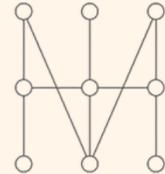


mental health journey:

**UNTOLD STORIES OF PEOPLE FROM THE
NORTHEAST OF INDIA**



EDITED BY
KUMAM DAVIDSON SINGH
THE CHINKY HOMO PROJECT

 mariwala
health
initiative

This book is a multilingual anthology of lived experiences of queerness and mental health in the Northeast of India. Every attempt has been made to ensure that the book is free of error and contains accurate translations and faithful representations of people's stories. Should you find any mistakes or mistranslations in any language, please write to us at contact@mariwalahealthinitiative.org. Thank you.

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In the case of material being triggering or upsetting, you can reach out to iCALL at (+91) 9152987821 or icall@tiss.edu.

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CONTENTS

	Title	Author/s	Page No.
	Introduction		1-3
1.	Towards light... उज्यालो तर्फ...	MRIDU RAI ROSHNI SUBBA	4-7 8-9
2.	No home for the lot of you; No language either <i>Naam Kama; Amin Kama</i>	YANAM BAGE	10-13 14-16
3.	When the Nagkesar petals hold যখন নাগকেশরের পাতা মাটি স্পর্শ করে না	ROSHAN R CHIRODIP NAHA	17-20 21-24
4.	Aparajita: A Bengali "Other" in Assam অসমৰ এক 'অন্য': আতংক, পৰিচয়, ইতিহাস আৰু ৰাজনীতি	RAGHU PRATAP জ্যোতির্ময় জিষ্ণু	25-29 30-33
5.	Ruth's Story <i>Ruth's Story (Mizo)</i>	CHHANI ZUALI	34-37 38-40
6.	Withdrawal নাঈখবা	PAVEL SAGOLSEM SAPAM SWEETIE	41-44 45-47
7.	Someone to call my own <i>Kiba Long Ki Jong Nga</i>	PAVEL SAGOLSEM JOBETH ANN WARJRI	48-51 52-54
8.	Illustrations from Makokchung, Nagaland	ONEN	55

INTRODUCTION

The Chinky Homo Project (TCHP) is a Digital Anthology of Northeast India that seeks to explore, discuss, and document the lived experiences and narratives of the LGBTQI community of and from the region. Over the years, TCHP has built a digital archive, done community building, art projects and storytelling sessions. TCHP has also done storytelling sessions both online and offline including in Delhi, Guwahati. Some notable art projects and collaborations of TCHP are Pandemic Series, Yes We Exist Campaign, Reframing Northeast under Reframe Genderalities 2.0. Currently, TCHP in partnership with Matai Society co-runs Mahei Centre - a grassroots vocational-livelihood project in Moirang - Manipur for Queer, Trans persons and women.

The book is a culmination of TCHP's community based anthological works and the Editor's ethnographic, curatorial and literary endeavours. His earlier published works include "Zubaan's Homebound Anthology" and "Routledge's COVID 19 Assemblages: Queer and Feminist Ethnographies from South Asia".

Pandemic Series, an effort to document the impact of Covid-19 on people marginalised on the basis of Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Sex Characteristics (SOGIESC) as well as People Living with HIV/AIDS (PLHIV) in/of the Northeast, an ethnographic project caught the attention of SAATHII India and Orfalea Centre for International and Global Studies, University Of California Santa Barbara (UCSB). The LGBTQ+ Fellowship awarded to Kumam Davidson Singh by SAATHII India and partially supported by UCSB gave the right

support to bring out many unheard stories from the region. The stories reveal complex lived realities of LGBTQ+ persons as well as PLHIV of which mental health reveals itself to be a terrain rarely studied through lived experience perspectives. On the other hand, mental health issues also continue to be largely medicalised/pathologised and taboo. When it comes to people on the margins -culturally, politically, economically and geographically - the sense of vulnerability leads to an overwhelming sense of isolation and hopelessness. At this juncture, the book has indeed been a true calling to venture towards an area of work and of lived experiences that hardly receives the attention it deserves. It is also a spontaneous expansion of the works TCHP has been doing through its documentation and archiving processes of LGBTQ+ lives of Northeast India.

Northeast India, often a contested region but also harmonious in its own way, tends to be framed as "fringes" and "periphery" but also as "frontier" and "gateway". It exists at the fringe to the centre New Delhi and also as a frontier/gateway to South East Asia.

Move the centre and Northeast India would cease to exist as the peripheral region. To speak of "the Northeast" is to account for eight different states, each with its own unique history, culture, and traditions. The national imagination tends to homogenise the Northeast and in doing so, erases the diverse ethnic, racial, and religious identities that are prevalent in the region. However, that is not to deny that the borders between these states, and even with other countries, are often porous and allow for cross-cultural interactions and fluid identities that cannot be bound to any one state in particular.

Due to its separation from the rest of “mainland India,” both geographically and socially, the region is largely shaped by armed conflict and also marred by border and security crises, drug mafia, ethnic crisis, human rights violations and contested claims of self-determinism, assimilation and political conflict. It also is a hotbed of natural resources bred by the rich ecosystem of the Eastern Himalayas such as rivers, mountains, lakes and forests, animals, minerals, and gas.

Who is considered a Northerner and who decides? Is it someone who was born in the region, with legal claims to citizenship, or one whose ancestors made territorial claims before ideas of nationality and citizenship found salience? The region’s contemporary conflicts are also rooted in these questions - dictating its unresolved past, unstable present and an uncertain future given the fast-changing demography, developmental planning and activities. From military takeovers to ethnic conflicts, the region continues to grapple with instability as porous borders and “illegal immigration” pose more challenges in aspects of citizenship, identity formation/assertion, and belonging.

Not only are there uncertainties and contestations amongst communities within the region, the region as a whole has also been grappling with unresolved issues ranging from political determination to identity assertion, inclusion, representation and leadership vis-a-vis “mainland India”. This often translates to racial prejudice and discrimination that not only denies Northeast Indians the sense of belonging to a democratic sovereign country but also the sense of socio-cultural belongingness.

Decades of armed conflict, gun violence, rampant substance abuse, poverty, judicial killings, border conflicts, ethnic riots, political instability, refugee crisis, migration experiences, and environmental disasters have instilled trauma that has lasted through generations. Mental health issues therefore, take very different forms in such a context: post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), intergenerational trauma, anxiety, etc are

common. Furthermore people marginalised on the basis of SOGIESC tend to have more complex mental health experiences.

One of the biggest challenges with mental health in general and also for LGBTQ+ persons in the region is the very language and censorship around it. Mental health has been for decades written, described, and communicated through a language of “madness”, “abnormality” or “stigma”. Pavel Sagolsem surmises, “In Northeast India one cannot be so vocal about what one knows, activists or researchers do not have much authority over what is to be said or done. There is backlash for everything, the progressive front in the region is not progressive enough. So we are walking a tightrope walk here, we need to be very careful and subtle with what we speak about mental health. Certain intricacies, aspects, parts of the stories need to be held onto for now as we wait for the right time. Capacity building for the storytellers is important to tell their stories. Can editors take responsibility for the contributors? Telling stories anonymously is one thing, but for how long? Sometimes, discourse on rights does not help the community, mental health services and empathy can do much more.”

Most stories that are in this anthology elucidate the difficulty of finding a place to call home while the very concept of home eludes concrete definition. Many who grow up in Northeast India are raised with a sense of home that is rooted in their physical location - whether state or locality - and their ethnic identity. In Assam and Tripura, questions of who deserves citizenship and who deserves space remain central to notions of identity and home. Arunachal Pradesh is home to people, constantly threatened by border incursions and threats of war at the margins of their already marginalised existence, while also retaining its patriarchal social arrangements that reject any non-conforming identities. In Manipur, people feel anxiety due to AFSPA,

militants and state violence. Socio-cultural taboo and religious conservatism can also be traumatic. Meghalaya's matrilineal homes have no room for transgender women and contain many unheard stories of fear and abandonment in a society that claims to value women's lives - transgender lives blatantly not included. In Mizoram and Nagaland, the influence of the Christian church seeps into everyday life, perpetuating patriarchal and heteronormative roles that often conflict with desires and identities that people want to explore or embody. While Sikkim is a tourist's dream, it is scarred by nightmares of high rates of depression and suicide* that mark the lack of infrastructure for mental health support in the state.

While spaces and ethnic backgrounds create emotional trauma, many of our contributors suffer an additional layer of marginalisation based on their gender, sexuality, or gender expressions. Being silenced, excluded, and even despised in places meant to be home has detrimental effects on mental well-being. Take S's story for example. As she shares about painful parts of her life and the trauma she suffered in childhood - of hiding, suffering, and finally of opening up - we get a rare narrative of mental health that Sikkim tries to hide behind its glorious facade.

More often than not, young queer and Transgender people from the Northeast also seek an escape to larger cities, where they hope to build new homes. While cities seem to offer safe homes, free of limitations that hold people captive, these stories are a testament to the inescapable clutches of identity and home that follow. For Aparajita, Guwahati offered a space to explore her sexuality and find her people, yet political circumstances made it clear that she was still unwelcome as a "real" Assamese - a notion she struggles to make sense of herself

Ruth left Aizawl's suffocating streets for a Delhi she thought she could make her own. To her chagrin, she learned that she would never quite be accepted in the city as a chinki, radical, Northeastern woman - even in the LGBTQ+ community she led and later fled to take care of her mental health. Donna Marwein grew up dreaming of wearing dresses and shiny jewellery in her small village in Meghalaya. Moving to Shillong, she shed the judgmental family and community in her village only to find that the city barely made room for her, asking her to constantly be resilient in the face of hate and disapproval.

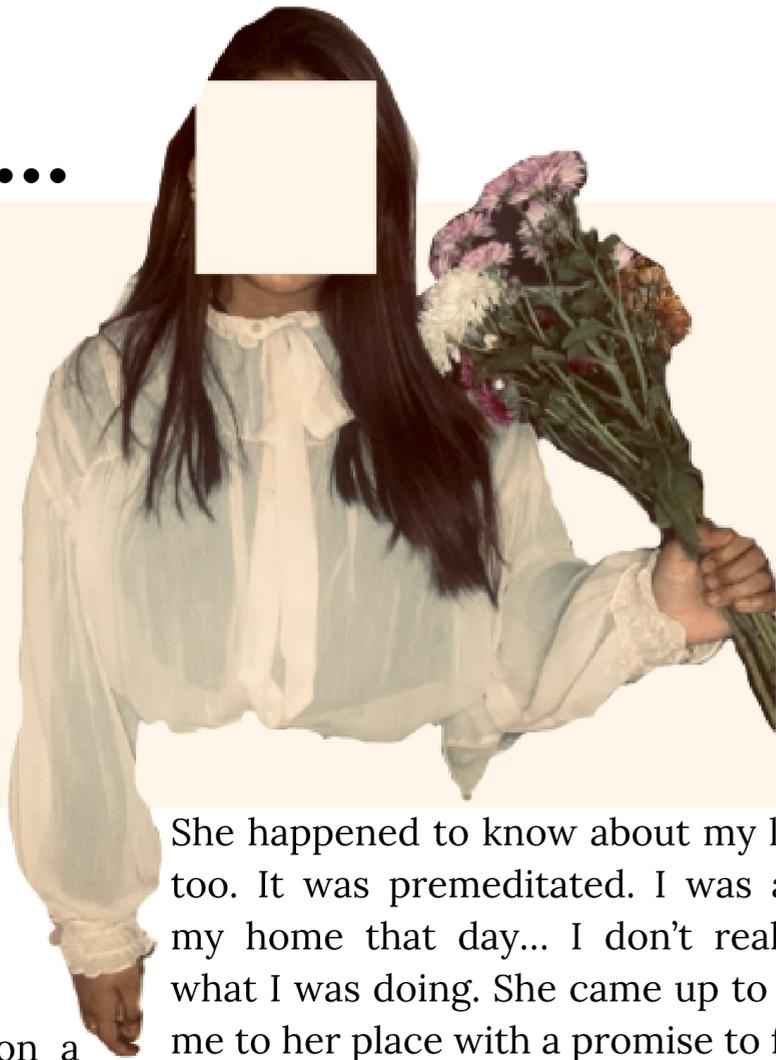
Recently, Donna left us all at a time when we all were reeling from Covid-19 while this book was being edited. Donna left an irreplaceable gap within the transgender community in Northeast India.

Methodologically, the book relies heavily on ethnography, friendships and conversations that are otherwise deemed personal and often insignificant. At the outset of the project, clusters were formed in each state to take up the task of documenting a story, transcribing it into English and then translating it into its native language. And finally, an artist/photographer brought out the visual rendition of the story in the form of photographs or illustrations. The tasks were enormously challenging. But each one of us, inspired by the need to tell our stories together, each of us collaborating with one another despite our differences and distances, managed to complete the tasks. This book truly is a work of collaboration; a milestone for us. It is more than a book. It in fact, is an epitome of solidarity.

