



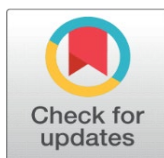


BELONGING AND UNBELONGING SPACES OF THE TRIPURA BENGALIS: AN ANALYTICAL STUDY OF SELECT POEMS FROM THE MYSTIC MOUNTAIN-AN ANTHOLOGY OF TRIPURA- BANGLA POETRY IN ENGLISH

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ABSTRACT

The former princely state Tripura, and its history stands different than other Bengali state like West Bengal. Their complex dynamics of belonging have been relegated to the margins until very recent times. There are various literary works which focuses upon the upheavals of Bengalis belonging to West Bengal or those who took refuge in West Bengal, but the situation of Tripura Bengalis is very less known. Hence the introductory segment of the paper might highlight the facts related to Tripura Bengalis, their arrival, and their stories of settlement. However, the purpose is to examine an epistemological study of history, the entire process of partition, their memories of lost home, and their settlement in Tripura. Partition was treated as an unwanted anomaly in the narrative of the otherwise successful national movement. It is the 'human dimensions' of the partition and its consequences on Tripura Bengalis has been taken up in the current Study. The Bengali population of Tripura still is struggling to define their identity, reflecting on the constant oscillation between past and present, amidst change and continuity. The human cost of the multiple migrations in Tripura and its impacts will be attempted to redefine and explore through the concepts of ethnographic approaches, textual analysis, and Diaspora studies. The text taken up by the researcher include: The Mystic Mountain-An anthology of Tripura Bangla Poetry in English, focusing on Nostalgia, Identity- crisis and a sense of belonging.

Keywords: Diaspora, Identity, Nostalgia, Belonging, Narrative

1. INTRODUCTION

Tripura is considered to be the oldest princely state of ancient India. Previously Tripura was ruled by the royal Manikya Kings, they claimed to be the decedents of the Lunar Dynasty. "Rajmala" the Royal Chronicle of Tripura is the only prior source to comprehend about the dynasty and the people of Tripura. The royal chronicle of Tripura was written in Sanskrit and consists of four volumes, composed by the royal

priests of different times. Other than Rajmala there is no such genuine source or data which will enlighten the idea of people about Tripura or the past history of the land. Tripura is not just a northeastern state, but it has a past history of formation, division and also stories of multiple communities who living here since ages. The Bengali Community is one of the major communities living in Tripura and they have their own share of stories which remained untold till now. The primary aim of this paper is to highlight the past history of the Bengali community of Tripura or the Tripura Bengalis and to connect the thread to their present identity with reference to literary works.

Northeast India which is known for its natural beauty and rich cultural diversity, it comprises of various community and tribes. Tripura one of the seven sisters of northeast shares its border with neighbouring country Bangladesh from three sides that is north, west, and south. The inhabitants of Tripura are mainly the aboriginal people and the migrated ones. The etymological meaning of the word Tripura is a debatable topic, but mostly it's believed to be clusters of two words 'tui' which means water and 'pra' means near according to the local language. Although previously Tripura used to be ruled by the Manikya kings and was a princely state and not a part of India. Tripura became part of India in the year 1949, the pre partition Tripura was known as ChaklaRoshanabad. The term Chakla means 'cluster' as ChaklaRoshanabad was cluster of four districts Noakhali, Sylhet, Comilla, and Chittagong (now belongs to present Bangladesh). The Bengali community of ChaklaRoshanabad had a steady relation with the Maninkya kings during the colonial period.

1.1. CONNECTING THE DOTS PAST AND PRESENT

The historical occurrence of partition was an incident which resulted as a mass disruption in the lives of many people and community. The boundaries after partition changed the dynamics of the entire nation, and the people who were part of it started oscillating between past and present, nostalgia and memory, physical home and mental home, and questioned themselves about their belonging. The Bengali community living in Tripura is the result of the great partition between India and Pakistan. If we discuss about the origin of the Bengali community of Tripura, most of them belonged to the eastern part of the undivided Bengal as in Chittagong, Sylhet, Noakhali district of undivided Bengal. They came to Tripura which was a princely state at that time and the king assured them to provide with food and shelter. Those Bengalis who settled here in Tripura like other victims of partition started feeling nostalgic about the memories of the long-lost home. The reason behind the nostalgia was not only because of the missing factor of land but also about the question of belonging. The identity of those people was being questioned every now and then, and they had to prove themselves as part of Tripura. Because of this reason the question of belonging for the first-generation displaced Bengalis was emotionally triggering, and they found themselves in the state of dilemma.

