Chapter III

Protest and Acquiescence: A Study of the Poems of

Brajendra Kumar Brahma

My intention was that we should develop, in a nice collaborative tension, a range of readings that engaged the insights of poststructuralist theories of narrative knowledge---The marginal or ‘minority’ is not the space of a celebratory, or utopian, self - marginalization. It is a much more substantial in intervention into those justifications of modernity-progress, homogeneity, cultural organicism, the deep nation, the long past-that rationalize the authoritarian, ‘normalizing’ tendencies within cultures in the name of national interest.


Brajendra Kumar Brahma was born on 1st June, 1943, at Batabari village in Kokrajhar district. He passed matriculation examination in 1959 from SaktiAshram Vocational High School and graduated from St. Edmund’s College, Shillong in 1968 and completed B.T. in 1977 from
Govt. B.T. College, Goalpara. He joined as the Headmaster at Banargaon High School in 1970 and retired on 31 May 2001. At present he resides at Baganshali, under Kokrajhar Municipality Board. After completion of his education in 1968, Brahma has closely been associated with Bodo literary organizations and at present he is the president of Bodo Sahitya Sabha (B.S.S.) for the terms 2002-2004, and, again he has been nominated for the same position. He also held different reputed position at different time and occasion. He was the joint secretary of B.S.S. from 1996 to 1992 and also vice-president of ‘Bodo Writers’ Academy’ and advisor for the same for the terms 1996-2001. He was the chairman of The Bodo, a mouthpiece of the B.S.S. for the terms 1993-1995.

As a freelance writer he has immensely contributed to Boro literature. He has three anthologies of poems, i.e. ‘Okhrang Gongse Nangau’ (In Search of a Sky, 1975), ‘Ang Phwiphingwn’ (I’ll Come Back, 1994) and ‘San Mwkhangari Bibar Jananwi’ (Being a Sun-Facing Flower, 1994). Again to his credit there are some valuable prose collections also. They are ‘Thunlai Arw Sanshri’ (Literature and Philosophy, 1986), ‘Raithaimala’ (Prose-Collections, 1992), ‘Nwjwr Arw Swrji’ (Views and Creations, 1994), ‘Thunlai Arw Thunlai’ (Literature and Literature, 2005) and ‘Raithaihala’ (Prose-Works, 2006). He is still writing poems and prose in different Boro journals and periodicals. His ‘Okhrang
Gongse Nangau' won the "Someswari Brahma Award" of the Bodo Sahitya Sabha in 1994, and, 'San Mwkhangari Bibar Jananwi' won the "Mukta Ram Brahma Award" of Bongaigaon Bodo Sahitya Sabha in 1995.

He admits of being influenced by poets like Nava Kanta Barua (Assamese) particularly in the field of technique and thought and Jivanananda Das (Bangla) in the field of theme, philosophy, idea and symbol, T.S. Eliot in technique and intellect and Mallarme, Rilke in language and expression. His experiment of style, technique and private symbol projects his search for own literary distinction and identity.

Brajendra as many scholars believe has firmly established both public and private symbols which were never tried in the Boro poetry earlier to that extend. He writes subjective as well as objective poetry to convey his message and mission. He has also the credit of introducing criticism in Boro literature. Sincere, disciplined, studious and one of the great Boro critics and poets, Brajendra Kumar Brahma is considered to be an institution by himself for his dissemination of ideas relating to poetic exploration. In his poetry the themes are based upon mysticism, love, nationalism, humanism, socialism, history, philosophy, religion and culture. Myths and legends also find expression in terms of exploration of symbols and images.
In the poem 'Biyw Thayw Eyun Bidinthayao' (He Lives in Posterity) Brahma expresses the theme of faith, mysticism and infinity deftly:

There is no end of time in the
womb of the yean,
I find fit it through the rules of creation
but I've not found Him
though I scanned thoroughly
as He has not appeared.
The time slips
from my hand to the past
and it remains in the bosoms of the future
for ever.¹

The poet peaks that there is no end of life. There is only a transformation in one's life. It is the Almighty God who is behind this process. The poet never sees him, though he tries to explore Him. According to the poet, everyone must leave the world for heavenly abode. Again in the poem, 'Biyw Phwiyw Jug Jug' (He Comes for Ages) the poet articulates that the almighty God is the centre of the universe. He emerges again and again with different forms and figures.

