
Commentary

Oppression and Ecology: Reading the Representation of Subaltern Voice in Rabindranath Tagore's Poem "*Dui Bigha Jomi*" ¹

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Rabindranath Tagore is one of the most acclaimed Indian poets who has given voices to the suppressed, indigenous or subaltern souls in his literary creations. His works represent the urban spaces, rural landscapes along with the native inhabitants of the different localities. Besides being an international creative genius, he also tries to establish himself as a critic of the socio-cultural- political issues of his contemporary era. This essay engages itself into a survey of Tagore's position as an intellectual who dares to question and makes his readers think critically. His poem "*Dui Bigha Jomi*" discusses the narrative of a farmer whose land has been purposefully occupied by a greedy, powerful zamindar. In this case, zamindar is the metaphor of the colonial forces whose territorial domination has caused ecological changes depicting the relation between colonialism and ecology. This poem is a mediation on colonialism and its effect on subaltern identities. This essay attempts to examine the voice of Upen, a subaltern figure who tries to establish a resistance against zamindar's dictatorship. Upen becomes the metaphor of all the subaltern figures who have to be awakened against the domination of any kind of exploitation.

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"Dui Bigha Jomi" by Rabindranath Tagore is a narrative poem dealing with the loss of the land, ill effects of capitalism, ecological degradation, lament and remembrance of a hapless farmer. Here, the farmer is the symbol of the oppressed colonized souls whereas the zamindar is the colonial soul. He snatches the land from the poor farmer forcefully making him a homeless monk. The tone of the poem is melancholic and ends with irony. The zamindar wants to capture his land for widening his own artificial garden. Here, the artificial garden is the metaphor for modernity and progress. The land evokes out the sense of primitivism, pre-modernity. In this regard, the incident of Singur Andolan can be remembered. This essay does not criticize the then government's activity and rules. Instead, it brings forth an instance of dispute centering on land which causes conflict among the farmers and government. The ill effects of Singur Andolan centring on transfer of lands to establish factories and industry led to chaos and divide among the farmers. This incident also depicts how the farmers since time immemorial are facing problems as they rely on the agriculture-based economy while the governments attempt to shift the country's or state's economy from agriculture to industry. It is also an example of industrialisation which causes ecological damage. It can be argued that Tagore's poem foregrounds the reality of this incident in this poem.

The poem satirises the activity of the zamindar like people who butcher lands, ecology in order to build up tall buildings, multi-storeyed houses. This poem is written from the perspective of the farmer in order to highlight the atrocities done by colonialism, capitalism, slavery, migration and the interconnected relation between ecology and (Post) colonialism. If the colonial activity is seen as the 'modern' initiative, this kind of 'modernity' is terribly criticised in this text. The main concern of the poem lies in the space, ecology and the relation between space and ecology. Sadly, the shift from farmer's ancestral land to the zamindar's modern land entails a sense of change in the environment causing the lament and remembrance of the farmer upon his arrival after many years. It also metaphorically depicts how colonialism has caused ecological degradation and transformation in the land/space(s). According to Foucault, heterotopia means spaces with spaces. This essay tries to examine this overlapping relation between ecology/ environment and colonialism and the meaning of Postcolonial

melancholia through the metaphor of the heterotopia of a small land. Thus, this essay meticulously points out the bad sides of capitalism and industrialization in his poem. Tagore, however, has been a staunch vocal person of protest against any kind of exploitation and his other writings also justify his indifference to any kind of modernity that hampers the core value and ecology. This essay attempts to read the metaphorical theme of the poem. Upen, a farmer is the narrator of the poem telling the slices of his life experiences. The poem opens with the importance of the land as his only shelter which the zamindar wants to buy. Farmers are the sons of the soils. Metaphorically, the land is the home and the shelter. Upen has nothing except this small ancestral land. It is precious to him as this land brings forth the memory and the smell of his ancestors. Consequently, he becomes homeless and starts wandering on the streets. Upen's utterances make him a figure of resistance. He becomes the mouthpiece of all those farmers who have lost lands. He even calls out the zamindar as thief for snatching away lands from people. He consoles his mind saying that in lieu of this land, God has given him the entire world. The entire world has become his home. Here, the world is the nature, the ecology, the life. He travels many places. He encounters the varied colours and shapes of nature but cannot forget his ancestral land. The memory of the small, ancestral land acts as a mother and from its umbilical cord, he has been uprooted. Therefore, this mini land becomes the microcosm of the entire earth, ecology. He is a living entity/ a life who needs the ecology, the habitat to survive. He is just like an animal who has lost the forest, the home. The incessant growth of the modernization along with the huge amount of deforestation makes the ecology fragile. The picture of the perfect, modern, urban life imposed by colonialism is latently represented through the master-slave dichotomy between Upen and Zamindar. Upen is the picture of the uncivilized people whereas the zamindar represents the high-class modernity, the flag bearer of civilization. If Upen is the metonym for village, the zamindar is the metonym for the urbanity. In place of primitive, ecological land, the modern, artificial garden/land has been created. It destroys the natural ecology. Upen's remembrance of his land unearths the beauty of the nature, ecology. He emphasizes on the importance of the rural countryside as well as the nature. His return to that land acts as a 'postcolonial'

