

The Fireflies Kindle Their Lights To Seek Darkness: Scripting Ecological Concern in Some Select Poets of North-East India

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ABSTRACT

The literature of India's North-east and her poetry in particular, is characterized by a strong 'spirit of place' and the vast ecological variety in the region strewn with rivers, hills, gorges and ravines, with a mesmeric charm of the flora and fauna, has ever actuated creative imagination in the poets and writers of the land. A confluence of various tribes and communities with their respective belief-systems, rituals and folklores, North-east has ever retained her exotic charm not only for mainland India but also for the rest of the world. After Independence, the region also had to undergo some territorial re-alignment of some states due to socio-political necessities and as a result of the emerging realities of urbanization, deforestation, industrialization and mechanization for the cause of development and also of the flip side of these changes in the forms of partition-violence and cross-border terrorism (with its bases operating mainly in neighboring countries); a genuine concern for the ecological well being of the land has developed over the years into a major vein of poetry in the North-east. To put it in simple terms, the persona which had so long been used to singing the naivety of existence amidst the plenitude of nature in a state of perfect bliss with the surroundings, now feels as it were perturbed by a gnawing awareness of something ominous lurking in ambush round the corner. The present article attempts for a synoptic overview of some representative works of the indigenous poets of two major states so as to trace how an acute eco-conscience marks the poetic sensibility in North-east where nature, as per the systems of faith and understanding enshrined by folk and literate traditions, is a vital force equipped with human emotions and having the potency to help poetic imagination.

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I. INTRODUCTION

India's North-east is the place of a rare scenic beauty with mystic mountains, magic rivers, and a sprawling verdure punctuated by little hamlets that have been for centuries the habitation of different indigenous tribes and migrant settlers. In popular imagination, at home or abroad, India's North-east, a conglomeration of eight sister states with an astounding ecological variety, is a space of a mythic realism where the simple, unassuming life-style of people living in peace with the hilly terrains is as if characterized by some presiding intelligence of nature as enunciated in the fables and folk-tales of this zone and such a system of a naïve, ingrained understanding as if crystallizes over time, into a potent force of conviction in the collective unconscious of the people living in North-east. Naturally, any unforeseen change (which is mainly wrought by urbanization and also by strayed souls working for separatist forces or apostles of militancy) in the familiar set-up – the fragrance of rice grown in the *jooms*, of known and unknown flowers, the sweet lilt of stringed instruments like *sharinda* or *chompreng* played by ordinary folk in the evening, often melting either with the notes of the mythic bird Nuyai or the rippling sound of brooks flowing through the cracks and fissures among the hills to fill the air – sparks off a rich 'melancholy strain' from the indigenous bards and their mournful numbers articulate in the ears of sensitive readers a rich expression of eco-consciousness. The varied expressions of some tensed wonder arising out of experiencing an imminent disaster in the familiar set up, as if edges on to what Wordsworth once felt with despair – 'That there hath past away a glory from the earth' (*Immortality Ode*, L.18). Though eco-consciousness as a marker of poetic experience may have distinctive and nuanced manifestations, however little, characteristic of the altered situations and the changing milieus in different states, the present article seeks to highlight the theme with reference to the works (translated into English) of some representative poets of two major North-eastern states – Assam and Tripura.

In the poetry from Assam, the largest state in North-east with river Bramhaputra as the life-line and an enviable bio-diversity almost at par (as per official sources) with the Equatorial rain-forests, and also a treasure-trove of myth and folk-lore, changes in ecosphere such as, pollution, urbanisation, global warming deforestation and also militancy, elicit poetic concern as manifest in the works of Navakanta Baruah, Anupama Basumatary, Harekrishna Deka, Hiren Bhattacharyya, Anubhav Tulsi and Santana Tanty among others.

A poem *Bat* by Nabakanta Baruah presents through an oblique angle, a tranquil yet tensed picture of nature in the fancied vision of bats. While alive, hanging from the racks of a grocery shop with their feet, the bats have an inverted view of the world:

They saw:
The earth strung above the sky,
And the trees that rest on the firmament
Thrusting their roots
Into the hoary darkness of the earth.
(Nabakanta 2009, p.8.L.7-11)

But this natural, innocuous scene receives a severe, teleological purport of an ecological disorder in the dying vision of the same creatures before they are electrocuted – by holding fast to 'the liquid death that speeds/ Through tense electric wires' (L.34-35). The closing lines are replete with suggestions of a terrible consequence when the earth as it were, loses itself in a blind bid for suicidal masochism.

