

Why Poetry without Fear?

By Dr Ananda Bormudo

Poetry without Fear, as the title suggests, wants to assure the readers that poetry can communicate with common readers. There is no need of depriving common people of poetic experience.

The reading public of a poem in translation is different from the readers in the source language. Things usually get settled in an original language and the readers take things for granted. If a new poet writes something original it is unlikely to be immediately recognized by the readers. They have their own expectations as they are familiar with the works of their poets. In reading a new poem written by an unknown poet, the reader's response is generally assisted by his prior knowledge of the poet. In case of a poem in translation, the reader does not have the advantage of stock responses. It is more so if the poet is lesser known or unknown. The reader has to depend on the text alone and the originality of a new poet may also come to notice. Translation may help discovery that way. Whatever strategy a translator adopts, an invariant core remains in translation. The Assamese poems in English translation included in *Poetry without Fear* will have a wider audience now.

Poetry is not something ferocious, fierce, violent, wild, ruinous, savage, unruly and vicious and yet it may also cause fear in the readers when it is too difficult to understand and the readers cannot puzzle out any meaning. Modern poetry was once very difficult. Its difficulty and obscurity reduced the readers of poetry. At one stage the poets far outnumbered the readers. What is a poem for if it fails to communicate to the readers? Should a poet scare away readers interested in poetry? The contemporary literary scene in Assamese literature is optimistic and sanguine. A large number of young men and women have been writing poetry and quite a few of them are keenly aware of this aspect of communication. They do not depend exclusively on their cerebration. *Poetry without Fear*, as the title suggests, wants to assure the readers that poetry can communicate with common readers. There is no need of depriving common people of poetic experience.

Many young Assamese poets have been writing poems about their situations and events in a way that makes readers admire their skill. When translated, their poems may be prized elsewhere. Poetry strengthens man's faith in man, it can console man at the time of crisis. So, poetry should be readable, understandable. People stop loving poetry when poetry ignores them, when poetry does not address their problems in a way that they can understand. And yet poetry differs from prose. What can be communicated in good prose need not be stated in verse. Simplicity of language does not mean something skin-deep, glib or frivolous. Profound and unresolved problems of life can also be communicated in simple language. Poetry should not ignore common people and neither should it induce fear in the readers.

[The author is the Editor-in-Chief of *Poetry without Fear*.]