.....

Towards light...

MRIDU RAI



M

We had scheduled our first meeting on a Friday. It was a busy morning, and I was rushing to complete multiple tasks before I sat down for the meeting. Maybe I was trying to stay distracted because I was quite nervous about speaking to her. I didn't know anything about her except that she was undergoing counselling for anxiety. Despite thinking about her and this meeting for long hours, I had come up with a blank. Not a good sign... What would I ask her? How would I even begin the conversation? How would I sustain it?

... Now when I look back and reflect on that day, I realise how my nervousness was in itself a symptom of the stigma around mental health. Without even beginning the conversation, I had decided that this was going to be a difficult dialogue. My heart and intentions were in the right place, my social conditioning was not. After getting to know her over several 'sharing sessions' in these past few weeks, I have undergone an intense process of unlearning and learning myself.

S

Achar... even as a young girl, I loved *achar*. At home, they called me *Achar Kumari*—Pickle Princess—and it was a fitting nickname.

She happened to know about my love for *achar* too. It was premeditated. I was alone outside my home that day... I don't really remember what I was doing. She came up to me and lured me to her place with a promise to feed me some *achar*. I was only a child. I was unguarded, unsuspecting. I had no understanding of deception. All I knew, or thought I knew, was that, I was going to be treated to some delicious *achar*. That was enough reason for me to trust her. I was happy, expectant. I followed her.

A new, strange room; almost dark, filled with confusing sounds—faint noises from the street mixed with blaring television noises; but it was mostly fear that suffocated the space. What was I doing there? Why was I listening to this woman? I was six or seven years old then. She was much older than me. What was happening? I didn't know the feeling. It was sudden, unfamiliar. She was naked. She was doing things to me. I, on the other hand, was motionless. I had come for some *achar*. I was just two minutes away from home.

M

She was just two minutes from home...

I asked her if it was difficult to recall and narrate the incident? She said it wasn't as difficult now. It was, however, a long process of reconciliation as I found out.

**S**

Maybe that was the day I stopped trusting people, stopped letting them in, as I withdrew into a shell. I was so young. I couldn't confront or comprehend what had taken place. I acted like nothing had happened. Then I forgot all about it... I don't know when and how...

but it was as if that day never happened. Now I know that I had only repressed the memory, because the trauma manifested in my all-consuming need to be loved and accepted. I am now beginning to understand that I wanted to find love that could fill the dark void she had inflicted on me.

M

She told me about this craving for “love” over a text. I was curious to know what kind of love. The same text also repeatedly used the word “darkness”... *“It was darkness that I was most afraid of, the darkness that she carried, the darkness of that wound. I wanted to find love so I could forget my darkness that came from her”*... love and darkness...

S

I think I was looking for love in two forms, from my family and from a romantic partner. I wanted to be seen and heard by people. I was often distressed when I was outside of home and away from my family for too long. I was admitted to a boarding school when I was in the third standard. I could stay there only for a year. As I grew older, I also sought out romantic relationships like any other girl of my age. But I also felt like I needed to transform myself to be loved by someone. I started to mould myself according to what I felt my partner wanted me to be. At times, I wasn't even sure who I was and what kind of person I needed to be. Now I'm a lot more confident in my own skin. I think I'm learning how to be and love myself.

M

When she told me this, I believed her. She was so articulate in her narration and always emphatic about how much stronger she is now... *“It will give people hope”* ... of course, she is still in the process of healing but every time we spoke, I sensed genuine positivity.

S

I suffered alone for a long time. It took another adversity to finally make me let go of all the pain I had been carrying for years and seek help. You see, finding help is difficult... you don't know where to start... how it works... what to say... how to say it. In 2018, when my father had just passed away, I got one of the worst anxiety attacks. But this also gave me the strength to speak out. Before this, it was just me howling and crying alone... that day I opened myself up for the first time. That changed my life. I revealed everything that was hidden inside of me for the last 10-12 years... slowly but steadily I started to become better.

I am in counselling now and have been taking medications. Whenever I have anxiety attacks, I feel like the people around me suffer too. It isn't easy. My mother, especially, has been my closest companion through this. My brother has been supportive too. Also my friends.





PHOTOS BY MRIDU RAI

I am 25-years-old now and am looking to help people in my community. That's my new goal. The idea is to build an accessible space where we understand our relationship with mental health better, to teach children about what touch is right and what is wrong, to encourage everyone to speak up and not suffer in silence. I am starting off with a website in collaboration with a professional where people can get counselling for free, identify the different types of anxieties they are suffering from and learn coping mechanisms. The key idea is to provide consistent support throughout the process and not just when the situation comes to a head. Eventually, I want to open a school where education is imparted on the basis of an individual's skill, without the burden of society's narrow presumptions.

M

I am thankful to her for sharing her story with me, with us. But this responsibility to be the listener and chronicler hasn't been an easy one. I am aware of the many gaps in this retelling. Some things I couldn't say to protect her, some I couldn't evoke from her and some, I confess, was I simply failed to articulate in writing. One of the notions I wanted to explore was her relationship to Sikkim—Sikkim as a place where she was both hurt and is healing.

Not only her but many like her, whose stories are yet to come out and to whom she wants to lend a helping hand. She constantly reiterated this idea of her story giving hope to others in Sikkim. I wonder if it's because she herself never had anyone's story to relate to and find comfort in. Stories that were closer to "home".

Her wish is to open a school "*where education is imparted on the basis of an individual's skill, without the burden of society's narrow presumptions*"... What is this societal burden? And how much of it has she felt over the years? How much of it will she continue to feel? As our interactions began to fade, my questions remained unanswered... or so I thought. The fact that I have never shared such an intimate conversation with any other person living with mental health issues in Sikkim says a lot, doesn't it? I am *this* society. Her relationship with the place, her attempts to navigate this space and the successes and failures thereof are all written between the lines. Is this how we end up overlooking other people and stories like hers too? I started this piece with a sense of guilt and ignorance; my ending holds the same.

The following visual story materialises this process of getting to know her and evokes my intellectual and emotional responses to the time we shared, no matter how short and fragmentary.

.....

उज्यालो तर्फ...

TRANSLATED BY ROSHNI SUBBA

म

हाम्रो शुक्रबारको दिन भेट्ने सल्ला थियो। त्यो बिहान म अत्यन्त व्यस्त थिए अनि उनलाई भेट्नु अघाडी कतिपय काम सिध्याउने चेष्टा गर्दै थिए। शायद म आफूलाई यत्तिकै व्यस्त राखेर मन भुलाउन खोज्दै थिए होला किन भने उनलाई भेट्नु अलिकति डर पनि अनुभव गरिरहेको थिए। त्यसै पनि मलाई ज्यादा केहि पनि थाहा थिएन उनको बारेमा, उनि चिन्ता परामर्श लिदै थियो भनेर मात्र सुनेको थिए। कति उनको बारेमा र हाम्रो भेटको बारेमा सोचे पश्च्यात पनि केहि बुझ्न नै सकेको थिईन । संकेत राम्रो थिएन ... के सोध्नु होला उनलाई? कसरी पनि शुरु गर्नु होला कुरा कानी ? अनि कसरी बातचितलाई बनाएर राख्नु होला?

... त्यो दिन लागेको डर जब म अहिले सम्झन्छु, मलाई लाग्छ, त्यो डर केहि पनि नभएर, हाम्रो समाजको मानसिक स्वास्थ्य प्रतिको धारणाको फल मात्र थिएछ । उनलाई भेटेर कुरा कानी गर्न अगाडी नै, मलाई थाहा लागी सकेको थियो कि, यो यति सजिलो हुने छैन भनेर। मेरो मन र मनशा त ठिक थियो, तर सामाजिक अनुकूलनको परिणाम त्यो डर थिएछ। उनलाई कतिपय चोटी भेटेर, संगै बसेर बातचित गरे पश्च्यात, यो केही हप्ताहरुमा , म स्वयम आफूलाई बेग्लै पाउँछु। यसै प्रक्रियामा मैले कति कुरा सिखे अनि कति कुरा नयाँ पाराले पनि बुझे।

स

अचार ... सानु हुँदा देखि नै, मलाई अचार खुबै मन पर्थ्यो। घरमा मलाई सबैले 'अचार कुमारी' भनेर बोलाउँ थिए - पिकल प्रिन्सेस - एकदम सुहाउने नाम।

मलाई अचार मन पर्छ भनेर उसलाई पनि याद थियो। योजना बनाएको थियो होला। त्यसदिन म घर बाहिर एकलै थिए ... मलाई त्यति याद भएन के गर्दै थिए। मेरो नजदिक आएर, उनले मलाई अचारको लोभ देखाएर उनको घर लग्यो। म सानै थिए त्यो बेला, असुरक्षित, कोइ प्रति केई शंका पनि थिएन। छल भनेको के हो , त्यो पनि थाहा थिएन। उनको घर गयो भने चाँहि अचार पाउँछु भनेर मात्र थाहा थियो। त्यति भए नै उनलाई बिश्वास गर्नु सक्छु जस्तो लाग्यो। म खुशी थिए , आशा लागेको थियो अनि मैले उनलाई पछ्याएर गएँ।

एउटा नयाँ , अनौठो कमरा ; निक्कै अर्ध्याँरो पनि, अनि यता उता बाट आवाजहरु आईरहेको - बाहिर रोडबाट आएको आवाज, अनि फेरि टेलिभिजनको पनि आवाज सुनिरहेको थिए; तर त्यहाँ बेसी जस्तो मैले डर महसूस गरीरहेको थिए।

म के गरी रहेको थिए होला त्यहाँ? किन ति आइमाईलाई सुनेर यहाँ आएको थिए होला? म त्यतिबेला - छ - सातबर्षको मात्र थिए। अनि उनि म भन्दा धेरै ठूलो थिए। के भईरहेको थियो ? खै मैले त बुझ्नु नै सकेको थिइन । एकदमै छिटो, अनि एकदमै अपरिचित। उनि नाङ्गो थियो। अनि म संग के के गरिरहेको थियो। अनि , म , एकतिर गतिहीन। म अचार लिन मात्र आएको थिए। म घर बाट पनि दुई मिनेट मात्र टाढो थिए।

म

उनि दुई मिनेट मात्र त घरबाट टाढो थिएछ ...

के उनलाई गाह्रो परिरहेको छ याद गर्नु वा त्यो घटना बारे वर्णन गर्नु , भनेर पनि सोधे ? त्यति गाह्रो हुन्दैन आजकल भने उनले। अलिक बुझ्दा , मलाई लाग्यो , त्यहाँ एउटा सुलहको लामो प्रक्रिया चलिरहेको थियो।

स

शायद त्यो दिन देखिनै होला, मेरो मान्छेबाट भरोशा उठ्यो। म आफैमा सिमित बस्नु थाले। म सानो थिए , केहि सामना गर्नु वा बुझ्न सकिन। केहि नभएको जस्तो गरेर बसे। त्यसपछि, बिस्तारी, बिर्सदै गए ... कहिले, कसरी ? त्यो थाहा भएन.... त्यो घटना कहिले पनि न घटेको जस्तो गरि बिर्सैर गए। अहिले बुझ्दा, मैले त्यो घटनालाई मन भित्र दबाएर राखेको थिएछु। मलाई परेको मानशिक आघातले मेरो मनमा मायाको चाहना जगायो। म माया खोजिरहेको थिए तर बुझ्दै जाँदा, मैले मायाले केवल त्यो गहिरो चोटलाई धाक्न खोजीरहेको थिएछु।

म

म उनको यो माया पाउँने चाहना बिषय लिएर जिज्ञासु थिए , जुन उनले मलाई मेसेजमा भनेको थियो। त्यै मेसेजमा उनले बारम्बार "अन्धकार " शब्दको पनि प्रयोग गरेको थियो ... " अन्धकार देखि मलाई सब भन्दा डर लाग्थ्यो, अन्धकार जुन ति आइमाईले लिएर आएको थियो, त्यो मैले चोट पाउँदा महसूस गरेको अन्धकार। म माया पाउँन चाहन्थे, त्यही अन्धकारलाई बिर्सन जो मैले उनिबाट पाएको थिए "... माया र अन्धकार ...

