community leaders faith based or otherwise can assist staff in making connection with marginalised communities. Trusted figures in the community can help establish and build relationships which can help to serve their goals. However, Jyotiprasad Agarwala seeks assistance of the common people, whom he called as **artists** to create a new world. (Dutta, Akhil Ranjan(ed)., 2012, p.11) He set an example to the intellectual middle class people for change in hegemony from the bourgeoisie to the working class. Jyotiprasad was never hesitant about his commitment for the oppressed masses and was always an unswerving artist. He believed in antipathy against the evils and sincerely felt and fought for the finer elements of the society are the responsibility of each artist. According to Hemanga Biswas Jyotiprasad was a revolutionary artist who devoted his life to harmonize life and culture. He never saw life as something divided in different closed rooms. He had a simple and natural thinking process. Jyotiprasad who was attracted to the ideology as peoples’ artist, very easily had shown his faith on people’s revolutionary leadership. When there is a congregation between the old and the new, there is always a conflict to welcome the new. Jyotiprasad was the symbol of this welcome step. (Dutta, A.R.,P.168)

Jyotiprasad Agarwala was not an ordinary nationalist. He was aware of the fact that political freedom will not change lot of the common people. Every country of the world had its underdogs. The rich-poor division is a common social phenomenon. Like P. B. Shelley, the great English poet, Jyotiprasad also wanted to change the destiny of the common people cutting across all political, geographical and national frontiers. He was essentially a lover of man. A great number of his writings and poems are written for the emancipation of man in general and his country in particular. His noteworthy poems are *Naba Biplabi*, *Kavi Jage*, *Mahamanab*, *Mukti*, *Kanchan janghar Buranji*. Unlike many of the romantics Jyotiprasad wanted to identify himself with common men instead of lying in an imaginary world with an elitist way of looking at things. He used his writings as a weapon for the emancipation of the exploited section of the society. (Goswami, Pranati Sarma,P.67)

Unlike many of the romantics Jyotiprasad wanted to identify himself with common men instead of lying in an imaginary world with an elitist way of looking at things. He used his writings as a weapon for the emancipation of the exploited section of the society. (Goswami, Pranati Sarma, P.67) Jyotiprasad was a revolutionary. He was a creative revolutionary. He promised to take his people to a world where there will be no darkness, pain, hatred and violence. In a poem named *Sirabidrohi* he says:

“Rupantarar moi
Jugantarar moi
Bharatar

Jogatar..." (I speak for change. I speak for new age. This new change is soon taking place in India and also in the world.)

He felt that to liberate the society from the spell it needs the bones of rishi Dadhisi, the great sage who willed death allowing the angels to use his bones for making a special kind of weapon to be used against the demons for their destruction. (Gohain(ed), P.345)

He wrote in his poem *Naba Biplabi Kavi Jage-*
"Aaji Jona Dodhisir ashthi bastra loi
Jili Joi mohattar
Asurak karak nipat

Danaviya adhikar kori utkhat..."(Let us take the bones and clothes of Sage Dadhisi and be inspired to finish the demons and put an end to the demoniac rights.)

He spent far more than he should have for the welfare, and his love for the workers and knowledge. Their culture is reflected in many of his lyrics. Jyotiprasad became a revolutionary in another sense of the term, fighting not to liberate the motherland but the minds of the people. It was by action rather than words that Jyotiprasad had displayed his revolutionary nature and his identification with the oppressed section of society. When Jyotiprasad able to knew that the new political forces after independence were less interested in working for the poor and downtrodden and more for the benefit of the traditional oppressing class Jyotiprasad raised his weak arm but strong voice against these forces.

He wrote about the new clothes and contents of modern poetry. According to him poetry must change with time. But in spirit they should remained unchanged. It must speak for the people, beset with new issues of modern industrial and commercial life-

"Factory, minat
Chepa khai jol howa
Manuhar
Hahakar suni tai

Solokai thale son- kharu...(People are now crushed by the factories and mines. New poetry takes off its gold bracelet on hearing the agonies of humanity.) *Janatar Abahan-* the call of the people. *Xabodhan, xabodhan-* careful! Careful. Khajna xodhat eta Dafalar Khong (A Dafala's Anger when asked to pay his Rent), Eta Matawal Banua (A Drunk (Tea) Labourer).