When the light of truth dies away
from the portal of this world,
then he alone takes strides fighting the darkness,
and holds an ever burning candlelight.

He comes for ages in this world, with no end of plays;
all lives and the cosmos revolve within his gravitation.²

Love, for Brajendra Kumar Brahma, is a very remote phenomenon.
It has emerged and has been flowing beyond the civilization of Ellora and
Ajanta of the Sind Civilization. Hence he says in the poem ‘Angni
Anjalinisim’ (To My Beloved):

When
the spring season took shape
at the slightest hints of your eyes,
when the butterflies exchanged hearts on the fresh flowers,
then I acquired the knowledge of
understanding the silent language of
Ellora and Ajanta.³

Here the poet makes use of some imagery to speak about love.
Phrases like: “spring season”, “butterflies exchanged hearts”, “fresh
flower” and “silent language” are related to love and compassion.
Brajendra Kumar Brahma would like to sketch love as a natural instinct.
This instinct is present not only in man but also in all creatures. For
example, “butterflies exchanged hearts” shows the natural urge of love. Moreover, the line “the silent language of Ellora and Ajanta” presents the great image of human love along with the civilization of the Sind. Hence, he says again in the same poem:

Instill in me the strength,

there is oasis in the Sahara too

despite the mistakes in my actions

to believe that.  

Here the poet says to his beloved that there is an oasis in the desert of Sahara too. So, he has a firm belief that despite the mistake of his love to someone dearest, there must be an excuse just like an oasis in the Sahara. Then only there grows in poet’s mind a great confidence to say boldly: “there is a life in love.” This poem by Brajendra Kumar Brahma has a close resemblance with the poem entitled ‘Banalata Sen of Natore’ by Jivanananda Das.

For aeons have I roamed the earth

from the sea of Ceylon to the straits of Malaya

I journeyed, alone, the whole night,

and the dark corridor of time I have walked

Through the mist of Bimbisara, Asoka, darker Vidarbha.

my only peace I knew with Banalota Sen of Natore.
Her hair was as dark as night in Vidisha;
her face, the sculpture of Sravasti;
I saw her, as a sailor after the storm,
rudderless in the sea,
the grass green heart of the leafy Island. (Gupta 23)

It is not necessary to say that love for motherland is a major issue for the Boro life. Nationalism in Brajendra Kumar Brahma appears out of trial and tribulation. He doesn’t like politics in the name of religion. But as his race had to face the challenges of existence, then, these untoward incidents are found to be responsible for the emergences of nationalistic feelings in him. In the poem ‘Dubri Hagra’ (Carpet Grass), he says:

I’ve started at the point
where the history of my life ended,
the body in the process of fossilization
has taken a new life today.