स

मलाई लाग्छ म दुई किसिमको माया खोजीरहेको थिए, एउटा मेरो परिवारबाट र अर्को मेरो प्रेमीबाट। सबैले मलाई देखोस् र सुनोस्जस्तो लाग्थ्यो। मलाई प्राय जस्तो आफ्नो घर र परिवारबाट टाढा हुँदा दुख लाग्थ्यो। कक्ष तिनमा पुग्दा मलाई बोर्डिंग स्कूलमा भर्ती गरायो। म त्यहाँ एक साल मात्र बस्नु सके। ठुलो हुँदै जाँदा, मेरो उमेरको अरु केटीहरु जस्तो मैले पनि माया खोज्न थाले। तर संग संगै आफूलाई बदलिनु पर्छ जस्तो पनि देखे। मैले आफूलाई मेरो प्रेमीको इच्छा अनुसार बदले। कतिपल्ट चाँहि, म आफूलाई चिन्न पनि सकिदिन थिए, अनि थाहा पनि थिएन को जस्तै हुन खोजीरहेको थिए भनेर। अहिले बरु मेरो अलिक आत्मविश्वास बढेर गएको देख्छु। म आफूलाई माया गर्न सिख्दैछु जस्तो पनि लाग्दछ।

म

मैले उसले भनेको सबै थोक कुरा विश्वास गरे। यति स्पष्ट थियो उसको वर्णन अनि उनी आफ्नो विकासलाई लिएर खुशी थियो... " यसले मान्छेहरुलाई आशा दिन्छ "... उनी अवश्य ठिक हुने प्रक्रियामा थियो, तर उनी संग जति बेला पनि बोल्दा, मैले एउटा सकारात्मक सोच देखे।

स

म धेरै समयसम्म एकलै कष्ट भोगे। एउटा अर्को वीपत्तिले गर्दा बल्ल गएर मैले त्यो कति साल भोगेको कष्टको निम्ति गुहार माग्न सके। गुहार माग्न सजिलो छैन ... तिमीलाई थाहा पनि हुन्दैन कहाँ बाट शुरु गर्नु भनेर ... कसरी काम गर्छ ... कसरी भन्नु। २०१८ सालमा, मेरो बुवा बित्तु भयो अनि मलाई सबभन्दा डरलाग्दो दुश्चिन्ताको दौरा आयो। तर संग संगै यस घटनाले मलाई मेरो दुःख कष्ट बयान गर्ने हिम्मत दियो। यस अगाडी त, म एकलै कराउँथे, रुन्थे ... तर त्यो दिन म प्रथम पल्ट खुलेर बोले। मेरो जिन्दगी बदल्यो। जे मैले अहिले सम्म दश-बाह्र साल लुकाएर राखेको थिए, त्यो मैले सबै खुलेर भने ... बिस्तारी तर स्थायी रूपले, म राम्रो हुन थाले।

म अहिले परामर्श लिरहेको छु अनि औषधीहरु पनि लीदैछु। मलाई लाग्छ मेरो वरिपरिको मान्छेहरु पनि मलाई दुश्चिन्ताको दौरा आउँदा प्रभावित हुन्छ। मेरो आमा विशेष गरी, मेरो सबै भन्दा नजिकको साथी बनिदिनु भयो। मेरो भाईको अनि मेरो साथीहरुको पनि साथ पाए।

म २५ साल को छु अहिले, अनि म जति सक्दो आफ्नो समुदायको मान्छेहरुलाई सहायता गर्न चाहन्छु ... यो मेरो नयाँ लक्ष्य हो। मानशिक स्वास्थ्यलाई बुझ्ने, नानीहरुलाई राम्रो स्पर्श र नराम्रो स्पर्श बुझाउने, अनि सबैलाई मौन नबसेर, खोलेर बोल्नुको लागि प्रोत्साहित गर्ने एउटा अभिगम्य जगह बनाउने मेरो विचार छ। म एउटा वेबसाईट एकजना व्यवसायिक संग मिलेर बनाउँदैछु जहाँ मान्छेहरुले निःशुल्क परामर्श पाउने छ। त्यहाँ उनीहरुले

धेरै किसिमको दुश्चिन्ताहरु ठम्याउनु र त्यसलाई सामना गर्ने क्रिया प्रवृद्धिहरुको पनि ज्ञानहरु सिक्नेछ। उनीहरुलाई लगातार समर्थन दिनु र परेको बेला मात्र न दिने, भन्ने मेरो मुख्य विचार छ। अन्तमा गएर मलाई एउटा पाठशाला खोल्नु मन छ, जहाँ शिक्षा प्राप्ति चाँहि सामाजिक मापदण्डमा मात्रै आधारित नभएर समग्र विकासमा आधारित होस्।

म

उसले हामीलाई उसको कथा भनिदिएकोमा म उसको धेरै आभारी छु। तर यो श्रोताको र अभिलेख गर्ने जिम्मेवारी उठाउनु धेरै सजिलो थिएन। मेरोबाट धेरै भुल चुक भयो होला यहाँ, त्यस बारे म सचेत छु। कतिपय कुराहरु यहाँ उसको परिचयलाई सुरक्षित राख्नको निम्ति लेख्नु पनि सकिन अनि केही म मान्छु, मैले अभिव्यक्त गर्नु पनि सकिन। एउटा कुरो जे म स्पष्ट गर्न चाहन्थे, त्यो उसको सिक्किम संगको सम्बद्ध हो ... सिक्किम त्यो जगह जहाँ उसलाई चोट पनि पर्यो अनि उनी निको पनि हुँदै छ। उनी बाहेक अरु अझै कतिपय यस्ता छन् जसको कथाहरु बाहिर आउँनु छ, उनीहरु सबैलाई सहायता गर्ने उनको उद्देश्य रहेको छ। शायद उसलाई आफ्नो कथा समबन्धित अरु कसैको पनि कथा थाहा थिएन होला जसमा उनी सान्त्वना लिन सक्थ्यो कि के हो, उनले बारम्बार सिक्किममा अरुहरुलाई आशा र सहायता दिने कुरो स्पष्ट गरिरह्यो। कथाहरु जुन घरको नजीक घटिरहेको हुन्छ।

एउटा पाठशाला खोल्ने उसको इच्छा छ "जहाँ शिक्षाप्राप्ति सामाजिक मापदण्डमा आधारित नभएर एउटा व्यक्तिको सिपकला माथि आधारित होस्" भन्छन् उनी। यो सामाजिक मापदण्ड के हो? अनि उनले कति समयसम्म यसको सामना गर्नुपर्यो होला? कति उनले अझै सामना गर्नु छ होला? जति हाम्रो भेटघाट कम्ति हुँदै गयो, त्यति नै मेरो प्रश्नहरु पनि अनुत्तरित रह्यो ... वा मलाई त्यस्तो लाग्यो। मैले यस्तो घनिष्ट बातचित सिक्किम जस्तो ठाउँमा कसै संग पनि गरेको थिईन, यसले नै धेरै कुरा हाम्रो समाज बारे दर्पण गर्छ, होइन र? यो जगह संग उसको सम्बन्ध, उनको सफलताहरु, हारहरुलाई संचालित गर्ने कोशिश सबै यही अक्षरहरु बीच लेखिएको छ। के हामीले अरु मान्छेहरुलाई र उनीहरुको कथाहरुलाई यसरी नै पत्तो दिँदैनौ? मैले यो लेख अलिकति दोष साथ र अज्ञान भएर शुरु गरेको थिए, अनि अहिले पनि त्यैइ अवस्थामा छु।

यो निम्न दृश्य कथाले उनलाई मैले चिनेको प्रक्रियालाई भौतिकरण गर्छ। साथ साथै जति नै छोटो र खण्डित नै किन नहोस्, तर उ संग हुँदा महसूस गरेको, मेरो बौद्धिक र भावनात्मक प्रतिक्रियाहरु पनि दर्पण गर्छन्।

.....

2 ARUNACHAL PRADESH

No Home For The Lot Of You; No Language Either

YANAM BAGE

Dauree always loved to dance. It filled him with energy, ecstasy, and a sense of euphoria. That is why he couldn't understand why his mother chastised him for dancing when he was barely 5 years old - the first time he felt like he was different from others. Growing up, people constantly judged him and commented, "ladki jaisa kyun baat kartai / why do you talk like a girl?", "yame jaab duth ke / sit like a man", "no nyijir na / you are a girl".

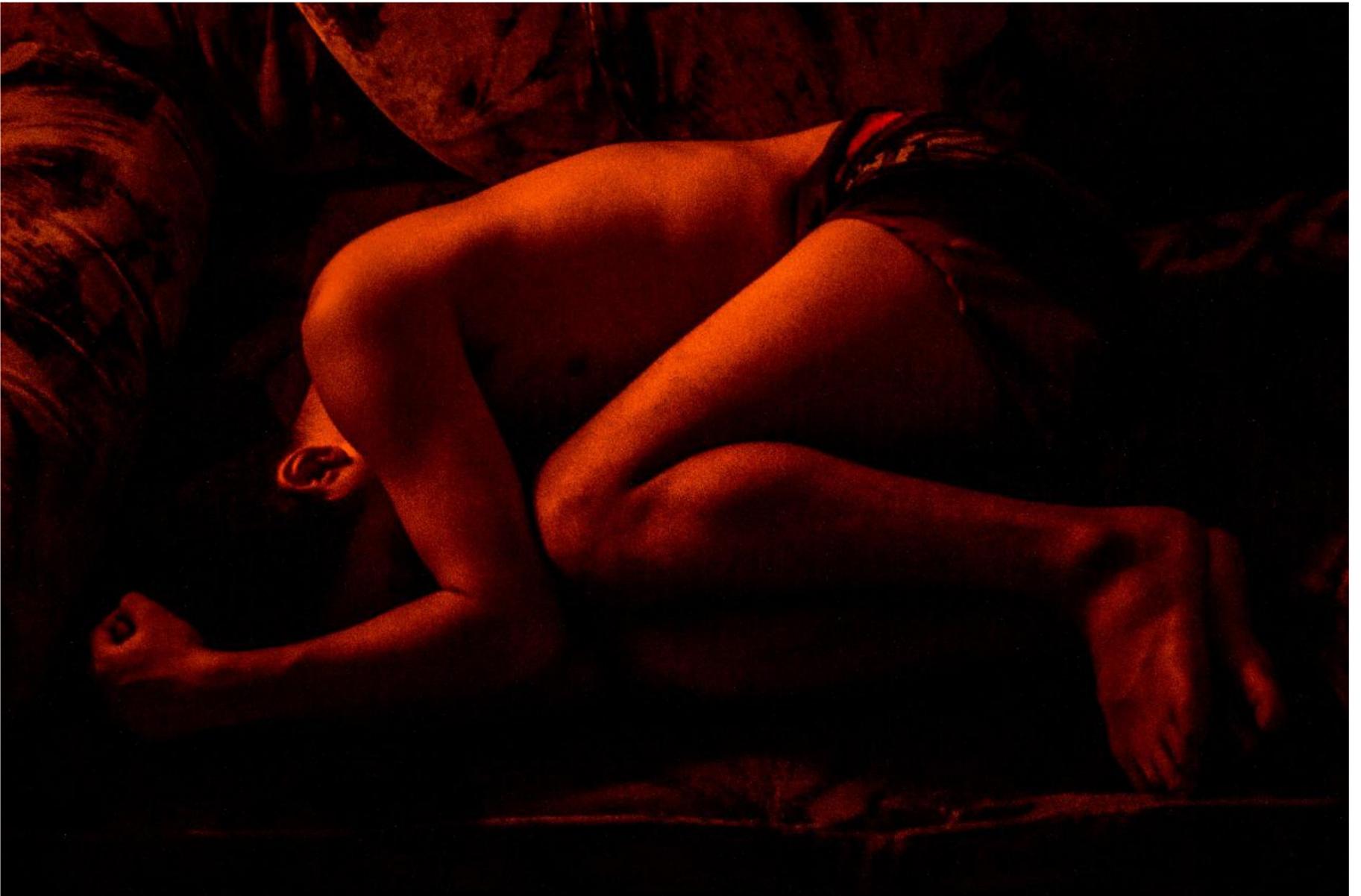
"Why are you so different from your brother? Dancing like a girl; be manly!" Dauree's uncle achieved what he intended. He created a line between Dauree and other "manly" men. When Dauree's grandmother confronted his mother, she rebuked her for being friends with a man who was "like a girl", saying, "This is why your son is turning out to be a girl!" Even in all this madness of gender conformity, weirdly enough, no one ever uttered a noun, pronoun, or even an adjective in Dauree's native tongue to describe what exactly it was that separated Dauree from the rest of the "manly" men. Dauree's grandmother had no schooling and did not speak a word of English or Hindi. When she expressed Dauree's *difference* from other boys, she likened Dauree to another man who shared similar characteristics. When Dauree's uncle and others, who had proper schooling and spoke in their native tongue, Hindi, and English, highlighted Dauree's *difference*, they likened him to a girl. The conscious construction of descriptions and comparisons further alienated Dauree as if the pointing fingers were saying, "We will continue to point fingers. We will continue to talk about you, but we will not create a language for you. We will not even accommodate you within our language. See, you are an aberration even in language."

