Chapter IV

Life, Memory and Enlightenment: *A Study of the Poems of Surath Narzary*

It is the poem one writes, or, the series of poems one writes in one’s lifetime that pursues one throughout his life. I believed once, perhaps when I began writing poetry, that the poem behaved as an act of exorcism, helping one to ‘cleanse’ oneself; or as I said earlier in this piece, to make a better heart the poet possessed. Today, after a lot of thought, one experiences the sense of being pursued, perhaps hunted, by the poems one has made. The poems act as surprises, at times amazing one, bringing the deeper, inner silence with a sentiment being into focus. So perhaps the poem, with its words, triggers an inner silence and in the end shakes one.

Surath Narzary was born on the 1\textsuperscript{st} October 1945, at Kunguri village in Kokrajhar district. He passed the matriculation examination in 1962 from Kokrajhar High School (now Kokrajhar Higher Secondary) and pre-university from Kokrajhar College in 1964, B.A. in 1967 from Cotton College, Guwahati. He did his M.A. from Gauhati University in 1974 and completed M.Phil from the same university. Surath Narzary joined as a lecturer in English at Kokrajhar College. For sometime, he was in-charge principal at the same college and superannuated in 2005. Being impressed by the teachings of Shree Shree Anukul Chandra Thakur, he is now concentrating on the philosophy of human life and infinity. After Gurudev Kalicharan Brahma, Surath Narzary is involved in enlightening the Boro society.

Surath Narzary is one of the best contemporary modern Boro poets. His first poetic collection is entitled \textit{Jiuni Alongbar} (The Light of the Life,1989) and the second is \textit{Angni Thwinai Swinai} (My Lost Darling,2001). He has contribution to Boro drama also. He also undertook some translation works. He has translated \textit{Okhrang Gongse Nangau}, a poetic work by Brajendra Kumar Brahma into English. Again Surath has translated \textit{Shyanusary} and \textit{Nareer Neeti} into Boro from Bangla written by Shree Thakur Anukul Chandra. He happened to be one of the editors of Bodo-Hindi-English Dictionary. In 2004, Surath
Narzary received the “Rangsar Brahma Literary Award” for his poetic work *Angni Thwinai Swinai* (My Lost Darling, 2001) from Bodo Sahitya Sabha.

There are 28 poems in his second collection of poems in *Angni Thwinai Swinai* (My Lost Darling). The first collection, *Jiuni Alongbar* (The Light of the Life) is based on devotional theme. But there is a turning point in his literary career with the publication of *My Lost Darling*. In an interview about his poetical evolution, Surath Narzary replied: “I had the habit of writing poems, stories etc. before I became the regular student of English literature. But after being a regular student of literature a clear concept of theme and style grew in my mind. Though not a strict follower of any poet, I became more impressed by the thought and style of Robert Browning. Thus there is a vast spectrum of life and world from sunrise to sunset in his poems. He deals with the themes like devotion, nationalism, love, man, socialism, politics, history, philosophy, culture, religion, myth, and legend.

Surath Narzary strongly believes on God. His first collection is based on it. He searches for infinity from the core of the heart both in sorrows and joys. Hence he articulates in the poem *Jiuni Alongbar* (the Light of the Life):

Lo! God,
I do hear
thou shelter
at peaceful region
of heavenly abode.
I can’t reach thee,
thou art at far-off an unseen land,
which I’ll never reach.³

This is to say that 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, and, it has been a turning point for the Boros. The Boros have started writing “Brahma” surname after being converted to the newly born Hindu religion. After Gurudev Kalicharan Brahma, it is Surath Narzary who takes much interest in religion. Having converted into Satsang-fold, Surath is searching the deep Philosophy of Shree Shree Anukul Thakur. He like Gurudev Kalicharan Brahma doesn’t believe in traditional way of worship. In the name of God, Surath says, the sacrifice of birds, and offering liquors are unholy activities. In this context, Narzary faces the odd situation in preaching his self-realization and belief.
Surath sees God in each and every being. This is what he says in his poem *The Light of the Life*:

Oh God!