And then?
Then the sky will again lie
Recumbent.
The hills will pin it down
Astride in an inverted coital variant ;
And under the monstrous breasts
Of an insatiable witch,
Love will die a shattering death.
(L.36-43)

A delicate message of Nature's retributive justice consequent upon the violation of human rights can be discerned under a socio-political metaphor in another poem of Baruah titled *Palestine*. A shameless politicizing of human needs under the blind craze for strengthening one's power and pelf ('We killed them for they wanted eternal life/ Then bulldozed their prisons into fields of corn (L.3-4),' is warranted with terrible repercussions couched in fitting images of ecological collapse as in the closing lines of this short lyric:

What's that hand sticking out from the earth?
Other hands will sprout from it ---
And tickle us to death.
(Nabakanta 2009, p.13. L.5-7)

The spectral hand beckoning the speaker to doom is reminiscent of, to a certain extent, the skeletal hand stuck out of a wraith of money and fame tantalizing the hero in Satyajit Ray's film *Nayak* (The Hero, with legendary Uttam kumar in the lead role) to death in his nightmare and also of the airy dagger pointing towards Duncan's chamber in the hallucination scene of Shakespeare's *Macbeth*.

Some works of Anupama Basumatary are characterized by an acute eco-anxiety as in the poem *Snails* for example. The sadistic pleasure derived from watching the 'agony' of the dying snails at the time of extracting the pulp, paradoxically turns into a nightmare of a role-switch as the speaker admits the shuddering impact of the speculation upon her soul.

Now I crawl around the sea-shores
clamber about on land and water
.....
.....

Strangely, an unknown hand picks me up
sucks my sap and leaves me empty.
The shell of my body creaks
in the agony of the heart breaking ...
(Anupama 2009, p.16. L.11-12, 17-19)

The poem *Sculptor* reminds one of a rare conjunction of life and art or, rather the alchemic property of art which is fortified by parallels in myth and folklore. Being transmitted life at the magic touch of the sculptor, the statue of a woman becomes a woman.

Is it at the magic touch
of his hand

or the conjunction of two hearts?
One day my stone - heart
Began beating
my two hands reached out
and clasped him.
Thereafter
I became a woman.
(Anupama 2009, p.17. L.12-20)

The popular strain of eco-feminism permeating the folktales and folklores of North-east, seems to have received here an added dimension in so far as recalling Philip Sidney's dictum that Nature is 'brazen' while Art turns it into 'golden.'

Two poems of Lutfa Hanum Selima Begum bear the same title - *Poem*. In one of them, she spells an anxiety for ecological crises in the chosen idiom which shows an inversion of natural order due to various reasons.

The fallen leaves want
A green passage
Back to the branches of trees.
The birds want
To be yellow inside eggs,
The river wants
That the dead fish return.
(Lutfa 2009, p.22-23.L.1-7)

The closing lines usher in an epiphany of order and are rich in ecopoetics in so far as, the persona expresses an urge for identification with the very system in nature and elicits response from the readers as well, in her role of a bard singing of the serenity in the eco-space.

And me, melting in you
Seek a passage back to me
Through the green.
Through water, stones
Words and tunes. (L.16-20)

The poetry of Sananta Tanty bears a strong note of eco-critical concern and here the poetic power is generated by a keen awareness of the changes wrought by violence, ethnic conflicts etc.etc., taking place in the familiar set-up. The opening stanza of the poem *After Dusk* drives home the point.

Everything occurs after dusk

a rape, or murder of a helpless man from
minority class
standing in front of such a truth
I witness the first explosion in the city
I hear the laughter of a battered river. (Santana
2009, p.271. L.1-5)

The poem titled *Poems Bring Me Back Again and Again* shows a brilliant fusion of the speaker's environmental sensitivity and her poetic accountability as a chronicler of life around, which poses diverse claims upon individual consciousness.

