Seeking the Ethical Self: A Postcolonial Perspective

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Abstract—*In a globalized world society where no set of relationship is fixed and everybody gets affected by social, economic, political, cultural penetration, an ethical sense of cosmopolitanism plays a vital role in maintaining the balance between local and global, linking us with others, living with their differences. The way we can't choose our 'neighbours' but are bound to learn to live alongside as them (Tomilson) locally or globally without expecting perfect harmony, similarly no mechanism of global governance can ensure perfect harmony among people as an idealized global community , therefore, the notion of ethical discourse, which includes the notions like feeling responsibility towards Others, hospitality, forgiveness, friendship, reconciliation etc, aims at structuring a world beyond boundaries and dichotomies, a peaceful cosmopolitan world where strangeness is welcomed not as an ethical obligation but in order to appreciate the difference and diversity of strangeness. In my discussion, I will try to project an ethical world not as a utopian, imaginary or an impossible world, but as a living world which lays emphasis upon the normative framework of being good with each other.*

1. INTRODUCTION

In my attempt to delve deeper into postcolonial theory, I find that postcolonial scholars admirably succeed in laying bare the cultural conflicts between east and west; confronting the Eurocentric view of the East; responding to hegemonic jargon of the west; and challenging the biased occidental perspective that wishes to maintain its economic cultural superiority over the orient. One of the most outstanding features of this turn in the history is that it opens up the world to make visible the Other side – the rights of others, the oppressed cultural ethnic minorities, the voice of alternative/multiple modernities, rights of refugees, asylum seekers, etc. Therefore, the questions that need to be answered to ourselves are: How to live in the world with different ethnic groups? Can there be any form of global ethics? What ought to be done to ensure that such framework of global ethics doesn't become another form of power politics? How can we identify ourselves as a part of global culture while preserving our diversity? How can we ensure 'the right of all human beings to have rights'? Can democracy be considered a viable option to look at? I tried to grapple for a possible answers in the ethical discourse which includes cosmopolitan sensibility and the notions like responsibility,

hospitality, forgiveness, friendship, reconciliation etc. this ethical discourse could be implemented if only we realize our interdependence for each other, and start imagining the world as a global community with ethical cosmopolitan consciousness.

The world witnesses the mobility of people across borders, migrants, displacement, signifying what Feyzi Baban argues in his article Cosmopolitanism and Modernity and Political Community, that leaving one's house for meeting others is itself cosmopolitan trait, and an indirect acceptance of the fact that one could be someone else in the process. 'People live in nation and when they move, move within and beyond nations' and national borders don't constitute or fix their identity necessarily, Bill Ashcroft proposes the term' transnation' which 'is the fluid, migrating outside of the state that begins within the nation' (Ashcroft 'Alternative Modernities' page 98); the global experience could be experienced in local and, thereby in my view, local transforms into a 'glocal' (or even cosmopolitan). In this context, I would like to put forward Tomlinson's view that 'there are no others... (there are) many cultural others'(Tomlinson 1999: 194) who are expected to be endowed with their 'own language and cultural symbols' (Beck 2006: 21) while identifying themselves to a part of global culture and not the identification based on nationality. According to Nancean philosophy also, (Being Singular Plural) the question of being (Seinsfrage) is not self-explanatory, it claims its existence in terms of the question of being-with (Mitseinfrage), and therefore 'with', a coexistence, a relationality, is very important in determining social relation, what he calls 'a coexistential analytic'.

K.A. Appiah, an advocate of liberal tradition, in his essay 'Ethics in a World of Strangers: W.E.B. Du Bois and the Spirit of Cosmopolitanism' propagated the theory of 'rooted' or 'partial cosmopolitanism' which focuses on obligations to others, obligations that stretch beyond our fellow nationals. Appiah's vision of 'partial cosmopolitanism' also talks in favor of owing obedience to state institutions as a fellow citizen of that state, instead of abjuring 'all local allegiances and partialities in the name of a vast abstraction, humanity' (page 7) Cosmopolitanism, thus faces this challenge of

combining both this need for particularity and value of plurality. Cosmopolitanism involves not in building a physical or structural cosmopolis, it is for the people who comprises community/ multitude to come out of narrow nationalized identity and 'accommodate the whole world, which is quite different from assimilating or containing it'(page (B. Schoene : 21).

