

Recollecting The Unforgettable: Interrogating Migration, Trauma and Identity In Select Tripura Bengali Poems

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Abstract

The human mind retains the sequences of episodes that include prior experiences, memories and narratives. The traumatic memories of past are the one which stays in the subconscious and the recollection of those events formulates images of terror. Partition of India is one such event which incorporates narratives of multiple experiences of migration and separation. Tripura a small hilly state of North East India has seen the flood of migrants even before the major India Pakistan division took place. Most of Bengalis settled in Tripura have their roots in East Pakistan or which is after 1971 known as Bangladesh. Many decades have passed but they are still carrying their stories of migration and passing it to generation after generation. The trauma of separation from homeland becomes part of their memory and gets registered by the help of literature. This paper aims to examine select poems of Tripura which focuses upon the relation of migration and memory.

Keywords: Memory, Displacement, Tripura Bengali, identity, narration.

Introduction

The British withdrawal from the Indian subcontinent in 1947 caused the territory to be separated into two sovereign states: India and Pakistan. This led to the partition of India and Pakistan. Due to the partition, there was a vast and violent population exchange between the two dominions, particularly in the provinces of Bengal and Punjab where religious boundaries were utilized to create boundaries. During their forced migration over the border, millions of Sikhs, Muslims, and Hindus had to flee their homes and endure violence, atrocities, and other hardships. The majority Hindu Bengali refugees from East Bengal (later East Pakistan and Bangladesh) were in especially bad conditions. The migration of the Bengali community took place majorly in West Bengal, Tripura, Assam, and Meghalaya. The Bengali refugees faced marginalization, poverty, and discrimination as they had to start over in India.

The 1947 Bengal partition, which split the province into East Bengal (Pakistan) and West Bengal (India), was the reason behind the Bengali migration to Tripura. In order to escape the violence and persecution at the hands of the Muslim majority, many Hindus from East Bengal moved to India. As a border state, Tripura had a significant influx of Bengali refugees, outnumbering the native tribal population.

During the partition, the monarch of Tripura had the responsibility of giving sanctuary and support to Hindu Bengalis who were escaping the turmoil and persecution in East Bengal. The last monarch of Tripura, Maharaja Bir Bikram Kishore Manikya, was a visionary and reformer who also oversaw the state's prosperity and backed the nationalism cause in Bangladesh. Just before he passed away in 1949, he signed the Tripura Merger Agreement with the Indian Union.

History of Tripura

Regarding the origin of the name Tripura, various theories exist. As per a theoretical explanation, the name originates from the Sanskrit term "Tripura," signifying "three cities" or "three fortresses." This is a reference to the three historical kingdoms that belonged to the same dynasty—Tripura, Arakan, and Chittagong. According to an alternate theory, the name is derived from the words "tui" (water) and "pra" (near), which together translate to "near water." This is in line with the state's geographic location, which is surrounded by water on three sides. A third theory is predicated on the myth of King Tripur, who was credited with founding the kingdom and serving as the ancestor of the Tripuri people. It is thought that the name Tripura came from his name.

Despite the fact that Tripura was once a princely state of India, ruled by the Manikya kings. 1949 saw Tripura join India; prior to the division, Tripura was known as Chakla, Roshnabad. Chakla, which translates to "cluster," was a cluster of four districts: Noakhali, Sylhet, Comilla, and Chittagong (which are now part of modern-day Bangladesh). Throughout the colonial era, the Manikya kings and the Bengali community of Chakla Roshnabad maintained a consistent relationship.

Migration of the Bengali community

The Manikya kings of Tripura were deeply influenced by the rich cultural legacy of the Bengali community during the colonial era and valued their establishment in Tripura as a source of patronage. According to Anindita Ghoshal, the Maharajas, or tribal kings of Tripura, have always been strongly in favor of Bengalis and Bengali culture. In actuality, they promoted Bengali Hindu immigration to and settlement in Tripura. They extended their hands to integrate Bengali language and literature with their own culture and gradually accepted Hinduism as the official religion. The Tripura kings made Bengali the official language, which was a major move (Ghoshal.,p.1208).