I must search for you,

I must think of you,

and must I embrace you only forever.

I always smile with you

I always play with you,

with temptation and mistakes.

Lo! God,

when my hope will be fulfilled

will you disappear half-revealed?\(^4\)

Surath Narzary analyses the elusiveness and mystery of infinity. With simple poetic language he speaks his feeling and aspiration. It is true that each and every one of the world would like the God to be always a part of life. As such in birth and death, joy and sorrow, victory and defeat, dream and practical life, the poet desires the God to be staying with him. Yet he seldom finds Him. Surath Narzary’s devotional theme reminds Rupnath Brahma’s poem on God, ‘*Mwnhasowi Howa*’ (The Infinite Man):

Lo! who are you?
with moving and un-moving in heart
playing on sweet violin
Lo! who are you?\(^{5}\)

Thus in the Boro poem, devotional content is something recurrent. Rupnath Brahma, Modaram Brahma, Satich Ch. Basumatary, Nileswar Brahma were the poets of first phase of Boro literature and Ishan Ch. Moshahary, Promod Ch. Brahma, Kali Kumar Lahary, etc. were the poets of the second wave of the Boro literary movement. Then Surath Narzary and his some contemporaries are also on the same track in terms of devotional and lyrical intensity. Yet, Surath Narzary matured both in theme and technique in his second collection, *My Lost Darling*. He has modeled this on Robert Browning’s monologue and on John Pope’s poems in terms of social satire.

Sickna John Wary, a leading critic of the Boro literature says:

> Although the Boro poets started with romantic technique, they soon felt the extreme subjectivity of romanticism would not serve the cause of the Boro aspiration, as the Boro had an inherent fear of being betrayed by the dominant community in the state. The thought of preservation of the ethnic identity and economic bases of the Boro was an important
issue at that time as the Boros were assimilating rapidly into the dominant community to escape the stigma of being an inferior caste in the society. So the Boros valued much the community consciousness. Boro poets came forward to voice this consciousness in their poems. The poets like Modaram Brahma, Rupnath Brahma, Promod Ch. Brahma ventilated this idea to the public through their poems. The poets gave a clarion calls to the illiterate Boro people to wake up and came to the forefront so that they may develop an equal footing with other. So the dominant themes of the Boro poets from the very start were romanticism and nationalistic expression. With regard to the technique, they adopted lucid style which were metaphorically subtle.⁶

As such Surath Narzary too is found dealing with national sentiment in his poem *‘Khidang’* (Horrible):

The articulated voice coming

from the silent weep

in the serene moment
has been marginalized,
at the edges of reciprocation and,
nonreciprocation of feeling.
The indomitable move of the heart
has become dry unknowingly to-day:
the victorious boy who could dive and swim easily
in the vast Brahmaputra is
in no position to survive.
I tried to sit erect somehow.
But failed, I’m not responsible
for my failure,
as I have been knocked by somebody else.

The poet would like to say that the Boro people who were once
very strong mentally and physically, even could dive and swim the
mighty Brahmaputra, are now in a drowning position due to someone
else that are not in favour of them. Hence, Surath Narzary says: “The
victorious boy who could dive and swim easily in the vast Brahmaputra
is in no position to survive.” Though the poet does not mention who in
fact, is responsible for such condition, the poet keeps in mind the
decaying influence of the Boros. What Gait says in this context is
relevance: “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). So the poet says: “I tried to sit erect somehow/but failed, I’m not responsible for my failure/As I have been knocked by somebody else.” Sickna John Wary says again about Surath Narzary: “In the poem ‘Khwidang’ (Horrible), Surath Narzary is very nationalistic. It is built upon the theme of self-scrutiny in the perspective of the Boro history.”7 Not only ‘Khwidang’ (Horrible), but also many poems are projected which have the undertone of nationalism. For example, some poems like ‘Nwngnwna Boroa?’(Are you yourself a Boro?), ‘Mwnnwi Hangkhw’ (A Projectile) deal with nationalism. Surath Narzary reminds the nationalistic spirit of Shelley and satirical tone of Alexander Pope. Surath is not always blaming others for the downfall and failure of the Boros. The Boros are also equally responsible for their present condition. He says it satirically in the poem ‘Nwngnwna Boroa?’ (Are you yourself a Boro?):

Who are you, brother?

are you a Boro?

