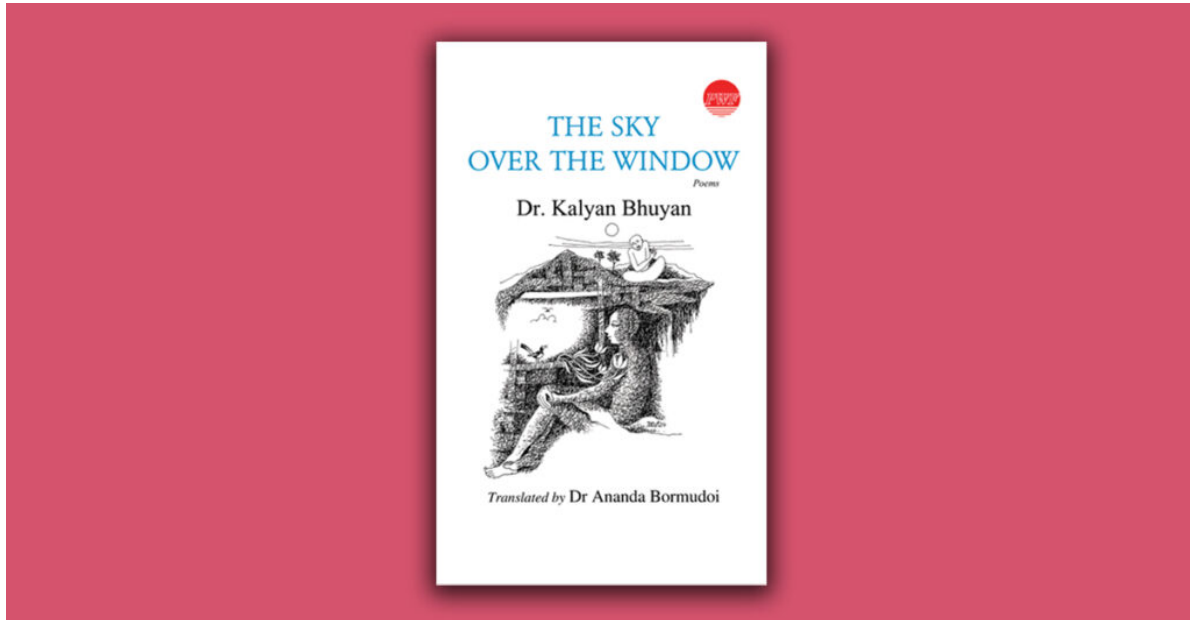


Kalyan Bhuyan's 'The Sky over the Window' : A Review

Dr. Mridul Bordoloi



American Literary critic George Steiner had aptly noted that “Without translation, we would be living in provinces bordering on silence.” Translators, like Dr. Ananda Bormudoi has succeeded in breaking the silence, and enabling writings from Assamese to get disseminated beyond the region. Nobel Prize winning Portuguese novelist Jose Saramago had rightly opined that “Writers make national literature, while translators make universal literature.” Thus, the role of a translator, at times, can transcend the bounds of a writer. I honestly think these Assamese poems composed by Dr. Kalyan Bhuyan and felicitously translated by Dr. Bormudoi will be able to find a global audience.

Dr. Kalyan Bhuyan's poetry anthology, *The Sky over the Window*, opens a window into a deeply nuanced, sometimes paradoxical world where wry humor, biting satire, and philosophical inquiry meet. The anthology, accessible to a broader audience thanks to Dr. Ananda Bormudoi's brilliant translation, becomes a reflective canvas for both the poet's introspection and the reader's self-discovery. Dr. Bhuyan, through his poetry, invites us to pause, reflect, and often question the reality we perceive and the ideologies we hold dear.