Jyotiprasad instead of flying in imaginary world he wants to keep himself occupied with people's down-to earth problems centring round food, clothes, shelter and human dignity. In *Mor Kavita* he wrote:

"Paharibo khoja nai
Bastab khoja na
Jivanar kartabya kathor

Prithibir mati pani..." (I am not interested in forgetting the down-to-earth problems that beset our life, nor am I interested in evading my duty and responsibility...).

Another important part of the vision of India's freedom struggle was the question of social change and social justice. His commitment to democracy was rooted in his deep faith in and respect for the common man. He was also fully aware that a diverse country like India could be held together only by a democratic structure of society where democracy also becomes an instrument for the achievement of social and gender equality and the drastic reduction of economic inequalities. His *janata* (common people) were two types. In pre- independence period his *janata* were all people of the country, but after independence his *janata* were the people who stand against the exploiters. (Hazarika., P. 77)

Jyotiprasad Agarwala, coming from aristocrat family became the leader of deprived class. It is viewed that people who were not belonged to the deprived class, do not have the courage to fight for

the deprived people. But Jyotiprasad was different, In spite of coming from the rich family, he always fought for the deprived poor people of Assam. (Mina Agarwala) His words were:

*"Janata tor pranoro pranot
Monaro manat
xilpi je moi*

lukai lukai aso (O' my people, me the artist is hidden in the deepest layers of your soul and mind) (Gohain(ed.), p.88)

*Aji Janatar alok bijoyi
apurba abhijan
aji prithivir akase akase
janatar abhan*

naba jibanor maha samghate kopai bortoman" (today (see) the great light capturing march of the people/ (listen to) their clarion call/that reverberates all across the sky/ (see how) the great conflict signaling the new life shaking the present).

*Toi jana nai
toi jak bhabo murxa janata
muruho janata
murho janata buli
jar habo khujo swayansiddha neta*

sei janata aji prabuddha hol (you know not/ whom you deem idiot/ dumb and rustic/ and fancy to became their self- styled leader/ those people are today an inspired lot). The reactionary forces understood the power of Jyotiprasad's involvement in popularizing the people's movement. Jyotiprasad's socialistic leanings, love for the common man and hatred of the exploiting class had always been reflected in his poems and lyrics-

*"Who are you that anatch a bowl of rice
To eat on your gilded platter?
Who are you that thread a pearl- necklace
From the beads of tears shed by the oppressed?"*

A childhood incident illustrates the innate humanism that lay at the core of Jyotiprasad. One afternoon at Tezpur he saw a beggar squatting by side of a road. Striking up a conversation, he learnt that the man was a tea worker who had lost his job. It deeply affected his mind and creates a poem titled *Bonuar Mrityu* (A Worker's Death).

In the tragic incident of Naliapul at Dibrugarh Jyotiprasad also wrote a fiery letter of protest against the police firing at Naliapul and also accused the Government of using the law enforcing force as a political instrument. In 15-17 July, 1949 A.D. at Naliapul railway colony there was the State Convention of the Indian People's Theatre Association being held with the presidentship of Jyotiprasad. Some anti-social elements, in order to disrupt the Convention, had infiltrated amongst the delegates. The police resorted to a *Lathi- charge* and unfortunately, a policeman was discovered dead. Therefore, the police went wild. Without any provocation, they entered the Convention venue and opened fire on the peaceful gathering. Two women were killed and many delegates were injured in the firing. At that moment Jyotiprasad was in his Tamolbari house and before he could come to the Convention venue, a police force put him under house arrest. His residence was thoroughly searched but nothing incriminating was found. Sadly none of the newspapers, not even his family paper *Dainik Asamiya*, dared to his fiery letter against the act of the Government in the tragic incident. Suddenly, a life- long

fighter for India's freedom became an enemy of the nation in the eyes of the Government. (Minaksh Agarwala)

When Jyotiprasad was in Tamolbari Tea Estate for managing the garden and recover his ill health, he carried on the good example set by his uncle Chandrakumar. He himself was an owner of tea garden but still he wrote about the labourers and told about 'class conscious' in his poems, songs and proses. He took particular care to the school started by his uncle and opened a night section for those children who did not have the opportunity and also for the adults who had to work in the daytime. He also sent his own children to study in the garden school. He also set up a workers' club, equipped it with sports equipment and encouraged them to participate in cultural activities. (Mina Agarwala) He, inspite of being a proprietor and manager of the garden, helped the workers to organise themselves into a trade- union, was a feature unprecedented in the annals of tea- garden management. (Gohain(ed), p.345)