Just for poems I remain engrossed
in your love even today. Look for words of life.
Cross the river carrying with me
some moist days

.....

.....

Sit beside *Sanghamitra* and lay hands on
A Kalashanikov.
Give birth to poems so inseparable from life.
(Santana 2009, p.272.L.1-9)

It is the poetic urge in the speaker that works as the sole motivation to trace the kaleidoscopic nature of experience called life – be it, to quote from the text – ‘ the intense tragedy of the river that flows in my blood’, or when ‘Life’s hunger ends with the shattering of dreams.’ Poetry and love of life are the only founts of sustenance for the speaker and the conclusion offers a confirmation of faith.

Just for poems I remain engrossed in your
love even today. Poems drag me away
from death. (L.38-40)

The poetry of Anubhav Tulasi carves a niche in the field of Assamese poetry with a powerful note of ecological concern. The poem *Infernal Playground* as the name suggests, possibly charts, in an artistic self-distancing mode though, the ethnic violence, insurgency, countermeasures by the government – all that had made Assam a hotbed of unrest a few decades back. The opening lines in a way echoes Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* where even in daytime, ‘darkness doth the face of earth entomb’(Act, Sc.L-11). Here in this poem, the uncanny light playing on the teak sapling, parallels a

fantastic light which as if shows a mockery of light, focusing a scenario where –‘Flameless darkness smoulders /And unbearable the moonlit night’(Anubhav 2009 p.293. L.3-4).

The ennui growing upon the soul as a dividend of some claustrophobic existence in a space lacerated by extortion, deprivation, injustice and a culture of mistrust, receives a poignant expression in the following excerpt:

Is there no way out of this hell
Are we to rot here without protest
Then why kidnap the obstinate one
Who would not surrender..... (L.12-15)

With a rare clarity of vision, the poet manages to see through the ploys of power-politics that *willy nilly*, perpetuate violence and the following lines in a rhetoric of fire, categorically denounce the ferreting of violence for mean political mileage.

Is hell your playground, sirs?
Then why do I suffer page after page
In labour of anxiety and nightmare
To deliver the horror alone. (L. 21-24)

The emergence of violence and fear in the sacrosanct space for living in conjunction with nature (continuing for generations) receives a telling expression in the poetry of another Assam born writer Ilabanta Yumnam. The poem *A Mountain Village* charts how the emerging change threatens to trammel up the traditional ways of ordinary life in the hilly slopes which is characterized by an unquestioned acceptance of the bucolic setting seemingly endorsed by oral narratives that acknowledge among other things, a pristine harmony between man, other living forms and nature.

They say they’d go abandoning this mountain
village
Reverberating with ballads sung by highlanders
Rushing towards the heart, this land
Of arteries
Brought by a bird in its beak one day and dropped
Where mountain and sky touch.
(Ilabanta 2009 p. 304. L.1-6)

How such an evil interloper called militancy
thwarts the serene flow of life, destroying the peace

in the environment, with nature as a mute witness to the menace, is expressed with a rare poignancy in the following lines:

Those bearing bombs and guns come to torture
and kill frequently keep dwellers restive denying
time when to eat or work.
The quivering strains of the guitar
The highland youths with dried- up throats.
Quietly nonchalant clouds with measured tread
Arrive to moisten the eyes of mountain maidens. (L.
7-13)

The poem *Native Land* conveys a mixed feeling of nostalgia for the poet's native place, Cachar along with a disquieting awareness of regular phenomenon of flood caused by Barak river and also the politics of identity allegedly perpetrated upon the minority of which the persona thinks himself to be an articulate part. The quick transition of thoughts – from vague homesickness ('My vacant feet would like to tread your road') to an instinctive feeling of flood ('I will kiss the water's cheek/I will sleep a night with you') interestingly terminates into a more urgent issue – the issue of ethnicity that lends a caustic hue to the poet's deliberations.