Naturally, Dauree felt more at home in a city filled with strangers than in Arunachal Pradesh where his family, kin, and friends lived. In the city, he did not have a secret. He was just another person with many interests, talents, and flaws, just like any other person. But when he went back "home", where he was given a tag, a part of him was made into a secret, a distinguishing feature that made him *different* from the rest. Did Dauree see a future in Arunachal? He replied that he did not because he deserved a fulfilled life, not just adjustments, compromises, and survival. He deserved a life where he would be allowed to make mistakes, and where his sexuality would not always be perceived as the reason for all of his mistakes. How can mistakes be rooted in one's identity? He deserved a life where his existence was not questioned.

Dauree did not fear coming out to his parents because they had always known who he was. He was willing to fight with them, to cry with them, and to love them. But he was not willing to bestow the same privilege to his extended family members and just any other stranger who felt the need to point out Dauree's *difference*. He did not owe them this intimacy. He did not owe a fight to the world where he would be forced to come out again and again and again.

When Dauree came out to his sister, she reluctantly accepted him but told him not to tell any Arunachalis. She said, "Arunachal is too small and if word gets out here, you will become a laughing stock."

Dauree was never someone who felt disconnected from his tribal identity. He was in fact rooted in his culture and tradition.



Yet, that comment somehow drew a schism in his identity as a proud Arunachali. While Dauree never questioned his Arunachali identity, Arunachal was always reluctant, because of his sexual identity and gender expression, to accept him as a full-fledged Arunachali man.

Pansexual And Proud; Polygamy: The Bane Of My Life

Victoria first felt she was *different* when she fell in love at the young age of 12 with a girl. Although young love felt exhilarating, she would whisper words of caution to her lover, as a then staunch Christian, “What we are doing is sinful. We should stop.” But then, who could stop first love? While Victoria, as a class topper and someone with supportive friends, was immune to any kind of bullying, her girlfriend was not. She remembers storming into her girlfriend’s dorm and confronting her bullies. She got into fights but things got better after that. However, one unfortunate morning, Victoria’s teacher thrashed her in front of the entire hostel because she sneaked into bed with her girlfriend. The teacher said it was because she created a ruckus after bedtime. But to this day,

the question remains, “Do whispered words and giggles after bedtime deserve slaps and blows?”

Hitting students as a disciplinary measure was quite common in her school but Victoria had never been one of those students who regularly clashed with teachers. She was an exemplary student, but after that morning, she felt her reputation irreversibly changed. She felt hurt. She felt wronged. But more than anything, she knew she was punished not because she talked after lights-out but because she was intimate with another girl. What Victoria’s young Christian mind thought was a “sin” suddenly came out into the open and stared at her as a transgressive violation.

A criminal act, maybe? With the violent reaction from older people around her, 12-year old Victoria couldn’t help but feel she had done something horribly wrong. These thoughts brewed in the back of her head but she brushed them off and continued as she was. The experience of her first romantic relationship was just so great and her friends never treated her differently. That presumably empowered her to live life as she wanted, but she changed schools the very next year.

The news spread far and wide. Even seniors who had left school years ago heard of Victoria's "misadventures". There was no doubt that people pointed, talked, laughed, and sneered; but for the most part, no one had the guts to say anything to her face.

From another school in another district, Victoria kept in touch with her first love through gifts and letters sent across. Curiously enough, the letters never reached their destination. She suspected the same teacher who demonstrated a particular hatred against Victoria and her girlfriend.

Back at home, "*Ladka ladka jaisa hai / You are like a boy*", "*Aare, ladka hona tha / You should have been born a man*", and the like were regular comments, not so much from Victoria's parents but from her aunts and uncles. These comments made her feel distinct from other "girly" girls. Such comments, rather than being demeaning, carried a sheen of praise and admiration for her masculine traits and appearance. Her academic excellence also helped her gain admiration. Her father once even exclaimed, as a "light-hearted joke", that his daughter would bring home a daughter-in-law.

However, his polygamous relationships and her internal family dynamics constantly added stress to her life. Victoria feared that her familial trauma might have sprouted seeds of abandonment issues, trust issues, and fear of commitment in her.

Victoria's first "romantic" relationship was with a boy though her first love was a girl. She had also felt attracted to Trans men and Trans women in the past. Growing up, she fought and accepted the label "lesbian" even though, in her mind, the label felt almost criminal. Realising her attraction to men too, she accepted bisexuality. After a lot more confusion as well as realisations, she found herself to be pansexual. Still, she realised that her gender expression switches between, and is a mix of, conventional masculinity, femininity, and androgyny. Similarly, her sexuality is fluid and floats through the spectrum.

When asked if she saw a future in Arunachal, Victoria replied, "I never wanted to settle in India, *Arunachal toh duur ki baat*" (Let alone Arunachal). Even though she had a support system (friends, siblings, and acquaintances) in the state, settling in Arunachal was not for her. Anxieties over how her sexual orientation would impact her parents' social status drove her intentions to leave Arunachal far behind. Walking into her mid-20s, Victoria knew that societal expectations were going to be rein her in tighter. If she moved back home and continued to be in a same-sex relationship, her family would be scrutinised too, just as she was. Victoria proudly handled criticism over her sexual identity and gender expressions with a "so what?" attitude, but didn't want her family to go through a similar walk of shame. She was not sure if they would be able to share the same sense of detachment that she used as a defense mechanism.

A Balancing Act; Mental Health And The Madness That Is Gender And Sexuality

As a kid, Dauree loved to dance. He loved to dress up in his mother's clothes. Slowly and steadily, through judging eyes, silent disapproval, and violent rebukes, Dauree realised that he was different from other boys. Dauree was nearly 9 years old when he grew a crush on a female classmate. It was sweet and nice, but it was not until he was 11 that he felt the intense pangs of love for a male classmate. Searching for approval and acceptance from others that didn't come, Dauree never acted on his desires. To make it worse, his classmates increasingly pointed out that he didn't conform to gender norms. The only solace Dauree could find was in becoming an exemplary student and dreaming of earning his dignity through independence - financial and emotional.

Victoria always loved to play football and play pretend-army with her cousins. Even in school, she played cricket and other sports that were considered masculine. Curiously enough, Victoria and other "masculine" girls like her rarely got bullied *specifically* for their conventionally masculine habits as kids.



PHOTOS BY YANAM BAGE

Sure, there was always an aunt who would begrudgingly grunt, “baal lamba palo / grow your hair long,” or feign dramatic shock and say, “aare ladki hoke ladka ka kapda kyun pehentai / why do you wear boys' clothes when you are a girl?” Even so, Victoria could brush off these remarks because her friends never treated her as if there was something wrong with her. She felt so close and understood by her friends that she didn't even feel the need to “come out” the first time she dated a girl. Her friends simply saw two girls in love, and somehow, they didn't feel the need to question it either. Similarly, she never came out to her siblings though they knew about her girlfriends. These validations not only helped Victoria rebel against gender norms but also to navigate through and accept her sexuality.

“I wish I was normal,” “I wish I was like other boys,” “I'm going to take my secret to my grave,” Dauree remembered these thoughts crashing like avalanches in his mind. He even wished that he had been born a girl. He felt, if everyone had an issue with his “girlishness”, wouldn't it be better if he were a girl?

Would people consider him normal then? It took Dauree years of education, exposure, and social support to finally accept who he is. He is a man, his gender expression oscillates between masculine, feminine, and sometimes androgynous. He is in love with a man, but he is also so much more than who he loves or desires. Although Victoria found her masculine gendered expressions generally accepted, she could not stand it when her father topped off her academic and sports achievements saying, “yeh toh mera ladka bacha hai / this here is my son.” She argued with her father and told him that she is a girl and she likes playing football. She is a girl *and* she likes her hair short. She is a girl *and* she falls in and (sometimes) out of love with girls, *and* she is so much more than who she loves or desires.

Dauree and Victoria are so much more than their hair, their clothes, their hobbies, or who they love. Despite all that they have done to assert themselves - their desires and identities - in Arunachal Pradesh, it has turned its back on them, saying, “I have no home for the lot of you, and no language either.”

Naam kama; Amin Kama

TRANSLATED BY YARO RIANG, LOPA REBI KOJUM
AND BAMCHRO RIANG

Dauree dance redebe ichal maegia do. Dauree dance ge lega be atuge life jebe rido. Dauree anyo loke dance kacig do. Hekeleki be Dauree ge aane dance rima ke mimblo, Dauree ngo ge Aane hebe hugube mindene mida mida do. Hoke nalyela/ hoke loke/ wo alu loke nalayela, Dauree nyi apam ge ara lo angu sibe himpe ku. Dauree naam loke doje ka, school lo imboloka, atu ge mui gede ge naam loka and ajin gede ge lekin be agum aeje ka, nyi gede Dauree nyi nyeme jebe minda minda do. “No hugu be nyijir jebe aedo”, “ no hugube nyijir jebe agam jabdo”, “nyilo jebe aelak”, “ no nyijir do aye”.

Dauree ge keyi, Dauree nyi asar ne agam mima tala, Dauree nyi kebae jebe treat mama do. “No hugu be atu ge buru jebe nyilo kaam rima dene”. Dauree ge keyi ho apak tala, Dauree ge Ayo ka ichal minda minda do. Ayo laku be Dauree ge Aane nyi mimpene, “No nyi ngo kelo mima aye. nyilo nyime jebe ripene nyi ajin mabeka. Hijak kado no ge ku nyime jebe riro ku”. Nyi gede Dauree nyi huguka mimbolo amin jima dene. Si bunu Dauree nyi “nyime jebe” hi mindo. Hekelega be, Dauree mipene, “hugube ngunu ge jebe nyi gede nyi atuge agam lo amin kama pene?” Dauree ge Ayo anyo loke school ima pene, he English ka Minchin ma, Hindi ka Minchin ma. Ayo Dauree nyi minchi sinam bolo, angu nyime jebe nyilo ge kebe nyi minchi sido. Ho koke lo, Dauree ge keyi school impe. Hekeleki be Keyi Dauree nyi huguka mimbo lo nyime kebe nyi minchi sido. Ho malinge kabolo, hebe ei midene jebe riroku ki “Ngunu nok laki lo minre, minda minra re hamla sin ngunu no nyi lakin jebe ka amin jima re.”

Dauree atu ge nampam loke agum ete la ichal himpu do. City lo heyeka Dauree nyi chima do, hekeleki be Dauree atu nyi ichal sagi himpa do. City lo Dauree city ge nyi gede jebe mido. Sika nyi gede Dauree nyi dauree ge aenam penam, donam nyi hugu ka mima do.

Nyi gede sika Dauree nyi Dauree ge talent, interest and flaws nyi chindo. Dauree city lo dobolo atu ge hapuk ge aare lo huguka apemadene. Dauree naam abolo, atu ge nyi gede ge saat lo dobolo, dauree ge hapuk lo mesinangu dodo. Nyi gede ge agam ge lagabe Dauree atu nyi angu jebe kada kada do. Dauree nyi ngunu taka pene, “No koke lo Arunachal lo dodebe mipayei?” Dauree mimpa, “Ma, ngo Arunachal lo doma re, Ngu agum lo dote la atuge life nyi alebe karya re. Arunachal ge nyi gede sedu gedu be keba rakila, ngo tani kuma. Ngo atuge segi be megie be rikar sureku”.

Dauree mindo ngo atu ge aane abu nyi minpa re mitela bosae maa do. Dauree chindo hog ge aane abu hum nyi anga loke sijak university student ripene nyi kapene. “Ngo ge aane abu atu ge agam lo mima jeka ngo chindo si bunu ngo nyi kapene ngo heye ge jebe do.” Dauree atu ge aane abu nyi mimpa tala aane abu ge agam minam hm ledum tele dope. Dauree atu ge mui, keyi, achi, anye gede ya mintam nima do.

Dauree atu ge anye nyi atu ge sexuality ge laku nga mimpa ro. Dauree ge anye, acho dote la, atu ge buru nyi accept mapene. Hebe rije ka, anye, Dauree nyi mimppe ne, “no atu ge Arunachali nyi gede nyi mimpa maa bolo ale re. Arunachal ichal anyo nampam do, sika nyi gede ka hijack alebe education pama tala, hugu ka chima do. Si bunu no nyi nyorji re”. Dauree school loke atu ge tribal identity nyi ichal mede kade do. Dauree atu nyi keyi Arunachalee jebe kadene, hamla sin Dauree atu ge anye ge agam tatla ajar muru roku. Dauree mipene, “ngo Arunachal ge ku do, ngo atuge tribe, agam, uyi nyi ichal alebe midene. Hebe rije ka ngo ge Arunachali nyi gede ngo nyi atu ge jebe hugu be kaama dene?”

