

THE WORLD OF SENSUALISM IN ROBIN S NAGANGOM 'S THE DESIRE OF ROOTS

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According to the Oxford Dictionary, “the word ‘Sensualism’ is a philosophical doctrine of the theory of knowledge, according to which sensations and perceptions are basic and most important forms of true cognition. It may oppose abstract ideas”. Sensuousness is a quality in poetry which affects the senses, i.e., hearing, seeing, touching, smelling and tasting. Sensuous poetry does not always present ideas and philosophical thoughts. It gives delight to senses, creates pictures to our eyes by presenting beautiful and colourful words, soothes our ears by its metrical music and melodious sounds, arouses the sense of smell and distinguishes between and appreciates different flavours by the presentation of varieties of words and so on. The quality of sensuousness can be traced back to the poets of the Romantic Period in English Literature. To a remarkable degree, the poets relied on the themes of nature/landscapes and nature with its flora and fauna became a significant subject of poetry. They described with sensuous nuance whatever they encountered in nature. One characteristic of this period was a shift from faith in reason to faith in the senses, feelings, imagination and adventure. Some poets of this period laid emphasis on the importance of sense perceptions and sensuous quality. They wrote poetry from the point of view of their relative susceptibility to sense impressions. Among them, the most accomplished sensuous poet was John Keats (1795-1821). Keats’s odes are famous for their sensuous quality which evokes feelings and emotions with colours and contours. For instance, the “Ode to a Nightingale”, contains the finest example of Keats's rich sensuousness. The lines where the poet expresses his strong urge for some Provençal wine from the fountain of the Muses appeal to both our senses of smell and taste. Flowers, the fruit-trees, the soft incense, the white hawthorn, the eglantine, the fast-fading violets, the fragrant musk-rose aromas--all this is a delight to our senses. Again, the “Ode on a Grecian Urn” abounds with a series of sensuous pictures--passionate men and gods chasing reluctant maidens, the flute-players piping their ecstatic music, the fair youth trying to kiss his beloved, the happy branches of the tree enjoying an eternal spring, etc. In the “Ode on

Melancholy”, again, we have several sensuous imageries like rain falling from a cloud above and reviving the drooping flowers below and covering the green hill in an "April Shroud". There is the morning rose; there are colours produced by the reflection of sunlight on wet sand; and there is the wealth of "globed peonies". In the "Ode to Autumn", the charm of the season has been described with all its sensuous appeal. The scenery, the fruit and flowers, the hazels with their kernel, the bees suggesting honey--all these appeal to our sense of taste and smell. Unanimously, Keats always selects the objects of his description and imagery with a keen eye on their sensuous appeal. Keats's pictorial senses are not vague or suggestive but made explicit with the wealth of artistic details. Every line is full with sensuous beauty. No other poet except Shakespeare could show such a mastery of language and felicity of sensuousness. Sensuousness in P.B. Shelley is entirely of the senses of sight and hearing. He is known for his lyrical quality that appeals to our ears. In the "To a Skylark", Shelley speaks of the setting sun encircling the bird in a golden aura and halo, and the clouds brighten just above the bird. The entire picture presents a sensuous, visual and auditory image of beauty and lyricism. The image of a blooming rose diffusing its fragrance is perhaps the most sensuous and lyrical of those used in the poem. The image of a high born lady sitting in solitary in a palace tower comforting her soul with music as delightful as love that overwhelms her heart is touching and heart-wrenching. The ecstasy of the song can evoke a romantic melody in the heart of the listener. The "Ode to the West Wind" is full of lyrical quality formed by the rhythmic and rhyming pattern of each line. The alliteration, the assonance, and the cadence of terza rima solace our ears. The image of the dead leaves driven like spectre from an enchanter; yellow, black, pale and hectic red, azure sister of the spring--all give delight to our sense of sight. There are a number of images in the poem which help build up to render gratification to our senses. More or less, almost all the romantic poets employed the attribute of sensuousness in their poetry.