The man who has his head behind the body

and who is accustomed to the act of betrayal

in thought and action.
Is he a Boro in the true sense of the term? 8

This is worth saying about the Boro that they sometimes think opposite to their noble ideas and philosophy. Nowadays they would like to blame and criticize themselves for their egoistic and senseless activities. In this light the poet highlights this sense and change. Self-criticism and self-analysis are important to reform a society. This is found in England also during the time of Shelley and Pope. Shelley would like to reform the society with the help of the West wind, which constitutes the leaf, the cloud, and the wave. Shelley speaks in the poem ‘Ode to the West Wind’:

If I were a dead leaf thou mightiest bear;
If I were a swift cloud to fly with thee;
A wave to pant beneath thy power... (Richard 204)

Pope would like to satirize the seventeen-century England in his poems. He speaks in the poem ‘on Mr. Gay’:

Of manner gentle, of affections mild;
in wit, a man; simplicity, a child:
with native humour tempering virtuous rage,
form’d to delight at once and lash the age:
above temptation in a low estate,
and uncorrupted, even among the great:
a safe companion, and an easy friend,

unblamed through life, lamented in the end (Pope 181)

Narzary too applies the satires primarily in social context. This is to say that though Surath Narzary could be compared with both Shelley in terms of nationalistic spirit and Pope in terms of satirical device, yet, he lacks both symbolic dexterity of Shelley and idiomatic use of language as well as witty expression of Pope.

Surath Narzary wrote a number of love poems which project poetic sense and sensibility. His poems are lyrical in nature; there is a vivacity of his poetic form, thought and expression. The poet writes only then when his poetic impulse is charged with emotion and feelings. Some of the Boro scholars like Brajendra Kumar Brahma, Anil Boro, and Rakhao Basumatary believe that Robert Browning’s poems might have influenced him enormously for such kind of composition and diction. Devakanta Barua has the credit of having introduced this art form in Assamese for the first time. Narzary says in his poem ‘Jiu Swinai’ (Darling) which is found as the articulation of love theme:

O my darling!

is it true as they say

you do not have a life?

But I do see and hear
in my ecstatic moment,
all of your motion and voice.

Here the poet would like to model his poem after Robert Browning’s dramatic lyric and monologue. There is the portrait of a female figure by an eminent artist Sobha Brahma. Having seen it at artist gallery in Kolkata, even an eminent artist of Kolkata, Nandalal Bose appreciated it. The poet having seen it, depicts the vibrant and spiritual aspect of inanimate thing. In his moments of emotional feelings, he often tries to see into the heart of things and, having seen he communicates and talks to himself.

Surath Narzary like Browning believes the difference between man and God. All moral experience is by its nature a striving of the individual to put himself in his right relationship with God: and truth is a record of the infinitude of ways in which man has sought God. But, yet each man’s path is his own. He has to make decision which way to reach the infinity. Here and there in Surath’s poems find expression the faith and philosophy, almost similar to that of Browning.

