

The Creative Launcher

An International, Peer Reviewed, Refereed, E- Journal in English

Vol. III & Issue VI (February- 2019)

Treatment of Mountains in Indian English Poetry

Dr. K. Balachandran

Prof. of English (Retd),

Annamalai University

64/1, Subramaniam Street

Chidambaram 608001

Tamilnadu, India

DOI: 10.53032/tcl.2019.3.6.02

Abstract

Literature is not only a mirror of (human) life but also of nature. Nature is one of the important aspects of this world. Without nature, human life or animal life is impossible. That much relevance nature has in this world. To some it is nothing; to some it is some objects; for some it is supreme like God. Wordsworth's pantheism is well known. He could see God in various forms of nature. All people are not like him. C.N. Annadurai, one of the leaders of Tamil country said he could see God in the laughter of poor people. Nature includes its various forms like mountains, hills, rivers, ponds, seas, canals, waterways, fruits, flowers, trees etc. Many poets both Indian and foreign have sung of these as their themes in their poetry. Mountain is also taken for treatment in poetry, drama, novel and short story. Mountains not only guard a country like India where, on the northern side, the Himalayas is like a wall giving protection to the people of India. They are the birth place for many a river. Indian poets have taken mountains / hills also for treatment in their poems. The present paper analyses some poets' treatment of mountains in their writings.

Keywords: Protection, Love light, Soul's living, Spirituality, Orology

Mr. Rana Pratap Nandi in his poem, "How Green was My Valley!" (*Chants of Peace*, p.178) records his experiences while visiting Cherrapunjee, one of the highest mountain peaks, where there will be immense rain. Though it reminisces his boyhood escapades, it records a very shocking event in his life in the mountain pool. On exam Sundays along with the warden, they used to look for the crooks of the trees; used to pluck berries with squirrels and birds; used to recite Poetry and chase apparitions. The beautiful huts are there with a coat of coal and limestone dust. He traced the trail of the river where truant boys indulged in merry - making with fear of the master's cane. While recalling the half cooked picnic which he loved also records the mountain pool which swallowed his friend and almost him. Luckily he wasn't dragged in - washed away by it. Now the scene has a sea change - the mighty falls are gone; in lieu of them resounding quarries. He could hear the old Kong Yulin lament, "How

The Creative Launcher

An International, Peer Reviewed, Refereed, E- Journal in English

Vol. III & Issue VI (February- 2019)

Green was My Valley!” The poem laments three important events. i) The once green valley is now a quarry. ii) His friend was swallowed by the mountain pool. iii) But somehow he escaped from being swallowed by the mountain pool. Though mountain and its surroundings bring associations to the poet, it brings sad associations. The poem sounds elegiac.

In the poem, “Sunrise on the Kunchinjunga” A. Christina Albers (*The Golden Treasury of Indo Anglican Poetry*, pp 178-179), pays rich tribute to Kunchinjunga, “the Himalaya’s Queen”. How is she? Vapours rise in the morning skies, clothed in purple glory. Love – light glows on the Eternal Snows upon the summits hoary which is calm and serene; returns the heaven’s greeting in white robes. Bathed in golden light, earth and sky meet. Morning dews and mellow hues paint her (the mountain’s) cheeks with fairy fingers. The breaking day sends the first faint ray of love’s undying fountains; “the heart feels the thrills/ of the voice from the hills/ And the Soul that dwells in the mountains.” (p.179)

Thus, the poem is a praise of Nature (like Wordsworth), how the sunrise beautifies the peaks of Kunchinjunga in the Himalayan ranges. It is a lovely description of Himalaya’s Queen. Though the poem is simple in 24 lines, it is a rich tribute to Kunchinjunga. It is not sun light which one sees on her; it is gentle love – light: it is love’s undying fountains. So it prescribes that there should be light in matters of love and one can voice from the hills! The poet answers positively. Where does the soul dwell? To people who have doubt about this, the last line in the poem answers, “The Soul that dwells in the mountains”. Human heart feels the thrills of the voice from the hills (part of the mountains). Thus Nature (mountain) helps humanity for love light, love feeling, love’s undying fountain and soul’s living.