Pansexual Holaga HohPiree Ala Mange Dana;
 Ngo Sangcha Ga Mangdak Sako-e Nyifang
 Aanyi-Aam Nobo Ke

Nyiang rangla-Nyiang nyi do ho Victoria mwi nyime pogo potu-poke porana, ato bome hoga mwi chingfi na. Potu rana tallo Victoria mwi hoh(heart) glo hingpio jaja kana haja la pe mwi Christian tano ma mangna, “manyi ga sau rana si alamo na gapa”. Sau mangna saam mwi maga pora bo mey bingsi tamdana. Mwi chingde chingdana si alamoke, hajalape higa nyi ye potu rabo myi yipo nyotana? Mwi Class ga chingyo yo yo boda, hoga ajing pe satam na kada tallo mwime hipe riyeh nyiomo, habasu mwigga nyime pora bome nyi ye hingye do. Hoga mwi nyime ga dungko bo yangne lo riyebo kadi mye mwi faara dana. Ho laga malange ala dakana. Alogala, aro kamchi ho ho Victoria ga sir-e mamye malang hostel hamyega kokam ho mamye ‘faana’, hogobo bing banang Victoria mwi maga nyime pora boga dungko ho rushi chiina. Hoga ma sir laga fakona. sir bingna yibdo ho mwi bingsa-bingsa rana. Sada qyabo si sabo taudana “yibdi la bingsi na-nyarsi na mye (to be pronounced as may) mung do re?”

Victoria ga school ho hmye-mye mnyam, Victoria de laka pe maki komo na. Habasu ho alo dara sau Victoria ga alame nyiye kopo kamo. Ho mwi hingfiya na, hoga ma mangdana mwimye rana si ala ramo. Victoria Christian hmme tanno atukho mwi mangna, mwi ga radungna si ala gamo pa, habasu sada mwi mangdana soga mwi rana si rala na tak. Habasu mwigga dungri dhosi lo atehbo nyi kadi ga kota sau Victoria ga rachu si ateh ala rachu gapa. Sau rako daralo Victoria mwi samme mangdak sako mang-mang kana hojalape mwi, maga sangcha lo smm mangpo tallo ala sangdar tabo rapa. Holaga maga ajing pe ala na kada tallo, maga potu-poke pohra na mye lungsa bo komo na, hoga lo victoria maga potu rabo ajing manyi maga porana ala jaja kana. Habasuto nyiang gana ho, Victoria mwigga school mye mawwe kana.

Sau gamsi tallo-ballo yukana nyi pangye chingme kana. Si takgo yunah mwimye richo yonbo hmmye kadi pe tapo kana. Hoga, mwigga school ho malange mwigga tamo kolo bingsi-bingpo bingmang kana habasu hiye pe mwigga atuk la bingyo mona.

Nyosa school ho kalon Victoria mwi maga nyime ajing, potu-poke porabo pohmye mwi aniya maang tallo aaming (letters-gift) bilak ding dara dana. Haba tallo pe, si maangsa jaja gam gapa, mwi ga bilak naye lakape mwigga ajing mye bichi kamo. Victoria mangdanasosi mwigga atuk school ga sir, mwimye fabopo ga radung na ga arang.

Victoria ga agu ho ho hiye pe gachi banang bingdana Victoria de “nyiga arang kodana”, “si nyiga banang ala sa pako”, Habasu mwigga ane-abo sabo bingmo dana. Mwi nyiga arang koko dara lo, ho laga nyosa nyime hoyo bo kadime kotallo, ma ayo nemye hoh piree ala mangsu dana. Holaga mwi ayo nemye niyro ala bape mangsu dana. Holaga lo mwi puri meype ching alado hoga mwigga agu nyi pe mwi mye satam jaja dana. Hoga mwigga Abo pe lako bingming dana “ngo ga khao si agu so nyifang woge tana”.

Victoria ga Aboye nyifaang aangi-aam (Polygamy) no-na dara sau mwigga agu nyiye maangdak sako kada dana. Ho dara lo Victoria ga hohlo nyi mye mang-jang nyomo, bingpa nyimo, yipo tak dana.

Victoria ma atuk cho chi ho nyiga laga pora dungna, haja lape mwigga potu poke ponaye nyime ajing mye. Holaga mwi chingna atuk ho pe mwi nyiga tallo pe nyime sangbo (Transwomen) mye mwi koffa na, holaga nyime talo pe nyiga sangbo (transmen) myepe mwi kobiyo dana. Mwigga sangcha ho mwi tatak dana mwi lesbian gapa, mwigga mangna sau gamsi magabomo.

Victoria mwi loko mangdi gareh dana, mwi nyiga mepe kopiyo, nyime mepe kopiyo, nyime tallo nyiga sangbo mepe kobiyo ho laga nyiga tallo nyime sangbo mepe kobiyo na. Sidigo mangchung- mangra mangpe kalo mwi ching dakana mwi 'pansexual' ke. Hoga mwi sabo chingdar dakana mwigana rana-mangna, kobiyo- tabiyo si aasi ga bikna aring bo hidi lape bikwe dana.

Aaro kalam Arunachal tallo dungsame tauna, ho Victoria bingna? "ngo India sau hidi lape dungde bo mangmo dana, Arunachal de bingmo lape yapo takto". Mwigana agu arab, ajing-abang pang malang Arunachal te do, hajape mwigana lebo

Arunachal talo dungna alamo. Mwi mangdana maga rana bingna lo mwigana ane-abo mye nyiye bingkam tana. Habo mangtalo mwi Arunachal mye yapo dara tabo mangdana. Mangdi takalo mwi sabape ching dana mwimye nyi-pangye mangkam gedana. Mwi agu gakar banang ho laga sabo mangna rana sam rake kare dana bingba nang mwigana agu bangnime nyi malangye kodi kori koye aeykam tana. Ayo ne mwide samme rakogalo rapey tanna, nyiga bingna-rana mye sabo mangtak tana, si ho go mo? Hajalape mwi mangmo dana maga agu nyiye mwi dara lo hanyiang to. Hosgo bo bingba nang mwi mangdana mwigana agu nyiye samme chaknya sa re?

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When the Nag kesar Petals Hold

ROSHAN R



ARTWORK BY MONALISHA CHASA

I have never seen Antarleena Das. My understanding of Antarleena developed through the voice notes we shared. Every voice note is like a piece of a mosaic: intricate, broken, distinct, and yet somehow connected. As she laid bare her fears—her loss, shame, identity, grief—I wept for an Antarleena I have never seen. Oftentimes, a burning sensation, because of acid reflux, would engulf my chest and other times a stream of anger would flow through my veins. I rooted for young Antarleena, wishing to rescue her from her tumultuous past.

Her resilience to record voice notes for a stranger is a testimony to her strength; she does not require me to salvage her from her past. She had already saved herself. And so, sometimes I revisit the voice notes and wonder how she looks; her smile, her hair, and the way her face muscles frown as she records her story. Her voice notes are structured, and fast-paced. I only have to prompt her, and a cascade of words flows out of her. Between every utterance her breath cuts across the gap between her mouth and her microphone, creating a rhythm, almost like a pentameter.

One day I casually ask her to describe herself and, in a moment, she writes back, “I didn’t get you.” In retrospect, I realise, we are not taught to know ourselves, what we are, and what our identity is; it is only when we speak to the Other about us, we learn ‘things’ that only our bodies know, secrets that creep within the thin layers of skin we carry, and the experiences that cruise only the walls of our being.

That same day, she sent me a picture of herself with a caption and a laughing emoji: “That’s how I looked till last year.” She looked tall, wore a salwar kameez, and had long black hair. She was courteously seated against the walls on a typical plastic chair; her lips red, almost attempting to smile.

But she looked restricted, as though she was ensnared. I chose not to say anything; instead, while I warmed my hands on my teacup, I asked, “so, how do you look now?” Then another picture with a different caption and even more laughing emojis came in: “That is what I have done to myself this year.” To my surprise, Antarleena has short hair; she looks liberated, not restricted anymore, and has a smile that is not forced.

In a hurry, almost spilling some tea, I picked up my phone and asked her what happened. And after a long moment of silence, she writes back, “I had to change, and grow. I ended a phase; I have reached a settlement. And in moments like these, I simply cut my hair.” I was left bereft of words. I remember reading: *the longest battle we fight is with ourselves!* from her poetry book—an accomplishment she casually shared saying, “oh, by the way, I wrote this.” I sat there in my room, my gaze fixed to the ceiling, imagining what Antarleena had been through as she peeled away every complex layer of her queer life in Tripura. Broken friendships, unpleasant relationships, and unsavoury disagreements with her family - all in the name of queerness! So more than anything, Antarleena Das is a young queer woman from Tripura who has battled with herself, her identities, and her mental health for the longest time. But like her new hairstyle marks the advent of a new life, this story gives her life, a new face, a new vantage point.

Love seeks us, always, but we run behind faces.

Antarleena sits there, poised like a Nagkesar tree, heavy yet graceful. She has been running away from her memories which had grown into strong branches that spread wide. But at that moment, soaked in the melancholia of her past, white Nagkesar flowers, filled with her childhood memories, bloomed out of her. Antarleena could not bear them anymore, so they fell: one by one, petal by petal.

She is transported to a period where she did not require a time, an occasion, or a reason to meet her friends. From getting scolded for performing poorly in a test, to meeting at a Chinese food stall to satiate their appetites, they journeyed together as if sewn to each other like the petals of some flower. They spread their fragrance wherever they walked, and coloured life around them. Their friendship was the pistil that held them together until one day it could not.

“I am not in the mood for such jokes,” exclaimed a friend when Antarleena spoke about her desires loud and clear. Antarleena desired women but she was not allowed to. In the summer of 2013 when she attempted to unfurl her queer identity she was ridiculed. Her identity became a “joke.” She could not desire it. Her friends’ remark grew within her. It silenced and erased her desires. The remark spread like a wild bushfire- and burnt the beautiful flower their friendship resembled. The petals fell apart and could never be put back together. Antarleena felt like a portion of her being was taken away from her. She explained to her mother, but she could not gauge the void; her father, on the other hand, did not understand the depth of her suffering. She was left to suffer alone.

*Two things are repeated:
“lies” and “assumptions”*

Antarleena would lock herself in a room, gaze at an object incessantly, and not eat. Her parents would find her in the softest corners of a world that she imaginatively constructed. The real world was outside of it, and her world was a void. With every passing day, she was sucked into it, little by little, piece by piece. In those moments, she desired for her parents to sit with her, listen to her and wipe her tears. But alas, that did not happen.

Loneliness had stripped Antarleena of her will to live. Their house, in those days, would be filled with poignant silences. They pierced Antarleena’s ears as they reminded her of her loss.

The memories made so much noise in her ears. So many voices. That is when she uttered, “I am queer.” She felt as if she burst into existence, into a new life. But later that week she was rushed to a psychiatric unit by her mother. According to her mother’s logic, Antarleena’s queerness is the prime reason for her anguish.

In Tripura, you are either fine or you are not. You are deemed “mad,” if anybody hears the phrase ‘mental health.’ The negative connotations associated with the word ‘mental’ had petrified Antarleena, preventing her from seeking help. She was prescribed medication. She knew medication would help her, but more than mere drugs, she required human connection and conversations. Our language can capture the greatest tragedies like that of *Hamlet*, feelings of existentialism like those in *Waiting for Godot*, and if you are in love, you can fall back upon the verses of John Keats. But as she went back and forth between her illness and the stigma surrounding mental health treatment in Tripura, I could not help but wonder: our language cannot capture our experience with mental illnesses. “I do not know how else to say it,” Antarleena would say every time I asked her to explain a certain feeling. I would pause, embark on a walk, frustrated for not knowing how to proceed or how to ask the right questions to understand her experiences. In that moment, I realised, she was already threading words and sounds while juggling her pain, grief, and trauma. Language was failing her, and her experiences.

Her mental illness was like an ocean within her. With each passing day, the tides corroded the inner walls of her being. Around her was a sea of people spilling judgments and lies about her condition. It made her journey through her diploma difficult. For the longest time, she could not place her trust in anybody until she decided to take a leap of faith.

She met Shubha in college. She had long black hair, big, curved eyes, and thin lips. They both desired each other. But there was nothing that held them together, so they soon fell apart.

Antarleena's condition worsened, as she found out that her first relationship was rooted in libidinal pleasure and not love. Shubha had been furtively intimate with another boy throughout.

This led Antarleena to poke holes into her understanding of her desires. *Is it even possible to love a girl the way I want? Will all my relationships end like that?* Questions surfaced and re-surfaced, doubts grew outside of her like parasitic plants, and she felt betrayed once again. She could not complete her degree. Throughout this journey of discovering and rediscovering herself, she wanted to speak but the only language she could access was silence.

Queerness and Desire in the context of Tripura and India

We are brought up in a society that believes in a linear path towards adulthood. For Antarleena, it has been difficult to determine when her childhood ended because she did not grow up as queer, as herself. Tripura overflows with conventions. "Sometimes I just want to run away," she would confess. "This place makes me sick, looks down on me, and I have so many bad memories here,"; suddenly, although miles apart, we were surrounded by a silence, one that could not be filled by any language.

