

Yearning For The Mountains: Apprehending The Profound Longing And Persistent Desire To Return Back To The Root In Nini Lungalang’s “Going Home”

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Abstract:

This paper aims to study the lifestyle of people dwelling in the two different worlds of the city and the mountains, through the select poem for analysis, “Going Home”, by Nini Lungalang. Lifestyle and environment can influence and affect a person’s life and behavior, and model and fashion it accordingly. The lifestyle, ethical values, ideologies and code of conduct of the humans living in the cities is incompatible and directly opposed to the lifestyle, code of conduct, ideologies and ethical values of the same humans residing in the lap of nature, in the mountains and valleys. Life in the mountains is comparatively simple and peaceful than life in the big cities, which is always challenging and demanding, with never-ending cut-throat competitions and hustle and bustle. There is a much bigger competition and tussle going on among the city people for almost everything in the cities, and the leading cause behind this ceaseless competition is their greed and growing materialism. In the poem “Going Home”, Nini Lungalang has tried to portray the vexations, fright and revulsion of her poetic persona who became a part of the terrifying city life, and this inevitably resulted into a desperate longing and persistent desire to go back to her native mountains, far away from the horrifying city life. Thus, this paper aims to explore how Nini Lungalang through her simple and poignant way of writing, with innocent tone and efficient language, has depicted the above specified issue in the select poem by astutely rejecting the ways and world of the city people.

Keywords: terrifying city, mountains, home, return, holy, sanctuary, unchanging, natural laws.

Introduction:

Nini Lungalang is an extraordinarily creative and inspiring poet from the North-East of India, Nagaland, who has to her credit some of the outstanding piece of magnificent poems widely appreciated and studied by people from all over the world. She is a very simple person who tries to express her coherent feelings through her writings in a dignified and simple way, opting unembellished language and straightforward expressions. Nini Lungalang says in an interview: “If you’ve read my poems, you might have noticed that I avoid metrical writing because I feel it detracts from what I’m really trying to say. I don’t use rhymes, I feel it makes ideas stilted although sometimes it unconsciously creeps in. when it does, I accept it but I don’t make an effort to rhyme. I feel every thought has its own rhythm and you have to catch it, that takes real work.” (Tellis) Born in the mountains of Nagaland, Nini Lungalang grew up embracing nature, bound by a harmonious, peaceful and blissful environment. But later on she went to the metropolitan city of Delhi and from University of Delhi completed her higher studies. Perhaps it was during this time, or might be at some later point in time, she became a part of the city life. Regarding her poems, Nini herself admits: “I am a very private person and these are very intimate thoughts...” (Tellis). And critics and writers are of the opinion that- “The poems capture Nini’s whole being, animating her personal life through her words...” (Assumi). Therefore, the select poem for analysis “Going Home” can be taken as the poet’s way of denouncing and repudiating the unnatural and artificial city life, and advocating for the tranquil and amicable lifestyle of her mountains of Nagaland. Thus, this paper aims to apprehend the poet’s profound longing and persistent desire to go back to the root, which is her native mountains, rejecting the petrifying city life.

Discussion:

In the poem, “Going Home”, Nini Lungalang talks about the harsh reality of city life. She throws light to the

fabricated lifestyle and hypocrisy of the people living in the cities and compares it to that of the amicable lifestyle and peaceful environment of the mountains. The poetic persona in the poem, which can also be regarded as the poet herself, overtly expresses how terrified she is, after briefly being a part of the unnatural city life, owned by the hypocrites. Thus, she has decided to go to her root; her home in the mountains. The poem is divided into four stanzas and has been pen down in a very simple and lucid language in free verse.

The poem begins with the poetic persona announcing and addressing to someone, most probably her beloved, she has left in the city and is now returning back to her home in the mountains. However, the person to whom she is addressing has not been explicitly mentioned in the poem, as the opening lines says:

“I’ve left the city, though you are there-

I am going back to my mountains.

