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REPRESENTATION OF LANDSCAPE AS PSYCHOLOGICAL AND CULTURAL SPACES: A STUDY OF *JOLOJ* BY JURI BORA BORGOHAIN

*Sujit Saikia*¹

Research Scholar, Department of English, Mahapurusha Srimanta Sankaradeva Viswavidyalaya, Assam, India

&

*Dikshita Kakoty*²

Research Scholar, Department of English, Mahapurusha Srimanta Sankaradeva Viswavidyalaya, Assam, India

Abstract

*The paper is an attempt to analyse how landscape plays an important role in shaping the psyche of an individual or people of a particular area as it is not only a physical terrain, but also it is connected with identity formation, psychological development and existential resilience. The hills, rivers, culture of a particular area develop the psyche of the people in accordance with the environment. By focusing on the literary text *Joloj* by Juri Bora Borgohain, this paper will analyse how a river i.e. the Brahmaputra may become the lifeline as well as disastrous for people which is led the mind to 'biophobia'. But, the people are sincerely attached to the culture of the particular area as they forget every painful moment made by the river. In addition, landscape has played an important role for developing the psyche of young people of the particular area i.e. Majuli as many of young people have joined the insurgent group. To save their identity, land and culture, the young people took weapon against the government. The paper will not focus who the right is between the government and the people of the particular area. The paper will only focus how landscape plays an inevitable role while developing psyche of young people, and how landscape becomes a psychological space for young people. It also focuses on the impact of the villagers because of the militarisation in the villages. In this case, the attachment to the landscape of the people has played an important role why the villagers forget their trauma in the time of raas.*

Keywords

Landscape, Psyche, Culture, Trauma, Existential Resilience, etc.

Full Article

Human psyche is always associated with the landscape around the people. We all aware that literature is the reflection of the society as the writer Juri Bora Borgohain has reflected the Assamese society through her novels. During the nineties and early twenties, an agitation started among young people against the governments of Assam and India, and had made a organization which was banned by the government later on. The writer tries to reflect the Assamese society, their challenges made by the nature, and issues during this period. This qualitative research is an attempt in understanding why the young people joined the insurgent group, how landscape develops their psyche, and how general people faces traumatic situation along with how nature affects the psyche of people.

From the ancient time, humans have been maintaining a connection with nature, and accepting benefits from the nature as they are the part of nature. The positive bond between humans and nature is considered as 'biophilia'. In addition, it is seen that emotions towards the environment



have been harming people in many areas of the world which can be considered as 'biophobia'. The relation with nature of people is very compound. It is a negative attitude towards nature i.e. fear, anxiety, and disgust (Soga and Maldwyn, 927). In the literary text *Joloj*, the people of Majuli have been experiencing the disastrous condition of nature in the form of flood created by the Brahmaputra. 'Vicious cycle of biophobia' is a concept which is explored how 'biophobia' grow in a particular area. The people of Majuli suffer from the problem of flood in every year. The 'biophobia' has been reflected in initial stage of the novel: "Kintu barisha? Barikha ai Brahmaputra nodi hoi nathake... Gobhir pokonia aru bishal jolorashi loi ai nodi paraparin akhon sagor hoi pore... Sagor! Dukhor sagor! Brahmar putro ai purukh nodikhon majulir praaibur manuhor baabe akhon dukhor sagor hoi pore" (Borgohain,29). (But in the rainy season? The rainy season does not remain merely a river like the Brahmaputra... With deep whirlpools and vast masses of water, the river turns into a boundless sea... A sea! A sea of sorrow! This masculine river, the son of Brahma, becomes an ocean of suffering for the people living in Majuli).

In this literary text, 'biophilia' is overpowered by 'biophobia'. For the tourists, the river is a place of enjoyment, looking the beauty of sunset during their journey through the river. But, characters like Nandini, this river is like a destroyer. There is no medical facility in Majuli as portrayed in the novel. If the people go to Jorhat, they have to cross the river which is very time wasted work for them. Sometimes, people suffer during their ferry journey. The protagonist Nandini, therefore, always consider the river as the destroyer or curse for her. "Nandinir baabe, ai nodikhon dhongkhokari Protidine huehurai khohai majulir buky.. Seujiya oporupa prokiti, soisso siyamola pothar... Huehurai khoi juwa mati bhetik loi ohoroho boi thake Brahmaputra.. Barisha dupar uposa paanir dharal sut, sute sristi kora fen aru pokoniyare bhora ai nodi" (Borgohain, 30:2025). (For Nandini, this river is destructive... Every day it relentlessly erodes the heart of Majuli. The lush and beautiful landscape, the green fertile fields—all are continuously swept away by the rushing current of the Brahmaputra along with the collapsing soil. During the rainy season, the river remains filled with overflowing streams of water, foam created by the sharp currents, and deep whirlpools).

Sometimes, the people of Majuli feel that this island will be destroyed by the river. Slowly and gradually, the river erodes the land. Yet, it is portrayed as a place of cultural landscape where human society and natural environment are connected. Whenever the festival of *raas* comes to Majuli, the Brahmaputra river becomes a path of transportation through which people of other districts of Assam goes to watch 'drama' based on the story of little Krishna in Gokul. *Raas* is the only festival for which the people of Majuli feel good as existential resilience comes into novel, and during that period, the people of Majuli forget all kinds of anxiety, depression and trauma.

