UNIT 1  K.S. NONGKYNRIH: REQUIEM
TRANSLATION: THE POET
CHANDRA KANTA MURASINGH: THE STONE SPEAKS IN THE FOREST
TRANSLATION: B.S. RAJKUMAR
YUMLEMBAM IBOMCHA SINGH: THE LAST DREAM
TRANSLATION: UDAYAN GHOSH

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1.0 OBJECTIVES

In this unit we propose first to acquaint you with the background to Northeast Indian poetry in brief with specific reference to the Assamese, Manipuri, Kokborok Tripura and Khasi languages. You will also be able to see how English language has been a dominant cultural force in the shaping of the poetry written in Northeast India, especially since the 1980s onward. It is note-worthy that some of the contemporary poets in this part of the country are bi-lingual, writing felicitously both in their mother tongue and in English. Such poets have also contributed in full measure to the growth of contemporary Indian poetry in English. We shall study in details one poem each by Kynpham Sing Nongkynrih (Khasi), Chandra Kanta Murasingh (Kokborok) and Yumlembam Ibomcha Singh (Manipuri).

1.1 INTRODUCTION

The Northeast of India remains a little less well known owing to its geographical location and socio-political conditions. There is a coexistence of paradoxical worlds such as the folk and the westernized, virgin forests and
car-choked streets, ancestral values and insurgency. (Isn’t it sad that such a picturesque region should remain especially vulnerable to tragic happenings of life?) In such circumstances, the society becomes a mute witness to the “banality of corruption and the banality of terror” (Editors, *Anthology of Contemporary Poetry from the Northeast*). However, as you will see for yourself, it is poetry that unites the different regions of the Northeast.

After a brief discussion of Assamese poetry, you will get an overview of poetry in Northeast India followed by Northeast poetry in English. The background information will help you subsequently to place the works of Nongkynrih, Chandra Kanta Murasingh and Ibomcha Singh in a proper perspective.

### 1.2 AN OVERVIEW OF POETRY FROM THE NORTHEAST

#### 1.2.1 The Assamese Poetry

I begin with Assamese poetry because the literature of Assam ‘influenced’ in its own way the creative literature of most parts of Northeast India, including Bengali literature in Northeast India, which has its own distinctiveness and is set apart from creative writing in Bengali, either in West Bengal or in Bangladesh.

The first phase of Assamese poetry that dates back to the early twentieth century was marked by a romantic trend coupled with patriotism and mysticism. This continued till the 1960s when there was a subversion of such treatment, making way for symbolism and esotericism. Eventually thematic changes and experimentation in both content and style became the hallmark of Assamese poetry. Also, there was an ideological dash (Marxist/socialist) as in the poetry of Navakanta Baruah, Ajit Baruah, Nilmani Phukan, Hiren Bhattacharya and Homen Burgoain. In their hands poetry for the first time reflected sociopolitical crises and expressed underpinnings of social and economic problems. This was a pronounced departure from the earlier expression of nostalgia and idealism. It was thus a watershed in Assamese poetry where a cultural shift from the ideal to the real was evident. Poetry therefore was not only contemporary but modern. Modernist elements were evinced in the use of symbolist and flashback techniques as in the poetry of the doyen of Assamese poetry: Navakanta Baruah. The language used was more abstract, fragmentary, symbolic and obscure rather than logical to suit new forms and style; traditional rhyme and metre in favour of free verse were rejected.

#### 1.2.2 An Overview of Poetry from the Northeast in Translation

Here I am specifically thinking of ‘modern’ poetry in Northeast India. We are witness to the emergence of a group of poets in the 1980s and the 1990s who wrote poetry in feverish moments of social and political crisis. Their poetry, as in the poetry of the Assamese poets referred to above, used symbolic devices, with a wide range of influences from the West. In Manipur there were poets like Nilakanta (now dead), Somorenda, Sri Biren, Thangjam Ibpishak, Y. Ibomcha etc. who wrote experimental poetry. They were wide-aware to the
violence and social unrest with increasing tension resulting from material culture, corruption and moral breakdown. They wrote (and still write) a poetry which is stark, real and naked, although lyricism is their rich repast. They are recalcitrant poets though, unable to accept the violence and horror of the contemporary society. So to ‘escape’ from this they would often speak of the past and, of halcyon days which they experienced either in their native place or outside. This trend was evidenced also in Khasi and Tripura (Kokborok) poetry as exemplified in the writings of Desmond Leslie Kharmawphlang, Kynpham Sing Nongkynrih and Chandra Kanta Murasingh.