Amidst the dry leaves of the winter
I hear the voice of green
vegetation all around.
The line “the body in the process of fossilization” reflects the dark period of the Boros. Due to lack of efficient leaders and descendants of the Boro kingdom, the Boros were about to be doomed. Besides the few heritages of culture and folklore, the Boros are found to have gone astray. And they have hardly seen the ways and means of existence. Hence, Gait said, “The Bodo dialects, though still spoken in Assam by more than half a million persons, are in their turn giving way to Aryan languages (Assamese and Bengali), and their complete disappearance is only a matter of time.” (Gait 6). Then and there, the Boros seemed to react it. Brajendra Kumar too articulates in this light: “I’ve started at the point/Where the history of my life ended.’ That is in the poet a confidence grows having seen the present outcome of the Boros. Here ‘I’ is representative of his own race the Boros. From almost doom stage, now the Boros are developing and all the more, they have got their language coming under the eighth schedule of Indian Constitution. Thus, the following lines fit to this point of time: “The body in the process of fossilization/has taken a new life today.” And, then, the next stanza must do follow as natural phenomena of the poetic sense and sensibility: “Amidst the dry leaves of the winter/I hear the voice of green/Vegetation all around”. This is to say that the prediction made by Gait had awakened the Boros from their long-and deep slumber. Otherwise, the Boros would
have been in darkness and the present scenario of progress might not surface so early. In this context, Gandhi’s “Suffering as the law of life,” needs to be quoted, “Mother suffers so the child may live and the seed suffers so the tree may grow.” These remarks of Gandhi became an epigraph to Australian novelist Patrick White. His first novel *The Happy Valley* and each one of his subsequent novels, a dozen of them, depicted a varied theme of suffering which qualified him to become the first Nobel Laureate for literature, for his country. (Narasimhaiah 8-9).

In the field of literature the Bodo Sahitya Sabha has been actively working since its inception in 1952. The Boro medium of instruction has started since 1963. Now the Gauhati University has recognized the Boro language as a Subject. Dibrugarh University and North-East Hills University, Shillong too have recognized Boro language among the Modern Indian Languages. And the agreement among Bodoland Tiger Forces, the state government in Assam, and the center in Delhi resulted in Bodoland Territorial Council in 2003, an administrative set up for the exercise of the minimum political rights of the Boros. With this reward, the Boro language has also crept up to the eighth schedule of Indian constitution. The said development comes as a relief to the Boros. So, the poet Brajendra Kumar Brahma’s expression is found to be a reflection of the present political development. In the modern poems two trends are
apparent. One is pro-Marxist and the other is non-Marxist. In this light Chandradhar Chamuah’s write-up “The Influence of T.S. Eliot on Modern Assamese Literature” needs to be discussed. He writes:

In modern poems two trends are apparent. One is pro-Marxist and the other is non-Marxist. Bhabananda Dutta, Birendra Kumar Bhattacharya, Amulya Baruah, Hem Baruah, Keshab Mahanta and many others belong to the first line thought. This stream still runs in a continuous process. The poems of Amulya Baruah are saturated with the message of class-conflicts. The non-Marxist is a group that seems to criticize the modern capitalist society with a humanitarian and middle-class outlook. They are Nava Kanta Barua, Mohin Borah, Hari Borkakaty, Homen Borgohain and others. The poems of Nava Kanta Barua are loaded with the hopes and aspiration, failures and agonies of the middle-class. The poetic artistry of Eliot, however, has influenced the Marxist and non-Marxist alike. (Chamuah 8)

Similarly in case of modern Boro poets, the same thing is justified. Jagadish Chandra Brahma, Brajendra Kumar Brahma, Nandeswar Boro,
Ramdas Boro, Baneswar Basumatary and many others are grouped as pro-Marxist and Prosenjit Brahma, Guneswar Moshahary, Kamal Kumar Brahma, Monaranjan Lahary, Dhoronidhar Wary can be grouped as non-Marxist. What Brajendra has expressed in the above poem is certainly a strain of nationalism with Marxist sense and spirit. However, it is seen that Brajendra Kumar Brahma has composed poems both of Marxist and non-Marxist strains.

