

Appearance and Reality as Characterised in a Bengali Short-Story by Uma Purokayastha a Distinguished Woman Writer of Shillong of the North–East

Abstract

The mid-twentieth century has witnessed a turbulent time in the life and existence of the people of North-East. The woman writer of Shillong has given expression to all her experiences and evaluation of that period of time and space, in her language, mainly in form of short-stories. To her conscience she (Uma Purakayastha) has remained impartial all through in her literary endeavour and stick to a search for truth and reality in human life. Her creations and characters again remind us of the fact that in no situation one should loose faith in man. This helps us to hold up the belief that the devil is not that black as he painted.

Keywords: Bengali Short-Stories, Shillong, Humanity and Womanhood.

Introduction

The Bengali short-stories of the North-East India has been flourishing mainly from the three geographical areas of the North-East. That is the Barak valley, the Brahmaputra valley and Tripura. In addition to it a newer literary stream had started functioning with extreme exuberance and enthusiasm keeping Shillong as the main centre of such an endeavour.¹ until 1980's literary activities from Shillong had attracted the attention of persons who were involved in the business of literary writings and publications of little magazines and journals from the North-East. Unfortunately this rich and potential source of literature of shilling had suffered a setback in the recent years and the volume of literary output has come to a not very significant one.² Because of these eventful passages of time and place either political or economic, literature and poetry started declining. As a result, the vast and rich natural endowment of the place has given the birth of a rivulet in place of a river in full swing.

Yet, a handful of writers are still active and carrying on the cultivation of the Bengali literature and language, either in form of poetry or in form of short-stories, essays and novels etc. Shillong has thus contributed a special thematic literary volume in the storehouse of Bengali literature of the North-East. There was a time when a good number of little magazines mainly of poetry were being published from Shillong, but for short-stories such attempts were absent. In spite of all such barriers writers who have enriched the field of Bengali literature specially that of short-stories are worth- mentioning. They are namely; Banamali Goswam, Bimal Sengupta Ajitkumar khan, Ranadhir deb Mihirkanti Roy, Purnendu Bhattacharya, Sanat Basu, Joshodhir Shyam, Amita Dey, Pratima Bhattacharya, Uma Purokayastha etc. All these writers and authors have documented the hard realities of human life, their social and economic crisis criticality of human relationship, woes and sufferings of uprooted persons and their families, language –based hatred, communal tension, oppression of wage-earners, naxalite violence and unlawful activities by the anti-social elements and the agony of so-called modern life. This was the perspective and the wave of social and political environment of the N.E. particularly that of a place like Shillong which saw the outburst of human feelings in the writings of Uma Purokayastha, when she wrote short- stories on the burning social issues of the time and place.³ Now I would like to consider one of her popular short-stories named *Dainee*. (Included in *Galposamver*, 2004) in the light of above discussion.



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The story (*Dainee*) begins with the quest for a rented house by a couple who are likely to stay in Shillong in connection with employment in a govt.office. Ultimately they found a single-storied nicely situated house in one area of the town. Mitu and her husband were happy enough to find such a house to stay, but the very look of the land-lady disheartened her, rather she got nervous and frightened. 'Kong Linda' the land-lady had a dreadful look. She was above sixty years of age with a headful of rough and uncared hair, eyes are similar to that of a cobra and her one of the eyes is noticeably smaller. She utters in an irritating tone⁴ and her backbone is bending low. In addition to all, her terms and condition are also very uncommon. As such she warns Mitu telling her that she can never tolerate a crying-child, she would kill him by suffocation.⁵ Mitu got confused what to do or how to pass the time and save her only child from the witches-like woman 'Kong Linda'. Linda's khasi neighbours too see her as the embodiment of evil and supernatural spirits. Micheal, Linda's husband is a sober and innocent person who runs a carpentry workshop in the main market area of the town, whose behaviour and attitude are all very opposite to that of Linda Kong.⁶ Linda's house is surrounded by fruit-trees and lovely seasonal flowers of different varieties but no children from the neighbouring families brave to enter there for a taste of ripe fruits and fragrant flowers. Even there are such rumours that several children had died after vomiting blood and with mysterious fever.⁷ People blame Kong Linda and points to her practicing black-magic for every unfortunate event. Mitu finds herself helpless in a sea of agony and remains afraid of Linda always. Anupom, Mitu's husband knows everything but ignores it all. Even then he cannot totally avoid it.

In her childhood days, Mitu lived in Shillong with her parents, but she had to leave Shillong following her father's pre-mature death. Now she has again come here with her husband in connection with a govt.job here. Mitu could very well realise the difference of time and place and the changing of a city of her childhood days. Meanwhile, Anupom had got an official order to visit Delhi on an urgent piece of business for about three weeks and this had put the family in a situation of utter uncertainty and fear. Anupom requested Kong Linda for taking care of his family during his absence. But Linda cried out harshly and said 'it is not my business to take care of others, I have many other things too.'⁸ Anupom and Mitu were shocked at heart, but Anupom had no other alternative but to leave for Delhi. Mitu's time became longer to longest with nothing to do or think. A sense of nostalgia enshrouded her heart and soul, while she extended her look towards the deep and distant pine forests of Shillong hills.

One day all of a sudden a group of an angry young men of the area trespassed Linda's house and warned her about keeping outsiders as tenant. Curfew had been imposed in the town. Mitu lost her patience and courage and burst into tears. She was extremely nervous seeing Linda talking to those boys who are extremely intolerant and violent. And it was about midnight when Kong Linda knocked at Mitu's door.

Linda took her to another room provided her with a bed and a blanket to sleep on. She also brought a plate of rice and curry and a glass of milk for her child. But strongly warned to be careful enough to see that her child does not cry anymore. Otherwise they will be captured by those rogues and killed. The hooligans came again and searched here and there but went back seeing no foreigner in Linda's house. In fact, Linda befooled them by hiding Mitu successfully from those anti-racial elements. Linda arranged a safe-passage for Mitu, gave her own khasi garments and in the darkness of night Mitu set out for a secured destination in the disguise of a khasi woman. To her utter surprise Mitu realised the reality of life and felt that Linda is none but her own mother in the appearance of a savior of herself and her child. Here lies the climax of the story *Dainee* by Uma Purokayastha where she ends the story with a sudden surprise by unveiling the clouds of distrust and hatred by throwing a light of compassion and humanitarian expression of a woman's inner soul.

Aim of the study

Generally, fewer people know about the tradition of Bengali short-stories of Shillong (Meghalaya) that survive severe ups and down like the green hills and valleys of mountain regions of the North-East. The present paper opens up the windows to the outer world to have a sight of its beauty and depth.

Conclusion

Linda despite her so-called ugly physical appearance has remained to be an incarnation of love and sympathy, when we see her handing over a hundred-rupee currency note to Mitu to meet any untowards situational crisis in her journey to a safe destination. Uma Purokayastha's *Dainee* reminds us of such a story by Tarashankar Bandopadaya, where the woman character surrenders unconditionally to the feet of a cruel and superstitious social organisation. Here lies the distinction and novelty of the story *Dainee* by Uma Purokayastha where she has shaken the century-old deep rooted inhuman tradition and darkness of our mental horizon.

Reference

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Anthology : The Research

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