**UNECLIPSING MODERNITY IN INDIA THROUGH AMIT CHAUDHURI'S ON
CLEARING A SPACE: REFLECTIONS ON INDIA, LITERATURE AND CULTURE.**

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What are the roots that clutch, what branches grow
Out of this stony rubbish? Son of Man,
You cannot say, or guess, for you know only a
A heap of broken images.

-Lines taken from the The Wasteland by T.S. Eliot.

India is heterogeneous, pluralistic, multi-voiced country, where many different kinds of traditions and pathways are followed. Literature in India is diverse in nature and anthologies provide us with information of all the different kinds of literature that is written with taking certain abstract from the text and defining some peculiarities about the text. It is always unfinished. Indian Literature does not comprise of all regional literature, just by taking each texts from various regions of India like Bengali, Gujarati, Tamil, Telugu will not encompass into Indian Literature. This kind of combination is more statistical in nature, while what we need is a critical inquiry. Thus Indian Literature is a 'problem' and not an unfinished compilation. In order to plunge into vast Indian Literature and draw some valid conclusions, we need to locate texts that might have similar strains of thought, find out which texts in past do they refer to and what future does it highlight for us and thus what are the roots that we clutch? Roots that help us grow larger, wider and make literature fruitful to reality and mirror the actual culture of nation and help nation's culture become intellectual in such a manner that it can appreciate art and aesthetics. There is a kind of literature written for the upliftment of the backward or weaker sections of society like Dalit literature, Women's literature and Queer literature, that is not our focus. Literature that depicts the very essence of being Indian, that portrays the cultural milieu of the country like some of the poems by Nissim Ezekiel, let us take for example, Poet, Lover and Bird watcher:

To force the pace and never to be still
Is not the way of those who study birds,
Or Women. The best poets wait for words.

Here the poet amalgamates all three roles of being the poet, the lover and the birdwatcher and notes the quality of patience. The Incredibility lies in the way the words are put to justify all three roles and still it is done so simply and with accurate subtlety and there is fun in reading the lines. Another such example is A.K. Ramanujan's Poetry, I have taken Self-portrait:

I resemble everyone but myself,
And sometimes see in Shop-windows,
Despite the well-known laws of optics,
The portrait of a stranger, date unknown,
Often signed in a corner by my Father.

Ramanujan notes how his self is constructed, he is not just an individual but others are also reflected in him, especially his father. Indian society has family at its core and thus identity of individual is interdependent with the family and others surrounding him.

One of the most prominent figure, a poet, a Nobel laureate, one might always want to go back to clutch our roots to is Rabindranath Tagore. Though the times in which he wrote is colonial India, we see the sprouting of Intelligence in India which is not of the nature of being colonized. The Indian Culture is such that it is always ready to grasp the best in other. During this time even Sanskrit literature had taken attention of the Europeans and was getting translated into English and gaining international platform. As Amit Chaudhuri notes:

Kalidasa was the court poet in king Vikramaditya's court in the fourth or fifth century A.D. and he became famous in nineteenth century Europe, especially for his play Sakuntala, which Jones translated and Goethe admired. Kalidasa was also to become Tagore's favourite poet, and this too, must surely owe something to the renewed attention directed to the long-dead poet by the Welshman in one of the earliest in a series of cultural collaborations that characterised the formation of Modern Indian Culture. (Chaudhuri.70)

Amit Chaudhuri in his essay, "The Flute of Modernity: Tagore and the Middle Class", seems to recover the modernism of the Tagore's times. He notes that "the awareness of tradition and heritage is accompanied not only by the vantage point of modernity and identity, but also by

a sense of loss and imprisonment.” (Chaudhuri.71). Tagore wrote a poem “Meghaduta” or “The Cloud Messenger” which is on Kalidasa’s poem Meghaduta. Tagore tries to revive what is lost. Our ancient glorifying ‘past’ and showcases intellectual and modern mind of colonial India, which has the culture of literary values of art, theatre, of reading and analysing. Here’s an excerpt from that poem:

Today is a dark day, the rain is incessant...
In a gloomy closed room, I sit alone
And read the Meghaduta. My mind leaves the room,
Travels on a free moving cloud , flies far and wide.
There is the Amrakuta Mountain,
There is the clear and slender reva river
Tumbling over stones in the vindhya foothills...

(Translated by William Radice)

Thus one of the major question posed is since when have we stopped taking recourse to ancient literature of India and why?

Amit Chaudhuri refers to biography of Tagore. His father Debendranath Tagore was the founding member of Brahmo-Samaj and he was very utopian in his nature, he had read Upanishads as well. It was time when Raja Rammohan Roy and Nehru’s Vision of India were in motion and Tagore’s songs are among the first and most profound utterances of a Secular Indian Sensibility, and they speak of the old world that is lost but is being transformed into something new. Here are the first two lines of the song *Ekhono taare chokhe dekhini/ shudhu baanshi shunechhi* :

I haven’t seen him with my eyes as yet,
I have only heard a flute playing.