Brajendra Kumar Brahma loves for having been born human. He says he will come back to this purple world again and again to fulfil his cherished hopes and aspiration. He is not like Buddha in the matter of life cycle. He rather moves from one life to another. He states in the poem entitled ‘Sinainai Buhum’ (the Known Earth):

By concealing thyself in the shadow of death
by avoiding the re-birth
Thou step forward through the
silent path from life to Nirvana.
but I turn from life to life
on this earth where sorrow abounds,
here I assimilate all the elements of life
for the creation of heaven
It is well known that Buddha meditated for long twelve years for salvation. But Brajendra Kumar Brahma never minds the sorrows and sufferings of human life. He loves it as he says in the line “But I turn from life to life/ On this earth where sorrow abounds / Here I assimilate all the elements of life.” Again in this connection he says in the poem ‘Ang Phwiphingwn’ (I’ll Come Back):

As the mind awakes
to make heaven on this earth
with the golden juice of heart,
as you have prepared the mind
to strengthen the vitiated thread
of the discordant lives
that binds to intimacy,
I shall bring alone
the lonely crane that flapped its desperate wings
when lost its home in the sky;
I shall come back.7

This poem reminds us a poem entitled ‘One Day I Shall Come Back’ by Jivanananda Das:

One day I shall come back, come back to Bengal
to the bank of this river with the terraced rice field
perhaps not as a man, but in the shape of a swallow
perhaps as the crow of dawn descending on this session of
the new rice.

.... .... ...... .......

.... .... .... .........

With a torn white sail, as in the dark across the red cloud
The white crane return, there will I be, among them.

( Gupta 44-45)

Brajendra Kumar Brahma would like to come back despite all the
sorrows in the life cycle in terms of re-birth, while Jivanananda Das too
would come again to the community he belongs in the form of a bird
among the white cranes. Both the poets love human life despite sorrows
and sufferings in terms of “life and death”.

Brajendra Kumar Brahma believes that human life is not a bed of
roses. At the time of birth he comes with bare hands. All he has to do is to
struggle and struggle as Rousseau said, “Man is born free but everywhere
he is in chains.” Thus Brajendra Kumar says in the poem entitled
'Mwdwijwng Swrjinai'( Creation by Tears):

In the dark procession

of a silent night

I see an inspired language
hovering around the place-
on this earth
and in this life
I’ve some responsibility
to carry out,
the unfulfilled gift of God.
But my mind trembles
because I’m a raw hand!

Yet the drop of tear
shed upon the loss of
something so dear to me
do inspire the creation.

Meditation upon experience
I take up a heavy hammer
and toil at the boulder;
by the sweat of my brow
I try to give life a form.8

In this context Jivanananda Das’ poem entitled ‘Standing
before Time’ may be discussed:
Yet today I am a man,
the harvest from the path of the autumn pulse
in the heart of creation:
and the future skeleton of this humankind:
and the ardent wait
to learn the path
for new men-new, new men
to learn-to wish to learn the paths,
and barring the way forward,
the endless hunger for food. (Das 68)

There is no life without food. Hence for food everyone is struggling
or has to struggle. Thus Jivanananda Das writes "Yet today I am a man /
The harvest from the path of the autumn pulse/ In the heart of creation:/And the future skeleton of this humankind:" In the similar
fashion Brajendra Brahma expresses "I take up a heavy hammer/ And toil
at the boulder;/By the sweats of my brow /I try to give life a form."

Apart from the philosophy of life, Brajendra’s poems also uphold
biographical elements. The idea of biographical literature must be
discussed in this context. About biographical literature Hudson says:

"In our study of the personal life in literature we shall
of course be greatly helped by the judicious use of
good biography. Our interest in the writings of any great author being once aroused, the desire will inevitably be stimulated to learn something of the man himself, as a man, beyond that which his work reveals to us. We shall be curious to see him in the social surroundings in which he lived, and in his daily converse with his, struggles, successes, failure-and the connection of his books with these; the way in which and the conditions under which such books were written; his intellectual habits and methods of work.(Hudson 6)

In this light, Brajendra Kumar Brahma’s poem ‘Okhrang Gongse Nangau’ (In Search of a Sky) can be discussed. This particular poem must show the poet’s impulses regarding social beings along with the tension all around!

We are in want of a sky,
today we need;
a free and fresh air
where a narrow boundary
doesn’t exist.
Where the empty body is filled
and the hungry mind spits poison.