The Board of Directors of the Tamolbari Tea Company had accused against him saying that he had misutilised the Company's money in the name of bringing about improvement in the quality of life of the tea- workers. It also resulted in the indiscipline amongst the workers. But the truth was that Jyotiprasad had alienated the entire tea- garden owning section through his attempt to give the workers, the soul of the industry, their fair dues. Capitalists to the core, the tea- owning class had banded together to drive the socialist Jyotiprasad out of the industry. At the same time some of his family member as well as the tea- growing group pressurized him to serve all links with what they considered to be a communist movement. (Mina Agarwala) Jyotiprasad Agarwala seeks assistance of the common people, whom he called as artists to create a new world. (Dutta, Akhil Ranjan(ed), 2012, p.11)

He set an example to the intellectual middle class people for change in hegemony from the bourgeoisie to the working class. Jyotiprasad was never hesitant about his commitment for the oppressed masses and was always an unswerving artist. He believed in antipathy against the evils and sincerely felt and fought for the finer elements of the society are the responsibility of each artist. The colonial government had almost neglected mass education. He himself was the true illustrator of this definition. He was a democratic artist- one of the movements launched to guide and conduct along the true path of culture is the real revolution. Keeping the real meaning of the word 'revolution' in mind it should be quite in the fitness of things that a man having the right type of enlightenment and conscience cannot but be a revolutionary. It is through the character of Labhita, Jyotiprasad Agarwala having deep faith in the social and cultural revolution, appeals to the people in general to resist oppression tooth and nail, to dedicate themselves to the removal of the oppressed class and to eschew the path of conservativeness and narrowness. Labhita is the true representative of the Assamese young men and women in the matter of self- confidence, social consciousness and liberal thoughts. (Gohain(ed), P. 7)

Jyotiprasad Agarwala believed that the world would be able to enjoy real peace only on the day when the rein of administration would fall on Rupkonwar's hand and not before that day. Jyotiprasad wanted to communicate this message through his play *Nimati Kaina*. It is through his play *Nimati Kaina* that he has revealed his philosophy as an artist. According to *Nimati*, the Rupkowar is none but the most dedicated worshipper of truth and beauty. The goddess of art comes only at his invitation and smiles at his clarion- call. Her smiles bring in pure joy and her songs bring about world peace, which can be effected only by the poets and philosophers. (Tamuli.P 32)

It appears that Jyotiprasad Agarwala's main purpose was to establish the human values and he wanted to do it by rousing the dormant capable of overcoming the obstacles like superstitions, oppressions, injustice, exploitations etc. to the realm of spiritual uplift. In order to get his purpose fulfilled he had chosen the womenfolk amongst whom the culture remains pure and simple. Therefore, the women characters played better role in his plays. Again, he showed the power of non-violent means through the characters. They protested what happened to their surroundings but it was a Non-Cooperation but Non -Violent act which can ultimately able to win the *duskriti* (evil). On the otherhand, Jyotiprasad had also revealed more clearly through his plays his implicit faith in and deep regards for the power inherent in women.

Since independence, there has been a marked development regarding the position, status and values of women. This century has experienced a spectacle of the emancipation of women all over the world. A woman no longer is to be considered as a breeding machine nor a chattel and plaything to be exploited for man's advantage and amusement. Women have now come to realize that they are in no way inferior to men and are capable in contributing to the development of the nation.

It might be possible that Jyotiprasad's film *Jaymati's* story reinvented and retold in a poignant visual narrative was in some way instrumental in working up Assamese women's subconscious to make them join and bravely face the British guns in much greater numbers compared to any other part in India. It is this depth of creative imagination that set him apart from his contemporaries. (Goswami, Pranati., P.67) Thus, Jyotiprasad Agarwala's cultural engagements have significantly inspired almost all sections of the Assamese society. Even today like any other personality, the popularity of Jyotiprasad Agarwala's works was not confined only to a particular era but has transcended the limits of time.

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