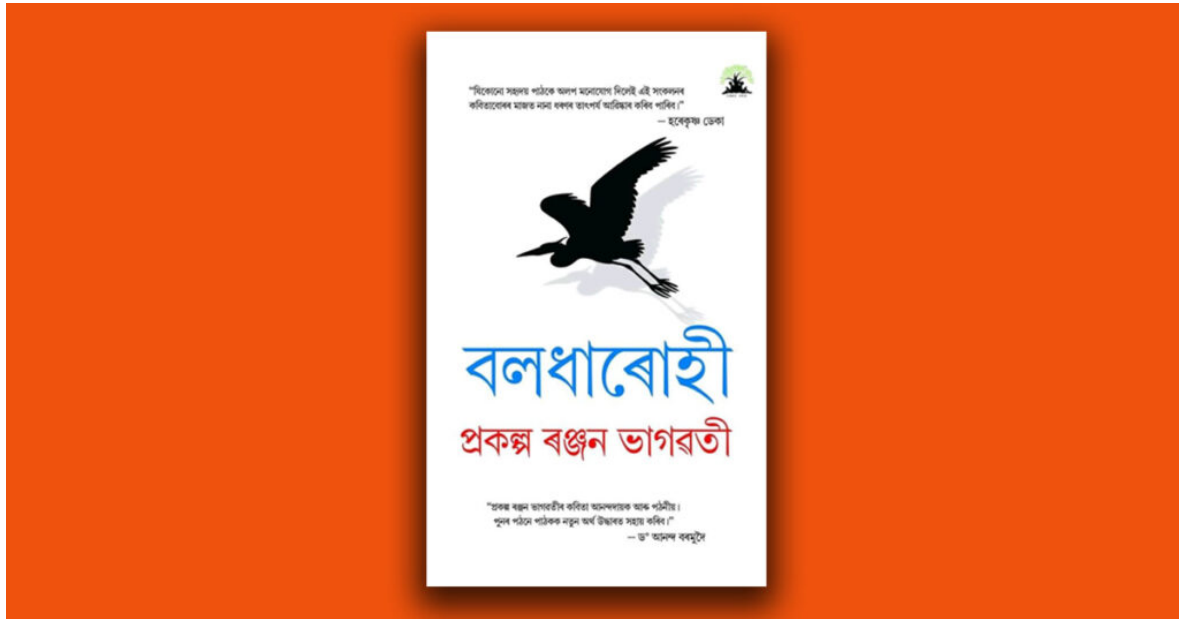


Prakalpa Ranjan Bhagawati's 'Baladharohi Aru Anyanya Kabita'

Dr. Mridul Bordoloi



The anthology starts off with the deceptively simple poem 'Rod' (Sunlight), which is about how shameless, self-centred urban denizens fail to acknowledge the benevolent gesture of the sun, which enables them to go through their daily motions comfortably. The poem perhaps suggests the loss of emotional connect in people due to the demands of their calling. The reified nature of contemporary life which desensitises people, is subtly indicated in the poem. The poem 'Jantrana' (Pain) is surreal in imagery, personifying poetry as pain, which moreover has the capacity to rouse powerful emotions. 'Rip Van' is a re-casting of Washington Irving's classic, which tries to imagine the altered political and ideological landscape of a place after one recovers from a comatose state after ages. Taken allegorically, the poem serves as a commentary on the contemporary geo-political climate where value systems once sacrosanct, have been falsified and supplanted. Wystan Hugh Auden opined that "poetry is the clear expression of mixed feelings." This is exactly what I felt after reading Prakalpa Ranjan Bhagawati's anthology *Baladharohi Aru Anyanya Kabita* (2021). The anthology boasts of 38 poems exploring myriad themes associated with the quaint or quotidian practices of everyday life in a nondescript urban space. The relevance of the poems in this anthology lies in addressing certain concerns that are of immense contemporary relevance, and are part of our public memory and collective imaginary. Themes ranging from the epochal to the banal find ample expression in Bhagawati's collection. The perils of the pandemic, the absurdity of post-truth reality, the cultural logic of rampant consumerism, the triumphalism of those in power and so forth, are supplemented by poems reflecting urban ennui, paranoia, feeling of disenfranchisement and resignation. The poem

