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*Indian Streams
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DEPICTION OF BURNING ISSUES IN AJU MUKHOPADHYAY'S POETRY

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ABSTRACT

Aju Mukhopadhyay is one of the few modern Indian writers who is sensitive to the current pressing issues in human life. Two of his poems, namely 'Fundamentalists' and 'Peace' have been selected for study in the present paper. In the former poem he talks about the greatest threat to humankind posed by religious fundamentalism today, while in the latter he speaks of the significance of peace in human life which is lacking today. The paper attempts to explore the poet's ideas on two of the burning issues in today's world and the remedies he suggests. The paper attempts to highlight the fact that fundamentalism and peace are mutually exclusive and therefore we must give up fundamentalism if we want peace in our lives; we should learn not only to respect all kinds of differences, but to accept them to make this global village a better place to live in for us as well as future generations. Therefore, the present paper aims to study Aju Mukhopadhyay's poems 'Fundamentalists' and 'Peace' to bring out this valuable message given in the poems.

KEYWORDS: God, religion, fundamentalism, violence, peace.

INTRODUCTION:

Aju Mukhopadhyay is a well-known Indian bilingual poet, essayist, fiction writer and critic – he writes in English as well as Bengali. He has published thirty four books till date of which twelve books are on poetry – ten on poems in English and two on poems in Bengali. The collections of his poems are: The Witness Tree, The Paper Boat, In Celebration of Nature, Insect's Nest and Other Poems, Aju Mukhopadhyay's Poems on Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, Short Verse Vast Universe, Short Verse Delight, Manhood, Grasshood and Birdhood, Time Whispers in my Ear, Poetry on Nature and Environment. He is not only a regular contributor to many national and international scholarly journals, but is in editorial boards of many of them also. Many of his poems have been translated in other Indian languages. He has been honoured with many awards for his poetry from India and other countries. He is a poet of high caliber who writes on the pressing issues of today in his poems. 'Fundamentalists' and 'Peace' are two such poems written by him; they deal with religious fundamentalism and lacking of peace in human life today respectively.

Religious Fundamentalism: The Greatest Threat to Humankind: Aju Mukhopadhyay's poem 'Fundamentalists' deals with the most burning problem of today that is religious fundamentalism. Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary defines the term 'fundamentalism' as 'the strict following of the basic teaching of any religion'. Worldatlas.com very aptly describes 'religious fundamentalism' in the following words:

Religious fundamentalism refers to the belief of an individual or a group of individuals in the absolute

authority of a sacred religious text or teachings of a particular religious leader, prophet, and/ or God. These fundamentalists believe that their religion is beyond any form of criticism, and should therefore also be forced upon others. Logical explanations and scientific evidences have no place in these belief systems if they work against their religious fundamentalists. For fundamentalists, religion dictates every sphere of their daily lives, and they also attempt to involve the entire society into their own belief system, often by the use of force.

The poet too uses the term with the above given meaning in the poem. Today 'fundamentalism' is a pejorative term which is taken to be 'the opposite of pluralism'. Aju Mukhopadhyay uses it as a pejorative term in the poem. For the poet 'fundamentalists' are the antisocial people with warped mind who are against plurality and so bent on wiping out from the earth the people belonging to the religions other than their own if they fail to convert these people belonging to other faiths to their own faith. The poet is well aware of the suffering of the present world due to religious fundamentalism. We call the present era a modern age, but which, in fact, is turning to be a barbaric age mainly due to the religious fundamentalists. Many saints and sages have always considered different faiths as different ways of leading to the same God. According to them, the Supreme Soul pervades all beings who are His children. Sai Baba of Shirdi, a great saint who lived at a small village named Shirdi in Maharashtra State of India in the nineteenth century preached the oneness of faith, but in vain. He said that the God of all religions is one and the same and therefore, all religions lead to the same God. However, religious fundamentalists fail to understand this eternal truth; they profess that their religion only is the true religion and leads to the Supreme Being and rest are false and cannot do so. They also falsely believe that their God is the only true God. They do not believe in 'live and let live'. On the other hand, they falsely believe that it is the duty given to them by their God to convert the people of other religions or to kill them if they cannot do so. That is why we see so much bloodshed today across the globe caused by religious fundamentalists. They pose the greatest danger to humankind today. About them Aju Mukhopadhyay writes in the poem:

*Religious fundamentalists
snake the earth
to spare nothing –
.....
they kill themselves
kill others.*

Here the poet makes an apt use of the word 'snake'. The word is used with two meanings: the religious fundamentalists today are moving like snakes in various countries across the globe killing and injuring people; the word also implies that these fundamentalists are like a gigantic snake that wants to swallow the whole earth, which is suggested by the third line in the above stanza. They are so bloodthirsty that they go to extent of killing themselves to kill other innocent people. The world has seen time and again how a huge loss of human lives has been caused by religious fundamentalists by becoming suicide bombers many a time at different places across the world. Religious fundamentalists do not value the precious human life. Actually most of them are misled by some anti-social elements. These misled fundamentalists have to be brought on the right path by good people. However, the good people are silent which distresses the poet. He comments on their annoying silence in the second stanza:

*Zealots' swords –
they hang over human heads
while saints
hide inside the dark caves.*

The poet is pained by the human loss caused by the religious fundamentalists; however the saints' being silent while the zealots are causing havoc causes him greater pain. It is rightly said that the silence and passivity of good people is more harmful than the bad deeds of the evil ones.