Such poets were reacting to their surroundings so that their poetry was marked by strong social and political overtones. It was the poetry of crisis creating conflicts within the poets’ mind — conflicts between the past and the present, between what ‘was’ and what ‘is’. I am trying to explain this to you in the context of what was (and is) happening in the various states of Northeast India, in the form of ethnic clashes, extremist movements, social unrest, corruption, nepotism etc. These poets could not shy away from such realities, and so their poetry became increasingly referential: the point of reference being their native land. However, this is not to suggest that such poets were impervious to the universal tenets of poetry nor do they lack love and human relationships to be taken care of. No, they are certainly poets of pathos, and they revere human relationships and their sacrosanct values. But the entrenched irony is never lost sight of. This is particularly typified in the poetry of Robin S. Ngangom who writes both in English and in his mother tongue, Manipuri:

My love, how can I explain
that I abominate laws
which punish a man for this post
only the night seems to understand
that we must bear in again.

When I am gone
I would leave you these:
A life without mirrors,
The blue ode between pines
And the winter sky, the
Secret understanding of
Roots and the earth.

But where can DAC run from the homeland,
Where can I flee from your love?
They have become pursing prisons
Which hold the man
With criminal words.

(‘The Strange Affair of Robin S. Ngangom: Khasia in Gwalia, 38)

While sharing universal human emotions, joys and suffering, poetry written in Northeast India cannot be reduced to stereotypes. It is also not the poetry of the metropolis, intellectual and arcane. It is, in short, the poetry of the heart, of the people of the land, their visions and dreams. It is characterized at times by rural or natural imagery recalling halcyon days. In this sense poets such as Robin S. Ngangom, Desmond Leslie Kharmawphlang and Kynpham Sing Nongkynrih are essentially poets of the soil who represent the dreams and
aspirations of the people of the region. Poetry of Northeast India is unfailingly committed to social, political and historical issues though satirical and personal themes are widespread whether that be in Assamese, Manipuri or Khasi.

1.2.3 Poetry from the Northeast in English

You may wonder as to why I am giving you an outline of English poetry which is being written in Northeast India. I mentioned earlier that many of the poets writing in this part of our country are bi-lingual. They also write in English and some of them have a Masters Degree in English. Perhaps this is one of the reasons why they choose to write in English, but we must also remember that in many of the states of Northeast India, English is the lingua franca. However, a majority of poets in a state like Manipur choose to write in Manipuri, because English is sidelined by them in their endeavour to create authentic Manipuri literature.

Northeast India witnessed the emergence of a younger generation of poets in the 1980s and the early 1990s, whose poetry was written in critical moments of societal crisis, and they attracted the attention of critics and literary journals in India and abroad. Coincidentally many of these poets live in Shillong and it was the poetry page of The Telegraph Colour Magazine edited by the celebrated Indian English poet Jayanta Mahapatra which gave them the opportunity to be published, and break new ground on the Indian English poetry scene. In the mid 1990s, the North East Forum For English Studies, in Guwahati, and North East Writers Forum devoted much of their energy to encouraging poetry written in English, in the region.

The poets whose names readily come to the mind are: Desmond L. Kharmaawphlang, Robin S. Ngangom, Kynpham Sing Nongkynrih (all from Meghalaya), H. Ramdinthari (Mizoram), Nini Lungalang, Manny Dai (Arunchal Pradesh) and Easterine Irolu (Nagaland). They weave universal concerns with local themes. Even though giving a broad continuity to the Indian poetry writing scene in general, theirs, at times, is a varying discourse from the poets of ‘mainstream’ India. This ‘discourse’ is related to the ‘multi-voice’ that they use: political, social and personal; often these interweave thematically in a single poem.