After many years of partition and the settlement of the Bengali community in Tripura their approach towards remembering the past or reminiscing about the home has changed. The primary reason behind this approach is the generation gap, those who had the firsthand experience of partition were much more sensitive towards their identity but later on the next generation of Tripura Bengalis identify Tripura as their homeland. This Bengali community of Tripura has their own share of struggle which made them the part of this state, through various literary works the stories of bygone days as well as their settlement has been portrayed. This paper

shall be analyzing selected Tripura Bengali poems, which showcases their identity, and question of belonging and unbelonging.

1.2. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

- The objective of this paper is to highlight the reason behind the settlement of the Bengali community in Tripura.
- Through this study the researcher shall be conceptualizing the notion of belonging and Unbelonging of Tripura Bengalis.
- This will also include the modes of imagining the past, the feeling of nostalgia and memory, with reference to selected poems.
- This paper aims to examine an epistemological study of history, the entire process of partition, their memories of lost home, and their settlement in Tripura through the window of the select texts.

2. FRAMEWORK OF ANALYSIS

This paper is based upon some key theoretical concepts:

- Nostalgia
- Physical home and Mental home
- Belonging and Unbelonging

2.1. NOSTALGIA

According to many critics the term nostalgia serves as a sentimental yearning or a feeling to revisit the past. This feeling of nostalgia grows with the course of time and generates a sense of discomfort in the mind of that person. In many cultures nostalgia is treated as a part of life, because of the intense attachment with the former time. The emotional attachment with the things which can never be achieved again, and makes one nostalgic. The constant articulation of past and thinking about it can be consider as a claim over those days of past.

2.1.1. PHYSICAL HOME AND MENTAL HOME

Home is considered to be a place which not only provides shelter, but it helps one to develop oneself as a good human being with the help of ritual, cultural values etc. But the case of the displaced communities is totally different from any other communities of the world. For them the idea of home exists in their mind because of the splitting from reality. These displaced communities are seen to be oscillating between the physical home and mental home. This happens due to the mental construction of the long-lost home, which is now only exists as memories. The physical home is now the part of reality and everyday life of the displaced communities. This incoherence between past and present, between here and there, makes home seem far-removed from reality, available for return only by the act of the imagination. [Saikia & Baishya \(2017\)](#)

2.1.2. BELONGING AND UNBELONGING

The process of leaving a place is not so easy for a displaced person, and it becomes more difficult when one has to start their life from the beginning. Diasporic literature explores identities which are constructed with multiple layers: nation,

race, ethnicity, class, generation, language etc. These diasporic narratives deal with the displacement of a group or community and their struggle in identity formation. The question of belonging and unbelonging is derived from that specific situation where the displaced persona is perplexed about the past as well as the future.

3. METHODOLOGY

Methodology has its own importance in any kind of social investigation because objectivity in any research investigation involves careful and proper adoption of research design, use of valid data, source, and information for analysis. This study is qualitative in nature and employed a descriptive research design. The present research work is based on the poetry collection, The Mystic Mountain-An anthology of Tripura Bangla Poetry in English, which shall include textual analysis method. In this method select poems from the collection concerning partition shall be taken up as the source of reference to justify the research work. This study is qualitative in nature and employed a descriptive research design. It includes an analytical discourse, which shall be based on the etymological understanding as well as the concept of Belonging and Unbelonging is also covering a major part of the study. [Misra \(2021\)](#)

4. DEPICTIC THE SETTLEMENT OF THE BENGALI COMMUNITY IN TRIPURA

Since the time of the colonial period the Manikya kings of Tripura were greatly impressed by the rich cultural heritage of the Bengali community, and appreciated their settlement in Tripura resulting as patronship. [Nayar \(2019\)](#)

From the very early times, the Maharajas (tribal kings of Tripura) were very much in favour of Bengalis and Bengali culture. In fact, they encouraged the immigration and settlement of Bengali Hindus in Tripura. Gradually, they adopted Hinduism as the state religion and extended their hands to assimilate Bengali language and literature with their own culture. Most significantly, the Tripura kings adopted Bengali as state language. [Ghoshal \(2010\)](#)

But there was a shift during the time when India was moving towards partition, and Chakla Roshanabad was supposed to be included into East Pakistan (now Bangladesh). A great number of people migrated in the princely state Tripura to seek for a safe shelter during that time. After some years of migration and at post partition time the migrated Bengali community from East Bengal was termed as 'Bangal' due to their distinct accent and food habit. On the other hand, Bengalis belonging to the West side of India termed as 'ghotis' as there is difference in the accent and food habit. [Nongkynrih \(2005\)](#)

4.1. EMERGENCE OF POETRY WRITING IN TRIPURA

For a long period of time West Bengal was the cultural epicenter for Bengali community due to the superiority in various aspects. The Manikya kings of Tripura were fascinated by the literary movements and cultural richness of Bengali community, and tried to adapt it into Tripura's culture too,

Tripura Bangla literature was born under an unfavourable star, having to constantly contend with the Bangla literature produced in West Bengal, more specifically Kolkata- the diasporic centre of Bengali culture, literature, and language. [Gupta \(2017\), p. ix.](#)

The first phase of poetry writing of Tripura belonged to the royal household, and the poems belonging to that phase reflected the style of poems from West Bengal. Those poems were written by the King Maharaja Bir Chandra and the royal princesses Anangamohini Debi, Mrinalini Debi etc. But all those poems were not related to the common people or about Tripura.