M.R. Venkatesh in his poem “Lone Flower in the Hill” (*Contemporary Poets*, p 123) celebrates the lone flower in the hill very befittingly. It gazes into the sunshine. Lying between boulders it radiates all alone.

Who is the visitor there? A butterfly. What it does? It brings message from down the valley’s passage where the relatives of flowers dwell! The lone flower (in the hill) feels happy knowing that her relatives (other flowers in the valley) are well. How beautiful is the imagination of the poet! In the last verse para (The poem is penned in three regular stanzas of 4 lines in each stanza), there are two more surprises for the readers. (i) The wild grass which grows there, gives respect to the lone flower which is so perfect! See how the objects in nature (grass and flower) respect each other lovingly. Does it happen between two neighbouring countries or between two families? (ii) “The clouds move to get a glimpse of the pretty damsel of their dreams” (p.123). The pretty damsel is none but the lone flower in the hill.

Thus the poem celebrates both a flower and a hill. It has become special because it is on a hill! The flowers in the valley don’t get that special importance. So the hill becomes special because of a lone flower and the lone flower because of its place on a hill. So both enjoy freedom, happiness and she (hill) spreads them to others.

The Creative Launcher

An International, Peer Reviewed, Refereed, E- Journal in English

Vol. III & Issue VI (February- 2019)

H.D. Sethna in his poem “Waterfalls” (*The Golden Treasury of Indo- Anglian Poetry*, pp. 254-255) celebrates waterfalls “over the naked hills /Mute rocky night” (p.255) How is the waterfall? It is thunderous. Its outpour is mighty like the effulgence the skiey vastness bore in the world’s dawn. It is like a Titan’s throw of his great mace.

The rays of the moon – the white flow is like a cascade over a crag which is beauteous as the grace of a leaping stag. Amidst the wild amaranth (flower that never fades) blowing the waterfall is lost in the sylvan stillness. The white birds on trees glow in pale silences. The warm – limbed waterfall over the naked hill’s mute rocky night spills its rapturous splendour. It, out of solitudes’ dark womb brings to birth voices of virginal joy on this hoary earth.

Here the waterfall is like a woman warm limbed and the hill is like a man. As a woman gets immense satisfaction and sexual pleasure when she falls on her man, the waterfall when it (she) falls on the naked hills, gets rapturous splendour. A world without men is useless for women and vice versa. In the same way, waterfall without a mountain /hill is useless and a mountain/ hill without a waterfall is useless. Indirectly both are interdependent like men and women. This is beautifully brought out in six regular stanzas of 4 lines each. The description is highly appreciable and appropriate.

Nilmoni Phookan, a poet from Assam in his poem, “Only the Sound of Stillness” (*One Hundred Indian Poets: Signatures*, pp.224-225, translated from Asamiya by D.N. Bezbaruah) describes how a dry cough sailing in the wind over the earth dash “against the cold mountain” (p.224) From where does it come? From a niche in the rock in the cold mountain. It splinters and drops down in the hairy darkness of a flock of grazing sheep. The sheep skip and their burning hairy darkness scatter numberless bits of cough; fall on the branches of a denuded tree: stick to the dry blades of grass until the sun disappears. To another field, the sheep scamper.

Some round words vapourised and flew away, flitting to and fro across the telegraph wires. There is stillness of a chunk of wax and skeleton; “some nameless old woman / Over the longevity of time/ Only the sound of stillness”. (p.225) Can stillness have a sound? Can stillness echo? Mountain gives life to nature and human beings. But there is a difference here. Here it symbolises the sound of stillness.

Nilim Kumar in his poem, “Shillong, 16th April’89” (*Signatures*, p.439 Translated from the Assamese by Pradip Khataniar) compares the crystal body of the rock to a nude girl! The narrative is yellowish! “The world’s hardest rock was sleeping / under a white pine tree”. He admits that the yellow intoxication of whisky brought him to this rock! Moonlight fills the cracks and crevices of the rock. “The crystal body of the rock was sparking like a nude girl” (p. 439). Yellowish wind whirs in the den of the ear.