If we speak of a general “Indianness” in the poetry written in India which is inclusive of both the vernacular languages and English, the poets of Northeast India have subverted such a nebulous notion by writing poignantly of their home, town and country, a shared nostalgia, and of the prevalent social issues and ethnic problems with their attendant pitfalls. They evince a racial, sociological and historical memory to capture iridescent moments of their societies in transition. They may also be described as ‘ethnic’ poets. Their poetry at times is simple, yet astonishingly lyrical; they shun, many of them, intellectualism in poetry and believe perhaps that the best of poetry and its finer instincts bear the indelible stamp of the native genius: innate and untutored wisdom. They effectively use the oral tradition and mythology/folklore of their specific cultures (the Khasi poets are a case in point), and rework these appositely to achieving their poetic vision and craft. Above all, they view the craft of writing poetry as essentially meditative, likened to what Wordsworth says of a poet as a ‘man speaking to man’. They
glimpse such a primal functioning of poetry and attempt to encapsulate the
same in their verse. They are nativist poets, but at the same time they are not
blind to the inadequacies of their immediate societies.

I feel that this has given rise to a second classification of ‘Indianness’ in the
poets in Northeast India. Their ‘Indianness’ is complexly and subtly related to
their cultural and historical moorings. They hearken to the past, to its nostalgic
calls. Despite this, to call them romantics and idealists will amount to
overlooking their social, political concerns appertaining to the angst of the
post-independence period. Perhaps, for many of them their past is as important
as the present; their awareness of regional identity and their concern with it
guarantee that they are at a par with their counterparts in other regions of the
Indian subcontinent, all of which will confirm Indian literary scene as a
product of unity in diversity.

What then are the actual themes of this poetry? A careful analysis shows that
in this kind of poetry there is a constant dialogue and dialectic between, ‘what
is’ and ‘what could have been’. There is an interminable hiatus between the
past and the present. There is no apparent lamentation in the poems, but there
are wounds, unhealing, unquiet. A strong historical sense pervades the best of
such poetry and there prevails the dialectics between reality and realism. The
dialogue between urban and rural is a thematic concern, if not an obsession.
At the same time the ‘angst’ of being and becoming besets such poetry with
deep humanistic perspectives, marked again by the ‘rural’ or ‘small town’
syndrome.

This is basically a framework, which I have given to you so that you are able
to discover ‘meanings’ when you read specific poems.

The dexterous intermingling of personal, social, political, historical, folkloric
and satirical themes makes poetry of the Northeast unique in itself.

I think that the poetry of Northeast India holds tremendous potentialities. The
younger generation of poets in Assamese, Manipuri and Khasi are writing
prolifically. Their poetry is at once reactionary, amoral and a critique of the
contemporary society. What is also interesting is that they are in close touch
with one another and, view themselves as one entity, sharing similar concerns,
and all get enmeshed at the crossroads of change and transition.

If life is going to be volatile, then why should literature be left behind? That
literature is a recreation of life rather than an imitation of life seem to be the
motif underlying their poetry.

### 1.3 KHASI POETRY: KYNPHAM SING NONGKYNRIH
— A SHORT LIFE SKETCH

Kynpham Singh Nongkynrih resides in Shillong, the capital of Meghalaya. He
is the Deputy Director of the Publication Cell in the North Eastern Hill
University, Shillong. He was born on 4 April 1964 in Cherrapunjee in the East
Khasi Hills District of Meghalaya. He did a teaching stint as Lecturer in
English in Sankardev College, Shillong and was co-terminously editing the
English daily *Apnira* during 1994-1996. He is now Reader in English,
NEHU, Shillong. He has published two books of poetry in English, *Moments*
(1992) and The Sieve (1992) and three in Khasi: Ka Samoi jong Ka Lyer, Ki Mawsiang Ka Sohra and Ka Jinghkyinmaw. Nongkynrih's versatility is also evident by the fact that he has translated ten books for children into Khasi. His poetry has been widely published and anthologized.