In every spot on earth
The souls of minorities
Are said to be suffering always
How chewing the cud
Shall we digest sufferings
We are not an alien species.
(Ilabanta 2009 p. 308. L.19-24)

Side by side with a categorical recognition of the violence and unwelcome changes creeping in the familiar orbit, a quietist tenor of poetry in perfect peace with the environment is not rare either, as in the case of poet Nirmalaprabha Bardoloi who in the poem *Dawn* for example, sings of the serene flow of life unhindered or unruffled by the urban pace :

Does the day break
with the sound of guns?
No.
it breaks with the cry
of that bird
which nibbles through
the night's darkness
very slowly. (Nirmala 2009,p. 73.L.1-8)

However, a cursory glance at the contemporary poetic output from Assam including those discussed here, some way or the other leads to the conjecture that notwithstanding being inter-assured of the divinity of their vocation arising out of the sacrosanct matrix of life and nature, the poets focus more on the unsavoury changes in their familiar space than merely valorizing nature and her pristine beauties which among all other considerations, mostly characterised popular poetic imagination in the state over decades.

The poetry in Tripura, a small hilly state with an astounding ecological variety and plenitude providing a fillip to creative imagination as concomitant to life spent in proximity to nature, offers an interesting picture of adulation and retrospection in terms of poetic attitude to nature in the works of the tribal and non-tribal poets of the state respectively. The ecosphere in the Kokborok poetry of Tripura, written in the language of indigenous people (known as Kokborok) appears to be a space much shredded by human greed and violence, and yet retaining much of its beauty, nuclear innocence and harmony.

Nature in the poetry of Chandrakanta Murasingh, a reputed tribal poet and the founder editor of *Kokborok Sahitya Academy*, seems to be fraught with a strong suggestion of human intervention and a strategic ecocide that invariably gestures to some ominous possibility in store for man. The following lines taken from the poem *Pebbles* seem to be sulphurous with a strong element of eco-conscience:

The tree that still remains in this forest
are we keeping it alive?
The stream is now a maid servant
in your house and in mine.
(Chandrakanta 2017. P.51. L.1-4)

The poet also disapproves human apathy to nature that does harm to the sanctity of eco-space comprising equally of the human and the natural – 'He who survives on the mountain's peak -/ do we also keep him alive?' (L.5-6). The cautionary urge in the persona finally bolts into a sarcastic outburst against the incongruity between the mythic exaltation of nature in gorgeous narratives and the

actual and sordid reality of lived experiences of those who are in close proximity with nature:

The sky is eloquent with folklore,
the rice is full of pebbles.(L.7-8)

Another poem *Sleep* offers an encomium on Sleep which in addition to being the 'chief nourisher in life's feast' as in the case of everyman (to quote Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, Act 2, Sc.2 L.52), sustains the being of the speaker as a source of emotional poise amidst the chaotic mess of experiences – 'sleep and me in an intense red in the heart' (Chandrakanta 2017. P. 53. L.12). However, even though sleep is deemed as the best possible gift of life or a laurel for the speaker ('...making me king, sleep sits on my head/ like a golden crown'L.18-19) compared to the power and pelf sought by an individual in this materialistic world ('Just as power, lust for wealth and pride/sits tight on the minister's head,...' L.16-17), it proves to be just a frail dike to an encroaching eco-conscience where problems, purely man-made, are born out of power-politics and deprivation:

Extremists run trampling the jungle.
Trampling the jungle march the sentries
in their obstinate and rude power.
Corpses travel to the cremation ground along the
hilly road. (L.21-24)

The pensive note of expression receives a sudden poignancy with a note of familiarity and recognition:

The face of the dead seems to be familiar,
and having eaten a broth of leaves, creepers and
wild toads
Kutugla's wife is dead. (L. 25-27).

A veiled concern for eco-crisis seems to characterise another poem *Chetuang Tree*, where an overall ambience of despair – in the projection of a wayward wind apathetic to the status of the speaker as an individual as far as his affiliation to some organization is concerned ('in which direction is my camp?'); and a desolate moon -- fail to quell in the speaker an acute urge for being repugnant of the limits imposed by reality: ' Yet I call to say-/ O sky, I am in your side.' (Chandrakanta 2017. P.60. L. 9-10). However, the image of the Chetuang Tree whose tapering peak almost pierces the cloud,

offers a streak of transcendence by paradoxically transmitting in the collective unconscious of men, the message of nature's sacrosanctity. A similar note of disquiet arising out of nature's impoverishment vis a vis human greed for money/power continues in a poem titled *Sky* – 'The white, red, green flags narrate the sky's story, / blood smeared money reddens the sky'(Chandrakanta 2017. P.61. L.5-6).