In addition, the Bengali population residing in East Pakistan (now Bangladesh). experienced a significant shift with the 1947 partition. Their future and fate were up for grabs, and they had to make a decision. Since the Tripura kings consistently favored their Bengali peasants, they believed that Tripura was the safest place for them to migrate.

Research objective

- This paper aims to elucidate the rationale behind the Bengali community's migration to Tripura.
- The researcher intends to use this study to conceptualize Tripura Bengali memories of partition and displacement.
- This will also cover how with passing of time these stories are being forgotten by the new generations.
- Through the prism of a few chosen texts, this paper seeks to investigate a theoretical analysis of history, the entire partition process, their memories of their lost home, and their settlement in Tripura.

Analytical Framework

Here are some fundamental theoretical ideas serve as the foundation for this paper:

- Migration,
- Trauma
- Identity
- Forgetting

Migration

The term "migration" refers to the temporary or permanent relocation of individuals. Factors including financial, political, social, and environmental considerations can all have an impact on migration. Conflicts, shifts in population, culture, and resources are just a few of the effects that migration may have on the locations and individuals involved. One can categorize migration into various types, including forced or voluntary, internal or international, and seasonal or permanent. A complicated and ever-changing phenomenon, migration has influenced human history and civilization.

From the standpoint of partition, migration is the act of relocating as a result of a nation being divided along religious or ethnic lines. When someone is forced to leave their homes and identity behind, it frequently results in violence, displacement, and trauma for them. From the standpoint of partition, the 1947 division of India was one of the biggest and cruelest instances of migration. Many migrants experienced sadness and loss for the homes, cultures, and customs they were forced to leave behind. They also had trouble keeping up or reestablishing relationships with their neighbours, friends, and family who had relocated or stayed behind

Trauma

The term "trauma" refers to the psychological and physiological repercussions from going through or witnessing a traumatic or potentially fatal event, such as abuse, violence, an accident, or a natural disaster. Depending on the nature, scope, and intensity of the event, as well as the individual's past experiences, social network, and coping mechanisms, trauma can impact people differently.

Some victims of the 1947 Indian partition who were forced to flee their homes and possessions are said to suffer from trauma related to partition migration. It is a type of trauma that can be passed down to future generations via social learning or epigenetic modifications. This is also known as transgenerational trauma.

Identity

The way that an individual or a group defines itself and is defined by others is known as their identity. Identity is a dynamic and multifaceted concept. Numerous elements, including psychological processes, cultural backgrounds, historical settings, social interactions, and personal experiences, can have an impact on identity. Developing and expressing one's identity through speech and other symbolic means is the process of identity construction. One method of navigating one's sense of self, relationships with others, and the outside world is through identity construction. Aspects like agency, uniqueness, belonging, sameness, and change may all have a role in the construction of an identity. Many migrants also took advantage of the experience of migration to develop and change their identities. To build and reconstruct their identities and histories, they resorted to recollections, storytelling, and narratives. In their new settings, they also created new communities and

identities by utilizing their imagination, resiliency, and agency. Their identities and cultures were enhanced by their growing sense of hybridity, diversity, and pluralism.

The identity of a person who has moved due to partition is a dynamic and ever-evolving process that embodies their individual and collective experiences, challenges, and triumphs. It is neither a fixed nor static entity. It also provides courage, pride, and optimism for the future.

Forgetting

The course of forgetting is a when information that has already been acquired preserved in a person's short- or long-term memory appears to be lost or altered, it is forgotten. This is the inability to access past memories from preservation, which can happen suddenly or gradually. Sometimes the stories from the past are lost to memory or never heard again because they are not connected to the present. When it comes to displaced individuals, memories can be lost for a variety of reasons, including the story's unrelatable quality or the younger generation's lack of interest. Integration and assimilation of the current generation into the host community, which could cause them to take on identities and values that are distinct from their ancestors. Other factors which may change the perception of the new generation is the disconnection from one's original homeland, leading to a loss of belonging.