There was a change in the themes when the migrated Bengali community started writing poems which represented the memories from the other side of the border. The central idea of the poems was partition, pain of separation, belonging and unbelonging to a new land etc. The writers were mostly first-generation refugees who belonged to the other side of the border but due to partition they left their homeland and settled into Tripura. All the poets shared a similar story of separation and pain which ultimately took the shape of poems. The poems written by the migrated Bengalis are totally different from the poems produced in West Bengal, as the pain of migration is connected to the Bengali community from pre partition East Bengal.

4.1.1. POEMS OF TRIPURA BENGALIS

The first-generation refugees of Tripura passed on their memories of old house, beauty of Bengal, their neighbours and loved ones with their family members, which worked as family memory. In the poem Sand Bank, the poet Nakul Das talks about the memories of old house:

Let
all the memories of
my
old house
get illuminated.
I want
that all the agonies
of my bankrupt mother
be turned to poetry; [Gupta \(2017\), p.72](#).

Here the poet speaks about the memories of his old house which cannot be visited by him again as it has turned into a memory, also he speaks about his mother whose agonies he wants to share through poetry.

The Bengalis from Tripura through the poems tries to document their family history to the next generation, as they are totally unaware of the struggle and pain of separation. In the poem Bangladesh '95 the poet Dilip Das shares the feeling of a man who was reminiscing about the old days

When I speak about those unanaemic days
my young friends look at me dispassionately
As if I were a nostalgic old banayan tree.

My land of birth, you were never like this? [Gupta \(2017\), p.67](#).

The persona here compares him with an old banayan tree which refers to the age as well as the experience, the speaker continues,

Instead, let's be a bit nostalgic once again
-when chaplain rice used to be

seventeen rupees a kilo-those on the banks of Titas
would narrate to their children...
In an evening of puffed rice, tea and fries
let those stories resurrect...once again. [Gupta \(2017\), p.68.](#)

This poem reflects the mental state of the Bengalis of Tripura, especially the first- generation Bengalis who have faced the trauma and pain of separation from homeland. After the settlement in Tripura the Bengalis are connected to their diasporic root through practicing the tradition and culture. The concept of mental home and physical home plays an important role in the case of Tripura Bengalis, as the now physically belongs to Tripura but as their mind belongs to the Bengal. It is not about the physical partition but the mental which separates one person from another, the mind of the migrated Bengalis thinks about the nostalgic past. As these stories are not limited to a particular person, it is the story of all those who shifted to a new place after partition. Krittibas Chakraborty in his poem Refuge, the speaker describes the terror of war,

In the intense noon a flying crow extinguishes
In the scorching daylight a dark house
intensifies itself in time like scandalous drops.
An unmindful year passes, by the side of a seven year old father
the flame of a candle flickers. In the tender candlelight
Looking at my father's face I remember the days... [Gupta \(2017\), p.77.](#)

As previously the poems from Tripura were very much inspired by the poetry writing style of Tagore, Sarojini Naido and Jibonananda Das, later on it reflected the roots of Tripura.

4.1.2. BELONGING AND UNBELONGING

When it comes to the Tripura Bengalis, their question of identity and struggle of existence reflected in the writings too. Before partition the Manikya Kings invited the Bengali community to settle in Tripura for the development of the state. Later on, after partition when Tripura was not a part of India the Bengalis from East Pakistan found a new homeland in the form of Tripura, although the displacement was not intentional but rather forceful. The notion of migration is depicted in one of the poems by Bijonkrishna Choudhury in the poem Migratory birds,

Migratory birds had come, they have also gone back,
in between, bringing snow's meditation in milk washed wings
in our green swamps
setting up family for a day or two.
Finally when the time would be over
escaped again with a flutter of wings. [Gupta \(2017\), p.31.](#)

Here the poet compares migration with the migratory birds that leaves their home and settles down into another place, they don't have any permanent place to call as "home". The Bangals after settling into Tripura are still in search for their identity and oscillating between the past and present. Their story of past are being

passed to the future generation in the form of family memory, in an article named *Locating Family in Cultural Memory Studies*, Astrid Erll says

