

Contemporary Literary Discourse of Globalization in the Critical Literary works of Pritam Basu

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Abstract:

The paper analyses the concept of globalization and modern literature discourse in the works of Pritam Basu, with the year 2019 being the cut-off date. One methodological challenge should be mentioned first, and it is that publicly available pre-2019 corpus of Basu formal, stand-alone critical essays is scarce. That is why, this paper takes a wider and more justifiable approach. It reviews the literature-critical work of Basu published before 2019 in his directly literary-pedagogic text *Chhiri-Chhand* (2013), in his hybrid book *Antyamiler Angane* (2019), in the critical discourse contained in his historically oriented prose books like *PanchmuRor Panchananmangal* (2015) and *Chouthupir Charjapad* (in circulation by 2018). This paper states that Basu pre-2019 project is highly influenced by the globalization though not in a naive celebration format. Instead of letting the homogenizing global modernity take over the Bengali literary culture, he employs transnational location, self-publication, popular genre, philological curiosity, and linguistic experimentation to reinvigorate the issues of history, script, metre, civilizational memory, and vernacular knowledge. His work exemplifies the ways the current literary discourse in Bengali can react to globalization in terms of recovery, reinvention and circulation, instead of cultural withdrawal. Simultaneously, modern reactions to his work indicate that this project cannot be deemed ideologically unopposed. What Basu writes is, therefore, not merely important, but how he locates Bangladesh literary heritage into a new global contemporary discourse.

INTRODUCTION

The globalization has transformed the production of literary works at least in three radical ways, which include: intensifying cross-border circulation, shifting the relationship between the local language and the global audience and compelling writers to mediate between tradition and contemporary forces of the market. The developments are usually talked about in the language of imagination, circulation, and world literary systems in literary studies. The *Modernity at Large* by Arjun Appadurai is a condition where imagination can be a social force in a shrinking world whereas the *What Is World Literature?* by David Damrosch is a mode of circulation and reading where texts are transformed during their national to global translation. These models can be applied to analyzing such an author as Pritam Basu, whose writing prior to 2019 can be viewed as the crossroads of diaspora location, the history of Bengali literature, genre experimentation, and the assertion of the vernacular culture.

There must be a second clarification. The title of this paper refers to critical writings, although the record provided by the present state of the literature before 2019 does not suggest that there was a body of formal criticism in the traditional scholarly sense that is large and can be documented easily. Rather we are presented with an uneven and eclectic collection of works which comprise literary pedagogy, poetic

commentary, historical-thriller fiction reeking with philology and literary history, and works that border the two forms of discourse, the creative and the critical. The current study does not have this as a weakness. Quite to the contrary, it lets us observe how literary criticism may be found in not merely essays but also in genre, narrative structure, linguistic reconstruction, and cultural argument. To be consistent, the present paper employs the spelling of Pritam Basu as that is the spelling in book records, reviews and catalog entries related to the corpus prior to 2019.

My main thesis of the paper is that the writing of Basu before 2019 addresses the issue of globalization, and it results in a genre of contemporary Bengali literary discourse that is, at the same time, popular and scholarly, local and transnational, familiar and archival. The concept of tradition and modernity does not accept such a straightforward opposition in his writings. Rather, they demonstrate that the modern can be framed by restructuring the less modern Bengali textual worlds, metres, scripts as well as knowledge systems into various new narrative and publication forms. Basu is best interpreted, in this respect, as having provided a vernacular response to globalization: not secluded, but hostile toward the flattening of culture.

Globalization as Framework: Language, Circulation, and Unequal Prestige.

All literatures are not influenced by globalization in the same manner. It opens up circulation yet creates asymmetry: there are the languages that circulate freely, and there are those languages that become trapped behind the necessity of translation, in small readerships, or diasporic pathways. That is why, globalization of literary discourse is never simply about openness it is about hierarchy too. The description of electronic mediation, migration and imagination by Appadurai assists in understanding how literary culture is disconnected with the territorial boundaries, whereas the model of the world-literature by Damrosch assists in understanding that the transgression of the contexts alters the meaning of texts. A Bengali writer is placed in a diasporic stance in such a field under the dual burden to be intelligible in the vernacular and to be pervasive in globalized circuits of circulation.

In this very connection, Basu is important in his pre-2019 writings. They do not attempt to globalize Bengali literature by giving up the densities of the text in Bengali. Quite on the contrary, they go the other way round: they make the Bengali linguistic, historical, and literary specificity even more accentuated. However, they do so in the forms dictated by globalization-diasporic authorship, self-publication, online presence, cross-border readership and the thriller as a worldwide mobile genre. It is that mix that makes Basu interesting to the discourse of contemporary literature. He fails to deliver a nostalgic 1980s throwback; he delivers the present-day vernacularism refined by the global circumstances.

Pritam Basu Before 2019: Corpus, Location, Literary Position.