There is a significant role of the history and memory which can help the new generation to it can aid in their comprehension and appreciation of the hardships, sacrifices, and difficulties their ancestors endured as refugees. It can assist the new generation in celebrating and preserving their historical and cultural heritage so that they can pass it on to next generations. Additionally, it can support them in establishing a sense of self and community, as well as a connection to their native country.

Methodology

In order to be objective in any type of social investigation, methodology must be carefully and appropriately adopted. This includes using reliable sources, data, and information for analysis. This study used a descriptive research design and is qualitative in nature. The present research work is based on textual analysis method, where the researcher has selected some poems which represents various phases of Tripura Bengalis. Using a few poems about partition as a point of reference, the research work will be justified using this method.

History of Tripura Bengali Poems

Poems from West Bengal's poetry was prevalent in Tripura's early poetry writing period, which was associated with the royal family. Among the royal princesses who wrote those poems were Anangamohini Debi, Mrinalini Debi, and King Maharaja Bir Chandra. However, neither Tripura nor the wider community were mentioned in any of those poems. According to Dr. Ashes Gupta:

This is however not true for earliest poetic compositions in Tripura Bangla by Maharaj Bir Chandra, Anangamohini Debi, Mrinalini Debi or Kamalprabha Debi since they circumscribed an elitist and aristocratic spaced from Tripura Bangla Poetry which was palace centric and basked with the glory of scholarship that was decidedly Baishnab Padaboly oriented and often Tagorean or at least Renaissance Bengali. (Gupta,2017 "The Mystic Mountain- An Anthology of Tripura Bangla Poetry in English)

As the Bengali community that had migrated began to write poems that reflected their memories of life across the border, the themes began to shift. Partition, the anguish of being parted from someone, identity crisis, nostalgia etc. were the poems' main concepts. Originally from across the border, the writers were mostly first-generation refugees who fled their home country and settled in Tripura as a result of partition. The stories of separation and suffering that each poet eventually wrote about were similar and ultimately evolved into poems. Poetry that was deeply rooted in Tripura and embodied the state's ethos began to be produced by the new generation of Bengali poets. The political climate and newly-emerging issues have also influenced these poems, shaping their themes. Many people from East Pakistan began seeking refuge in Tripura because it was a princely state during the country's independence. There was stress and uncertainty everywhere as a result of this condition.

Literature emerges from the roots of a community and in some ways reflects the conflicted feelings associated with that community. According to Kailash C. Baral, through expressing their opinions, feelings, and emotions as well as describing themselves and their cultures, writers from Northeast India signify the uniqueness of their ethnicity and culture. Despite their individual approaches and narrative styles, the up-and-coming authors also stand for something that might be referred to as the regional ethos, which emphasizes their common political destiny and shared history (Baral, "Articulating Marginality" 5).

Analysis of Tripura Bengali poems

The recollection of a refugee who is now in a new country and is looking for his former neighbours from motherland is described by Kalyanbrata Chakraborty in his poem "Autumn's Neighbour."

Everyone's face or rather no one's face is properly known to me. In such houses on the rusty nameplate is written the address of faraway exile. (chakraborty, 2017)

This poem captures the anguish and suffering of the displaced person looking for a Neighbour who recognizes them. Many Hindu Bengalis from their native East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) were compelled to migrate to India as a result of the partition. A migrated person's psyche changes due to migration for a variety of reasons, including losing their home and experiencing a shift in social status and family absence. Kalyanbrata Chakraborty states in the poem's next lines before this one, "my companions have gone far away/ as in exile" (25). As per the Oxford Dictionary, "exile" denotes the situation of being sent to live in a foreign country, usually for political reasons or as a form of punishment. Partition was nothing less than a form of punishment for those who were made to migrate against their will.

The migrant person's identity crisis is influenced by their circumstances as well as the traumatic event. Another distinguished poet from Tripura, Swati Indu, discusses her recollections of her ancestral home in her collection of Bengali poems called INDURHAT. She shares a piece of her memory in one of the poems, Indurhat, as a second-generation immigrant. The poet describes how one of her ancestors left the village known as Indurhut and how she continues to identify partially with that surname.