The poet narrates that his shoes were becoming pale in the moonlight. When he writes “Everybody/ wanted as if to be nude in the moonlight, my clothes were restless”. (p.439), will any sensible individual agree with him? May be the “Intoxication” changed his mind – “be nude in the moonlight”. He further allows his reel. “The rock was folding up getting

The Creative Launcher

An International, Peer Reviewed, Refereed, E- Journal in English

Vol. III & Issue VI (February- 2019)

twisted/ bending towards my lips.” Is this possible? “Impossibility, thy name is Poetry” seems to be the poetic tenet to this poet. When he writes, “The world’s hardest rock was/ becoming softer for two seconds” under a yellow wind, moonlight is highly imaginative! A wild thorn suddenly pierced his feet and blood spurted out. What a wonder! “...that my blood was not red, it was yellow instead”. The question likely to be asked is - Are people sleeping? Are they yellowish? Or are people ready to become sleepy and yellowish?

Bharathiyar, the patriotic poet from Tamil country in his poem “Our Country” praises the Himalayas in the opening two lines, “Himalaya is our mountain/ There is no equal to this mountain”. In his poem “Bharatha Country” he eulogizes, “Let us stroll in the silver capped snow mountain”. In the “Bharatha Nation” poem, he gives a catalogue of the nation’s worthy fortunes; “Rivers are many, mountain springs are many/ Breeze is immense and mountains are many”. (p.21)

Bharathidasan, another revolutionary poet from Tamil Country speaks high about the slope of Sanjeevi Mountain.

Cuckoos will be singing; beautiful
Peacocks will be dancing; odourful
Wind be coolbreezing. Mirror like
Mountain springs; fruit trees in plenty
Fragrance from flowers; Honey bees
While sucking, humming in ecstasy
Hunting women used to go for play
Forest brave men used to love - marriage
Steer all these in your heart! This place
Only is called the slope of Sanjeevi Mountain. (p.1)

Lalitha Kumari, in her poem, “Lord Srinivasa, the Cynosure” (*Frames of Fancy* p.47) celebrates the Seven Hills (Tirupathy) and the Lord of Seven Hills (Venkadachala Perumal) in 7 regular stanzas of 4 lines in each stanza. She addresses aptly, “Thoul Lord of Seven Hills, the most pompous/ Of Gods on this side of river Indus” (p.47). She asserts that no temple exists with such splendour and no God matches His grandeur!

When she describes the Lord, it is inclusive of the Seven Hills. The Lord moves along the Thirumada (car) streets to the rhythm of clarinets and drum beats. He presents a picture of great beauty which surpasses any description and comment. While He comes in the car streets during the Bramotsava (10 day festival during the Tamil month, Puratasi i.e in September), people should enjoy the scene - if only one is blessed, one can see and experience that divine/ spiritual ecstasy! The real flower garlands are huge, attractive and colourful. What the flowers do? Not only they beautify the Lord and send pleasant odour but also vie with the dazzling large diamonds studded in His ornaments. What a beautiful imagination!

The Creative Launcher

An International, Peer Reviewed, Refereed, E- Journal in English

Vol. III & Issue VI (February- 2019)

The poetess further details that His forms are many and His names myriad. What devotees do? They buy His pictures and frame them in their favourite frames. Some call him Vishnu, some Bala (Thiripurasundari a, Goddess). Why do devotees throng Thirupathi? To seek redress to their grief and grievances, pain and palliation, quail and qualm, rage and raid, sabotage and sack, taboo and taint, ulcer and under- world, vainglory and vandalism, wail and wastage. Lalitha Kumari is able to see the difference between other Gods and the Lord of the Seven Hills. There are regional Gods; seasonal Gods too. The Seven Hills' God has immense power. His powerful sway transcends time and place. There is no limit to His grace also. Is it that easy to reach the Lord of the Seven Hills? The poetess says that one should cross the six hills to reach Him and subdue the six foes to please him. And when people go before Him, though for a few seconds, only the heart remains. He comes and occupies the heart of devotees. In the last (7th) stanza, the poetess puts forth all she has been longing - it is not her longing but also the longing of any devotee before the Lord of Seven Hills.