In his bibliography of Pritam Basu, publicly indexed, we can see that even in 2019 he already published a recognizable body of work. Chhiri-Chhand is marked as published in 2013 and PanchmuRor Panchananmangal is marked as published in 2015 on Goodreads. Antyamiler Angane is also listed on the same record, and a different book listing records the date of publishing as 2019. A listing on Flipkart of Chouthupir Charjapad lists a third edition of the book as published by self in 2017, and as of September 2018 the book was already being reviewed elsewhere. Such details are important since they reveal that, prior to the year 2019, the project of Basu has already gone through poetry/poetics, historical-literary reconstruction, and the experimental hybrid literature.

The Diasporic location of Basu is also significant. A report by Anandabazar calls him an expatriate Bengali based in New York who not only learned metre through formal classroom instructions but also wrote Chhiri-Chhand as a book to study metre in form of a story. The report also suggests that the book included an introductory note or a blessing note of Sankha Ghosh and Sudhir Chakrabarti. Another Parabaas review

of PanchmuRor Panchananmangal (2015) also lists Basu as a New York resident and highlights the importance of creating such a language-focused work by the diaspora. Such specifications put Basu directly into a Bengali literary state of globalization: physically out of Bengal, but intellectually and emotionally involved in Bengali language, prosody, textual history, and cultural memory.

This place can be used to justify why Basu should not be read as writing a historical thriller fiction. Evidence available indicates that there is a wider cultural ambition. The history of Bengali language, manuscript culture, prosody, archaism, the Buddhist and the medieval intellectual worlds, the rediscovery of the buried knowledge repeatedly come back to his work. That is already a critical project. It means that globalization is not merely a force, which one consents to. It is also a condition that has the ability of enhancing the urgency of linguistic and cultural retrieval.

Chhiri-Chhand and Literary Knowledge Democratization.

Were the explicit literary-critical writing of Basu most observable, prior to 2019, the first thing one can point to is Chhiri-Chhand. Here it is important to discuss the Anandabazar. Whether Bengali prosody must remain confined within the Bengali Honours syllabus, it questions, and can metre be identified in everyday life, said in ads, in rhymed lines overheard on trains, and in the sound of the routine. It then introduces Basu as having acquired rhythm intuitively based on the works of poetry and transfigured this experience as a book to be learnt in metres in the form of a story. This is not just a mere technical exercise. It is a democratizing act in the literary discourse. It tries to eliminate the elite institutionalism of prosody and bring it back to the language of life.

The gesture is very pertinent to globalization. In the present media age, the ability of literary knowledge to be transcendent of formats and publics is often the only way it will be preserved. The answer that Basu gives is not to trivialize the literary culture of Bengali to mere superficial popularity. Instead, he renders literary scholarship into a non-academic form without making it frivolous. It is the reason why Chhiri-Chhand is important. It demonstrates that there should be no opposition between modern discourse and pedagogy and pleasure, or scholarship and narrative. Through readability it can generate literary criticism. This is further supported by a subsequent Parabaas bookstore categorization, which refers to Chhiri-Chhand as chhanda bishoye ramya-rachana, or funny/grateful writing on metre. Although that catalog note is short, it proves the hybrid nature of the book. Basu is not writing metrical theory in a dry scholastic register per se; he is refreezing the literary knowledge in the spicy, modern vernacular form. It is a significant hint to his bigger project. His critical disposition is not the anti-popular one. It is constructed through popularization without losing the complexity.

PanchmuRor Panchananmangal: Globalization and Retrieval of the Past Bengali.

It is perhaps Basu who has made the greatest contribution to the current literary discussion prior to 2019 with PanchmuRor Panchananmangal (2015). The review of the novel written by Parabaas starts with contemplating and reflecting on change as the only constant and clearly explains that Bengali language and culture are not an exception to the process of change. Then it gives praise to the book in that it recreates the ancient Bengal, the society, state of political affairs, invasion by foreigners and religious co-existence, the practice of rituals and the art of war-making, and also, it shows the patience of a research-oriented writer and lover of language who writes in New York. It is an impressive expression. The novel is not merely entertainment history; it is a literary reaction to culture instability.

Even a 2018 Guruchandali review makes the point even sharper. It asserts that the most compelling point in the novel is not necessarily suspense over the finding of a text that has been lost, but rather, the uninhibited love of our lost past which attempts to wed an opening of selfhood beyond viewing the world through the eyes of the Europeans. The reviewer further includes that Basu introduces into the story the

development of the Bengali alphabet, materiality of manuscripts, training of scribes as well as a created intermediate phase of the Bengali language between Charyapada and Srikrishnakirtan. Above all, the critic notes that within the story there can be seen a language investigator, metre expert and a talented poet. The given formulation is the key to the present paper. It demonstrates that by 2018, the literature of Basu was being read as a place where narrative excitement, literary criticism, and the history of languages intersected.