Though you are there, I cannot return” (lines: 1-3)

Perhaps it is her beloved or someone dear to her with whom she had been living for quiet sometime in the city and has developed a deep relation with fond memories. Despite the fact that her beloved person is still in the city, she cannot return back and is determined to go back to her home in the mountains. “Mountains” here can be interpreted as representing the mountains of Nagaland, the home of the poet. She is determined to go back because she is exceptionally terrified by the environment of the city life. The expression- “the terrifying city that thunders at night” (line: 4) is not related to any violence, war or bloodshed. The word “thunder” here hints at the piercing noise, hullabaloo and ceaseless hustle and bustle of city life. She is talking about the cacophonous environment of city life. She has felt this raucous setting as wanted even after the sun goes down. In the mountains there is peace and silence at night. The environment is serene and pleasing. But the work, activity and machinery in a city are always on. There is no

rest and pause; there is unending exertion, movement and noise all around in every nook and every corner of a city even at night. The city life is freakish according to the poetic persona and thus, she has decided to leave and not to come back to the city again.

In the second stanza, the poet, throwing light to the stark and cold realities, talks about the bona fide tussle of the inhabitants dwelling in the cities. Even after striving and struggling very hard, if failure is only the fruit a person receives, surely the futile result is going to exasperate him. He will have to endure intense mental pain and discomfort. And gradually that pain will turn into anger, acrimony and vexation. So this cycle starting from hard work leading to failure, causing pain and suffering, and ultimately converting into anger and frustration, appears to the poet as a never ending cycle of the city life. Life is very hard in the city and for existing and surviving there one has to make payments with their “very breath” risking their life every single day, in almost each and every sphere of their work. The poet writes:

“There the toil and pain and rage of life

Is paid for with one’s very breath,” (lines: 6-7)

This simply means the people of the city are sacrificing their life everyday for earning their daily bread and butter and for continuing to exist in the so-called rat race of achievement, progress and survival in the metropolitan cities.

The speaker further says that in the city the value and importance of a person hinge on the amount of money one has in his bank account. It is only after scrutinizing a person’s wealth, capital, cash or bank balance, the inhabitants of a city decide that person’s worth and eminence. If someone has got an incredible amount of bank balance, surely people will offer him a substantial amount of importance and respect and also exchange valuable words with him, otherwise the conversation will be abruptly concise. These complications point towards the hypocrisy of the rich city people and throw light to their poor attitude towards those who are striving hard for survival. According to the speaker, the way in which these people respond to the downtrodden

and underdog, using very few words, it clearly marks their arrogance and ill-nature. Life is very hard and cruel in the cities and nobody wants to interact with a person who has no money. Here the poet attacks the ever growing materialism and insatiable greed prevalent among most of the so-called sophisticated inhabitants of the cosmopolitan metropolis. Then the speaker says that she believes “home” represents familial bonds, love, respect and lots of emotions and warm and loving companies. But for the city people “home” means just the “four walls” of a dwelling which they can buy with their money. There is no genuine relationship or the close bonding of love and association. Home, for these people is not an emotion or feeling; it is just about the four walls made of bricks. Therefore, a man ends up to be a stranger among his own family members even at his one home. In the city, one’s company is valuable only when one has money in his wallet.

Hence, the speaker confesses in the third stanza that all these hypocrisies, artificial people and raucous surrounding has been haunting and tormenting her and she is terrified from within. Thus, she has decided to return to her home, situated at the lap of the blissful mountains. A place or a space, where one find’s refuge and feels safe from all the dangers of the world, converts into a “sanctuary” for that person. And for the speaker her mountain is that very “sanctuary” for her. So she declares that she is going back to that sanctuary of her mountains where she feels safe from within, as the line states:

“So I’m going back home, I’m terrified here,
I’m going back to the sanctuary of my mountains –
High they are, remote and harsh,
Grim they are, but real and holy, unchanging,
Forever clad in the dignity of silence” (lines: 15-19)

For the speaker her “home” in the mountains is her “sanctuary” where she feels she will be safe from the tormenting and terrifying city life. Apart from this she also says that there is something permanent in the mountains,

unlike the city life which has nothing called 'permanence' and is erratic and capricious. There is no core value to hold on or preserve as observed in the people of the cities. City people do not have real identity or any type of genuine and honest feelings in their heart. They only know how to pretend and most of the time what they mean or say is just the opposite of what they feel or do. But in the mountains, there is no pretension. Things are real and people do not pretend, even if their life is harsh and grim. And the speaker says the very existence of these real and genuine people makes her mountains "holy", something which is "unchangeable" and divine. Moreover, there is a dignified or divine silence and peace in the atmosphere of her mountains. There are some laws peculiar to the mountain life itself. And as the mountains have their own divine laws so time has no existence there. In other words there is no rush and hullabaloo in the mountains as compared to the cities. People live and work in peace in the mountains.