However, under the façade of a rampant skepticism and apparent disillusionment arising out of some unwanted changes in the familiar environment (wrought by different reasons, man made or not), nature emerges as the motherly figure of a sanctuary for the bruised soul of this bard and a short lyric called *Ma* encapsulates as it were, the eco-testament of the poet:

The fireflies kindle their lights to seek darkness,
wild rats bite soft roots
inside earth's heart,
in darkness.
Still the earth is my mother,
with so much of light within,
the waters of the stream know.
(Chandrakanta 2017. P.62.)

The poem *The Stone Speaks in the Forest* seems to be rich with a mythic symbolism. The stone pressed by the feet of a king looking for a golden deer and also bearing the tears and dreams of some commoner such as a frustrated lover, seems to outgrow into a living entity equipped with the agency for speech. The closing lines gesture to the stone as the form of 'life petrified' showing parallels to myth (as in Ahalya's case in the *Ramayana*) or popular imagination (as for example the stone images in *Unokoti* of North Tripura):

The stone speaks in the forest,
Bow and arrow in hand.
(Chandrakanta 2009, p.184. L.22-23)

A mild note of eco-consciousness is detectable in the works of some other poets such as Bikashrai Debbarma , Bijoy Debbarma and Utpal Debbarma among others.

The trauma of being cut off from the umbilical cords of one's being is conspicuously felt in the poem *Without an Address* by Utpal Debbarma. The postcolonial reality of diaspora and

its concomitant feature – ‘Swagreehe parabasi’ that is, ‘feeling alienated at home,’ – is unmistakable in this poem where the poet’s familiar space with all its terrestrial beauty that have sustained him in his weal and woe, seems to have lost its nuclear feature in negotiating changes wrought by time. The opening verse paragraph unravels the pangs of dislocation and subsequent loss of identity:

My life is entwined with rivers, streams, stones,
hilly paths,
fertile land and rows of mountain ranges.
Walking incessantly in storm, hail and dew drops
across night, I am exhausted.
But the path that I had travelled on
is now without address, lost is history
and I am wreck.
(Utpal 2017. P.139.L.1-7)

The loss of cultural moorings, inferiorisation in the altered subject-position for the indigenous people, a hang-over of the colonial as well as postcolonial social reality; receive an eloquent expression in the second verse paragraph:

On a temporal road I move today
without any constancy in life.
My hearth is dark, companionless I have nowhere to go.
And the story of my striking roots is now lost.
(L.8-11)

Another poem *I behold these* reads like a vagrant’s diary reflecting on as if, the ‘ignoble strife’ of ‘the madding crowd’ in the name of life around or the so called procession of humanity – ‘Barking and roaring hollow men, in lust/tend to tear off flesh from their own bodies’ (Utpal 2017 p. 140.L.8-9). In the orgy of violence and terrorism wrought by men, even nature, as it were, feels unnerved – ‘The dark evening smiles and the moon and the stars/ hide their panic stricken face behind the clouds’(10-11). The toll of rampant insurgency or counter action of the State leaves no impact upon either men in power or the misguided folk and as a result ‘the spark of guns dances in delight in the border’(L.13).The anxiety for the future of the progeny reigns paramount in the perfect idiom of a deeply moving, acute eco-anxiety as in the closing lines of the poem:

Moving the veil of mist emerges the sun,
a dark, murky light on the face.

