

**Aparna Debnath's *Ei Jeeban Ei Aashar* : A Book Review**

By

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Poetess - **Aparna Debnath**

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**A note on the reviewer:** Dr. Joylal Das, is an Assistant Professor in English at Alipurduar University (Erstwhile Alipurduar College), West Bengal. He has done his doctoral thesis on Dalit writings from West Bengal. His area of interest covers Dalit literature, Indian writings in English and in English translation, local historiography, literature and culture from margin. He has attended some national and international seminars and conferences. Side by side he has published some research papers in journals and chapters in edited books. Besides academic works, he writes poems on marginal people, marginal culture, marginal society etc.

## The Review of *Ei Jeeban Ei Aashar*

Aparna Debnath grows up at and around Kamakhyaguri, a census town in the Kumargram Block of Alipurduar district amidst natural environment of Dooars . The fertile natural environment and mosaic of cultures gives birth to her a kind of poetic frenzy, and began to pen at an early age of thirteen. At present she teaches English language and literature in a higher secondary school in Kolkata and receives Kolkata as her permanent abode. But her passion is poetry and longing for a life in Dooars. She writes poems in literary magazines both print and web. Her anthology of poems entitled *Ei Jeeban Ei Aashar* got published from Gangchil, a reputed publishing house in Kolkata in 2023.

The volume of poems centres round the experiences gathered at different phases and stages about life. Human relationship, search for the truth of life, and feelings of existentialism prevail in this collection of poems. With an insight into human psychology, she also deals with the themes like love, transience of life etc. in some of her poems.

Aashar, a month in Bengali calendar, makes the life of the common people of Dooars deplorable with incessant downpour of rain. We read in Tagore, "*Neel nabaghane aashar gagane teel thai ar nahire*". In the month of Aashar the sky is overcast with dark cloud from which showers "black rain". In the anthology life is equated with Aashar. This association gives the collection a pessimistic tone, and showers of Aashar may stand for tears of common people.

In her collection of poem, *Ei Jeeban Ei Aashar*, Aparna Debnath has woven a garland with bead of experiences gathered in long run of life. In the Dooars region rainy season appears as a curse almost ceasing the day to day activities and chores leading to starvation. However, nature decorates herself with green hue in this peripheral region as we find in Sudipta Maji's collection of poems, *Baksha Ban Barsha Ban*. Rainy season vitalizes the nature with germinating force. This duality of theme implied in the title of the collection gives it a tone of optimism amidst an atmosphere of morbidity.

Dooars, her place of birth and upbringing, appears to be an ethnographic museum with a mosaic of indigenous cultures. Dooars had housed in pre-colonial period

hundreds of indigenous communities like the Rajbanshis, the Meches, the Ravas, the Garos and some other Nepali speaking communities. With establishment of tea plantation in the Dooars region in colonial period some Dravidian and Austric tribes like the Oraons, the Mundas, the Mahalis, and so on were imported to facilitate tea plantation and industry. Migrants with education from other parts of Bengal ran to Dooars for easy access of job in colonial government sector and industrial sector. Thus, the demography of Dooars was being changed. The extreme transformation was induced by the partition, and resulting migration. Different communities living here have their own culture, and due to a long coexistence cultural assimilation took place which resulted in a mosaic of cultures. Aparna Debnath with her East Bengali social and cultural background was brought up in this mixed culture. While getting her higher education, she came across friends of different communities from whom she got acquainted with their cultures. But her shifting from Dooars to the heart of Kolkata has severed her bond with root. Amid a *ghati* culture she finds herself culturally alien in spite of her best effort to be accommodated with it.

Loneliness of myrobalan plum tree presented in the poem, “Unmesh” (Awakening) is expressive of postcolonial diasporic longing for root. This sense of alienation results from otherness felt in an alien environment. The tree is belittled by the centre. It is unwanted, but ultimately succeeds in raising its voice with a resistance against hegemony. This poem may be considered as a psychological autobiography of the poet in face of dilemma of living a cozy life in a cosmopolitan city and longing for root. Despite the fact that any biographical reference while appreciating a poem may harm the literary merit of that work, this present poem requires biographical references for a clear understanding of the subject. The poetess’ journey from periphery to centre appears to be pleasant one but a deep nostalgic anguish lies deep within the psyche which intuitively requires an expression. The poetess can’t help expressing it. She is unwanted in the circle of centre. This fact cannot be seen with open eyes but is felt by the poetess as we find in the second stanza of the poem that the poet is denied entry into the circle made by the centre. A sense of alienation depresses her.

The tree in the poem is emblematic of subaltern voice and resistance. The term subaltern was first coined by Antonio Gramsci in his *Prison Note book* written in time of his imprisonment resulting from his raising voice against fascism. Subaltern in the code language of this Marxist thinker connotes downtrodden section of the society. According to the interpretation of the poetess herself, the

poem was written from her experience of confronting an old vendor selling vegetables in the scorching heat of summer sun on a pavement when most of the city dwellers confined themselves to their cozy confinement. The vendor through the jotting of the poetess mocks at these heartless city dwellers. This mocking is mingled with a kind of postcolonial resistance.

Keats like escapism opens the poem with the poet being lost in drowsiness on hearing the chirping of the birds as Keats feels pain and numbness equating to the drinking of hemlock. But at the end of Keats' poem the poet comes to reality. But in the present poem, the trance breaks at the end of the first stanza.

The poem "Utsav" (Festival) pinpoints the segregated life of the marginal people who on living at the side of railway line celebrate the festivals with loneliness and nothingness. The romantic light of glow-warm and blooming flowers seem to be a day dream in their life. They are accustomed to living life in lightless darkness where gay festive mood is nothing but fen fire:

On the other side near the railway line,

Everyone knows Anadi to be mad,

Anadi smiles and says

They don't know, loneliness is the festival ( Debnath 9).

