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A Dichotomy of Water Degradation as Represented in Rabindranath Tagore's *Muktadhara* and Suryaganthan's *Sons of the Red Soil*

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Abstract

*Water is an essential component for every living being to sustain in life. Moreover, our earth's surface is water-covered for about 71 percent and the oceans hold about 96.5 percent of water. Moreover, Water has a unique feature of holding the shape in which it finds place. In India, people worship holy rivers and its tributaries for being the source of life and salvation. The spectrum of life of a human begins with the water in the womb, amniotic fluid and ends with the final rites and rituals near the rivers. Water has a dichotomy of irony of face depicting the serene nature and the arrogant face of the environment. As a result of the ruthless act of the humans towards their milieu, the mankind has to face the unprecedented challenges across the world. The curated information regarding the scarcity of water and the construction of dam to arrest the current of water are discussed exhaustively by the erudite writers of India, Rabindranath Tagore and Suryaganthan. The former being the writer of Bengal and the latter, the regional writer of Tamil Nadu. In the poignant tale of *Muktadhara*, Tagore records the fatal history of people behind the bars of the dam construction and emanates the compassionate voice for the oppressed people. Nonetheless, Suryaganthan weaves the intricate tapestry of the mundane life of Kongu region where the locale faced the unthinkable water famine nearly for five years making the field crops to wither. The present paper attempts to compare the regional writer of literature, Suryaganthan with the iconic writer and the Nobel-Prize winner of India, Rabindranath Tagore, in order to elevate the regional writing to the international standard.*

Keywords: Dichotomy of Water, Kongu Region, Rabindranath Tagore, Regional Writing, Suryaganthan, Water Scarcity.

Mukta-dhara is a political play which reveals the versatile genius of Rabindranath Tagore who achieved eminence in every other literary genres. Initially, Tagore intended to give the title as 'Path' and later, he shifted his idea to 'Mukta-dhara' which signifies the 'mountain spring'. In the story, Tagore represents the dichotomy of water within the story by introducing the fictional places, Shiv-tarai and Uttarakut "...whose waters rushing down the slopes of Uttarakut, irrigate the plains of Shiv-tarai, whose people are held in subjugation to the King of Uttarakut." (3)^[1]. People of Shiv-tarai are always degenerated by the people of Uttarakut and in order to subdue them further, the king of Uttarakut decided to arrest the flow of water by constructing the dam. Interestingly, throughout the play,

Tagore never uses the word ‘dam’, instead, he uses the words like ‘machine’, ‘demon’s head’. The royal engineer, Bibhuti constructed the dam for twenty-five years and he was swank about his achievement to the society.

Albeit the fact the place of Shiv-tarai will face the great trouble if the dam is constructed to confine the free flow of water, the King Ranajit never reckoned to their misery. If ever the water is stopped, definitely the crops will wither and the people of Shiv-tarai has to undergo a lot of challenge to sustain their life for the better. “Climate and environment had a very significant impact on the expansion of modern humans.” (21)^[2]. Dhananjaya, a social activist of Shiv-tarai and Abhijit, Yuvaraja of the kingdom fought for the justice of the people of Shiv-tarai. Their vibrant and dominant voices went unnoticed and struggled a lot for their people to enjoy their freedom. In the end, despite all the efforts they have taken, justice was never in favour of them and therefore, Abhijit took a bold decision of sacrificing his life to break down the dam.

As a visionary writer, Tagore envisaged in 1922 itself regarding the issues behind the construction of the dam as that warrants the displacement of the native people from their land. He also gives a hint in the play that there will definitely be a breach in the dam construction and there is a close possibility for the dam collapse like August 1975, the Banqiao Dam collapse which recorded the death toll ranging from 26,000 to 2,40,000. Literary texts provide a “transformative site of cultural self-reflection and cultural self-reflection, in which the historically marginalized and excluded is semiotically empowered and activated as a source of their artistic-creativity...” (28)^[3].

The regional writer, Suryaganthan always depict a poignant history of the native land and their day-to-day sufferings. He prefers to throw more light on his place, kongu region, their significance, farming, water scarcity and their regular challenges in life. When the play Mukta-dhara propagates on the issues behind the construction of the dam to confine water, Suryaganthan’s Sons of the Red Soil pivots on the water famine that prevailed in the certain areas of Kongu region. When there is a heavy downpour of rainfall throughout the year in a place like Cherapunji, certain other places receive no rainfall or rain only in scanty. Similarly, the kongu region received no rainfall and faced water famine for the past five long years. Even at the time of crisis, people never bothered to evacuate from the place and preferred to stay back to face the challenges of their life. They had great reverence for all the natural resources and especially, water. Despite their natural despair, people were reluctant to sell their lands. They always awaited the water supply and walked several kilometers at a stretch to fetch the drinking water. Right from the young children to old women, everyone walked a long distance to carry water.

The same situation prevailed for a very long time and due to the unavailability of water, crops started to wither and people had to starve terribly. They could not even afford any cattle to help them in their domestic activities since they could not feed them food and water. When the seasonal rain betrayed the inmates of the Kongu region, celebrating a temple festival has turned to be a rare phenomenon. When people could not bear water famine thereafter, they got support from Lakshmanan who has worked in the construction of the dam when he moved out of the village under unavoidable circumstances. Along with Lakshmanan several other people of the village protested in the Collector office and after the agitation, the collector promised them to send lorry-load of water to solve their issue. No one budged to the offer of the Collector, and later, the issue was compromised when the Collector ordered to set up the bore well in the region to resolve the water famine. After the water scarcity was resolved, children rejoiced at the sight of water from the bore well. Both the chosen works of the study falls under the category of Environ Mentality which understands “literature as an ‘aesthetic discourse’ as a text’s polysemantic nature is neither a coincidence nor something that distracts us from the ‘real world’”. (247)^[3].

Water is the perennial source of life and without which, no other life is possible to live on the earth. Until the yester years, water bodies were treated with so much of respect and were treated as the goddess. People have to develop ecological consciousness towards nature and only then, there will never be fluctuation and unpredictability in the weather condition. When the natural resources are protected and ample and diverse trees are grown to maintain the ecological balance of life, people can never repent for their miserable condition of life. Thenceforth, uniform rainfall can be witnessed everywhere to bless people in abundance, if people understand the value of natural resources and water sources. It should be a collective responsibility to protect the environment. Moreover, all these incidents are a history of human-induced climate destruction.

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