For this reason today
there's the ugly countenance of
the four varnas of history,
and the wrong thought about them,
the poisonous fruit in an amrit tree.  

The poet believes that the caste-system is the root causes of tension and crisis among the Hindus. The Holy Scriptures like the Upanishad, the Bible and the Koran have lost the influences upon people as they are losing their spiritual consciousness because of wrong interpretation. There is also politics in the name of religion, and, in this politics the lower classes have to face the worst consequences. Hence, to end up all these tensions, the poet desires an open heart rather than conflict in the name of different religious thinking. Ambikagiri Roychoudhuri also composed such type of poem in Assamese. He wanted to do away with the caste-system, inequality, envy, vanity, meanness and selfishness those poisoned the growth of the society. (Brajendra Kumar Brahma seems to have got influenced profusely by the philosophy of Vivekananda. The latter said, "No nations possess so many laws as the Hindus". He is quick to add, "The ills we see around are not religious ills but social ills...what our
country needs is muscles of iron and nerves of steel; gigantic wills which
nothing can resist". (Narasimhaiah 14). Moreover the poem entitled ‘In
Search of a Sky’ by Brajendra Kumar Brahma has thematic resemblance
with the poem of Navakanta Barua:

Helpless I’m, even if mine
is only the luxury of supplication,
hear my prayer, O sky,
tell me what issue falls like an arrow
from the moon’s amber-crescent.
give us a little more space, O sky,
for our sky is too, too narrow. (Barua 145)

Brajendra Kumar Brahma would like to say that the human
civilization is not built by the virtue alone. There are abundant
contributions of the evil also. The civilization of India had witnessed such
type of experiences. The poem ‘Valmiki’ expresses the myth of Ram and
Ravan and that transforms Ratnakar to Valmiki. As the Boros have fought
for their political rights some untoward incidents like agitations,
aggressions, movements took place. Thus the movements with the passing
of time turned into violence and bloodshed. But with the agreement
between the Bodoland Tiger Forces, the state government of Assam and
centre in Delhi, an autonomous administrative set up, the Bodoland
Territorial Council came into being. This brought peace to certain extent to the Boro dominated area. The poem entitled 'Valmiki' by Brajendra Kumar Brahma seems to be most pertinent in the present context.

The birth of human kind on this earth,

a music composed in a single breadth,

beyond that lies only nothingness;

there is timeless darkness everywhere.

Yet earth, know it that life is true-

holding the truth in your bosom

you made a plan to build heaven

out of the dust of this world.

Your heart was filled with sadness

over the tears shed by Krounch bird,

a fruit of meditation for thousand years

in the bosom of darkness.

You are the persecutor through the self

and also a protector,

a sagacious new life of Valmiki

out of the carrion of Ratnakar dacoit.

through your inspired hands
Ram has taken birth on this earth,
to destroy the insolent Ravana
and to establish religion for man.¹⁰

The missionaries who came to the Boro areas for the propagation of Christianity indirectly played a role for the development of Boro language and culture. The books like Outline Grammar of the Kachari (Bara) in 1884, A collection of Kachari Folk Tales and Rhymes in 1895, The Kacharis in 1911 by Rev. Sidney Endle are very significant in this context. Hence, the period from 1885 to 1919 is called the Missionary period in the Boro literature. In The Kacharis a missionary author wrote: “The religion of the Kachari race is distinctively of the type commonly known as animistic and its underlying principle is characteristically one of fear or dread.” (Endle 33). On this statement a number of pioneering Boro social reformers were not convincingly satisfied. It was none but Gurudev Kalicharan Brahma who had to go outside of his state in search of enlightenment. But it was unfortunate that the then Boros have failed to find the five-fold principles, which have readily been present in their traditional religion, namely the Bathou. After being influenced by Sibnarayan Paramahamsa in Calcutta, the devout Gurudev Kalicharan Brahma has come to preach his faith and philosophy to his near and dear ones since 1913. This is to say that it was a turning point for the Boros,
because the Boros have started writing “Brahma” surname after being converted to the newly born Hindu religion in terms of enlightenments. This is assumed by the Boros that they could dismantle the wrong notion “the Boros are “animist.”” They have proved they are very religious. Brajendra Kumar Brahma is moved by the said development. His poem entitled ‘Gubun Abang’ (A Different God) suggests clearly:

A child’s honest faith
is lost somewhere
by the sad tangles of life.