These lines are translated by Amit Chaudhuri and he explains that they are written in the context of changing world of India. He dwells more on the Bengali Middle class sentiment and Tagore’s high philosophical poems, portraying the modernist sensibility. Even Gangeya Mukherji in his essay “Tagore: Transcending Post-Colonial Attitudes” sketches Tagore’s vision of India, which is not based on Nationalism of Patriotic kind, but based on Land which has high values which needs to be adhered to. Gangeya refers to one of his letter/essay written on Indian History and produced an English version in the Vishwa Bharati Quaterly in 1923:

We shall know for certain that just as it is futile mendicancy to covet the wealth of others in place of our own, so also to keep ourselves segregated and starved by refusing the gift which is the common heritage of man because it is brought to us by a foreign messenger, only make for utter destitution. Our western critics, whose own people, whenever confronted with non-western races in a close contact, never know any other solution of the problem but extermination or expulsion by physical force, and whose caste feeling against darker races is brutally aggressive and contemptuous, are ready to judge us with a sneering sense of superiority when comparing India's history with their own India's problem has been far more complex than that of the west, and I admit that our rigid system of social regulation has not solved it. For to bring order and peace at the cost of life is terribly wasteful, whether in the policy of government or of society.... I love India, not because I cultivate the idolatry of geography, not because I have had the chance to be born in her soil, but because she has saved through tumultuous ages the living words that have issued from the illuminated consciousness of her great sons : Satyam, Jnanam, Anantam Brahma, Brahma is truth, Brahma is wisdom, Brahma is infinite; Santam, Sivam, Advaitam, peace is in Brahma, goodness is in Brahma, and the unity of all beings.” (Tagore.42-46)

Thus Tagore’s high culture, nationalism, modernity and spirituality are fused in his work and this has inevitably divided modernity into fragments and so it’s been difficult to capture. For example Secular in present time has only one meaning, which is of the political domain, where people are allowed to follow any religion. The Second meaning which is lost is of Secular mind, related to “high cultural history”. Same is true with the word ‘Cosmopolitan’, which means varied diversity of people inhabiting a space. They are no more real terms of a state of mind, thought, idea, imagination or literary ambition. On this note Chaudhuri states that:

We have always been due to unique mixture of Nationalism, Marxism, and now Post-Coloniality in our Intellectual discourse uneasy with the Idea of an ontology or phenomenology of what ‘being Indian’ means: What it means to see, smell or touch as an Indian, or to live inside a dwelling, or to encounter a horizon, and how these experiences are not given but coterminous with the ‘secular’ in our history; and this uneasiness means that we feel far more comfortable defining ourselves in the

context of the 'secular', through the external marks and symbols that a powerful constitutional notion gives to us. (Chaudhuri.29)

Secular is occupied by politics and religion, and there is no space for culture in it. Secular should be addressed to culture and be separated from religion. Such culture would be able to appreciate, Tagore's Kirtan or Spirituality and can be moved by its art, aesthetics and spiritual immediacy without believing in the existence of that religion. In such a case we can also include Narsinh Mehta's poetry or Meera bai's Bhajan.

The West's view of India as a mystic India which is irrational, religious, full of magic and antiquity in nature needs to be altered. The exotic India that we have always offered to west, seemingly it turns that we have nothing else to offer to the consumerism of the International readership which is a market. Those writing in English either portray an exotic India or a Post-colonial India, the vernacular as the term used by Amit Chaudhuri "basha" writers do not speak of such India, but they are not given International readership and it is not a question of wide readership or winning a booker prize, it the question of the advent of marketing by leading publishing houses in the time of Globalisation. In this context Amartya Sen's *The Argumentative Indian*, may not be a significant work but it does focus on the problem of Indian Modernity. Chaudhuri writes about Sen thus:

Sen's purpose is to remind us that democracy and the secular inheritance we value in India today are not an accident, and neither are they merely a gift from the west." (Chaudhuri.100)

Sen puts forth the view of an Indian who is rational, scientific, secular and intellectual. There is a tradition of rational thought in India starting from King Akbar to Nehru to Raja Ramamohan Roy , Aryabhatta to Dr. Abdul Kalam and although there is radical growth in nineteenth century it has its roots in Indian Humanism. Through the intervention of different sects and races in India, changes, dissemination of knowledge and social mobility has taken place as the Indian has been in constant dialogue with the new and the modern. According to Chaudhuri in his essay "Argufying: On Amartya Sen and the deferral of an Indian Modernity":

Probably, one of the principal reasons that the word 'modern' is problematic for Indians, that modernity remains, in South Asia, an unofficial and potentially embarrassing reality in spite of being a hegemonic and foundational one, is its filial involvement with the "colonial" (Chaudhuri.105)

Here, the viewpoint that all the growth and development that happened in India is due to colonization, but what actually might have happened in last 500 years could be home-grown modernity, where the problematic moment of colonialism never occurred. Chaudhuri explains that Indians believe that modernity is half theirs and half authored elsewhere. Thus one more question posed is If modernity was manufactured by colonizer, where did the 'being Indian' or 'Indianness' as a distinct and fluid identity was constructed, which is not a subaltern colonized mind?