1.4 AN OVERVIEW OF NONGKYNRIH'S POETRY

Kynpham Sing Nongkynrih is flexible in his choice of themes covering a gamut of ideas ranging from nostalgia, the small town syndrome, Khasi mythology to social and political ones. Therefore his poetry provides wide-ranging themes and sensibilities. This is the focal point and overarching quality of Nongkynrih's poetry. The wide array of themes is indeed the distinguishing attribute of his poetry. There can be the coy lover, the irate husband, the sulking son, the laughing journalist and so on! He uses the techniques of irony very effectively in his poetry, as a means to satirical ends. There is a nice blend of humour in his poetry. For example, he writes about the Earth Summit in an ironical, if not a trenchant, vein. The poem is satirical and is a caustic comment on politicians, yet it is tempered with some kind of sadness.

The very first Earth Summit
Was given a big build-up for weeks,
....At Nan Polok
the parking lot
humbles down
fifteen of our proudest
pines

("The Parking Lot", Khasia in Gwalia)

His "Winter Song" vivifies the charming winter season in Shillong and is once again an intrusion into the social fabric of the times, of what is 'happening' around us.
1.5 THE POEM: REQUIEM: A DISCUSSION

In Requiem Nongkynrih takes us into the social world of a close community, which has gathered together after the death of a woman. The poem, as the title suggests, is a dirge written on the death of a young woman “Meri”. The first stanza sets off in a lugubrious tone:

The moans that floated
into the still autumn nights
were borne by the cold winds
onto the season of carols.

The refrain, “I heard them” that is repeatedly used in the next three stanzas, adds to the general sadness climaxing into the question, if not the insinuation: “What was wrong with Meri?” Such poignancy obliquely reflects both a general condition of sadness and a specific condition that of the speaker’s (who need not necessarily be the poet). The above question is also ironic because it prompts one to ask what could be ‘wrong’ with a dying person or what could be ‘right’? The question is a lamentation as if the speaker were asking: “What is wrong with you? Come Meri wake up”. Notice carefully the imagery in the first four stanzas. The “moans” are deeply associated with the still autumn nights, the cold winds, the plaintive note of the cock crowing, and the muezzin’s call. Such disparateness in the use of images intricately and subtly conveys an emotion: the stillness of mourning. Someone who is stunned into silence by the moan of someone who is going to die, probably unattended is pictured in the first part of the poem. But through the sounds heard by the poet it is clear that the suffering of Meri is acute and fatal, accentuated by the murky symbolism and the trenchant imagery, which reminds one of Shakespeare’s sonnets dealing with time, change and death. As Meri was dying, we gather “No doctor came”. There is an irony here. Is it because of negligence, or is it because the family was very poor?

Meri’s death was no ordinary death (stanza 7). The images evoked in this stanza are hair raising, for we are told that:

And finally, only two titanic tarantulas,
one black, the other with a crimson chest,
crept with slow hairy step, like skulkers
of the night, and hauled her off to their invisible lair

Finally death’s messengers came and ‘hauled her off/to their invisible lair’. The poet draws upon his cultural belief associated with death. Thus the intense emotional situation is heightened by the personification of death.

The second part of the poem which describes the mourning of friends and relatives releases the tense emotional state of the first part. A return to normal pre-cremation rituals ensures this release easement. It is descriptive, whereas the first part is more meditative. The metaphor of death is used in the first instance as a generic condition of humanity, and in the second and third
instances, as a specific condition; the referential points here are the speaker and Meri’s beloved ones. The second part of the poem describes the pre-funeral situation with the dead body “bathed and scented”, “dressed in her favourite clothes”. Friends and relatives and visitors were entertained with feast, tea, biscuits in the midst of prayers until they sadly mourned the sudden demise of Meri:

such a young girl
such a sweet girl
such promise....

The poet, however, overcomes the tragedy of untimely death by a stoic acceptance in the last two lines where “some comfort” was offered by the eschatologists so that “They were happy she went so peacefully”. There is a streak of irony in such comfort. Meri made no noises about her death but rather she died “as naturally as a sleeper snoring/no doctor came...”. See the contrast between her painful suffering — moans — and her natural death. The irony of the situation is that death disturbs the living more than the dead.