The present paper is an attempt to assess the sensual aspects of a Manipuri poet, Robin S Ngangom, a Meitei by birth who has tried his hands in writing poetry in English and made some significant contributions to Indian Writing in English by publishing three volumes of poetry: *Words and Silence* (1988) published by *Writers workshop*, *Time's Crossroads* (1994) and *The Desire of Roots* (2006) published by *Chandrabhaga Society, Cuttack*. Robin is one of the most representative contemporary Indian English poets of the North-Eastern India. He has been publishing his poems profusely in the leading journals of India and abroad. He is a poet who believes in "the poetry of feeling which can be shared, as opposed to mere cerebral poetry". This paper will present the sensual aspects found abundantly in the poet's volume of poetry, *The Desire of Roots* which was published by *Chandrabhaga Society, Cuttack* in 2006. The volume contains two sections-- *The Book of Lusts* and *Subject and Objects*. Throughout these two sections, the subject matters and the languages deal with sensuousness and can be found in the dedication itself-- "To my father and mother, who by making love, also made poetry". Some of the poems are riddled with raw images of sexual

sensualities. Due to the prevalent abrasive conditions in his homeland and the anxieties the poet felt, he wanted “to explore the ornate and sentimental poetry”. Among them the “Primary Schools” is a poem dealing with the poet’s childhood days and his childhood friends. The innocence in childhood days are sometimes dangerous and it is this innocence that leads the poet’s naive friend to explore the world from childhood innocence to adulthood, a mystic atmosphere. His innocence is tainted at the cost of his experience. We are readily reminded of William Blake’s *Songs of Innocence and Experience*. In these short sentences, the poet brings out the vivid images of sensuousness through the projection of terse and succinct words...

I can see the naive boy

Who couldn’t read the dirty word

spelt on the ground by his older friends

in the calligraphy of randy boyhood,

and, later, obsessed with that moist idea

explored his girl cousins fervently. (13)

The above words affect the senses of sight and taste. We are made to imagine a realistic picture of the prevailing situation in these very words as if it happens just before our own eyes. And a kind of tasting and experiencing the unexplored human physical body is crafted beautifully through the verbal choices. In the same vein, Robin reiterates his boldness in using such candid words like 'clitoris' without hesitation and the word 'clitoris' is described as stimulating and exhilarating in the poem, the “Writer”...

For example, the word ‘clitoris’

would be as exhilarating as uttering:

“the revolution is a farce”. (14)

We can vividly picturize the sensuality of the word “clitoris” and its energy to boost and make flow the human blood in our body. Such is the potential of the author in invoking an arousing sensation in reading through the lines.

In the "To a Woman from Southern Hills", the poet goes on attributing a woman from Southern Hills like this...

Woman with the soft voice

Whispering wind among trees

I know why you run away from me,

fading from leaf to hill,

pursued by my tarnished name. (18)

The melodious, mild and soft voice of the woman brings home such an imagery which provokes our sense of hearing. Such musical expressions are soothing to our ears and we enjoy its rhythm. The words give delight to the sensation of the ear/listening.

The poet's candidness can be traced from the poem, the "Summer" where he compares the boredomness and listlessness of summer season in various ways arousing our dormant senses...

Lassitude settles,

On the bitch stretched on the roadside,

the folk singer plucking rain from blind strings,

the mind deadened by lust on a street

as sexless as a stockinged nun,

and summer passes again with the plums

and young women

sweet and bitter with juice. (27)

The conceits and the imageries here are meticulously presented. They are crystal clear as picturized in our mind's eye. The far-fetched images of lassitudes being compared to a "bitch stretched on the roadside, the folk singer plucking rain from blind strings, the mind

deadened by lust on the street, the sexless as a stockinged nun” are bold images which give vent to arouse our senses-- seeing, hearing and touching. Furthermore, young women are drawn parallel to sweet and bitter juice which is again a symbol of sensuous side of tasting and experiencing. The expressions like lust, bitch, sexless, sweet, bitter, juice are luscious and sexy which immediately provoke and kindle our senses.

The “It Has Become Dangerous to Love You” is a poem full of surprises and sensuousness. The poet now becomes prey to the love of his ladylove. He knows that being in love with her is dangerous but he is willing to kiss her and make love with her. Each word in the poem is heavily adorned with sensuousness...

Everywhere, poets only want to live,
make love and sing
but this one becomes hysterical
at the memory of a woman's smell.

Those are lips others have kissed
but it doesn't have to make sense
when love is running out of time
like a password which bears someone's name,
an overcoat
that gets older every January.
I am already missing your wet hair
on this winter day
which hinges on your laughter
twenty minutes away. (39)

The words—“make love, woman’s smell, lips others have kissed, your wet hair”, all these connote sensual and sexual characteristic of the poet and his desire to make the minds of the readers explore into his world of sensualism.