There by the side of the border lies a corpse-
my neighbor, my brother, had come of youth recently.
(Utpal 2017. P.140.L.15-18)

Another poem *I go on searching* seems to add to Utpal’s reputation as an indigenous poet in so far as it strives to communicate an obtuse pain bred at the psyche by the insentient bid to urbanization that often tends to repudiate the sanctity of one’s roots:

Here there’s no joom, no forest,
nor any tong-ghar or hill top.
Then wherefrom this smell, or is it a conflagration
here in this dirty lane of the capital?
(Utpal 2017. P.141. L.7-10)

A faintly Eliotic detection of an ‘unreal city’ in this context (reminiscent of *The Wasteland*), instead of echoing a Baudlairean epiphany, here remains content with the recognition of a parochial experience -- violence, that seems embedded in the North-eastern ethos:

Sometimes it gets lost God knows where,
and then again comes back with a sharp happiness.
Gun and gunpowder float at the tip of my nose.
(L.11-13)

The deliberate evocation of pathos with an astute use of understatement foregrounds the pity underlying violence and the fate of wayward youths and the poetic stance as it were, reiterates once more, the moving wail of Wordsworth – ‘What man has made of man!’

A smothering feel of ennui out of the perpetrated cult of violence, angst at the politics of identity that shrewdly flares out ethnic riots, a mute pain of thwarted interpersonal relationship and an acute eco-consciousness -- mark the works of another powerful poet Bikashrai Debbarma.

The poem *Within without* as the title suggests, dramatizes the rival claims of two contesting affiliations -- espousal of one’s cultural roots and a commitment to nurture the same on the one hand and the urge to respond to the call of so called War for autonomous identity of the indigenous people following the mode of indiscriminate violence on the other. In a way, the poem projects very much a dialogue of self and

anti-self. If the self finds consolations in thoughts of peace and reconciliation as characteristic of a rooted identity ('I am very much within. /Nothing to worry about,' Or, -- 'Kokborok is the language of the Boroks/ and I am a Borok. '); the counter argument is offered by the anti-self :

To have the war is more important,
within or without doesn't matter.
Goal is the same.
You too are a Borok.
(Bikashrai 2017. P. 67. L.11-14)

While the 'War' unravels the hideous face of brutality with 'severed heads', 'chopped arms, legs' littered 'in a pool of blood,' the persona expresses frustration at the motivated silence of a particular group, perhaps the elite or the creamy class, whose conscientious role could have altered the situation for good. The closing lines thus mark a height of ironic undertone pointing to the inconclusive nature of the rampage going on:

War gains momentum.
It might be you.
It might be me.
The one within
is silent.
He too is a Borok. (L.33-38)

In the poem *Bunyan Tree*, poet Bikashrai mourns the denuded looks of a site which with an illusion of a shelter or shadow (and of Bunyan tree?) practically exposes the speaker to an experience of aridity:

not even a single tree anywhere.

.....
.....
broken branches and twigs,
scattered helter skelter.
(Bikashrai 2017. P 74. L.3-7)

Even celestial bodies such as the moon and the sun feel lonely to have found no peer on the terrestrial plane and the imagistic movement in the following excerpt offers a claustrophobic sense of an impending disaster:

The drowsy lullaby of a dull moon
unknowingly transforms itself to a moan
at the loss of someone dear.

.....
.....
The sun-burnt hills
with scorched dehydrated tongues
are flung here and there
like the folds of a worn out cloth. (L. 9-17)

In the poem *Untitled*, the poetic concern for ecological well being is superbly couched in terms of ultra modern and apparently incompatible experiences of civil and commercial interests as advertised in social media. The requirement of 'uninhabited vacant land' for development is counterbalanced by an equal cry for afforestation with the slogan: "Saving tree saves life, forest is therefore, / a necessity for life"(Bikashrai 2017. P 79. L.9-10). The third appeal sounds yet more vitriolic in the suggestion of utopian schemes of development which are afault with self-contradictory agenda that at best betray a studied indifference to the question of promoting ecosphere: "For wildlife sanctuary forest has to be vacated"(L.12) The irony at the heart of all this fiasco is superbly stressed by the common urge for enlisting "Like, Comment and Share" from the viewers of Social Media, specifically, Facebook, Instagram, Ex-handle, etc.etc.