More usually, Browning’s love poems express the passionate love. ‘The Last Ride Together’ prompts him to a mystical perception of immortal love. Surath also makes use of this philosophy in most of his poems. It is admitted, his poem ‘Angni Thwinai Swinai’ (My Lost
Darling) has been modeled on Browning’s dramatic monologue ‘My
Last Duchess’. He himself admits it in his Preface of his anthology under
the same title. That poem was written as a tribute to his beloved friend
Ranjit Kumar Borgoyary’s tragic incidence, who is too equally a great
Boro poet. The poem ‘My Lost Darling’ goes like this:

Come and sit by me
oh my new beloved!
I am going to respond the question
you raised.
come and listen!
It is a long history,
It is a tale of dream and reality
an incomplete rhyme of gain and loss!
come a little closer oh my dear
and have a look!
How beautiful was she in heart and body
the eyes were wide and bright,
hairs were long and rhymed
how beautiful was she to look at;
her palms were like the petals of lotus.10
Surath Narzary delineates a beautiful poetic vision relating to his friend's dead beloved. It is his friend's pathetic life that prompted him to write a poem of love, which is dramatic in voice and elegiac in tone. Humanism is also a recurrent theme in his poems. Moreover, Surath has been found influenced by Robert Browning in most of the poems both in technique and philosophy.

The poem entitled 'Juge Juge Kuruketra' (Kurukshetra in Every Age) projects history as well as myth embedded together. The poem goes like this:

It is heard that a battle was fought
at Kurukshetra, a battle of Dharma.
No, it was a battle for empire
and that kind of battle still goes on.
The battle of Kurukshetra goes on,
in each and every age.
Alas! The deprived Judhisthir came
and appealed with sobbing face
for a share of the empire.
the appeal was not for the kingdom
but for five villages for five brothers
just to reign
to which Durjayadhana responded with a roar

‘No brother, no!’

We can not give the smallest part of the Kingdom

what to speak of five villages,

even you won’t be allowed

an iota of soil

that can be picked up by a needle point.

Yet Shiboo Soren and his followers

sought their lands back

and Sansuma Khungur roared

in the floor of the Parliament

with the mock royal robe on his body.

on the contrary, Bajpayee negated with

highbrow; “Aplog quun chillate hain”

people do go to Kurukshetra

to demand land even to-day!

with furore Bhima and Arjuna

roared:

“Let us start battle, come what may!”

but the devout eldest calmed them

“No brother,
It is now the period of ceasefire”

I see, the people perhaps for this reason
have gone to India Gate for recreation.
But we, the idle people have gossiped
“No gain brothers!”

now Kurukshetra has been
re-christened as Delhi;
some parts have become Shantivan,
and some Paharganj;
may be that the Parliament House
the spot where ShriKrishna
had kept his Chariot.

but now here the debates and disputes
prevail on the hike of the price
of garlic and onion.

as such, the Kurukshetra battle
goes on every day.11

In this long poem, Surath Narzary depicts the on-going unrest of the Boros. The entire political scenario of Assam, particularly in the Boro dominated area, a great chaos prevails and the issue of the separate state is overshadowed. The indigenous people of Assam like the Boro
raised a demand of separate state namely “Bodoland” within India. But this demand is not wholly fulfilled yet. But the chaos and issues of the local communities like the Boros, the Santhals and the Rajbanshis are remained unsettled. This much is found place in Narzary’s poem.

Surath Narzary reflects the erstwhile Boro legendary hero named Dwimalu, through his poem ‘Are yourself a Boro?’ He was very brave and courageous. He was the chief of the soldiers and led many successful battles against. Dwimalu heroically died but he cursed his people to die in feuds and jealousy. The poem ‘Are yourself a Boro?’ reflects how his curse turns true.

The curse of great Dwimalu
has not been exhausted yet.
So you are bound to die
in every nook and corner.
In the deep jungle and
on the top of the hill and hillocks,
the provision will be with you forever.
The stepmothers are many to apply metals
in each and every organs of you,
as they are aspirant for the thrones.12
Hopes and aspirations of the Boros are focused through this poem apart from conspiracies surrounding them.

Most of Surath Narzary’s poems are prose narrative in structure and language. Satire and dramatic monologue are abundantly found here and there which he modeled on the English poems. He says about his poetic form: “By and large I have studied Assamese, Bengali, English, and American poets. I think the nature depicted by Assamese poets, devotional poems of Bengali poets, deep intellect of English poets, and spiritual features of American poets have influenced me.”