Here is the point where globalization is the most conspicuous in the discourse of Basu. The alternative to the cultural flattening of the world is the epistemic restoration, his response to literary flattening. He recovers Bengali manuscript culture, metre, script and precolonial knowledge not to disavow the present, but to re-enter it in a different way. The novel is successful in stating that the modern Bengali literature can still be contemporary by investing in its own archive. In this respect, the discourse presented by Basu challenges two things simultaneously: the Eurocentricism of the interpretive frames and the commercial pressure of the market to expect that popular writing is going to be historically shallow.

Genre, Knowledge, and Contemporary Contestation Chouthupir Charjapad.

In 2018, Chouthupir Charjapad developed and made the same project more complicated. The Rokomari synopsis talks about a story of archaeology, ancient Buddhist icons, old scripts, a manuscript of one of the learned women of the Bengali community named Gandhakali, Buddhist-tantric society, old Bengali tongue, history and solving a text enigma. In a review published in September 2018, Souvik Ghoshal refers to the novel as an attempt to reenact yet another violent historical event following PanchmuRor Panchananmangal once again, under the banner of finding old literature and archeological evidence. The reviewer points out that the book has united poetry, mathematics, astronomy, herbal knowledge, Buddhist setting, and the desperate bid to safeguard the knowledge and science during political disasters.

This is a tell-tale sign of the modern literary discourse in the times of globalization. Basu employs the thriller genre, which is a globally acknowledged form, yet his is loaded with the material, which is primarily Bengali and subcontinental literary-historical. It is not an accidental or decorative move. It enables knowledge that is specialized to flow outside the academic enclosures. Stated differently, Basu globalizes Bengali literary legacy by not translating it into cultural platitude. He introduces philology, script-decipherment, archaic forms of verse, and local intellectual history into a narrative form of writing which makes contemporary readers continue to live with excitement in.

Meanwhile, the 2018 review does not give a pass to the novel. It states that the study occasionally slows down the story and that there were concerns over historical treatment as well as even the possibility of Islamophobic content. This is significant to a critical study. It demonstrates that the discourse of Basu does not enter the modern literary discourse in the form of consent but rather as a form of confrontation. His work rediscovers the past, yet it is rediscovered in a way which is open to criticism, ideological questioning, and dispute. It is that tension, which is itself a constituent of modern literary discussion: a revival of history can drive up a sense of vernacular self-respect, yet it also can give rise to fears of the politics of memory.

Hybrid Form and Late Pre-2020 Basu (2019). Price ceilings and price floors: Antyamiler Angane.

Of particular significance to the book record of 2019 is Antyamiler Angane, which is more explicit about the hybrid mode that Basu adopts. The description at hand refers to it as a set of plays, stories, poems, and a novel. It has a table of contents of sections such as, Antyamiler Natok, Antyamiler Kobita, Antyamiler Class and finally a novel. Within "Antyamiler Class" there is a section bearing the name Soja-mil, Gojamil, which strongly implies that there is still a pedagogic activity of rhyme and verbal pattern. The book thus is an excellent illustration of how Basu was able to make his literary-critical writings work not by a

collection of formal essays, but by various mixtures in which he juxtaposes the creative writing, teaching, playfulness, and literary commentary.

This hybridization is important in the eyes of globalization. The modern literary discourse is shifting in terms of genres, platforms, and target audiences. The 2019 volume by Basu is one that is a part of that movement. It does not view literary knowledge as a preserve of a given institution but rather as something that can be presented, performed, poetsified, and taught and dramatized. It is a modern form of criticism though it is not necessarily always clad in the standard garb of criticism.

CONCLUSION

A 2019-only study should be done very cautiously, since the publicly accessible collection of Pritam Basu formal critical essays is not substantial. Nevertheless, such a restriction brings about a significant point. The value of Basu to globalization and the literary discourse of the contemporary world is hardly found in a traditional critical prose corpus. It is in the literary-critical vitality that is scattered through his pre-2019 work: in Chhiri-Chhand, the democratization of prosody, in PanchmuRor Panchananmangal, the rediscovery of Bengali manuscript and linguistic history, in Chouthupir Charjapad, the mixing of thriller narrative style and scholarly philology and premodern knowledge, and in Antyamiler Angane, in a genre-crossing pedagogy.

The most effective approach to processing Basu is, therefore, to regard him as a writer who reacts to globalization by making vernacular literary consciousness more intense. He is not denying the modern, he is redefining it. He does not object to circulation; he employs transnational location and modern form to bring the circulation of Bengali literary heritage in new forms. He does not use criticism as a kind of academic insulation; he makes it narrative, rhythm, genre, cultural argument. Even as of 2019, that project already renders him a figure of note in the discussion of how Bengali literature balances the demands of globalization without losing its density in terms of language and history.

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