The closing lines of the poem sound as an astute statement of eco-conscience that abjures the fetish of populist craze threatening to become the dominant trend in the most influential thing known as Social Media:

I just don't require anything,
just a share in land and forest everywhere-
no like, no comment, no share.(L. 14-16)

The poetry of Bijoy Debbarma offers an exquisite blend of mythic consciousness, ecological anxiety and a teleological concern couched in brilliant poetic imagery. The popular narratives of repressed histories and the politics of representation, a vital feature of postcolonial literature, seem to have been beautifully rehearsed in the poem *Ekalabya of Longtarai*. Under the façade of the age-old saga of deprivation of the marginal to gratify the interest of centre, the poet exalts the iconic figure of Ekalabya who in spite of having arguably a greater skill in archery, was ostracized by guru Drona to safeguard the interest of Arjuna. Here the mythic parable of monopoly,

nepotism and victimization seems to suggest a parallel in the prioritization of the centre or the capital (Agartala) by eliding the interest /worth of the periphery and the third verse paragraph strongly gestures to such a conjecture.

Arjuna's are jealous and many faced,
they have many appearances.
At every street intersections,
at every traffic point,
on table, chair, corridor and red tape-
Arjunas, Duryodhans and Dronacharyas stand on guard.
When you shall reach the Longtarai peak,
They'll cut off your right thumb.
(Bijoy 2017. P.82. L.32-40)

This superb blend of the perennial with the parochial makes the poem truly remarkable and the postcolonial urge for rewriting one's own history reclaiming the agency for speech for equally rich yet repressed histories, is further traced in the sequel piece *Ask your thumb back* where Eklabya, the legendary figure of subalternity, is exhorted to claim his thumb back from the schematic ostraciser known as Dronacharya. The poem bears an excellent account of eco- narrative further characterized by, what may be called, a strategic essentialism to dismantle the hegemonic. To put in simple words, through the haunting description of nature, the persona as if seeks redressal for the injustice meted out to Eklabya. The following excerpt drives home the point:

The breeze that spreads the fragrance of your blood,
now returns as a song.
Eyes open in a sleepy face.
Poetry germinates in the earth
that bore drops of your blood.
The grass that felt the touch of your blood
is now reciting your poem.
(Bijoy 2017. P.86. L.5-11)

Since the designated subject position is altered in a counter-narrative ('the dumb have now found articulation'L.14), the poet finally urges:

Ekalabya, gone are the days of gurudakshina.
You have a bow and a sound-piercing arrow.
So now, ask your thumb back. (L.15-17)

A mythopoeic treatment of nature contextualizing the present scenario distinguishes the poetry of Bijoy Debbarma. The last poem discussed in this context, *Why Should I go?* reads, as the name suggests, like a poetic testament of Bijoy kumar, containing his apology as a poet (also as an individual) for his affiliation to his indigenous roots in course of his cultural odyssey through different métiers of experience which are most often, not without lures of opulence and power threatening to trammel up traditional ways of life. The disquieting awareness of an unwholesome nature of experience; of an emerging change, is aptly expressed in the following lines:

Those innumerable roads lead towards the road royale.
Random winds blow from that direction;
dress disrobed, hair disarranged, a scorching feel of the blast.
(Bijoy 2017. P. 87.L.10-12)

Being used to his familiar space—containing the mythical 'Chethuang forest', 'the tongghar in the orchard', with scenic spots like *Longtarai, Shakantan, Jompui, Atharamura,* -- the persona can repudiate the narratives of something 'new', fascinating reality which is termed as below: "A distant lyric comes floating far beyond, /tune unknown and unheard, but new in appeal"(L.15-16). While the tantalizing charms of an exotic reality cause emotional perturbations in the poet by 'breaking boundaries, leaving addresses'(L.18), the agitation at the core is quelled by the poet's allegiance to his sustaining values or moorings as reiterated in the closing lines of the poem:

Innumerable murmurs creep into the heart,
revolting at every step –
Why should I go? Why?
– discarding the roots, far away from the origin.
(L.19-22).

Thus, a subterranean consciousness of myth negotiating the contradictory claims of reality characterizing existence, over all marks the poetry of Bijoy Debbarma.

Speaking generally, in the poetry of the indigenous people of Tripura, one comes across an overall peace of understanding with some naïve and pristine sanctity of the living space and its recuperative potency in negotiating unwholesome

changes that for a time threaten to trammel up the ways of life in the bucolic setting that has been spanning through generations.