Ethical aspect of human relationship plays an important role in propagating world peace, feeling of brotherhood, the sense of sharing the world with multiple others, vacating a due space for every others and letting the others grow and explore the opportunities of the world while enjoying the rightful place on this world through the feeling of empathy, understanding, forgiveness, mutual respect etc. Ethics, not as a codified universal morality, but as a possibility or an expandable reality, we can refer to few critics like Foucault, Levinas, Nancy, Derrida and others. Foucaldian therapeutic ethics of "care for self"which was inspired by Greek-Roman ethics of self- formation, emphasizes on caring for self as a means of caring for others through self-training and self-control.This is to be noted that both care for self and care for others are mutually interdependent and they incorporate and innovate the potentiality of each other. There is neither absolute self nor absolute others, a site of collaboration can be cited for the encounter of self and other to eradicate this division and binaries.

Levinisian ethics of care for others serves as a contrast to Foucaultdian ethics of self-care but it also revolves around a hierarchical relation between self and other where self is responsible for others who is vulnerable and weak; it is an unavoidable obligation of the self to take care of the well-being of others. Levinas prioritizes ethics as "first philosophy", values humanism and believes that "man is capable of putting the other's existence before his own". Critics like Critchley and Judith Butler have considered that charitable model of Levinisian ethics support democratic politics which acts as a 'motivation' to it, and works against injustice.Critchley captures the soul of the matter when he points out that "ethics without politics is empty...politics without ethics are blind...we need ethics in order to see what to do in a political situation" (283). This helps to direct social reality towards a new higher goal, where multiple subjectivities were not only understood and revered for their encounter with Others but a new discourse of the "care of the self" also emerged as the rhetoric of freedom.

Derridian ethics of 'hospitality' (hostility + hospitality) captures the essence of the agonistic pluralist approach among various poles which maintain such a relation (of 'hostipitality') without claiming superiority. The principle of 'hospitality', "the right of a stranger not to be treated with hostility when he arrives on someone else's territory" (Kant), plays an important factor in propagating the Kantian cosmopolitan space where perpetual peace will prevail through the practice of "principles of justice among free and democratic peoples" (Kant, The Law of Peoples). Friendship is an important aspect in social relations. In the present age of nuclear family and single life, friendship plays an important role in maintaining a cohesive relation with others; where people are dependent more on others than on families. Respect is a cardinal factor in establishing agonistic pluralistic democracy where multiple poles confront each other as adversaries and an ethical relation of mutual respect and understanding prevails. W.Westmoreland supports the necessity of unconditional hospitality as a condition of possibility for a global community. The concept of responsibility that one feels for another is another important factor which functions at the political level but also at the ethical level.

From the above discussion it seems that the idea of ethical cosmopolitanism might do miracle but we must not forget that any kind of 'ism' achieves its desired destination through human beings. Ideology does not control humans, it is human beings who control ideologies. Arendt's concept of cosmopolitanism seems to be ethical and propagates cosmopolitan consciousness and ethical obligation to humanity across borders. Arendt says a crime is an offence not because it is against a set of law but because it is an offence against humanity. She tends to humanize the humanity instead of demonizing it and as a human we need to be concerned against crime, not an individual criminal but to realize that humanity is capable of committing such heinous crimes. Cosmopolitanism requires much more than political, legal intervention; it requires the awareness and consciousness of being human, the ethical moral humane responsibility and obligation towards others, in that process discovering humanism within self.

My attempt is to find the relevance of such ethical discourse in reality, and also if politics could preach ethics to mankind not as a sermon but as an integral part of politics, a factor that plays an important role in collective coexistence of human beings, to build a human association or political system like democratic system. To Edward Carpenter, the word democracy is associated with heart, something loveable rather than a dry and dross political system, his ethics of love is integrally related to politics.