Love broke into loud lamentations
The mother cried for divine explanations
Mourners swarmed her death-bed.

The distancing of the speaker from the event in the second part is once again ironical. However, in the first part the speaker identifies with the death. Such neat balancing of the subjective self with the objective fact invests the poem with a thematic unity: death seen from different perspectives and viewpoints.

Requiem in my opinion is a poem which not only transforms the ordinary into the extraordinary but also merges the natural with the universal. It takes us into a typical social situation: people gathering in a house to mourn the death of a person. But it presents multiple viewpoints: that of Meri’s (she didn’t get a chance to speak before she died), that of the mourners’ and that of the speaker’s who finally represents the death scene in a multifarious form with dramatic effect.

1.6 KOKBOROK POETRY: CHANDRA KANTA MURASINGH — A SHORT LIFE SKETCH
Chandra Kanta Murasingh who lives in Agartala, the capital of Tripura was born on 1 April 1957. He is a bi-lingual writer, writing both in Kokborok, the language of the indigenous people of Tripura and in Bengali. He is the President of the Kokborok Sahitya Academy. He has received numerous awards and accolades for his poetry in Kokborok, including the prestigious Bhasha Sanman from Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi. He is presently employed in a government bank in Agartala.

1.7 AN OVERVIEW OF MURASINGH’S POETRY

Chandra Kanta Murasingh’s special appeal as a poet lies in his upholding the simple life of the village folk in his native Tripura. He is essentially concerned with the common man, with what William Wordsworth would call ‘humble and rustic life’. Murasingh is able to re-create the elemental aspects of life coupled with his use of natural imagery. A deeply sensitive poet, Murasingh’s poetry is embedded in the tradition of humanity, village life unsullied by the intrusion of a materialistic or mechanized world of humanity, he uses images vividly and sensitively, landscaping his poems in myths of the past and memory. In this manner he is able to make his poems deeply evocative.

The sensible world for Murasingh is the world of the commoner, the rural folk as opposed to the urban elite. He voices anguish and oppression in any form. His poems are spontaneous and lyrical in their song — like cadence.

Chandra Kanta Murasingh has published five collections of poems, namely happeing Garingo Chibuksa Ringo (The Python Calls in the Deserted Tong House), Holong Kok Sa — O Bolong Bisingo (The Stone Speaks in the Forest), Lok Chethuwang Lok (Rise Up Chethuweng Tree), Pindi Watwi Pin (Sprinkle the Rain), and Rufen Ni Buduk Ani Nogo (The Silver Pope in My Room). As is evident from the titles of these poems, Murasingh’s poetry abounds in natural imagery. He is sensitive to human situations and society at large. The pleasure and pain of the common folk, the strife and stress of the urban people, and the myths of the Kokborok community constitute the imagery and vision of his poetry untrammeled and melodic.

1.8 THE POEM: THE STONE SPEAKS IN THE FOREST: A DISCUSSION

This poem speaks probably of an ancient myth, but in a complex manner; it builds the relationship between animate and inanimate things, between man and nature. All over the poem the running motif is that of ‘search’ — a golden deer looking for a mate; a king looking for his prey; a man with his lady love going upstream to build their home in the deep forest, and Hachukrai rowing downstream towards a market. However, the search motif in the last two stanzas is subdued. But the stone that appears in all the four stanzas is central to the poem’s very subtle emphasis on the relationship between the stone and others, the deer, the king, the man and a villager, all of whom are defined in relation to the stone. As mentioned above, each stanza of the poem speaks of a particular situation.

The deer, the king, the lover and Hachukrai symbolize earthly life, drawn from the past and the present. Their movement is intricately woven, and archetypal symbols work demanding the emotional involvement of the reader too. Each stanza is closely knit with structural opposites: (1) deer and stone —
animate and inanimate, (2) man and nature — the dichotomy between the
invading man and the invaded nature:

He stood, with his foot
Pressing the forehead of the stone
And looking — to find which way
His prey was on the run
The weight of feet tormenting the hill
The stone was silent because
The pain was not his alone.