Till now I can hear, The names of forefather which is still there, leaving forefathers land, this hilly land of this side is our motherland now. It is still there in our name A drop of pain... (Indu, 2019).

There is no demarcation barrier that can take the poet's ancestry away from her. The only identification that the Bengalis who came to live here in Tripura brought with them was their surname. The experiences of Bengalis are entirely different from those of any other member of the Bengali community because they have experienced discrimination, separation, and the need to reconstruct their identity in a foreign country.

The life of a refugee and their children is highlighted in another poem by Krittibas Chakraborty, titled Refuge. The 1971 war experience of the narrator is described in this poem, along with how their father, a strong figure, supported the family. In the tender candlelight Looking at my father's face I remember the days Of the War of seventy-one, me and my brothers and sisters clinging to his ribs And the tired heart of my mother counting the sounds of mortar sitting alone. (Chakraborty,2017)

It is extremely challenging to settle in a new place and refer to it as one's motherland after being forced to flee one's native country. The poem describes how a father who fled his home country provided his family with warmth and a strong sense of purpose, which allowed the family to remain together. Their memories of leaving East Bengal and fleeing to India as refugees were brought back by the 1971's War. The poet continues:

Today we have all, home-house-wealth, except when the siren blows, in our trauma we do not have his wretched ribs to cling to. (Chakraborty,2017)

The poem concludes with an intimate note in which the speaker expresses his sense of emptiness that follows having everything. The speaker's father, who is no longer with them and whose space cannot be filled, was the family's pillar of support. For the Tripura Bengalis, for whom the tales of their ancestors' survival are an integral part of their existence, this poem also mirrors their inner struggles. The speaker of the poem shares the suffering of numerous other refugees who arrived in Tripura through the poem's narration. It also discusses the speaker's diasporic identity—being cut off from their native country.

For the first-generation migrants or the first-hand survivors of the partition, stories and memories of the past abound among the Bengalis of Tripura. Speaking of their past makes them nostalgic, but the next generation does not share this sentiment because they do not feel the same way about their ancestral home. The historical accounts and tales pertaining to the ancestral home are lost as a result of this state. Because of the non-relatable characteristics of the current generation, for whom there is only one home, one country, and no oscillation, the older generation or the survivors are no longer at ease discussing the past.

As the new generation is completely oblivious to the hardship and anguish of separation, the Bengalis from Tripura attempt to preserve their family history for the coming generation through their poetry. Poetry by Dilip Das describes the sentiment of a man thinking back on the past in Bangladesh '95.

Just beyond the banks of the Durgah lies Mashaura Math, Standing solitary in the waters touching the horizon
Is my own land, A seer like taal tree on one leg by its side Seeking fathomless depths of memory
In self-shadow. (Das, 2017)

The speaker here found to be surrounded by the thoughts of past, which comprise of the memories of the ancestral home. Although these lines suggest the division between memory and reality. Durgah and Mashaura Math are Islamic and Hindu religious shrines now in Bangladesh. It is interesting to note that as far as pilgrims were concerned, the were not mutually exclusive and were frequented and even more significantly believed in by both communities. This highlights the unique syncretism in the pre-partitioned land that adds up to the loss of the ecological niche. Moreover, the speaker continues When I speak about those unanaemic days my young friends look at me dispassionately As if I were a nostalgic old banyan tree.

My land of birth, you were never like this? (Das, 2017)

This poem captures the emotional state of the Bengalis living in Tripura, particularly the generation who have experienced the anguish and trauma of being separated from their native land. By upholding their traditions and cultures, Bengalis in Tripura remain linked to their diasporic origins even after their arrival.

Conclusion

The Tripura Bengalis and their past experiences are preserved in the mind of the community; these experiences are unforgettable for the community. Since the Tripura Bengalis now physically belong to Tripura but their minds belong to Bengal, the idea of a mental and physical home is significant to their situation. Migration-affected Bengalis' minds are filled with memories of bygone times; it is not the physical division that divides people from one another, because the connection remains forever. The recollection makes them feel united and connected to each other, moreover it also keeps the glorious past alive which is shared to the future generation of the Tripura Bengalis.

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