Ella Myres who proposes a worldly ethics, an "alternative ethos' rests on democratic relation propagates a new dynamic idea where every citizen collectively is important and their joint action can bring change or take care in shaping the world. She writes: "A world-centered democratic ethos aims to incite and sustain collective care for conditions, care that is expressed in associative efforts to affect particular "worldly things."" (page 1). It neither ignores the world, the association among multiple citizens, nor the individual agents who co-exist or associate around something common to conceptualize an associative democratic politics. The relation is not 'intersubjective', rather what Myre says, is that it involves a "relations among plural individuals which are mediated by

shared, yet also disputed, objects of attention"(page 7). I think what is important in 'Worldly ethics', Myre refers, is the sense of collective association or the 'art of association' and its shared action of cooperation or antagonism to construe an effective democracy. Inspired by Bruno Latour's object-oriented democracy, Myre opines that nonhuman and intangible or inorganic objects also condition human existence and therefore the capacity of human beings to change or to be altered is beyond any limit, and perhaps here lies the unlimited possibility of a possible ethical world with a consciousness of coexistence.

On the basis of above discussion on democracy and ethical cosmopolitan consciousness we may tend to conclude that what we are looking for is a cosmopolitan world where democracy will prevail and people in this global community will have cosmopolitan sensibility beyond narrow boundaries and differences. However, pairing democracy,a concrete system, with cosmopolis to a great extent abstract and ideal may seem utopian to many, but I think democracy could be a stepping stone to achieve the goal of cosmopolitan democracy. In the era of globalization when the world has shrunk into a small territory, we need to go beyond state communities to global and replace state government by global government. I would like to put forward Daniele Archibugi's suggestion that every citizens need to be politically conscious about their representation and represent both the state, they belong to and the world in which they live, in short, they need to be cosmopolitan, not only a citizen of the world but citizen for the world. We need to fashion a strong and effective global organization, and simultaneously develop an ethical consciousness to embrace the world on the basis of 'commonality' and 'common causes of concern.In the postcolonial context care for the world or worldly ethics play an important role in building a collective association with democratic ethos. The colonial violence of the past on the colonized people, the trauma of suffering, the nationalistic zeal for independence has already provided them with political objects of common concern, a binding force, objects of association or antagonism which through collaborative efforts is directed to create a material condition that make the world a home to the people.Postcolonial perspective captures democratic ethos, a care for world and cultivate 'commonness of the world'.

Postcolonial literature proves to be an important tool to capture the distorted, fragmented, unfinished, incomplete, form of cosmopolitanism because the goal of cosmopolitan d is latent and till now unrealized and 'actually existing cosmopolitanism'(Spencer: Page 238) is 'distorted or at any rate incomplete in forms' (page 3, Spencer). Therefore, one way to capture cosmopolitan aspect in Postcolonial literature, following Robert Spencer is to portray violence and aggression of imperialism, conflict, different forms of inter dependence and mutual relationship among people of different cultures, forming a global society. These texts through their forms and contents provoke the readers to think, introspect

critically and be self-conscious and also let them react and respond to the turbulent period of encounter between east and west. Through their self-reflection and self-scrutiny the readers inculcate a kind of broad mindedness and recognize and respect the differences of others. To him generating cosmopolitan sentiments or consciousness through instilling self-consciousness among the readers and scrutinizing the 'moral and political dimension of postcolonial situations' and in that process mobilizing people for a cosmopolitan future is more worth considered than the novels which project a cosmopolitan situation or cosmopolitan community or images.Portraying a cosmopolitan community might seem utopian but a community which practices mutual recognition among diverse cultures brings 'cosmopolitan solidarity' (Craig Calhoun) because no nation / community is 'self-sufficient', it gets shaped and reshaped through mutual encounters with others. Therefore cosmopolitanism is a process, not being but becoming. It aims to 'replace a world based on hierarchy, division, and inequality with one that is far more democratic and egalitarian' (page 5, spencer).If the nation along with its diversity develops a communal as well as global consciousness, there is no barrier to imagine the world as a community. Today the whole world is connected through communication technologies, internet, information technologies and therefore it is easy to 'imagine' the connection with the whole world and accession to the happenings of the world. There is no doubt that global community is so much interconnected and interdependent that any blow on any part of the world is going to interrupt and affect the balance of the whole and the new realistic cosmopolitanism aims not at erasing out the diversities or deficiencies and inconsistencies of the world rather its goal is to form a strong global community which will live with its diversity, inconsistencies and rifts and gaps but with an underlined current of cosmopolitan imagination.

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