In this context, Robert Browning’s dramatic monologue, Alexander Pope’s satire and Shelley’s nationalistic spirit have deeply influenced Narzary. The influence of the Bengali can be discussed through the poems written by Rabindranath Tagore. Because Tagore’s earlier poems are nationalistic while his later ones are increasingly philosophical and devotional. The latter says in his poem ‘Gitanjali’:

Thou hast made me endless such is thy pleasure.
this frail vessel thou emptiest again and again,
and fillest it ever with fresh life.
this little flute of a reed thou hast.
carried over hills and dales,
and hast breathed through it melodies eternally new.
at the immortal touch of thy hands my little heart loses
its limits in joy and gives birth to utterance ineffable.
thy infinite gifts come to me only on these very
small hands of mine.
Ages pass, and still thou pourest,
and still there is room to fill. (Paul 31)

Narzary also says in the poem *The Light of the Life*:

Oh God!
I must search for you
I must think of you
and must I embrace you only forever.
I always smile with you
I always play with you,
with temptation and mistakes.
Lo! God,
when my hope will be fulfilled
will you disappear half-revealed?14

Both the poets have realized God. Poems of the both the poets are
also on the inner search and are subjective and lyrical. Shelley speaks
with intensity of emotion:

I met murder on the way-
He had a mask like Castlereagh-
Very smooth he looked, yet grim:
Seven bloodhounds followed him:
All were fat; and well they might
Be in admirable plight,
For one by one, and two by two,
He tossed them human hears to chew
Which from his wide cloak he drew. (Whitworth 11)

In Narzary there is a vivacity of his poetic form, thought and expression. He writes only then when his poetic impulse is charged with emotion and feelings, no matter whatsoever the issue. Hence Narzary says in his poem ‘Jiu Swinai’ (Darling):

O my darling!
is it true as they say
you do not have a life?
But I do see and hear
in my ecstatic moment,
all of your motion and voice.15

It is Gurudev Kalicharan Brahma first and then Thakur Anukul Chandra later who influenced and shaped the thought process of Narzary. He was upset by the traditional unrefined behaviours and
culture of the Boros, which gave rise to chaos all the time because of the lack of discipline. In the poem "Are yourselves a Boro?", he criticizes himself with a great disappointment:

Who are you, brother?
are you a Boro?
The man who has his head behind the body and who is accustomed to the act of betrayal in thought and action.

Is he a Boro in the true sense of the term? 16

In this way Surath Narzary suggests, reforms and upholds the Boro people with poetic terms. He seems more often to be inclined to Hindu thought and philosophy.

The strength of Narzary's poetry lies in his symbols, his ideas of religion leading to the growth of nationalism and a romantic self-exploration resulting in enlightenment. His poetry, however, is a reminder of the lost glory steeped in rich history and ancient myth. With a yearn for nobility of mind and honesty his poems are always the voice of each and every action. Besides, each and every poem of Narzary upholds virtue and suggests that moral depravity ends in catastrophe. Hence virtue and self-consciousness are the recurrent themes of his poetry.
End-Notes:


3. Ibid. P. 4.


5. Sickna John Wary. Personal interview. 10 April 2006.


7. Sickna John Wary. Personal interview. 10 April 2006.


10. Ibid. P. 7. trans. the poet, “My Lost Darling.”

11. Ibid. P. 50. trans. the poet, “Kurukshestra in Every Age.”

12. Ibid. 4. trans. the poet, “Are Yourself a Boro?”


16. Ibid. P. 4. trans. the poet, “Are yourself a Boro?”
Works-Cited:


A scene of Gaurang river boulder pitching protection: The calm and quiet atmosphere inspires many poets to a dizzy poetic height.

A scene of Diplai Beel which is also a source of poetic inspiration for the Boro poets.