Family memory is a typical inter-generational memory: a kind of collective memory that is constituted through ongoing social interaction and communication between children, parents, and grandparents. Through the repeated recall of the family's past- usually via oral stories which are told at family get-togethers-those who did not experience past events first hand can also share in the memory. In this way an exchange of "living memory" takes place between eyewitnesses and descendants. Inter-generational memory thus goes back as far as oldest members of the social group can remember either their own experiences or stories that they heard from their elders. [Erll \(2011\), p.306](#)

The intergeneration memory of the Bengalis ultimately took the shape of poems. Another Bengali poet from Tripura named Aparajita Roy in her poem *Blood relation*, she speaks about the dilemma of a migrant who thinks of his people,

Here there are hungry kids with teary eyes
and the deluge of rains through perforated roofs,
their broken fences enveloped with wild creepers.
These miserable people with heads bowed low- they are my kin,
they call me repeatedly
with outstretched arms. [Gupta \(2017\), p.28.](#)

The title of the poem itself suggests the theme of the poem which is related to the separation from family. It was not easy for those people who left their ancestral home due to the partition and their blood relation with loved ones. The same rootedness can be found in many other poems of Tripura which talks about the ancestral ties, and stories of the time when people were united. Sometimes the themes of the poem vary as some uses natural element to depict the pain or some uses imagination to convey the feelings of the poet. The Tripura Bengalis through their poems represents the past and the present situation of their life. In a poem named *Illogical* by Anil Sarkar, he talks about the futile nature of partition,

Hours spent in unbearable pain.
Every month I behold the spherical moon on the sky.
There's news in the air: season changes.
I am thousands of miles far away from where I was,
If you ask-How are you?
I shall say – exiled. [Gupta \(2017\), p.32.](#)

The poem depicts the frustration of a person who compares the situation of migration with exile. As the Bengali community settled in Tripura is basically part of the undivided Bengal which was also previously part of the princely state Tripura, the concept of partition was totally illogical for them. According to Neeladri Bhattacharya and Joy L. K. Pachuau,

Demarcating jurisdictional boundaries are acts of the state. They re-territorialize a region, creating new notions of spatial identity. But people living within such re-territorialized spaces often have a conflicted relationship to these state defined lines. Their sense of identity and feelings of belonging are

never entirely shaped by the practices of the state. [Bhattacharya & Pachuau \(2019\), p.4](#)

The poem from Tripura depicts the mixture of memory and experience of the Bengalis, who generation after generation living with the stories of their past.

5. CONCLUSION

Previously the poems of Tripura were based on the style of poets from West Bengal, but later on the style changed after the emergence of the Bengali poets who portrayed the journey of the community as well as their past and present. The first-generation writers from Tripura were refugee themselves as they were born before partition on the other side of the border. Another group of poets and writers were the second and third generation who belonged to the family of forced migrants. All these people since their childhood were surrounded by the stories of pre-partitioned land and the memories related to that space, which created the notion of identity crisis. According to Ashes Gupta,

Being co-sharer to the collective social writers of Tripura Bangla literature belonging to the second half of the 20th century consciously or unconsciously set their texts against a backdrop that was decidedly not the hilly terrain of Tripura. Rather it was invariably the lush green landscape watered by innumerable meandering rivers and rivulets (the land of Padma, Meghna, Titas). [Gupta \(2017\), p.6.](#)

This similarity of themes can be seen in various Bengali poems from Tripura as they have faced similar situations in their life. All the poets are bound together with the love and memories of the pre-partition land. There are many poems which also reflect hatred towards the decision of partition, like the poem named Holy Hatred by Anil Sarkar. In this poem the poet expresses his grief,

Right from birth I have known that hatred to be sacred
Since right from birth our homes are hunted by
Hunger and death, by murderers of love. [Gupta \(2017\), p.33.](#)

The diverse cultural spaces of Tripura are filled up with various narratives which comprises of different communities. The Tripura Bengalis who are residing since pre- partition time are trying to live with the culture and tradition of their ancestors, and to keep that tradition literature has an integral part to play. The mainland India is still unaware of the stories of Tripura, but poets like Bijoykrishna Chakraborty, Nakul Das, Aparajita Roy, Swati Indu, and many other new generation poets are trying to reflect the stories of Tripura Bengalis with their writings. The purpose of this paper was to focus upon the feelings and emotional dichotomy of the Tripura Bengalis through the help some translated poems from Tripura.

Finally, texts that deal with these wide-ranging issues, written over a long period of time, try to reconstruct the lives of individuals and communities, marginal or elite, whose memories of trauma and displacement had dissociated them from their own life stories. The less visible and delayed effects of displacement and violence are seen in the family and community spaces that these texts foreground. They give an added dimension to a set of micro-events, often unspeakable, within the partition and lay bare the processes of how literature transforms the actual into the apocryphal and the mythical.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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