“Lord, enchain my mind to your lotus feet
Drench me full in the rain of your kindness”.

When anyone goes to the temple (mosque or church) one should surrender one's mind to the lotus feet of God Almighty for getting His rain of kindness.

“If you condescend to give me succour
Against all odds, the world I can conquer ” (p.47)

One who surrenders to God, will get all succour, against all odds and also conquer the world. The poem ends with a ray of hope that is, what is wanted in this world to everyone. Though the poem has “Lord Srinivasa, the Cynosure” as its title, it can be even “Lord of Seven Hills” since, it is about the Lord of Thirupathy. Govinda! Govinda! Thirupathy Venkadachalathikku Govinda!Govinda!

Conclusion

So in the nine poems (by nine poets) one can see the treatment of mountain or hill. Rana Pratap Nandi, though reminisces his early boyhood experiences in Cherrapunjee, later records the present plight - the green valley has become a quarry; his friend was swallowed by the mountain pool and his narrow escape brings pathetic fervour. Christina Albers' tribute to Kunchinjunga, “the Himalaya's Queen” is beatific for its gift of love light, love feeling and soul's living. R. Venkatesh's tribute to both the lone flower and the Hill spread the fervour of freedom and happiness; from which the human beings have to learn to follow them. H.D. Sethna's description of the warm - limbed waterfall over the naked hills takes us to the sexual congress of a woman with a man - it is rapturous splendour - a world without men is useless for women and vice versa; stressing same sex marriage and union is nonsensical whichever high body dictates. Learn it from nature to be bisexual. Nilmoni Phookan is of the opinion that mountains give life to Nature and human beings, symbolising sound of stillness. Nilim Kumar's description of “the crystal body of the rock was sparkling like a nude girl” has yellowish fervour. Bharathiyar's eulogy of Himalayas is highly patriotic, enkindling the

The Creative Launcher

An International, Peer Reviewed, Refereed, E- Journal in English

Vol. III & Issue VI (February- 2019)

patriotic fervour in the people who have been like slaves. Bharathidasan's encomium to the slopes of Sanjeevi Mountain has treasures in a mountain with a romantic fervour. Lalitha Kumari's treatment of Seven Hills (Thirupathy) has spiritual fervour. Let us do 'girivalam' and be happy and peaceful.

References

- Albers, A. Christina. "Sunrise on the Kunchinjunga", *The Golden Treasury of Indo - Anglian Poetry*, Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi, 1970, 10th Reprint 1998, pp.178-179.
- Bharathidasan, "Sanjeev Parvathathin Saral", *Bharathidasan Kavithaigal*, Manivasagar Publications, Chennai, 1992. p.1.
- Bharathiyar, "Bharatha Nadu" (pp. 20-21), "Bharatha Desam" (pp.21-22), "Engal Nadu" (pp.23-24), *Bharathiyar Kavithaigal*, Poompuhar Publications, Chennai, 1976, 3rd Reprint, 1981.
- Kumar, Nilim. "Shillong, 16th April 89", *One Hundred Indian Poets: Signatures*, Ed.K.Satcidanandan, National Book Trust, India, 2000, 4th Reprint, 2008, p. 439.
- Lalitha Kumari, V. "Lord Srinivasa, the Cynosure" *Frames of Fancy*, published by V. Lalitha Kumari, 5-21-13611, 2/14, Brodipet, Guntur, A. P, 2014, p.47.
- Nandi, Rana Pratap. "How Green was My Valley" *Chants of Peace*, Eds.P. Gopichand & P. Nagaseela. Authors Press, New Delhi, 2016, p.178.
- Phookan, Nilmoni. "Only the Sound of Stillness" *Signatures, op.cit.*, pp. 224-225.
- Sethna, H.D. "Waterfalls" , *The Gloden Treasury of Indo - Anglian Poetry op.cit.*, pp. 254-255.
- Venkatesh, R. "Lone Flower in the Hill", *Contemporary Poets*, ed. M.S. Venkata Ramaiah, Bizz Buzz Bangalore, 2007. p. 123.