



The Image of Dying River in the Select Poems of *K. Satchidanandan*

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K. Satchidanandan a poet of national and international repute has penned a series of poems in which the image of the dying river haunts the readers. The present study aims to expose the pitiable state of rivers in the country through the analysis of poems such as “The Peasant Who Committed Suicide Speaks of Rivers,” “The Boatman of the Dead River,” and “The Last River.” All these poems are vituperative criticism on the modern culture of people living in the nation. Rivers which were once the water bowl of the nation flowed honey to quench the thirst of people. From those overflowing rivers, all the creatures including animals and humans have tasted the elixir of life. Its unending love is always the source of inspiration for the artists of all kinds. But as the capitalistic creeds began to dominate the rivers become spots where man could dump the waste materials. Thus the once beautiful rivers began to be filled with the waste of factories, E-wastes, plastic and many more. Apart from this the money minded man began to loot the river by plundering the sand beds of the river, for building concrete bungalows for families. All these looting and dubbing of waste have made Indian rivers mere shadows of their glorious past. In the poem, “The Last River,” Satchidanandan draws the image of a river which bleeds blood instead of water. He says:

The last river had
blood in place of water.
It was boiling hot like lava.
The last lambs that drunk from it
fell dead without a bleat.
The bird that flew across
fainted and fell into the river. (1-7)

The intensity of the poetic lines makes the readers to realize the way the rivers are destroyed by the greedy men. The poisonous content emitted through the factory waste and the waste of the garbage

has made the majority of Indian rivers toxic and highly dangerous to eco system. The report of the central pollution control board stating that in the last five years the number of rivers defined as polluted in India has risen from 121 to 275 and it shows the fact how Indian rivers have become almost extinct.

The poet's concern for the rivers in the state of Kerala is best revealed in the poem "The Peasant Who Committed Suicide Speaks of Rivers." The state, Kerala with forty four rivers is often considered as the land of rivers. The culture of the state is flourished through these river banks and the artists resonate the beauty of these rivers in the different art forms it possess. Kerala was once known for its paddy fields which were evergreen as the water from these rivers used for irrigation purpose. The farmers of the state have extensively depended upon the rivers of the state for proper irrigation. But in the modern times as the rivers become more or less extinct, the beauty of the paddy fields also begins to fade. The agricultural sector in the state has perished completely and the reports of peasant suicide have begun to fill the news media regularly. Satchidanandan through this poem gives voice to one such peasant who committed suicide. The poet gives voice to the soul of the peasant who has committed suicide and he meditates over the beauty of the rivers in the initial part of the long poem. The evergreen memories of the late rivers in the state Kerala, fill the initial part of the poem. The soul of the dead peasant recollects how the yester year rivers fed the people lavishly. For the children of the state, the river was the cradle and it played lullaby. Its breast milk has nourished the newborn baby. For the adults the main rivers of the state like Periyar, Pamba and Kabini are the arteries and nerves of the human body. With oneness, they have led their life in the midst of nature. The traditional art forms of the state like Kathakali, Teyyam, Sopana Music, Mohiniyattam and Mappila Songs reverberate the divine beauty of the rivers in the state.

The poem remembers how the divinity of the river encompassed the soul of the entire state. But the time has distanced man from all his affinities with nature and river. His greedy self lost in the world of profit, began to fix prize tags for each and every particles in the nature. The poet gives voice to the soul of the dead peasant in narrating the drastic change that took place in the behavior of man towards nature:

Then the trumpeting forests
mowed down by the killers
pierced the rivers' laughter with their tusks,
then the sand that used to ride the water
with the fish and the snake
began to travel on the wheels of greed. (63-68)

The rivers in Kerala have become victims of the sand mafia and the fact is sharply pointed out by the poet in these lines. The devastating effect of sand mafia could be vividly seen throughout the rivers of the state. The once grand Pampa, Kabini, Periyar become mere rivulets. Due to the excessive loot of sand, the river "Nila" which is always a source of inspiration for the poets has become mere dry land with pebbles bathing in the sunlight. Though the court has denied the permission to take sand from the rivers of the state considering its devastating effect it causes to the rivers, the sand mafia in Kerala with the support of police as well as politicians continues to loot the rivers making them mere corpses.

The death of the rivers in the state has adversely affected the peasants as their agricultural crops beginning to die one after the other. The paddy fields which were once the main attractions of the state become mere barren land as water for irrigation is not available. The state has witnessed the death of many peasants in the agricultural sector due to the failure of crops. Satchidanandan concludes the poem by giving voice for the soul of the peasant who wishes to see his mother river

filled with cool water with the blessing of nature to quench its thirst and helping the barren land to sprout healthy off springs. The poet says:

My soul will not rest until
our rivers again fill with cool waters
like the moonlight on the full moon night,
until the drums of the waterfalls
rouse the dead forests, until
the hammer and the plough tame
the venomous arrogance of the
thousand-hooded Kaliya,
until this dear parched earth
soaked in my blood and marrow
sings the fertile song of the ancients once again. (101-111)

The devastating effect of modern life style draped in the cloth of money, has already consumed much of the natural resources. The need of the hour is to protect the remaining rivers from being polluted. The message that K.Satchidanandan has conveyed in the poems carries weight, as the tussle between different states in India in the name of water increases day by day.

References

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