We thus come to some of the most important questions posed by Amit Chaudhuri, in the introduction itself titled "On Clearing Space". He foregrounds the question by saying that Indian English Writers may relate themselves, not to the post-colonial identity but to vernacular and ordinary life of India, "who finds it difficult to adhere to, or accept, the post-colonial intellectual's or writer's exclusive right in the present moment to define what the minority or marginal experience might be. Could there be marginal experiences, to do with the imagination, that are crucial to the life of the writer that post coloniality often finds itself ,unable to open up to; and does post-colonial theory become, paradoxically, an instructive and pedagogic discourse on marginality, providing an absolute definition of what it constitutes? Does the pressure of the marginal, in its turn, lead us towards affinities that may have little to do with identity and language?" (Chaudhuri.11)

First let us understand these questions. First he talks about Writers whose source and inspiration is the way India is, the present reality, culture, manners and life around and they write in the vernacular or even English language and portray, the Indianness that is the modern, secular, aesthetic and spiritual in nature are in the marginal domain of Indian Literature, in the sense that at the level of International readership of Indian Literature, they do not have space, so the viewpoint of being in minority is important to them. For these kind of writers , post-colonial identity is not appropriate, because they have not ingrained the sense of being 'colonized' by mind and culture or they are not writing about post-colonial experience of India in the light of Colonized India.

Post-Colonial theory on the other hand has become absolute in nature. A. Raghuramaraju in his essay, *Internal Project of Modernity and Post Colonialism*, seeks to point out an important limitation in Edward Said's discourse on colonialism, namely his failure in recognizing the internal tensions within east, or the internal project of modernity. In general, post colonialism studies the impact of colonizer and the colonized, of European discourse in non-western colonized countries. It looks at Identity of the decolonized people from the

perspective of them being in the influence of the colonizer's culture, and it establishes space for subaltern's to speak.

Inheritance of the status of subaltern, leads us to ignore the intellectual and secular movements within the nation. The notion that there is only one kind of modernity, and that is west's has been so ingrained, that the native modernist ideology is eclipsed. The habit of looking at ourselves as a product of colonization or macaulay's education makes us defile our on view of self in the mirror. We see our traditions, culture and literature of being 'low' in status. One such case is described by Chaudhuri, in his essay, "Poles of Recovery". He looks back to Michael Madhusudan Dutt, who is compared to Shakespeare's moor, and his struggle is of disowning and recovering Indianness. His ambition was to be a canonical 'English Poet' and so he converted to Christianity and slowly disowned his identity until he again turned back to Bengali language, literature and culture and wrote an epic poem, "Meghnadbadhakabya" he realized that Indian literature was a vast field of inspiration literary enterprise. He rewrites the episode of Meghnad from Ramayana, where Meghnad is the tragic protagonist. This is not a religious work, but secular work, where its aesthetics can be appreciated. Many such writers in regional literature, who were teachers of English Literature have turned to 'modern vernacular', to create their own literature. For example there is Qurratulain Hyder (Urdu), U.R. Anantha Murthy (Kannada), Mahashweta Devi (Bengali), Ambai (Tamil), or likes of A.K. Ramanujan who initially translated ancient tamil poetry and then wrote in English. Thus Post-colonial theory is inadequate in the sense that it does not look the experience of vernacular, native Indian English writer and his world in the marginal domain vis-à-vis the mainstream literature of European modernism or the post colonial literature of India. Thus here the theory of Post coloniality itself becomes the dominant mainstream framework for writes and in turn becomes oppressive in nature to India writers with vernacular. Modern, secular and aesthetic bent of mind. Thus Chaudhuri laments that:

I can say that what I have been resisting is not just this or that orthodoxy, but the terms of the argument as they are given to us today, with the so called 'bhasha' or 'Indian Language writers' on one-side, and Rushdie and the putative progeny on the other; and that 'modernity' rather than identity, authenticity or language (in that modernity itself produced a constitutive consciousness of these things), might be one way of shifting the focus , of remapping a history- modernity as a creator of

myths, fictions , and artistic practice, as a phase in our history, as a site under threat, as a mutating sign (Chaudhuri.13)

Through this Chaudhuri tries to bring to light diminishing readership and attention towards the sense of being Intellectual modern artistic and aesthetic Indian to becoming only a postcolonial product by reiterating just the post-colonial experience and sensibility. There is an urge to revive literature which is written in ample amount in vernacular or in english, that might project being Indian in more authentic way so that the artistic, aesthetic and modernist India and Indianness do not come under threat of becoming a mutating sign.

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