In addition to those, the literary text portrays the period of insurgency movement in Assam. During this movement, many young people joined the insurgent groups to protect their land. Some political issues raised during this period as many young people wanted the state of Assam as an independent country. Ecological psychology is a concept through which relationship between perception and action is studied. Roger Barker in his book "Ecological Psychology" articulated that human behaviour is connected to environment or context. People behave in accordance with the surroundings. In literary text, young people like Dipan, Rajat, Jatin, Bhaida and many others joined the insurgent group. The incident of joining the insurgent group can be said as a brainwash done by leaders, but it is a perfect example how people behave in accordance with the environment. Environmental psychology has a relation with landscape, and it is about perception. Therefore, it is said that landscape has its own meaning, and it is associated with the significance of people of the particular area (Uzzell, 34-35).

The literary text has reflected the impact after joining the insurgent group by the young people. The character of Dipan is a simple boy of a village who likes to act in the festival of *raas*.



One day, he has gone from his house to join the insurgent group. The news has become a thunder for the villagers and the parents of Dipan. His father suffers from anxiety because of his son and young people of the state, saying: “Chai thaka, akhomoyot akhomr obostha punjabor dore hbobogoi... Punjabot khalistanir dabit santrahbadi aru sebar major huwa sangarkho! Aru L.T.T. Er obostha dekhisai nohoi.. Amar obosthay abekuwai hobogoi... Dhonkho hoi jabo amar lorabur..” (Buragohain, 55). (To stare helplessly at the situation, in time Assam’s condition will become just like Punjab’s... In Punjab, the demand for Khalistan led to terrorism and major conflicts. And haven’t we already seen the condition created by the L.T.T.? Our situation too will become even worse... Our young boys will be destroyed).

Various companies of army have occupied the land of Majuli to subdue the movement of the insurgent group. The name of Nandini has attached with the name of Dipan because they acted in together in the *raas*. People also think that Dipan has a connection with Nandini. The mother of Dipan suffers from anxiety because there is no any news of his son. Army personnel and police often come to their house to ask about his son. One day, Nandini goes to Dipan’s mother. At that time, a vehicle of army has arrived the house. Some personnel come towards Nandini by seeing her. She suffers from anxiety by remembering her aunty as she said that many young women are raped by army. “Nandiniloi sai sai namil samorik juwan dujonman... Nandinir bormakoloi monot poril...” (Buragohain, 87). (The two army soldiers kept staring at Nandini as they got down... Nandini was reminded of her aunt).

The army operation increases in Majuli. Army comes to the houses of the villagers without informing anyone. Sometimes, they order the young people to stand outside, and asks many questions about the organization, and their relationship with the insurgent movement. If the army enters their home, they observe houses with neat and clean, looking letters of the organization. Often they bring young people to their camp, and give them to sign in papers. As a result, the people of Majuli suffer from collective trauma. Young people like Anuj and Dipakor who are innocent, but they are brought by army personnel to their camp. They are gotten punishment by army personnel as Dibakar has become crippled for good, and other boy Anuj has not returned by the army. Therefore, this period has become a period of collective trauma for the villagers. “Gaonkeikhonloi ratibur bhoyanok hoi naame.. Andharor loge loge manuhburor mukhbur hukai aahe.. Pradulit aahi gari akhon robohi ai akankhat dur durkoi kopi thake” (Buragohain, 88). (At night, terror descends upon the villages... With the coming of darkness, the faces of the people grow pale and dry with fear... Whenever a vehicle stops at the courtyard gate, they tremble from afar in anxious fear).

In this novel, women have been suffering secretly which can be considered as ‘secret trauma’. Diana E. H. Russell in her book *The Secret Trauma : Incest in the Lives of Girls and Women* reflects the experiences who are sexually abused in their lives. As a result, they have been facing issues like anxiety, panic attacks, depression, PTSD. Like this, this novel reflects how army looks at women lasciviously. The army personnel always targets young women as a sexual object as they attempt to touch the chest of women. Nandini, the protagonist of the novel also suffers of secret trauma because one day a group of army has arrived in her house to ask about Dipan alias Sasanka Baruah. The army and the public think that Nandini has a secret relationship with Dipan. During her interaction with army officer looks her in a lascivious way, and the other young army personnel looks her from the backside which affect her psyche.

Though the place lacks tranquillity and harmony, the people of Majuli feel existential resilience because of their attachment to culture, and landscape which can be connected to the concept of existential psychotherapy by Irvin D. Yalom. Culture is considered as a way of life, and landscape has played an important role to attach with culture (Tamuli). The people of Majuli suffer from anxiety and trauma because of flood and insurgency issue. Their culture especially the festival



of *raas* is the only source through which they feel to live again in this chaotic atmosphere. The perception of landscape is filtered by culture. Landscape can be portrayed as public statements of cultural values. Sometimes there may be contradiction between the demand of landscape and culture (Nassauer, 230). In addition, sometimes people bring changes into culture when landscape demands different. In this literary text, culture is only thing which is helped to people not to accept the demand of landscape i.e. the period of insurgency.

This paper tries to focus on how 'biophilia' transforms into 'biophobia' in the psyche of people, and how people's mind are associated with land with reference to *Joloj*. Amidst the terror of insurgency, people are always attached to the land, culture, and festival. Though the people of Majuli have become the victim of flood every year, *raas* is the only festival through which they feel resilient to live which can be considered as existential resilient. The Brahmaputra which is considered as the lifeline of Assam becomes a curse for the people of Majuli. In addition, the literary text reflects the period of Assam where the insurgent group was active. The paper does not focus on who the right is i.e. the government and the young people of Assam, it only focuses on how the psyche of a particular of an area is associated with the landscape.

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