There was something alive then,
vibrant through the warm channels
of lips and moisture,
like woman and blood
not wood, linen, or paper,
which cannot be even cold to the touch
in order to be warm again,
not bloodless objects of affection
to fondle or merely look at. (45)

The above lines are from the poem, the ‘Loneliness’ where the poet describes his loneliness and solitude. Amidst his seclusion, something lively images occupy his mind, some sensual and sensuous images fill his mind to keep at bay his loneliness. The expressions like warm channels of lips and moisture likened to woman and blood which are again compared to soft and furry objects connote the sensuous and sensual world of the poet’s lonely mind. Such expressions immediately arouse the luscious and voluptuous nature of our senses-- the sense of touch, fondle; the melodious, soft and soothing sound; the taste of soft and glossy moist lips are words used as a part of sexual orientation.

The “City of Baked Clay” is a poem taken from the second section of “Subject and Objects” of the volume. Here, the poet describes his relationship with objects represented by many things, many incidents, and many situations. Particularly in this poem, the poet posits his view about a city called Bomdila in Arunachal Pradesh where the poet likes to sit and dream of his beloved. His description of a full moon night in a quiet sky stirs up a sense of longing for love and intimacy into the readers’ mind. The readers are taken into a sensual world of the poet where the poet dreams of his beloved’s pushed up breasts bright with wet moonlight. Immediately, we are aroused at the thought of wet, bright and white breasts in a full moon night. The very pictures make us delectation and exciting and provide the sufficient pleasance and gratification to our senses...

A full moon,
a quiet night,
a sky which has lost its way,
the blazing rhododendron trail
to Bomdila still far away.
When all eyes closed
I dreamt of your breasts
Bright with wet moonlight. (61)

The “The Strange Affair of Robin S Ngangom” is the longest poem in the whole volume. At first we are baffled by the eery affairs of the poet with various objects. Objects can be anything according to the poet. Being a poem with multi-themes, it deals with the problems of homelessness, insurgency, atrocity, love, crimes, patriotism, etc. The poet is puzzled at such situations. Yet at the end, his strange affairs become accustomed and part of his nature. The mutilated situations become hackneyed/clichéd in his own homeland and no one bothers about, everyone seems exulting. It reveals the poet’s uncertainties and insecurities of the fake sense of belongingness. Therefore, the poet asks his beloved...

Hands filled with love,
I touched your healing breasts.
Like the beaten-up past
scars appeared on your body.
I ask, who branded the moon's ski of my love?
Who used you like a toy doll?
Only my hands disappear and return to me
mutilated with guilt. (67)

Though the subject matter of the lines conveys a harsh reality faced by the poet and his beloved, immediately we are enthralled by his world of sensualism where the used words and expressions suggest a sense of pleasure to our senses. The words give delight to our sight, pleasure to our ears with the use of mellow words like “healing breasts, moon’s skin of my love, toy doll”, etc.

Yet again in another poem, the “Native Land”, the poet narrates the tyrannous conditions of his native land. He reports every incident with minute details. In one instance, he describes the reality faced by women folks in their homeland because of *Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act (AFSPA), 1958*. "The Act has violated human rights in the regions of its enforcement, where arbitrary killings, torture, cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment and enforced disappearances have happened". The women are widowed by the target killing of male folks. The poet speaks about the anarchies perpetrated by the so called law-makers and politicians. The power lies in the hands of few people and the few holds the reins like playing puppets with strings...

And the women heavy with seed,
their soft bodies mown down
like grain stalk during their lyric harvests;
if they wore wildflowers in their hair
while they waited for their men,
I didn't care anymore. (81)

Here, the imageries are worth commendable. The women heavy with seed are compared to expectant mothers who are like stooping mown down stalks full of grains ready for harvesting. The comparison is vivid and calls to our mind a picture of raw sensuousness. The words are lucid as well as lurid and give gratification to our senses. This shows the poet’s craftsmanship in his language usage to explain the fullness of a pregnant woman.

All the poems carry volumes which more or less contribute to the cognition of sensualities and sensualism. The expressions of the lines do not present philosophical thoughts but provoke and arouse our senses of seeing, hearing, touching, smelling and tasting. The imageries play musical sounds and perfect rhythms to the ears, present beautiful and

colourful pictures and scenes to our eyes, provide the ability to taste and feel the sweet, bitter and sour of the words, makes us smell and enjoy the fragrance. Robin, though a realist in its true essence, is a sensualist at heart. He transports us from this world of realism to the world of sensualism. He gives us gratification though the content is harsh and stark. Through his choices of words and lexical arrangement in the poems, he strikes a chord in the readers triggering sensual emotions.

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