Antarleena wanders with her stories, her desires to be with a woman, her loss and trauma at not knowing which place to call her 'home.' Tripura is static in its structure, it will not be able to carry Antarleena, her identities, and her desires as she does not fit into the linear temporalities and life patterns that govern her family's life.

Queerness, for Antarleena, is the zeal to explore the unexplored, to re-imagine, and to re-invent herself in this journey of eccentric temporalities, and non-conforming ideals. Her understanding of queerness evolved through popular culture. *Anyone but Me*, an internet series with queer themes, opened a new world to Antarleena. When she looks around, she notices that our world is filled with desires; desires which do not conform, which spill over boundaries, which travel with our bodies, which have multiple forms. They led Antarleena to the alleys that she never wished to visit and pushed her away from the path she always desired to walk on. They led her to search for herself.

There is always something to explore, something unexplainable. She has the strength of a forest, the fragrance of Nagkesar flowers, and the patience of an ocean. She is made of nature and can never be broken. So, she sits there gracefully like a Nag Kesar tree.

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যখন নাগকেশরের পাতা মাটি স্পর্শ করে না

TRANSLATED BY CHIRODIP NAHA

আমি কখনো অন্তর্লীনা দাসকে দেখিনি। আমার সাথে অন্তর্লীনার পরিচয় হয় কিছু ভয়েস নোটের মাধ্যমে। এই ভয়েস নোটের মাধ্যমেই আমি ওকে একটু একটু করে বুঝতে শুরু করি। মনে হতো প্রত্যেকটি ভয়েস নোট এক একটি মোজাইকের মতো, কারুকার্য বিশিষ্ট, জটিল, ভাঙা, স্বতন্ত্র কিন্তু তাও সংযুক্ত। সে যখন তার ভিতরের ভয়, লজ্জা, দুঃখ, পরাজয়ের স্মৃতি আমার সামনে তুলে ধরে তখন তার দুঃখ আমাকে পীড়া দেয়, আমি ভেঙে পড়ি, সেই অন্তর্লীনার জন্য যাকে আমি কখনো চোখে দেখিনি।

ওর কথা শুনতে শুনতে প্রায় সময়ই জ্বলন্ত এসিডের একটি জ্বালাময় বেদনা আমার বুকের উপরিভাগটা কে আচ্ছন্ন করে রাখতো এবং আমার শিরা দিয়ে প্রচন্ড রাগ বেয়ে যেত। আমি অল্পবয়স্ক অন্তর্লীনার জন্য প্রার্থনা করতাম যাতে সে তার ভয়াবহ অতীত থেকে মুক্তি পায়।

সে যখন আমার মতো এক অপরিচিত ব্যক্তির কাছে ভয়েস নোটের মাধ্যমে তার জীবনের ইতিহাস তুলে ধরার সাহস দেখায় আমি বুঝতে পারি তার সহনশীলতাই তার শক্তি। তার অতীত থেকে বাঁচার জন্য তার আমাকে দরকার নেই। বরং সে নিজেই নিজেকে বাঁচিয়েছে। এবং তাই, আমি যখন কখনো কখনো সেই ভয়েস নোট গুলো আবার শুনি এবং মাঝে মাঝে বিস্মিত হয়ে চিন্তা করি, সে দেখতে কেমন, কেমনইবা তার হাসি, তার চুল এবং তার মুখের বিভিন্ন ভঙ্গিমা যখন সে তার কথা আমাকে রেকর্ড করে পাঠায়।

তার প্রত্যেকটি ভয়েস নোটে একটি সুন্দর কাঠামো আছে। সমান গতিতে চলে তার ভয়েস নোট গুলো। আমার একটি ইশারাই যথেষ্ট, তার ভেতর থেকে নির্ঝর শব্দ আপনা আপনি বেরিয়ে আসে। মাইক্রোফোনে কথা বলার সময় শব্দের মাঝে তার নিঃশ্বাসের শব্দ একটা ছন্দ তৈরি করে ঠিক চরণবিশিষ্ট কবিতার মতো।

একদিন কথার ছলেই আমি তাকে একটি মেসেজ পাঠাই। বলি তোমার সম্পর্কে আমাকে কিছু বলো, তোমার জীবন সম্পর্কে বলো। সে লিখে পাঠায়, " আমি ঠিক বুঝতে পারিনি।" এখন অতীতের দিকে দৃষ্টিপাত করে আমি বুঝতে পারি আমাদেরকে কখনো শিখানো হয় না কিভাবে নিজেকে জানতে হয়, কিভাবে নিজেকে বর্ণনা করতে হয়, আমাদের সত্তা কি ইত্যাদি ইত্যাদি। একমাত্র যখন আমরা অন্যের সাথে নিজের সম্পর্কে কথা বলি তখনি আমরা নিজের সম্পর্কে এমন কিছু আবিষ্কার করি যা এতদিন শুধু আমাদের শরীর জানতো। কিছু গোপন তথ্য যা আমাদের শরীরের চামড়ার স্তরে স্তরে মিশে রয়েছে।

সেদিনই সে আমাকে তার একটি ছবি পাঠায়, সাথে একটি ক্যাপশন এবং কিছু হাসির ইমোজি : "গত বছর পর্যন্ত আমি দেখতে এমন ছিলাম।" ছবিটিতে সে একটি সালোয়ার কামিজ পরা, তাকে লম্বা দেখাচ্ছিল আর তার সুবিন্যস্ত দীর্ঘ কালো চুলের পরিচয় পাওয়া যাচ্ছিলো ছবিটিতে। সে দেয়ালের সাথে হেলান দিয়ে রাখা একটি সাধারণ প্লাষ্টিক চেয়ারে পরিমার্জিত ভাবে বসে ছিল। তার ঠোঁটগুলো ছিল লাল, মনে হচ্ছে হাসার একটি ক্ষীণ চেষ্টা সে করেছিল।

তাকে দেখে মনে হচ্ছিলো সে যেন একটু সংরক্ষণশীল, যেন একটি সাবধানী পাখির মতো যে একটি ফাঁদ থেকে নিজেকে বাঁচাতে চাচ্ছে। আমি সেই ছবিটিতে কোনো মন্তব্য করিনি, বরং গরম চায়ের পেয়ালাটা হাতে নিতে নিতে আমি তাকে জিজ্ঞেস করি, "তা, তুমি এখন দেখতে কেমন?"

সে আমাকে আরেকটি ছবি পাঠায়, একইভাবে, একটি ক্যাপশন এবং কিছু হাসির ইমোজির সাথে। "দেখো আমি এখন নিজের কী অবস্থা করেছি।"

ছবিটি দেখে আমি বিস্মিত হয়ে যাই, তার চুল ছোট করে কাটা, তাকে আর সাবধানী লাগছে না, খুব প্রাণবন্ত লাগছে এবং সবচেয়ে সুন্দর তার হাসিটা; স্বাভাবিক এবং সচ্ছল।

তাড়াহড়ার ফলে কিছুটা চা পড়ে যায়, আমি দ্রুত ফোনে তাকে একটি মেসেজ পাঠাই, "কি করে এতটা পরিবর্তন?" অনেকটা সময় পর সে জবাব দেয়, "আমাকে বদলাতেই হতো, আমি কঠিন সময় পার করে এসেছি এবং সেই সময়টাতেই আমি আমার চুল কেটে ফেলি।"

আমি কি লিখবো বুঝতে পারছিলাম না, আমি শব্দ হারিয়ে ফেলছিলাম। আমার তখন খুব পরিচিত একটি লাইন মনে পড়ে যায়, "আমাদের জীবনের সবচেয়ে দীর্ঘ যুদ্ধটা আমরা নিজেদের সাথেই করি।" এই লাইনটিও আমি তার কবিতার খাতায় পড়ি।

মেসেজটি আসার পর আমি অনেকক্ষণ আমার রুমে বসে থাকি, সিলিং এর দিকে তাকিয়ে থাকি। চিন্তা করতে থাকি অন্তর্লীনা কি না সহ্য করেছে ত্রিপুরার মতো একটি জায়গায় নিজের কুইয়ার অস্তিত্বটাকে টিকিয়ে রাখতে। ভাঙা বন্ধুত্ব, অপ্রীতিকর সম্পর্ক, পরিবারের সাথে অপ্রয়োজনীয় বিবাদ শুধুমাত্র এই কুইয়ার অস্তিত্বটার জন্য। সব কিছু থেকে উর্ধ্ব, অন্তর্লীনা দাস এমন একজন মহিলা যে ত্রিপুরার মতো একটি জায়গা থেকে প্রতিদিন যুদ্ধ করেছে নিজের সাথে, নিজের সত্তার সাথে, নিজের মনস্তত্ত্বের সাথে বহু বছর ধরে। কিন্তু তার নতুন চুলের স্টাইল হয়তো তার নতুন জীবনের একটি প্রতীক হয়ে থাকবে। এই গল্পটি তাকে একটি নতুন চেহারা দেয়, জীবনের নতুন একটি দিক দেখায়।

" ভালোবাসা আমাদের সন্ধান করে কিন্তু দুর্ভাগ্য আমরা মুখোশের পিছনে দৌড়াই "

অন্তর্লীনা সেখানে বসে থাকে, স্থির, একটি নাগকেশর গাছের মতো। দীর্ঘ কিন্তু মায়াময়ী। সে তার অতীত থেকে পালিয়ে বেড়াচ্ছে, যেই অতীত ডাল পালা ছড়িয়ে তাকে আঁকড়ে ধরেছে। কিন্তু সেই মুহুর্তে মনে হচ্ছিলো অন্তর্লীনা আর সহ্য করতে পারবে না, যেই নাগকেশর ফুল তার ছোটবেলার স্মৃতি নিয়ে তার মধ্যে পুষ্পিত হচ্ছিলো, সেই ফুলের পাতা একটার পর একটা ঝরে পড়তে থাকে।

সে এমন জায়গায় পৌঁছে যায়, যেখানে তার আর সময়, স্থান, উপলক্ষ বা কারণ প্রয়োজন হয় না তার ছোটবেলার বন্ধুদের সাথে দেখা করার জন্য। পরীক্ষায় একসাথে খারাপ ফল করার থেকে, রাস্তার পাশের ছোট্ট চাইনিজ দোকানটিতে দেখা করা, সে আর তার বন্ধুরা একসাথে এই যাত্রার সঙ্গী হয় যেন তারা ফুলের পাপড়ির মতো একসাথে জোড়া লাগানো। যেদিক দিয়ে তারা হেঁটে গেছে তারা তাদের সুবাস ছড়িয়েছে, তাদের বন্ধুত্ব ছিল ফুলের গর্ভকেশরের মতো যতদিন সম্ভব এই বন্ধুত্বের মধুর সম্পর্ক তাদের একসাথে ধরে রেখেছিলো।

"আমার এরকম রসিকতা পছন্দ নয়," অন্তর্লীনার এক বন্ধু তাকে এটি বলে যখন সে তার ইচ্ছা, বাসনার কথা খুব স্পষ্ট করে বাকিদের বলে, যে সে মেয়েদের প্রতি আকৃষ্ট।

২০১৩ এর গ্রীষ্মে সে নিজেকে মেলে ধরার চেষ্টা করে কিন্তু তাকে সমর্থন করা হয় না বরং তাকে নিয়ে হাসা হাসি করা হয়। তাকে নিয়ে মজা করা হয়। তার সত্তা বাকিদের কাছে একটি তামাশার বিষয় হয়ে যায়।

তার বন্ধুদের কটাক্ষ, মন্তব্য তার ভিতর জমা হতে থাকে। এই মন্তব্য গুলি ধীরে ধীরে তার বাসনাগুলো কে দমন করতে থাকে। তার সত্তা এই মন্তব্য গুলোকে সহ্য করতে পারে না, এই মন্তব্য গুলি তার ভিতর এক জ্বালাময়ী আগুন জ্বালিয়ে দেয় যা এই সুন্দর ফুলের মতো বন্ধুত্বগুলোকে নষ্ট করে দেয়। ফুলের এক একটি পাপড়ি ঝরতে থাকে। অন্তর্লীনার মনে হয় তার জীবনের বড় একটি অংশ তার জীবন থেকে কেড়ে নেওয়া হয়েছে। সে তার মাকে বুঝানোর চেষ্টা করে কিন্তু তার মা তার ভেতরকার শূন্যতা অনুধাবন করতে পারে না। তার বাবা তার কষ্টের গভীরতা বুঝতে পারে না। সে একাই এই কষ্ট নিয়ে বাঁচতে থাকে।

দুটো জিনিসের পুনরাবৃত্তি "মিথ্যা" এবং "অনুমান"