#### Revision

In the poem "Namantar" ( Alternative Name) the word, " word" is repeated at the beginning of every line to bring into focus the complex web of contrary meanings like sorrow and happiness, past and present, light and darkness, night and day, primitivity and modernity , lover and beloved, dream and reality and so on. The complexity of the meanings of "word" also relates to the complexity of human relationship:

Word is now blue envelop of past

Word is now loveless love

Word now makes home with words

Word is alternative of dream ( Debnath 10).

“Bishad Sundari” (Morbid Beauty) is a contemplative nature poem where we find an echo of the Shelley’s line, “our sweetest songs are those that tell of saddest thoughts”. The poem has shown the gloomy aspect of nature which has a beauty of its own. This happens in human life too. The poet wants to drink the sweet nectar born out of bitterness of life as we know life is bitter sweet:

I drink a bowl of melancholy.

Before a toxic reaction in stomach,

Dip myself in water tank again and again.

At the end of the day bright moon comes closer to me( Debnath 72).

“Dinguli” ( the Days) is a short poem of sixteen lines but the vastness of its theme has made it one of the finest poems in the collection. “Dinguli” is a chronicle of life where nostalgia lurks again and again like “ decaying leaves”, “ a poem”, and “ a crowd of words”. This chronicle of life is a blending of joys and sorrows; sometimes a dazzle of light enlivens, and sometimes painful memories shadow the struggle of life:

In the ear of air

Known and scented words come.

Decaying leaves driven with dusty wind

Returned to past.

Golden time yoked with silver light

Budding banana leaves show colour of happiness.

Laziness scatters dot of light.

Old face in the fold of memory comes( Debnath 13).

“Athacha” ( Though) is a short nature poem with an allegorical meaning. Here tree allegorically stands for life. The morning song of tree is paen of life:

Morning appears

The tongue grapples for new meaning,

In the song of the tree ( Debnath 74).

A nostalgic longing for one dear one and her root forms the backbone of the poem, “Ashis” meaning blessings. The speaker is totally alienated and her attempt of communication falls flat:

Far way thousand light years

Your address locates.

I write letters everyday

Not knowing its future ( Debnath 16).

The speaker has confined herself to her cell with windows closed. Absence of dear one severs her from root. Longing for home, and sense of alienation have shadowed the jocund life of the speaker.

“Agamee” (Future) is a poem about poetic creativity. A poem is an expression of experience. What we experience, all of it cannot be expressed in a poem. There remains a gap between experience and expression:

The more I got, the more I left.

Writing a poem requires a complete dedication.

The setting sun knows well

To acquire rhythm and melody is not easy.

Complete dedication makes a dream true ( Debnath 17).

The poem, “Panchish Bachhar Pare” (After Twenty Five Years) is a kind of prophetic vision of heralding golden days after the end of gloomy evils. The conch of time like *panchyajanya* gives a call to fight a war against evils. The poet goes back to twenty five years to see only gloomy evening with enveloping darkness, black rain, faded trees- all symbolising evils. Then the conch of time calls for a war against evils, and in which the good triumphs over evils:

Light floods everything now,

The field awakens in light,

Light fills the breast

Trees get radiant with green hue, face is reflected in light ( Debnath 37).

The poem, “Bikaltuku” ( Only the Afternoon) gives a signal to the end of life’s struggle. Upward movement waded through hardships puts us to our summit of success from where we begin to decline to old age that is symbolised by the afternoon. After life-long struggle we long for rest in our old age:

Sunshine, rain overcome we

Then come the supreme and tranquil moment

And the afternoon (20).

“Golpo” (Story) like “Athacha” has also employed natural background as metaphor of life:

Echoing far

The whisper of river

Tells a story of life

During whole year ( Debnath 41).

The poem, “Sangjog” (Connection), is a subjective expression of nostalgia for the poet’s roots lying on a green country far from the stony heart of her present city. This far way land is her birth place, her mother who remains clung to the poetess in every moment. As if every domestic object is animated with nostalgia and memory:

The trace of birth gets awaken ( Debnath 42).

“Danda”( Conflict) written from a subaltern perspective is a daily saga of a mother who lives under the open sky near Howrah railway station and works as a maid in four to five households. Amidst hundreds of hardships and lacks her motherhood is intact. Her motherly affection is so strong that her face gets darken while thinking about the future of this unwanted child. The mother is representative of all working class women who struggle hard just to fill the belly.

The volume of poems centers round the experiences gathered at different phase and stages about life and world. The title poem or the first poem of the volume, *Ei Jeeban Ei Aashar* (This Life, This Bengali Month of Aashar) is the key to unlock

the heart of the entire collection. On a monsoon day the poet feels suffocated with pent up feelings. The shower of Aashar animates her and helps to outlet her feelings:

Then one by one the letters,  
Pray for leave.  
Being drenched and cold,  
They feel morbidity of autumn.  
One drop of rain  
Engulfs life. Debnath 1).

The window of mind gets open to see in inward vision the ups and downs of human relationship which is refreshed with the shower of Aashar:

If it rains cats and dogs suddenly,  
It makes free, floods parallel life  
The cave of mind drenched  
Silently, quietly and unendingly.  
Love is there boundless.

The month of Aashar is bliss in human relationship as it enlivens with shower of love. With the coming of Aashar life finds its fulfilment:

Again when Aashar comes,  
The body gets fulfilled,  
The female stands at the door,  
Male showers love like Aashar.