Dr. Kalyan Bhuyan's use of satire and humor is evident throughout the anthology. However, it is not the kind of humor that evokes a hearty laugh; rather, it is nuanced, understated, and

sometimes cloaked in irony. In poems like “Cow”, Bhuyan uses allegory to critique the ideological and often political delusions of contemporary society. The poem, with its seemingly simple title, becomes a metaphor for larger societal issues. Here, the cow is not merely an animal; it symbolizes the ideologies and beliefs that people blindly follow, leading to a skewed sense of morality and ethics. The humor lies not in overt jokes but in the irony of our collective delusions, making the satire more piercing and profound. Similarly, the poem “Donkey” echoes this satirical undercurrent, where the animal becomes a stand-in for human folly and naivety.

Bhuyan’s poetry often teeters on the edge of absurdism, drawing from a tradition of literary thought that seeks to explore the inherent meaninglessness of life. This theme is especially prevalent in the poem “The Flock of Black Swans.” This poem evokes a sense of “waiting”—waiting for something to happen, for meaning to emerge, or perhaps for a revelation to unfold. In a manner reminiscent of Samuel Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot*, Bhuyan’s characters in the poem seem caught in an eternal loop of anticipation, reflecting the existential void that defines much of modern existence. The waiting is not for a tangible event but rather for an understanding, a moment of clarity that never quite arrives. This absurdist trope emphasizes the futility and uncertainty of life, mirroring our own sometimes aimless search for purpose and direction in an increasingly chaotic world.

One of the standout features of Kalyan Bhuyan’s work is its philosophical depth, evident in poems such as “Dissection.” In this poem, Bhuyan delves into the metaphysical realm, contemplating the essence of poetry itself. By questioning whether a poem has a body or a soul, Bhuyan perhaps invites readers to engage in a deeper meditation on the nature of art and existence.

Themes of isolation and existential vacuity recur throughout Bhuyan’s anthology, creating a poignant commentary on the human experience. In poems like “Reflection,” “The Sky over the Window,” and “A Bend in the Road,” Bhuyan captures the feeling of being alone in a crowd, of searching for connection and finding only emptiness. These poems evoke a sense of disconnection, not only from others but also from oneself.

The failure to communicate is another recurring theme in Bhuyan’s work. Poems such as “Identity,” “Lost Paths,” and “The Midday” explore the barriers that prevent true understanding between individuals. These barriers are not merely linguistic or cultural; they are existential, rooted in the very nature of human consciousness. The poem “Lost Paths”, for instance, captures the disorientation that comes from losing one’s way, both literally and metaphorically. The paths are not just physical; they are symbolic of the direction one takes in life, and the poem highlights the confusion and uncertainty that arise when those paths become unclear. Bhuyan’s exploration of communication failures powerfully resonates with the reader, emphasizing the isolation and alienation that are inherent to the human condition.

Memory is another trope that haunts Bhuyan’s poetry. In poems like “In the Home of a Dead Dream” and “The Last Flame,” Bhuyan explores how memories shape our present and influence our perception of reality. These poems are suffused with a sense of nostalgia, a longing for what was, and a recognition of the impermanence of all things. These poems resonate with the

universal experience of holding onto memories, even as they slip away, leaving only a faint glow of what once was.

Bhuyan's poetry on the COVID-19 pandemic is particularly notable for its emotional resonance and poignancy. The poem "The Migrant" addresses the plight of those displaced by the pandemic, capturing the desperation and uncertainty that many migrant workers faced as they travelled long distances on foot, seeking refuge. The horrifying event of migrant workers mowed down on railway tracks during the pandemic-induced lockdown had shaken the collective conscience of the entire nation. Thus, the poem brings to light the stark social and economic disparities exacerbated by the pandemic, highlighting the vulnerability of marginalized communities. "The Invisible on the Railroad" and "The Last Station," revisits the traumatic episode of the tragedy befalling migrant workers. These poems evoke a sense of disorientation and helplessness, mirroring the broader existential uncertainty that permeated the pandemic era.