stance perpetuated by him. After reaching there, he sits under a tree. Miraculously, nature accepts and embraces her son by gifting him the fruits. Ironically, he has been criticised as thief by the council of zamindar. This is the tragic portrayal of the powerlessness of Upen like people and the position of the landlords, the colonial souls. The colonial masters attempt to conquer the lands. In the meantime, the land goes through the changes. The ecological temperament of this land goes through transformation but remains same in its essence. And this thing makes Upen nostalgic and close to nature.

According to Foucault, heterotopia signifies a place that is different from the mainstream space/place (Foucault, 1984). He mentions places like prison cells, graveyard, library and others. Heterotopia is a space within spaces. It is other spaces. In the poem "Dui Bigha Jomi," these two-acres land becomes the heterotopic space that makes Upen come back to its root. It is a long narrative of nature and the relation between nature and an individual. Written in the British Raj India, this poem becomes the mouthpiece of the indigenous voices and narratives. This land is the metaphor of India that is forcefully conquered and ruled by British Raj. But the poem celebrates the voice of the marginalized. It is the voice of the soil, soil of India. Therefore, Upen like farmers become the indigenous or postcolonial people narrating their sides of stories. The poem centres on the representation of ecology and land and how the powerful people like colonizers do the politics with the land. This land is snatched from Upen. It symbolically shows how the colonizers establish their colonies by uprooting and transcending the native, indigenous people into paupers. Later, Upen comes back for the sake of his memory and the land embraces its son metaphorically by giving him fruits. This poem does not promote colonialism rather sings the victory song of the possibilities of freedom, postcolonial melancholia and resistance. There is a sense of probability and possibility of returning of ownership and power in the poem. The poem depicts the master-slave dichotomy, the politics of power between powerful and powerless. Although the powerless (Upen) fails to reclaim his land, the poem ends with a sense of silent positivity and possibility. The Indian soil is the home of Indians. Similarly, the land rightfully belongs to Upen. Thus, Upen's arrival acts as a resistance to the paws of colonization

and exploitation. Although Upen is considered as thief, he is the ultimate master of this indigenous land. Thus, this poem reflects the native voice along with the representation of the urban ecology and transformation of the land. Therefore, one can find the yearning for the past land and this yearning makes the land a heterotopic space.

Dasgupta (2011) stated that Rabindranath Tagore can be understood as an Upanishadic poet who harmonized humanity with nature and recognized both the diversity and deep interconnectedness among human beings and other life forms. She focuses on the unity of man and ecology reflected in Tagore's works. "*Dui Bigha Jomi*" does not only celebrate the indigenous, Postcolonial voice of the wronged farmer, but also shows how colonialism negatively affects environment. Environmental humanities is a discipline of study that focuses on the environmental crisis from the socio-cultural- political perspective. The discussion on this theme can be extended to environmental humanities as this particular poem shows how the zamindar's action makes changes into the land. It goes through the metaphorical implementation of colonization. The poem maintains a temperament of resistance for the hapless farmer being the spokesperson. He returns and sings the song of melancholia and nostalgia. The process of colonialism has done a great change onto the land but Upen identifies his poor land. His subaltern voice remains 'unheard' and the problem related to the land remains 'unresolved' within the context of colonialism. This poem can be read as a wake-up call against oppression and colonialism. To me, Tagore appears to be a critical commentator. This essay concludes with the thought that the subalterns cannot speak properly.

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