‘Bhalpowar Kabita’ (A Poem on Love) is self-reflexive, and indicates the how remembering and forgetting are integral aspects of the creative process. Thus, the creative spark tends to be ephemeral, not sustained. The act of interpretation too is provisional, even in the case of a poet or an author. The unreliability of memory in re-remembering even an epiphanic moment is aptly suggested in this poem. The poem ‘Bat’ (Road) is a satire on greed and the culture of consumerism, ironically contrasting the life of ordinary people with little need, against the life of the super rich with inconsumable greed. The metaphor of road is especially pertinent in Assam’s context as it is experiencing arterial extensions in the form of multi-laned highways. These provide logistic support for the uber-rich class to multiply their wealth exponentially. Another poem ‘Dalong’ (Bridge) is about the necessity to connect rather than remaining insulated in a carceral space. The eponymous poem ‘Baladharohi’ starts off in Ted Hughes’ characteristic style, extolling the primeval instinct of a heron sitting majestically atop a bull. The contrast between humans’ reliance on specious arguments and non-humans’ (the heron’s) lack of sophistries, comes out powerfully. ‘Shabda’ (Words) brings out the contrast between the language of prose and the language of poetry, highlighting poetry’s capacity to draw attention to its itself as an aesthetic object as opposed to prose’s tendency to meander or deterritorialize. A couple of poems offer encomium to Gandhi as a man who undergoes apotheosis into the Mahatma. In ‘Gandhijir Atmajivaneerpora Ki Shikilo’ (What I learnt from Gandhiji’s Autobiography), the speaker ironically records his/her impression on the man who became a myth, but whose autobiography turns him human. The contrast between contemporary (blustering) demagogues’ aspiration to be mythical figures through simulation, and Gandhi’s effort to remain human (Mohan), is subtly hinted. The other ‘Swacchwata’ (Purity) is a hieroglyphic poem illustrating the hijacking of values through strategic displacement or palimpsestization. ‘Bisana’ (Bed) is another hieroglyphic poem where bed stands as a metaphor for home, as well as a site in which the four stages of human life, is poignantly depicted. In ‘Ekhan Nadir Mrityur Ghatanato’ (The Case of A River’s Death), the death of a river on account of privileging anthropocentric concerns, is lamented. The cathexis for development can happen only by exploiting nature. This idea is presented starkly. ‘Hahi’ (Laughter) satirises the hypocrisy of contemporary existence characterised by what William Butler Yeats famously phrased “the best lack all conviction, while the worst are full of passionate intensity.” The only mode of subversion is laughter. The speaker in the poem notes that it is only by lampooning the present state of affairs that the absurdity surrounding contemporary society, can be documented. ‘Swecchabanditwar Edin’ (A Day in Sanitised Self Isolation) is a poem dealing with the neurosis engendered by the covid pandemic. The regimen of keeping oneself sanitized, isolated, or quarantined makes one suffer mental health issues. These ideas are evocatively expressed in the poem. The ennui surrounding a carceral existence, and the belief that social distancing is the only mode of keeping oneself out of harm’s way, is ironically presented. ‘Baraf’ (Ice) is laden with imageries of people suffering from the covid-induced lockdown. The image of migrant workers walking home or getting rammed to death by trains in blood-soaked railway tracks and so forth, were so disturbing that it rendered people catatonic. The metaphor of ice is indicative of the stoic resignation of people suffering hardships of epic proportions. Robert Frost said, “Poetry is when an emotion has found its thought and the thought has found words.” Prkalpa Ranjan Bhagawati’s poems in this anthology has that rare quality of finding just the right words to communicate his thoughts on the shape-shifting events unfolding right in front of our eyes. The beauty of his craft rests on the way he expresses his concerns lucidly, injecting satire and humour felicitously, in poems depicting the monotony of everyday living in an etherised

suburban space. According to Pablo Picasso, “The purpose of art is washing the dust of daily life off our souls.” A reading of Bhagawati’s anthology gives ample evidence of the truth of the claim of the great modernist painter.

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