

**Review of Preetinicha Barman's
*My Body Floating with Hyacinths***

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Jayashree Haloi

<https://orcid.org/0009-0000-6191-1228>

Department of English, St. Ann's College, Bodoland University, Kokrajhar

Book Review

The hallmark of appealing poetry lies in its connection to the roots of life and the world that encompasses our existence. This rootedness signifies a deliberate effort: an effort to cultivate a sense of belonging to one's origins, to seamlessly blend the richness of past heritage with present realities, and to convey a philosophical perspective through an affectionate portrayal of nature and humanity's inherent aspirations. This effort has the exquisite power to gently guide any reader into the deepest recesses of their own mind, unveiling the radiant essence of their true self. In this regard, Preetinicha Barman's poetry collection, *My Body Floating with Hyacinths*, emerges as a sublime and harmonious creation. Each poem unfurls with a profound sense of individualism and a fervent, almost ethereal passion for both the human spirit and the world beyond, crafting a delicate and enchanting tapestry of beauty and introspection. This poetry collection, consisting of 70 poems, is divided into four parts, each adorned with a deep meaningful subtitle: "You May Not Believe My Story," "We Had Emerged Out of Chaos," "Let the River Narrate Her Own Tale," and "My Body Floating with Hyacinths." Barman is adept at expressing a wide range of emotions and feelings; and this is evident from the very first glimpse of her book's title and subtitles. Though there is a splendid variety and breadth in the emotions, subjects, and gestures in the composition of the poems across each segment, every verse is imbued with a deep and abiding devotion to the essence of Indian philosophy, and a subtle connection to romanticism.

Barman's depiction of the inner world resonates with a profound sense of humanity and a deep reverence for heritage. This connection to heritage naturally intertwines with the cultural consciousness of a nation, a theme beautifully embodied in Barman's poems such as "My Old Story" and "Khajuraho." In "My Old Story," she writes:

You'll hear the evening prayers
of my great-grandmother
emerging from the dilapidated temple,
harmonizing with the medley of the thunderous drum,
the forceful cymbals,
and the high-pitched conch. (13)

Through these words, Barman crafts an immersive canvas of tradition and memory, capturing the delicate fusion of time and heritage that reverberates through generations. Her poetry transcends the present moment, inviting readers to experience the profound depths of cultural legacy and the serene echoes of a bygone era. Although the words evoke the beauty of tradition and heritage, they also poignantly capture the sense of decay that marks the erosion of past cultures in today's society. Through expressions like 'dilapidated temple' and 'abashed mansion,' the poem paints a melancholic portrait of the decline of once-vibrant traditions. In contrast, the poem "Khajuraho" presents a timeless portrayal of historical heritage, depicting a grandeur that remains resilient against the ravages of time:

I am present, forever young, desirous.
My lustrous gait attracts tourists,
archaeologists, historians.
I am a living dream, a dreamy reality,
an object so often objectified,
an embodiment and a representation.
Yet I am not a lost culture
embossed only in history. (25)

Preetinicha Barman's poem "Khajuraho" mirrors the eloquence of Assamese poet Nirmal Prabha Bordoloi's "Khajuraho." Bordoloi's poem celebrates the worship of the body, a theme that was rare in her contemporary poetry. Similarly, Barman's "Khajuraho" seeks to uncover the

ultimate beauty in the feminine form. This profound exploration is exquisitely illustrated in the lines:

They gaze at my slants,/ my breasts, my deep navel,/ and the deeper chasm between my thighs. (25)

Through this vivid imagery, Barman establishes the idea of the beauty inherent in cultural heritage. This process of physical unveiling can also be seen in Barman's other poems. Through her delicate exploration of love's essence, she reveals the raw, unadorned truths of human experience. In these works, the poet recognizes love in its simple and natural form, rejecting artifice in favour of sincerity. By focusing on the true feelings of flesh and blood, she captures the essence of what it means to connect on a deep, emotional level. Her poetry thus becomes a vessel for exploring the most intimate aspects of the human heart. It is within this intimate exploration that her love poems are marked by a profound sense of longing and sadness, revealing the delicate interplay between joy and sorrow in intimate relationships. Some beautiful and poignant expressions emerge from her verses, lending the poems a fascinating and evocative appearance. In this way, Barman's poetry not only reflects but also magnifies the subtle, yet powerful, truths of love and melancholy. Some of her poems where love and melancholy emerge together are as follows:

From "The Response":

She licked honey
inside his mouth-cave.
His beaded pearls
bit her lower lips
turning it into a coral.
It was not him that she yearned,
[...] It was not exactly him. (46)

From "Nights":

After the act, I see your back turning to face me.
It's marvellous; enormously dignified.
While you are sleeping peacefully

it's looking at me.
 My breasts rippling with perspiration
 have been sending messages
 to the deepening naval –
 a thunderous thrill is yet left.
 Can your back with its two large bumps feel it?
 Does it yearn to wake you up for another act?" (49)

The poet's mind is a realm suffused with love and yearning, sadness, and quest. Within the lonely world she has crafted, she labours to rend the fabric of pain and distill the essence of hope and anticipation. She speaks of salvation (*moksha*) through physical intimacy in the poem entitled "Play, Love":

Each time we make love
 I ask you to call my name;
 for you it's a chant, a hymn
 you recite in an ascending tone,
 on the path of attaining
 the Moksha stage of erotica. (48)

The speaker's modern mind reflects the radiant essence of Hindu Vedantic Philosophy. According to Hindu Philosophy, the attainment of *moksha* stands as the highest goal among the four *purusharthas*: *dharma*, *artha*, *kama*, and *moksha*. It is within this profound context that the poet crosses sensory experiences of physical intimacy, ascending into the realm of transcendentalism. The poet's passion, deeply influenced by Indian philosophy, is uniquely expressed in a style that distinguishes her among contemporary Indian poets. Her solitary self-surrender is unparalleled, and her relationship with her beloved is imbued with anger, complaints, and prayers. Her poetry transcends her inner world, entering an eternal realm where every element radiates with otherworldly joy and miraculous beauty. She showcases this concept of love in a holistic sense in the poem "A Pilgrimage":

The moment your placid smile delved
 into the glacier of my body
 I smiled away

a hundred butterflies
 bathed in the sunshine.
 My pilgrimage started the very day
 on the path of the sun.
 Twisting my body around the banyan
 I transformed into a holy lotus. (51)

In Barman's poems, two distinct entities emerge. One seeks to capture intimate moments from the depths of her mind, while the other desires to share thoughts and problems that stretch from sky to earth. Perhaps this duality explains why the poet's inquiry into the soul often transcends her personal identity. She questions her existence and quotes:

I often ask myself, 'Am I a poet?'
 ("To Poetry")

My being shrinks
 at the thought of coming out,
 of facing the commotion outside.
 Your pages shelter my essence.
 Even the gibberish words,
 distorted sentences, calamitous scenes
 do not put me into any existential turmoil
 ("Simulacra")

I am a sinner
 or rather, I'm called a sinner?"
 ("A Legacy of Sins")

This awakening to existentialism springs from a profound quest for self-realization and the vision of truth. It embodies a prophetic perspective on life and the world, transfigured by spiritual contemplation. This is a testament to the poet's deep faith in God. But, when the very existence of this God is assailed by some in society, the poet's heart burns with anger. In the poem "Demons," she portrays how spiritual subjugation disrupts individual identity:

You placed our God
 beside your frightened God.
 You hailed Him as one of yours.
 With Him, we crawled to your territory of faith,
 never to be able again to stand up on our feet. (61)

Such direct expressions of emotion symbolize the poet's protest against a world in decline. As spiritual and human values erode, the poet's heart grows increasingly solitary. However, amidst this solitude, her poems also carry a unique infusion of optimism, illuminating paths to renewal and transcendence. Barman's reincarnational verses, with their profound exploration of life's cycles and transformations, stand as a vibrant testament to this enduring hope and resilience in the face of adversity.