Kalyan Bhuyan's engagement with contemporary issues extends to his critique of urbanization, as reflected in the poem "A Concrete Sapling." This poem metaphorically juxtaposes the organic growth of nature with the rigid, unyielding development of urban spaces. The image of a "concrete sapling" powerfully conveys the loss of natural landscapes, replaced by the artificial structures of modern cities. Bhuyan's critique is subtle yet profound, suggesting that urbanization, while symbolizing progress and development, often comes at the cost of ecological balance and human connection to nature. Bhuyan's use of this metaphor serves as a reminder of the importance of preserving natural spaces and maintaining a harmonious relationship between urban development and environmental sustainability.

A distinct feature of Bhuyan's poetry is his ability to evoke a sense of the eerie and uncanny. Poems like "About a House," "Let the Clocks Melt," and "The Lanes" create surreal landscapes that blur the lines between reality and imagination. In "About a House," Bhuyan transforms a seemingly mundane setting into one filled with spectral presences and uncanny echoes. The house becomes more than just a physical space; it is imbued with memories, emotions, and perhaps even spirits that linger, creating an atmosphere of quiet unease. This poem explores the idea that places carry the imprints of those who have inhabited them, suggesting that the past is never truly gone, but rather coexists with the present in a spectral form.

"Let the Clocks Melt" draws inspiration from surrealist art, reminiscent of Salvador Dalí's melting clocks, to create a dream-like narrative that challenges the conventional perception of time and space. Bhuyan's use of surreal and spectral imagery not only adds a layer of complexity to his poetry but also deepens the reader's engagement with themes of memory, time, and the unseen forces that shape our reality.

Throughout the anthology, Bhuyan employs recurrent motifs that gain symbolic significance, weaving a thematic continuity across his work. The river is a prominent motif, symbolizing the flow of time, the passage of life, and the constant state of change. Stones, on the other hand, symbolize permanence, resilience, and the weight of memory. They contrast with the fluidity of the river, representing the things that remain unchanged amid the flux of life. In Bhuyan's poems, stones often evoke a sense of history, of stories etched into their surfaces, bearing silent

witness to the passing of time. This duality of the river and the stone captures the tension between change and stability, between the ephemeral and the enduring.

Mirror is another powerful symbol in Bhuyan's work, representing self-reflection, introspection, and the search for identity. Mirrors in his poems often suggest the idea of looking inward, confronting the self, and grappling with the fragmented nature of identity. They serve as a metaphor for the human desire to understand oneself and one's place in the world, while also highlighting the inherent ambiguity and elusiveness of the self. Through these recurring motifs, Bhuyan creates imagery that deepens the thematic resonance of his poetry, allowing readers to engage with his work on both an intellectual and emotional level.

To conclude, Dr. Kalyan Bhuyan's *The Sky over the Window* is a testament to his poetic brilliance, capturing the complexity of the human experience through a range of themes and styles. The emotional depth and intellectual rigor of Bhuyan's poetry are matched by the skilful translations of Dr. Ananda Bormudoï, who has faithfully rendered Bhuyan's nuanced voice into a form that will resonate with readers across linguistic and cultural boundaries. Dr. Bormudoï's translation is not merely a linguistic endeavor; it is a bridge that connects Bhuyan's poetic world with the global literary landscape. By capturing the subtleties of Bhuyan's language and the profundity of his themes, Dr. Bormudoï has ensured that the essence of Bhuyan's work is preserved and appreciated by a wider audience. The translation is a celebration of literary collaboration, showcasing the power of poetry to transcend boundaries and touch the universal aspects of human experience. Dr. Ananda Bormudoï's translation has opened a window into Bhuyan's world of words, allowing readers to explore the richness and depth of his poetry. Together, Dr. Bhuyan and Dr. Bormudoï have created a literary work that not only reflects the contemporary human condition but also resonates with the timeless questions that define our existence.

Dr. Mridul Bordoloi teaches in the Department of English, Dibrugarh University. As a literary critic, he writes in English and Assamese as well.