For some Bengali poets of Tripura (which is also a border –state like Assam), the trauma caused by urbanization is coupled with the pangs of separation due to partition of the country in 1947 and this is nowhere better illustrated than in the works of Amulya Sarkar, Kalyanbrata Chakraborti and Aparajita Roy among others.

The following extract from the poem *Gone are lamp-lit Nights* by Aparajita Roy conjures up the sordid imagery of an uncanny look of vagueness and uncertainty that a familiar evening dons as a result of geo-political changes in the name of partition. The resultant feeling is one of unremitted gloom fretting in the blind alley of despair.

Gone are the lamp-lit eves for long
Only the stifling load-shedding reigns
I grope for the door in vain,
To lock-out an old prisoner of darkness.

.....

.....

In words written in fire on the wall,
Shall it set all lapses right?

(Roy 2005. P.31. L.1-4, 12-13. Translation mine)

A poem titled *My Boat yearns to be Ashore* written by Amulya Sarkar contains a heart-rending account of post-partition violence and civil war which has turned the homeland into a wasteland of aborted hope with the cries of widows, raped women and bereaved parents that rend the sky.

My woeful night throbs
Cribbed with enemy tents around
While I cover my body with cactus
Pall my child's corpse with moonlight

.....

.....

In my yard, now unknown serpents hiss,
The woods murmur the moaning of the raped,

.....

The water of Gomati turns red
With a new spurt of bloodshed

.....

.....

Is this the land we dreamt all along,
To be a place my dear, for a sweet home?

(Sarkar, 2005, p. 36, L.1-4, 7-8, 10-11,14-15. Translation mine)

In the works of another formidable Bengali poet of Tripura Kalyanbrata Chakraborti, one comes across a chiseled expression of facing the loss of a nuclear innocence characterising the familiar space due to reasons more man-made than natural. For example, the poem *In A Strange Darkness* upholds the political diplomacy of cross-border tactics that repudiates the common man's desire for living together with those weaned from the homeland – a legacy of shared culture that marks the sanctity of generations. The lines quoted below relate to the transference of 'Three Bighas' land and its effect upon the people of the Indo-Bangla border and thus unravel the pangs of feeling alienated at home, the 'anxiety of being a foreigner' at one's homeland.

My grandmother died several days after the land.....
.....was seized in the name of setting an orphanage.

After paying my loans and dues I have moved to this hut in

the colony.

.....

it is simply propaganda that the imperialists have Left our country for good.

(Chakraborty 2009, p.85 . L.3-10)

Another poem titled *Refugee* spells the trauma of isolation and uncertainty faced by a middle-aged refugee and the urban setting paradoxically whets memory and desire only to inure oneself to further bouts of self-pity.

...trickeries of the heart, its weal and woe,
civilization and its gifts -- All
Have to be bundled up
In this pre-recluse state of life.

.....

.....

Memory unremitted, floods every corner,
Before the siren blows, the brothel and *Brindaban*,
Are washed alike... the city tower goes up and down the flow...

Night sets in...at the detention camp,
Eating just a handful of beaten rice

We pass wakeful nights

Expecting that the sins accrued in our hearts,
Be covered by the silt of waters....

(Selected Poetry, Translation mine, p.41-42)

Taking cue from the epigraph, one may safely conclude that Timon's reflections leading to his "deep recognition, and intimacy [...] toward the vast forces, the stillness, the immensity, of nature, [...] which the intellect of man has muddled..."(as detected by critic G.Wilson Knight), seems to be symptomatic, though to a certain, limited extent, of the predicaments faced by the indigenous bards of North-east. While negotiating untoward changes in the familiar space, these raconteurs of a lost Elysium seek to articulate in their respective métiers the human role in the Reality they encounter – viz, a mounting fear of being weaned from the sanctimonious relationship with nature that has sustained humanity over the ages.

[**Word notes:** *Joom/Jhum*– Patches of leveled land on hill slopes used for cultivation. *Nabanna*– New rice after harvest. *Tong-ghar*– room on the mound to keep watch on the *joom*.

Sharinda, Champreng –traditional musical instruments used by the tribal people in Tripura., *Nuayi*– Mythical birds in the belief-system of tribal people in Tripura.]

Longtarai, Shakantan, Jompui, Atharamura, – hilly areas in Tripura]

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