That was the day I was born again.
 My old face rejuvenating
 with the vigour of youth,
 looking at a fresh sky.
 A new birth it is [...]
 my body floating with the hyacinths
 falling in love with the sun god
 once again.... ("Birth")

My response to him
 flew as butterflies,
 cherishing the dream
 of living another thousand lives
 to decipher the mystery
 tuned by his flute. ("The Flute of Krishna")

Barman's poems stand out for their profound engagement with life and the world. Many of her verses capture the essence of collective existence through the lens of personal emotions. In this way, her poetry transforms individual feelings into reflections of the broader human experience. The poem "As Expected" magnificently exemplifies this:

Buying fish together in the market isn't love. But,
 selecting each other's favourite fish, pretending to
 like it, knowing each one by the bones of fin rays is
 an intimacy so keenly knitted as to fertilise the soil
 of love. (56)

The same spirit within the poet seeks expression in poems like “Red” and “The Field” through dream. A dream rests eternally in the mind of one brimming with knowledge, weariness, and a yearning for love. Setting aside the tally of gains and losses in a corner of the heart, one can envision the sweetest expression of their life. It is here that the line between reality and dream blurs, and surrealism breathes life. In brief, Barman mesmerizingly embodies the essence of romanticism. This continuity of romanticism endures through her deep passion for the history of her nation and society. Barman’s work beautifully intertwines personal and collective memory, creating a tapestry that honors the past while dreaming of the future. It is not only poets who embrace romanticism; this profound awareness of history should flow from the pen of every poet. As Jibanananda says, a poet must deeply understand society; amid the delicate instability of the poem, there should be a profound consciousness of history, and within the poet’s mind, a crystal-clear awareness of that history must shine. Barman’s poems demonstrate an immense sense of responsibility in this regard:

She was a rider of both a bicycle and a horse.
 The *koler-gaan* and the radio both amused her.
 If you meet her ever, she'll tell you
 how her father had smuggled
 a silk sari for her wedding
 when *khadi andolon* was at its peak [...]
 She would tell the tale how
 she gave shelters to a dozen of destitutes,
 participated in their last rites,
 married off their daughters, settled their sons....

(“The Storyteller’s Tale”)

The pond with its reddish water
still hallucinates the red history.

(“Atharokota”)

Preetinicha Barman’s talent is a mesmerizing blend of profound contemplation and intense emotion. Her poems resonate deeply, stirring the heart and gently knocking on the door of the mind. A spontaneous stream of love flows through her verses, interweaving with the complexities of thought and the weight of existential concerns. The scent of the native soil serves her as a wellspring of inspiration; and her poems celebrate a love for every facet of nature. In her work, life emerges as an endless quest to explore reality; and her poetry becomes a written expression of that quest. The use of symbols imbues Preetinicha Barman’s poems with a unique and profound dimension. Through evocative works such as “Riddle,” “A Calf’s Dream,” “Coil, Hide Inside,” “My Window,” and “My Closed Window,” she brings to life the complexities of identity, the longing for legacy, and the depths of human emotion. In many of her poems, the use of fragmented, short sentences reflects the instability of the poet’s heart, capturing the delicate balance between introspection and expression.

Overall, it can be concluded that Barman's poems are not distant from life. On the one hand, her work is about the helpless and desperate aspects of human existence; on the other hand, it is about the sweet intimacy of the heart. Her attachment to her country and land has sometimes troubled and hurt her. Yet, after anger and disappointment, she ultimately discovers a bright land of hope. The poet's love for nature transitions from physical passion to a transcendental devotion. The entire essence of her poems is grounded in the concept of *Satyam Shivam Sundaram*—truth is God, and God is beauty. Human minds are susceptible to change, and the problems we encounter are transient. Despite the relentless march of mechanical civilization, which often disregards traditional ideals, it cannot eradicate human values. These values persist as long as humanity exists on Earth, enduring through various adversities. It is through the words of poets like Barman that these timeless human qualities are kept alive.

Bionote

Jayashree Haloi is an Assistant Professor of English at St. Ann’s College, Kokrajhar. She has completed her Masters from Bodoland University in 2023. Her research article has been published in *SARE: Southeast Asian Review of English* in 2024. Her areas of interest include

Environmental Humanities, Trauma Studies, and Psychoanalysis. She can be reached at halojayashree99@gmail.com

ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0000-6191-1228>

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