অন্তর্লীনা নিজেকে একটি রুমের মধ্যে লক করে রাখতো, দূরে রাখা কোনো একটি জিনিসের দিকে তাকিয়ে থাকতো, খাওয়া দাওয়া বন্ধ করে দিয়েছিলো সে। নিজের আলাদা একটি আলাদা জগত বানিয়ে নিয়েছিল।

তার বাবা - মা এই জগতটা বুঝতো না। বাস্তবের জগত তার জগত থেকে অনেকটাই আলাদা ছিল এবং সেই জগতে তার ছিল অনেক বেশি শূন্যতা। দিনের পর দিন এই শূন্যতা তাকে গ্রাস করে। ওই মুহুর্তে সে চাইতো মানুষের সখ্যতা, সে চাইতো তার বাবা মা যেন তার পাশে বসে, তার কথা মন দিয়ে শুনে তার কান্না মুছে দেয় কিন্তু দুঃখের বিষয় সেটা হয়নি।

শূন্যতা আর একাকীত্ব অন্তর্লীনার বেঁচে থাকার ইচ্ছা দিন দিন কমিয়ে দিচ্ছিলো। আত্মঘাতী চিন্তা ভাবনা তার মাথায় ঘুরতে থাকে। ওই সময় তাদের বাড়িতে ছিল তীব্র শব্দহীনতা। অন্তর্লীনা এই নিস্তব্ধতা সহ্য করতে পারতো না, এই নিস্তব্ধতা তাকে তার হারানো স্মৃতির কথা মনে করিয়ে দিতো। সেই স্মৃতি গুলো তার বাড়ির মতো শব্দহীন ছিল না বরং সেই স্মৃতিগুলো ছিল অনেক কোলাহল পূর্ণ, নানান শব্দ , নানান কণ্ঠস্বর তাকে ঘিরে রাখতো এবং ঠিক সেই মুহূর্তটাতাই নিজেকে বলে "আমি কুইয়ার।"

তার মনে হয় সে তার জীবনের নতুন অস্তিত্ব পেয়েছে, তার নতুন করে জন্ম হয়েছে। কিন্তু সেই সপ্তাহেই তার মা তাকে একজন সাইকিয়াট্রিস্টের কাছে নিয়ে যায়। তার মার মনে হয় তার কুইয়ার সত্তা তার প্রচন্ড যন্ত্রণার প্রতিফলন, একটি মনের ভুল, একটি মানসিক সমস্যা।

ত্রিপুরার মতো জায়গায়, একজন মানুষ হয় সুস্থ বা অসুস্থ। যদি কারো নামের পাশে মানসিক সমস্যা শব্দটি যোগ হয় তাহলে লোকে তাকে পাগল ভাবে। এই নেতিবাচক দৃষ্টিকোণের জন্য অন্তর্লীনা তার মানসিক সমস্যার জন্য সাহায্য চাইতে ভয় পেত। তাকে ওষুধ দেওয়া হয় , সে জানতো ওষুধের থেকে তার বেশি প্রয়োজন মানুষের সখ্যতা , কথা বলার একজন সঙ্গী।

আমি তার সাথে অনেক কিছু নিয়েই খুব স্বাভাবিক ভাবে কথা বলেছি, হ্যামলেট , এক্সিস্টেনশিয়ালিজম বা কখনো কখনো জন কিটস এর কবিতা। কিন্তু যতবার আমি তার মানসিক সমস্যা এবং সেই বিষয় ত্রিপুরার মানুষের দৃষ্টিকোণ নিয়ে কথা বলতে চেয়েছি আমি ব্যর্থ হয়েছি। "আমি জানিনা আর কিভাবে আমি তোমাকে বুঝতে পারবো," অন্তর্লীনা বলতো যখন আমি তাকে একটি অনুভূতি ব্যাখ্যা করতে বলতাম।

কখনো কখনো আমি একটু থামতাম, কখনো একটু বিরতি নিয়ে হাঁটতে যেতাম , হতাশ এবং নিজের উপর রাগান্বিত হয়ে চিন্তা করতাম কীভাবে প্রশ্ন করলে তার অভিজ্ঞতাগুলো সম্পর্কে আমি অবগত হতে পারবো। সে সময় আমি বুঝতে পারি দুঃখ প্রকাশ বা ভাষা বা শব্দ দিয়ে তার অভিজ্ঞতাগুলো কে ব্যাখ্যা করা সম্ভব না।

তার মানসিক সমস্যা বিশাল এক সমুদ্রের ঢেউয়ের মতো ছিল , প্রত্যেকদিন একটু একটু করে সেই ঢেউ তার সত্তার চারপাশের দেয়াল কে একটু একটু করে ভেঙে দিচ্ছিলো। তার আশে পাশে একদল মানুষের সমুদ্র বার বার তাকে ধিক্কার জানাচ্ছিল। অনেক লম্বা সময় ধরে সে আর কাউকে বিশ্বাস করতে পারে নি কিন্তু একদিন সে একজনকে ধীরে ধীরে বিশ্বাস করতে শুরু করে।

তার সাথে শুভার দেখা হয় কলেজে। শুভার কালো লম্বা চুল, বাঁকানো চোখ এবং সরু ঠোঁট তাকে আকৃষ্ট করে। তারা দুজনেই একে অপরের সঙ্গ কামনা করে। কিন্তু তাদের সখ্যতা বেশি দিন টিকে নি। এই সম্পর্ক ভাঙার পর অন্তর্লীনার মানসিক অবস্থা আরো খারাপ হতে থাকে যখন সে বুঝতে পারে এই সম্পর্কে ভালোবাসা ছিলই না, ছিল শুধু যৌনতা। অন্তর্লীনার সাথে সম্পর্কে থাকার সময়ও শুভা আরেকটি ছেলের সাথেও তীব্র ভাবে অন্তরঙ্গ ছিল।

এই পুরো ঘটনাটি অন্তর্লীনাকে বাধ্য করে তার ইচ্ছা, বাসনা ইত্যাদি সম্পর্কে পুনরায় চিন্তা করতে। "আমি যেভাবে চাই সেরকম ভাবে কি একটি মেয়েকে আমি ভালোবাসতে পারবো ? আমার সব সম্পর্কই কি এরকম ভাবে শেষ হয়ে যাবে ?" ইত্যাদি প্রশ্ন , ধোঁয়াশা তার মনে ঘুরপাক খেতে থাকে। তার মনে হয় তার সাথে প্রতারণা করা হয়েছে, আর এতো কিছুর মধ্যে সে তার আনুষ্ঠানিক শিক্ষা শেষ করতে পারে না। নিজেকে আবিষ্কার করার এই পুরো সফরটাতো সে বার বার কথা বলতে চায়, কিন্তু সে বার বার নিজেকে আবিষ্কার করে নিস্তব্ধতার মাঝখানে।

" ত্রিপুরা এবং ভারতবর্ষের মতো জায়গায় কুইয়ার এবং বাসনার স্থান "

আমরা এরকম একটা সমাজে প্রতিপালিত হচ্ছি যেই সমাজ শুধু এক রৈখিক পথে সাবালকত্বকে গ্রহণ করতে চায়। যেই সমাজ কোনোরকম বৈচিত্র পছন্দ করে না। অন্তর্লীনা বুঝতেই পারেনি কখন যে তার শৈশব কাল শেষ হয়ে গেছে। সে কুইয়ার হয়ে বড়ো হয় নি। ত্রিপুরার মতো একটি জায়গায় প্রচলনের বিপরীতে গিয়ে বড়ো হওয়া সম্ভব না, স্রোতের সাথেই গা মিশাতে হয় এখানে।

"কখনো কখনো আমি এখান থেকে পালিয়ে যেতে চাইতাম, এই জায়গাটি আমাকে অসুস্থ বানিয়ে দেয়, এখানে সবাই আমাকে নিচু চোখে দেখে এবং এখানে আমার অনেক বাজে স্মৃতি আছে।" এসব শুন্যার পর, হটাৎ করে, যদিও হাজার মাইলস দূরে তাও একটি বিষন্নতা ছেয়ে গেলো আমাদের, একটি অদ্ভুত শূন্যতা যা কোনোরকম ভাষা দিয়ে পূর্ণ করা যায় না।

অন্তর্লীনার জীবন কাহিনী, তার বাসনা একজন মহিলার সাথে জীবন পার করা, তার দুঃখ, বিষাদ , শোক এই সব কিছুই তাকে মাঝে মাঝেই ভাবিয়ে তোলে। সে বুঝতে পারেনা কোন জায়গাটাকে সে তার নিজের স্থান বলে জানবে। ত্রিপুরা খুবই রক্ষণশীল এবং স্থিতিশীল একটি জায়গা। এরকম একটি জায়গা অন্তর্লীনা ,তার সত্তা, তার বাসনা ইত্যাদিকে বহন করে নিয়ে যেতে পারবে না। এখানকার সংস্কৃতির সাথে তার সত্তা মানানসই নয়।

কুইয়ার সত্তাটাকে অন্তর্লীনা আরো বেশি করে অনুসন্ধান করতে চায়। সে নিজেকে নতুন করে পেতে চায়, আবিষ্কার করতে চায় এবং এমন একটি সফরে যেতে চায় যেটা প্রচলিত নয়। নতুন একটি সংস্কৃতি যেটা অনেকটা পাশ্চাত্য সংস্কৃতি দ্বারা প্রভাবিত অন্তর্লীনাকে সাহায্য করেছে তার নিজের সত্তাকে বিকশিত করতে। একটি জনপ্রিয় ওয়েব সিরিজ "Anyone but Me", যেটা কুইয়ার থিমের উপর নির্মিত, অন্তর্লীনাকে অনেকটা প্রভাবিত করেছে।

সে যখন আশে পাশে দেখে, সে উপলব্ধি করতে পারে যে আমাদের সমাজটা ইচ্ছা, আকাঙ্ক্ষা, বাসনাতে ভরপুর। এমন সব ইচ্ছা যা হয়তো সমাজের গতানুগতিক নিয়মের সাথে যায় না। এমন সব ইচ্ছা যেগুলোর অনেকরকম রূপ, গঠন বা ধরণ আছে। এইসব ইচ্ছাগুলো অন্তর্লীনাকে এমন এক জায়গায় নিয়ে যায় যেখানে সে কখনো যেতে চায় নি। এই ইচ্ছাগুলো তাকে তার নিজের সন্ধান নিয়ে যায়।

সবসময় কিছু না কিছু একটা অনুসন্ধান করার মতো থাকেই, কিছু একটা যা গতানুগতিক ভাবে ব্যাখ্যা করা যায় না। অন্তর্লীনা একটি সমুদ্রের মতো, বিশাল এবং সুবৃহৎ, একটি নাগকেশর ফুলের মতো পবিত্র এবং সুরভী, অরণ্যের মতো ধৈর্যশীল। সে প্রকৃতির দ্বারা তৈরী এবং অপ্রতিরোধ্য। তাই একটি নাগকেশর গাছের মতোই সে করুণাময়ী।

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Aparajita: A Bengali "Other" in Assam

RAGHU PRATAP



... Meanwhile, my family, extended family and the rest of our illegal Bengali bodies that have travelled across the border to seek shelter are quivering...

These words by Aparajita, quivering and stinging at the same time, reflect her personal anguish of the heart, the mind and the soul. It would not be far-fetched too, to say that decades of history and trauma have been encapsulated in these few lines, summarising succinctly, the experiences Aparajita recounts to me in great detail.

Aparajita Deb and I meet on a relatively cold April day. Dusk has just begun to set in. She apologises for being late, but since she has been working till the evening and then making the trip to our rendezvous, I understand. Over some food, we talk and crack a few jokes about her work and my university. She talks to me in fluent Assamese, using some of the modern local slang with expertise, as we talk about her life, my life, history and politics, and the quandaries plaguing the world.

In any other circumstance, one perhaps would not have paid much attention to the language she uses to converse with me. However, enmeshed within the context of Assam's history and politics and her identity as a Bengali, it acquires immense significance.

In the space of that evening, Aparajita weaves together various fragments of her life and her family's history and trauma with an uninhibited frankness. I gradually realise, as her story unfolds, that the context in which our conversation takes place is far removed from her family's tumultuous history. She carries a lightness to the way she narrates her story, which tells me that her family's history, a jarring fact to me, has become a part of her.

Aparajita's grandparents were Partition refugees, who migrated from the Comilla district in present-day Bangladesh. They settled down in the Maligaon locality of Guwahati, where Aparajita continues to reside. The Partition remains an event of horrific proportions, one that is recalled with palpable unease. Trauma and bloodshed are embedded into people's memories and recollections, trickling down through successive generations like Aparajita.

For her grandparents, the Partition not only meant the loss of home, it also meant the search for a new one. Various factors concerned them - the refugee movement, the socio-political situation of the newfound place, and assimilation into the new culture.