There are quizzical looks
in the eyes of the guru;
seeing the different steps
the mind trembles,
and the waves of our thought
Strike at some point;
They come back today
and take us towards a new road
in search of a different God.\textsuperscript{11}

Brajendra is unlike Buddha in the matter of rebirth. The former loves man so he would like to come again and again to the earth. To avoid pains and rebirth Buddha sat long twelve years for meditation. Finally, he attained \textit{Nirvana}. But for Brajendra Kumar Brahma life with all its pain and pleasure is delightful. Birth and death, love and hatred, joy and sorrow, rise and fall are the parts of human life. These experiences are rather the very spices that add more colours to mankind. Hence, he articulates in his poem \textit{‘the Known Earth’}:

Oh Buddha!

how deep and vast is your

\textit{Astamarga}?  

is there more delight

in the sea of poison?

and how far is your ultimate aim, \textit{Mahanirvana}? 

\ldots 

By concealing yourself in the shadow of death,

by avoiding the re-birth

you step forward through the
silent path from life to Nirvana.
But I turn from life to life
on this earth where sorrow abounds,
here I assimilate all the elements of life
for the creation of heaven.\textsuperscript{12}

After all, Hindu philosophy has largely influenced Brajendra Kumar Brahma. It is found here and there in his poetry. It also influenced T. S. Eliot at large. For instance, the \textit{Upanishad} is said to have impressed deeply T. S. Eliot. Moreover, Brajendra owes to Vibekananda for the latter's ideas of humanism. Brahma’s poem ‘In Search of a Sky’ has a lot of references to it.

As the Boro life grows complex and fragmented more and more, the strain of modernity in terms of private symbol becomes very clear in Boro poetry since 1975; with the publication of ‘\textit{Okhrang Gongse Nangau}’ (In Search of a Sky) by Brajendra Kumar Brahma. Brahma is unanimously accepted as the greatest among the contemporary Boro poets. He is influenced by the poets like Navakanta Barua, Jibanananda Das and T. S. Eliot. He experiments with style, technique and private symbols to project his search for own literary distinction and voice. Brajendra’s poem ‘Carpet Grass’ is found in the same style of Eliot’s ‘\textit{Little Gidding}’ Brajendra says: “I have started at the point/ Where the history of my life
ended, the body in the process of fossilization has taken a new life today." T.S. Eliot's says:

what we call the beginning is often the end.

and to make an end is to make a beginning.

The end is where we start from. And every phrase

and sentence that is right (Eliot 484)

Thus Eliot, Mallarme, Baudelaire are found to have influenced directly or indirectly Brajendra Kumar Brahma. Brajendra Kumar Brahma has not denied the influence of Bangla modern poet, Jivanananda Das. The poet himself admits honestly that he has gone through a good number of poems by Jivanananda. Thus the former incorporates the theme, technique and philosophy of the latter in his poetry. Still, Brajendra Kumar Brahma could focus his own nation, nature, culture, etc. in greater perspective to the world people with different self.
End-Notes:


4. Ibid.


6. Ibid.P.35. trans. Surath Narzary, “the Known Earth.”


12. Ibid. P. 35

P.T.O.


**Works-Cited:**


Neog, Maheswar. *Asamiya Sahitya Ruprekha.* Calcutta: R.S. Computer 13,
Tarun Pally, 1995.
Surath Narzary is seen at Khaspur, the erstwhile palace of the Bodos built by the then king of Khaspur. The palace is known for its artistic dexterity. It is a source of poetic inspiration for Narzary.