It goes on like a formula tale and one can see the bundle of relations referred
to. (3) a couple crying and rowing upstream to build their home in the deep
forest recalls the past as set against the present and (4) man and nature in open
conflict in which the stone comes out as a powerful symbol of the indomitable
force of nature that is self-preservative and self-protective against the abuse of
its resources in terms of buying and selling.

In the first three stanzas what is unique is that suffering is universal whether
for a deer which does not get a mate, or for a hunter unable to find his prey;
this does not preclude even a man with his lady love, who “Sprayed dreams
and tears on the stone”. In the last stanza the stone rises up against the man
with “bow and arrow in hand” in protest against the material exploitation of
the forest by man. The deer, the king and the lover are painted as shedding
pain in their own way, but not the villager who represents a threat to
environment and nature. The poem, thus, speaks volumes of modern day
ecological imbalance implicitly in symbolic and metaphorical terms, in which
the stone remains a convincing central motif, an anthropomorphic image.
Everything in the poem — the deer, the lover — is under the shadow of the
stone. The king and the stone are nearby to confront gradually locked in a
duel.

The poem mirrors the past and the present on a meaningful symbolic and
metaphorical plane. It delves into the mythic past of a culture reliving it in the
present. This, however, is my view. You may or may not be in agreement with
me. Think about it and reach your own conclusion.

1.9 MANIPURI POETRY: YUMLEMBAM IBOMCHA
SINGH – A SHORT LIFE SKETCH
1.9.1 An Overview of Ibomcha’s Poetry

Ibomcha’s early poetry was rebellious, a kind of protest poetry to ‘counter’ social and political oppression. He was part of a literary movement by a group of poets known as the “Angry Young Poets”. Noteworthy among one of these avant gardists was the celebrated Manipuri poet Thangjam Iibopishak (1948-). The protest was against social oppression and violence of the times which overtook the state of Manipur in the 1980s. However, Ibomcha’s poetry gradually eclipsed such a note of protestation and took surrealistic overtones, with dreamlike imagery. Perhaps it was an ‘escape-route’ from the reality of the times. Ibomcha’s poetry takes a narrative shape characteristic of his style. It is complex and deals with wraith-like images: it is as if the poet is in a reverie and stupor. There are dominant overtones of irony and satire, but the poems also depict absurd situations as in “Story of A Dream” and “Battle Ground of The Victorious”. He uses surreal images to express the absurdity of social realities. Rats are run over by vehicles, bullets are compared to raisins and being shot is like being caressed by ladies! Ibomcha constantly expresses the absurd as an antidote to the suffering and ills of society. In this context the poems also assume a satirical note with irony being used as a literary device.

Ibomcha moved away from a directly protest poetry to a kind which is surrealistic and dreamlike as mentioned above. The theme of protest however remains implicit in that he tends to be very critical of his immediate surroundings. As mentioned above Ibomcha’s poems border on ‘escapism’ as a kind of his personal myth as you will see in the poem prescribed for your study. The absurdity in his poetry is an attempt to depict the topsy turviness of the world, how things have gone wrong, how truth and reality have been travestied. In “Home for the Homeless” he says:

To his father who begot him
A boy asks
Where is my home,
The one who begot him stands confused
Looking into the distance,
As the sky’s verge....
Where is my home
Where is my home
The questions reverberate
From the nooks and corners
of the earth

Where is my home
The question returns and looks
At the boy’s face.
Note the expression, “the question returns”, which typifies a kind of absurdity as “The question returns and looks/At the boy’s face”. There is obvious irony in the lines which reverberate:

Where is my home
Where is my home

1.10 THE POEM: THE LAST DREAM: A DISCUSSION

This is a poem dealing with the theme of death, and the motif of death pervades the poem. But this death is not real; it is a fantasy, some kind of a ritual death or some kind of death against life and vice versa. The villagers, who could swear that they carried the old woman in a hearse, are now told that she is visible to some people across the banks. They react:

That can’t be
That can’t be
She had died many years ago
She cannot live any longer