Here we should realize the fact good and bad people are found in all religions; no religion has only good or bad people. It is the fact that fundamentalists are not found in any one religion, but nearly all religions of the world. They sometimes cause violence due to their belief that their religion is beyond any form of criticism and is the only true religion, and therefore all the people of the world follow it, they should strictly follow the basic teachings of it in their daily life. However, religious fundamentalists of some religion cause physical violence and that of other religions cause mental violence, some cause less violence and some more. It is also a fact that fundamentalists belonging to various faiths have caused violence and the loss of human lives some time or other in the past. Therefore, of late some people are questioning the very need of any religion to lead a moral, happy, peaceful and meaningful life. They argue that all religions, founded many centuries ago, have become useless to guide us to live a worthwhile life today so should be discarded. According to them religions which are ultimately responsible for fundamentalism are the root cause of violence and many problems in the world. Some argue that Lord Buddha taught man that he can live a moral life without believing in the existence of God; similarly we can live a moral, happy life without any religion. Some others argue that to be spiritual we do not need any religion. Religion or no religion, but one thing is certain that we must cease to be fundamentalists to make this world, the only place for us to live in, a safe place for us and future generations to live in. That is what is expected by the poet too.

The poet is an optimist; he sees the light at the end of the dark tunnel. He hopes that 'the sons and daughters of the light' i.e. good people will come out some day 'to redeem the earth' i.e. to repel the darkness of fundamentalism from the earth and thereby save humankind from extinction. We can just of that these good people will succeed in making fundamentalists of all religions that the God, whom some people prefer to refer as Nature, likes pluralism, which is opposite of fundamentalism, hence there is a huge variety of flora and fauna in the world; the garden does not look beautiful if it has flowers of the same kind, but it does if it has flowers of different kinds, different colours. It is high time we all realized this divine truth. We must also realize that we do not have any right to take anybody's life, if we cannot give life. We need to believe in and practice the age old dictum 'live and let live'.

Lacking of Peace in the Modern Life: Aju Mukhopadhyay's Poem *Peace* is divided into three stanzas. The first two stanzas contain eight lines each and the third is a quatrain. The first stanza delineates man-made as well as natural disasters that have banished peace from this beautiful world. In the second stanza the poet talks about the things required to be done by human in order to achieve peace. The third stanza defines peace and brings out its importance in human life.

The poem begins with the cruel, inhuman massacre of human beings by the fundamentalists in the name of religion. The poem thus begins strikingly:

*In a global village beheading in video show
Bomb blast and wreckage in T.V.'s glare*

In the above lines the poet uses the phrase 'global village' ironically. He implies that many nations are fighting war with each other, the people of different religions are hungry for the blood of each other and still we call the world 'a global village'. He seems to question it? We have yet to come together mentally. The cruel inhuman treatment and oppression of human being at the hands of other human being is taking place everywhere, not in just few countries. That is what the poet suggests in these lines:

*Media reports of rape, carnage, arson and massacre
In my neighbourhood rivers of blood flow;*

We cannot be complacent thinking that bad occurrences are taking place in a far off place. The fact is that it has reached your neighbourhood. That is what is suggested by the line: 'In my neighbourhood rivers of blood flow'. What is more, natural disasters too occur now and then as if evil deeds of human beings are not enough to

inflict pain on humankind. These things together or separately, according to the poet, 'banish Peace from earth's shore'. It is noteworthy that the poet uses the first letter of the word 'peace' capital suggesting its divine quality. The poet also talks about man's pretentious, farcical attempts of bringing about peace in human society by means of organising 'a cycle or run race' or writing a poem on it. The poet intends to convey that such farcical activities cannot bring about peace in society; to achieve peace we need to tackle social problems head-on. Further the poet puts forth his ideas of bringing about internal and external peace. To achieve peace, he says, we should stop being selfish and narrow minded, we should not ignore social problems around us, instead do our bit to resolve them. For this purpose, we need to fight for truth 'heart and soul' without bothering about the result. We should not attempt to satiate our crude desires for they can never be satiated as proved by the example of Yayati in Mahabharata. We should do the right thing, work for truth sincerely without worry or fear. We can achieve peace – both internal and external – only when we free ourselves from 'worry, fear, wrath, envy, hatred and self conceit'.

In the third stanza the poet says, "Peace is a state of mind, state of being sound'. He means that peace does not depend on external things; its source is not outside, but inside – in one's mind. It is true that it is all in the mind. The moment we realise this truth, we will get real peace perennially which will 'soothe all our wounds'.

The poem very realistically brings out the madness of the modern world and underlines the need of peace in human life to end this madness. It conveys the message that we should stop being fundamentalists. It is high time we respected differences in all aspects of life and stop killing each other, we should stop our atrocities on fellow human beings, we need to stop living selfish life; on the other hand we should think of each other's well being and work for it. Then only we could bring back peace, the most important thing in human life, in human society. For this we need to realise that fundamentalism and peace are mutually exclusive; one cannot be where another is. Therefore, we must stop to be fundamentalists to achieve peace in our life which is the most essential element to live happy, meaningful life.

CONCLUSION:

Thus both the poems by Aju Mukhopadhyay deal with the burning problems of present world. He hopes that good people will one day come out to bring misled religious fundamentalists on the right path which only will ensure the regaining of peace in human life in the modern world. Fundamentalism and peace are mutually exclusive and therefore one cannot be where another is. Therefore, it is high time we chose between peace and fundamentalism which causes violence. About the aim of Aju Mukhopadhyay behind writing poetry, Bernard M. Jackson in his criticism on the poetry of Aju Mukhopadhyay writes:

... the remarkable outpourings of the widely acclaimed Aju Mukhopadhyay are simply pregnant with yearnings for a better world, a world where peace, fellowship and justice can be universally established.

Thus Aju Mukhopadhyay writes about the pressing issues today that are related to all of us. He also suggests remedies to the burning problems through his poems.

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