And in the last stanza, the poet offers a touch of spirituality to the poem, as the speaker concludes that it is the time when she must "return to the dust", the contradiction of existence itself, as the line says:

"So I return to where I began,

I go, because I must:

I return to the dust of which I was formed

And the air that breathes life in me-" (lines: 23-26)

Since Nini Lungalang herself asserts that her poems are somehow connected to her own personal life, therefore, the above revelation can be taken as the poet's own profound longing and persistent desire to return back to her root, to accomplish her sense of fulfillment and spirituality. The speaker asserts that she started her journey from her mountains, from Nagaland, and now she has returned to that same space again. The air in Nagaland has built her and it still continues to nourish her. Thus, she has come back to her root, in other words, to the very "dust" from which she was born and which has given her a distinct identity, thereby completing the cycle and journey of her life. Nevertheless,

the concluding last three lines of the poem give us the impression that, despite this sense of safety, spirituality and fulfillment, the poetic persona is in tears due to some inescapable reason, precisely associated with the person dear to her, her beloved, who is still in the city. Both might have exchanged promises to be forever together but unfortunately due to some sudden circumstance she is not able to keep that promise and has returned back to her home in the mountains. She does not want that her dearest person contemplate in any possible way that she has betrayed and is perfidious. Perhaps, this is the reason why she has put forward this elaborate explanation. She endeavors to make her beloved person thoroughly understand the fact and acknowledge how terrified she was in the city and therefore, how much it became decisive for her to return back to her native mountains. The poet concludes:

“And yet- through the misty heights I see,
Your face strange now, shattered, refracted
In the prism of my tears.” (lines: 27-29)

Here, in the concluding lines, through the expression, ‘shattered and refracted image of the face’ in the ‘prism of tears’, the speaker wants to convey the fact that she presumes that in her tear drops, the image of her dear person is in a way getting refracted and emanating before her as broken, blur and shattered. When light passes through a prism, it gets refracted in a different direction. In the same way, when the image of that person is getting refracted in the “prism” of the speaker’s ‘tear drops’ it is giving her the impression of something which is broken and blurry. She is not able to perceive it clearly. This comments and hints on the nostalgic moments of the speaker’s past life in the city with her dear person. Memories and images are flashing in front of her and the pain of separation has brought tears in her eyes. Apart from this, it can also be assumed that the person she has left in the city is also heartbroken due to her sudden departure to her native mountains and is also wailing. Therefore, the shattered

image seems to portray this very idea at the end of the poem.

Conclusion:

To conclude, we can say that the poem contains some thought provoking imageries and issues which are pertinent to almost every person struggling to survive, caught between the two worlds of the urban and rural. Life in the city is totally different and challenging as compared to the simple and rustic lifestyle amidst nature in the mountains and valleys. When we talk about “home”, different person will have different experience and emotions related to it. One who has found love and affection in his/her “home” and has got a loving family, the home of that person will be the most precious, peaceful and safe place in the entire world. While on the other hand, “home” may literally turn out to be the worst possible and tormenting place in the world, if someone is a part of such a home where the atmosphere is disorganized and irksome, where no one has respect for anyone, neither there is any bond of love and affection in that family. And this is the instance and occurrence customary in the cities. There is no space for understanding, respect and love in the case of most of the so-called sophisticated people dwelling in the cities. The only thing which matters to them is material possession and money. In the cities, people willingly involve themselves in the unnecessary rat race, even at the cost of sacrificing their precious family bonds, love, peace and inner bliss. Therefore, the select poem for analysis, “Going Home” by Nini Lungalang can be seen as representing these dreadful issues. The speaker of the poem, boldly asserting the fact that she is terrified and frustrated in the cities, comments on the artificial and hollow life of the people dwelling in the cities, in comparison to the blissful and self sufficient life of the people of the valleys and mountains.

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