The poem attempts to build a mythic compulsion: that of the ‘ghost’ of the woman who died long ago. It is woven round the beliefs, customs and traditions of a community, all of which form an anthropomorphic vision of the existence of a village goddess — “ancient goddess of the village” who has been treated as an ordinary human being — unwanted, hence to be disposed of. How callous the villagers are as they can catch the women from across the river to be cremated alive, the “vaguely staining old woman” carrying her on a bier “through the narrow village paths”. But the “hundred tongue of all consuming flame” to which the woman is consigned cannot harm her, burn her, but rather in her anger she comes out after flinging all her parts one after another, as if in a process (re-process) of recreation. It reminds us the theme of Eliot’s The Waste Land that tells in a subtle and symbolical way how the modern world turned into a waste land consequent upon man’s corruption and lack of faith. The nightmarish condition of the village when the ancient goddess of the village has been burnt is conflated with the waste land condition of the village as shown in the opening of the poem.

Lifeless fields stretch scorched and dry
Like death in silence

The same image of being waste recurs in the sixth stanza: “The village was laid waste by her/Hunting ghosts she had sent”.

The poet laments the sacrilegious deeds of the villagers. It is consecration and not desecration that would save both the village and villagers without which they will be constantly haunted and terrorized by the spirit of the mythical old woman. The last stanza reveals the unredeemed fate of the villagers who violate what is inviolable and sacred:

Thus was cremated the old woman
Darkness of the night embraces
The wide forehead of the village
Sleeping they cannot change positions
In the early hours of daytime
Up and down the village
They are all having nightmares
The old woman looks on wet eyed.

Through the painful depiction of the contemporary human condition the poet writes about the inseparable ties of the past with the present for which he tries to relive the past — mythical past as extremely meaningful to restore the old values of life and existence. That becomes his 'last dream' in which he sees the peace and harmony of his community represented by the villagers.

The poem is rich in imagery. And the presence of a world behind the visible is strongly suggested in a dreamlike world of myth and fantasy. Flashback technique is adroitly exploited as a link between the past and the present almost as a continuum.

Can you add a few more points to the mythopoeic vision of the poet? Poets and writers not only draw upon myths but also create personal, communal and cultural myths.

1.11 LET US SUM UP

We have in this unit given you a bird’s eye view of the poetry of the Northeast and talked about three contemporary poets and their poems. The poems you have read deal with different aspects of life, death and parabolic relationship between man and nature. But you, as student and reader, will have to decide how each poet treats his subject matter, and what the poetic and philosophical implications of such treatment are. The poems have been discussed. This of course does not mean that you will necessarily agree with a particular way of looking at the poems. You will have your own interpretations. Try and discern qualities associated with good poetry, such as lyricism, contemplation of certain moods, thematic unity, irony etc. Note also, weaknesses if any, such as repetition, desultoriness etc.

In short you should be in a position to analyse critically the strength and weaknesses of the poems and, also whether, there is harmonious blending of form and content in them.

1.12 GLOSSARY

Dialectics: intellectual debate, conflicting positions
Kwai: The Khasi word for betel nut
Khasi: The language of Meghalaya
Kokborok: One of the languages of Tripura
Manipuri: The language of the Meitei community of Manipur.
1.13 QUESTIONS

1. Write a critical analysis of each poem prescribed.
2. Write an overview of Northeast Indian poetry with special reference to the poems prescribed.
3. Make a comparative study of these poems.
4. Critically examine the titles of the poems.
5. Write a note on the structure of the poems prescribed.
6. Which among these three poems do you like the best and why? Give reasons.
7. Do you think that the flavour of the oral tradition can be detected in these poems? Give reasons.
8. Write a critical note on contemporary Northeast India poetry.

1.14 SUGGESTED READINGS


I am mentioning this book once again because it is a fairly definitive book on contemporary poetry written in Northeast India. You will get a wide panorama and insight into the kind of poetry which is currently being written in Northeast India, today. It will also help you to compare and contrast poets representing a particular cultural and social milieu. You might discover commonalities among these poets and that will help you to understand the prescribed texts better, and more critically.

The anthology includes poem from Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland and Tripura. It represents as many as 45 poets in Assamese, Manipuri, Hindi, Bengalee, English, Khasi, Tenyidia (Nagaland) and Chakma, Tripuri and Kokborok (Tripura).