In Assam, the Partition intensified political complexities relating to the already longstanding fissure between the “indigenous” population and the “migrant Bengali” community to which Aparajita’s grandparents belonged.

As a colonially affected land frontier in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Assam became home to a large number of Bengali immigrants. Around that period, Bengali was designated as the official language of the State, which resulted in struggles to assert the Assamese language. The migration continued into the Partition era and the post-Partition era – the 1971 Bangladesh Liberation War. As a result, there loomed demographic anxiety among the Axomiya populace that they would be reduced to a linguistic and ethnic minority. This provoked ethnic hostility towards the Bengali immigrants, to people like Aparajita’s grandparents. In the 1960’s, “Bongal Kheda” (Drive Away the Bengalis) gained prominence where “Bongal” was used to refer to all outsiders. The chauvinistic character of the movement meant fear and insecurity was injected into families like Aparajita’s, who were already embroiled in their historically induced traumas.

Aparajita studied English Literature at Delhi University. When she was in college in Delhi– the National Register of Citizens (NRC) in Assam found renewed prominence. The Register, first published in 1951, ostensibly aims to weed out illegal immigrants from Bangladesh and establish a “genuine” register of citizens in view of the prevailing demographic anxiety within Assamese society. Procedural lapses and the arbitrary character of the NRC meant that many Bengali families found themselves once again overcome by a sense of fear, including the worst – being left out of the Register altogether. Aparajita tells me that this fear was legitimate and startlingly real. At that time, her mother would frequently call her and urge her to get her documents in order. Her mother was petrified. While this was her first real brush against any systemic ‘othering,’ Aparajita knew that her parents had seen far worse back in the day, especially during the anti-outsider Assam Movement of 1979-85.

During the Assam Movement, occasional mob violence by chauvinistic elements led them to cower inside their houses out of fear as chaos ensued outside. To protect the house, family members would take shifts to guard it. Those lived experiences provided a critical reference point to locate her own embedded wounds.

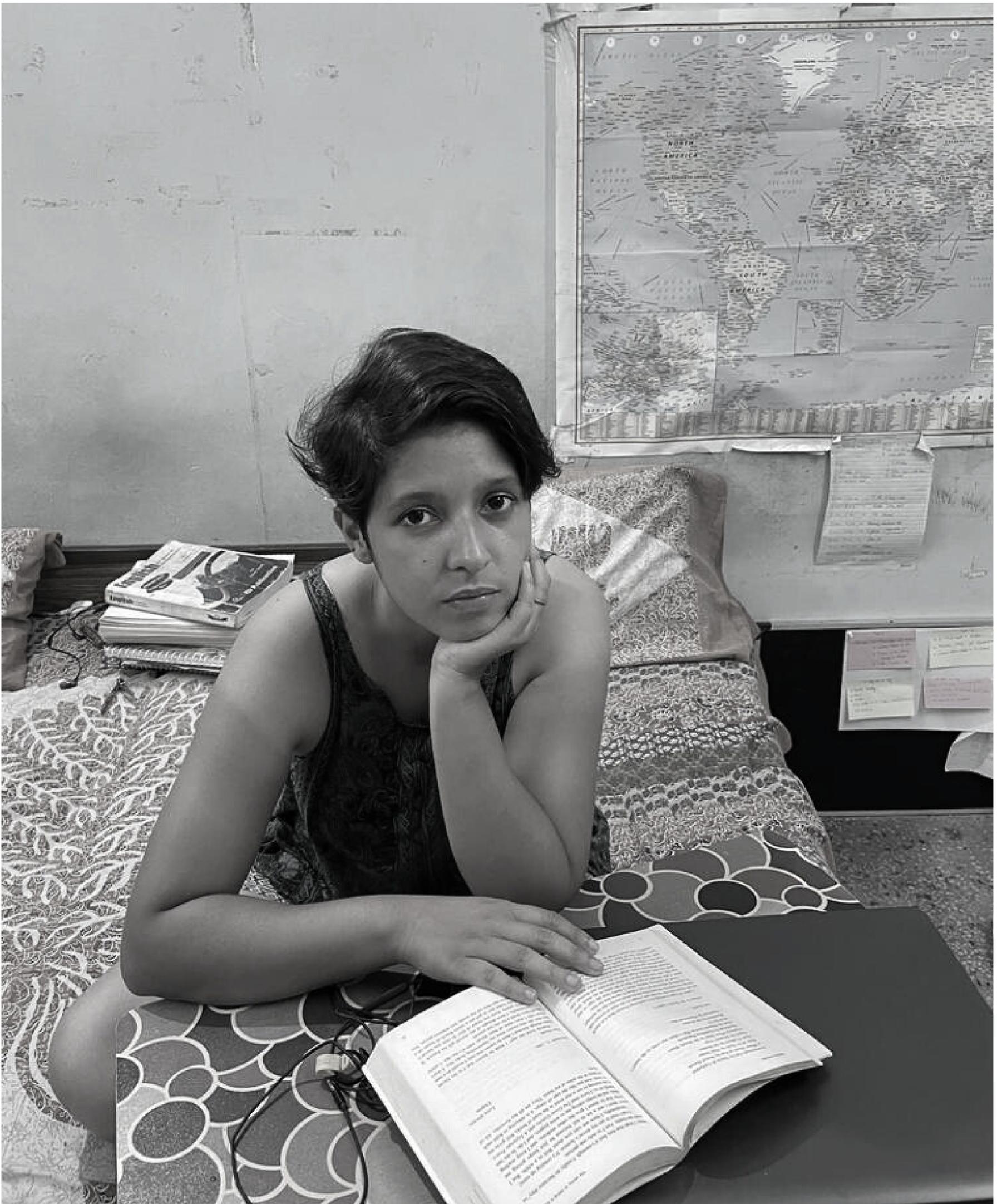
In December 2019, the reality of being an “other” in a place where she was born became more apparent to Aparajita. Despite her family being technically safe from the NRC’s cutoff date, there was no sense of relief. The “illegal immigrants” the NRC sought to identify (with 24th March 1971 as the cutoff date) mostly referred to people from Bangladesh, pejoratively referred to as the “Miya’s” – generally understood to be Muslims of Bengali descent. Notwithstanding an existing latent Islamophobic colour to the NRC exercise, protests erupted in December 2019 against the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) which sought to protect Hindus from the NRC exercise. This meant that all “outsiders” irrespective of religion were not welcome.

In these times, Aparajita found herself isolated from friends and acquaintances who suddenly became vocal about the need to “expel outsiders” and “Bangladeshis”. This marked a critical moment in her life when she felt like an alien and an outsider. Her social media timelines flooded with xenophobic posts. She deleted her Instagram account when an acquaintance published an incendiary poem, a surpassingly triggering piece, that questioned her entire sense of belongingness. Aparajita responded by writing:

... Voicelessness goes back...

... to school where the Assamese of my class would casually throw around the slang ‘Bangladeshi’ or ‘Bangal’ or ‘Miya’ to me...

... Assam had pity on us. It gave my grandfather a clerical job, a roof. We were part of the lowest strata of society and we were never allowed to forget that... We were refugees...



During the anti-CAA protests, her mother, a bank employee, was revisited by fears of not being able to safely returning home after work. As Aparajita weaves these incidents for me, it strikes me how the overarching politics, no matter what justification is provided, affects the very core of one's everyday life. The fear of a safe return to one's home, lays bare the nature of the anguish.

As a “Bengali” in Assam, a sense of segregation has always remained with Aparajita since childhood. In her formative years at school she was constantly reminded of her “Bengali” identity through behavioral pointers such as eating habits. She was even bullied for it. The use of “Bangal” as a slur directed at her coerced her to hide her Bengali origins.

Her identity was simultaneously erased because of her own attempts to assimilate into the “Assamese” crowd.

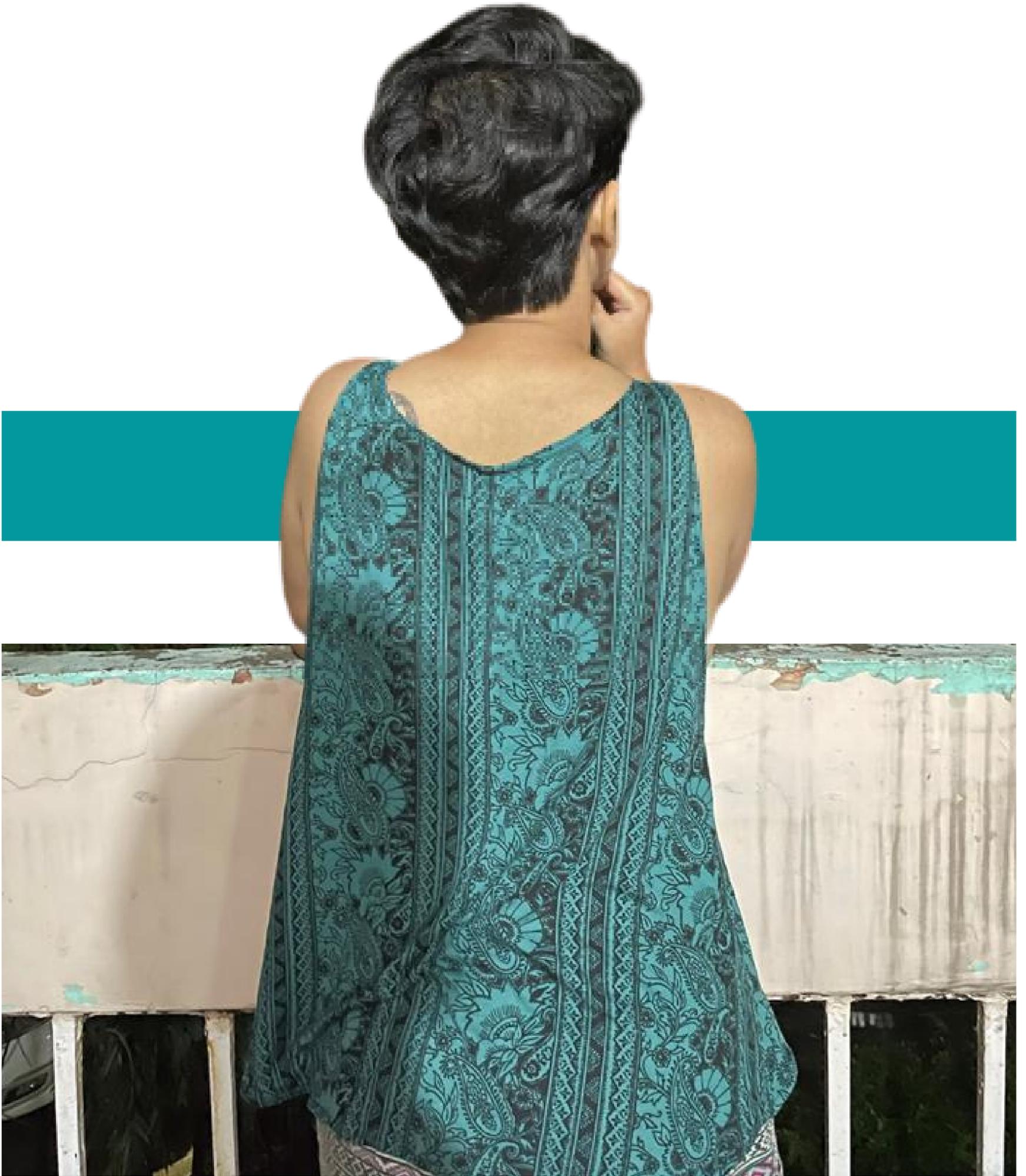
In the celebration of festivities at school – notably the traditional Assamese Bihu festival – she would be left out of the dance troupes. Everyone would wear the traditional Assamese *mekhela sador* whereas she did not own one. Her mother even bought her one to assuage any feelings of being ‘left out.’ No one in her family had the courage to tell her that she did not have to wear a *mekhela*. In hindsight, she discerns that oppression had been normalised in her childhood. This memory is lodged beneath the darkest depths of her self, her unconscious.

Queerness is another elemental aspect of Aparajita’s life which she has to navigate as an “other”. Her identity and desires as a bisexual woman were suppressed in her adolescence. She always wanted to explore her identity and desires—to love women, to dress differently, to have a chic expression. She instead carried them in the covert corners of her world; they moved and eventually grew with her although she wishes to go back in time to unearth her queerness which was erased by the patriarchal structures of Guwahati. Until recent times, Guwahati did not provide a space for queer youth like her. In her school, any discussion surrounding LGBTQ+ identities was viewed as “disgusting”. She suppressed her true self both at home and in society.

Aparajita’s journey away from Guwahati to Delhi was a kind of metamorphosis for her queer and ethnic identities; it led her to discover newer avenues for expression. She attended her first Pride Parade in Delhi. Her jocundity, smile and euphoria paints for me her joy of being able to experience her repressed desires and emotions. She became increasingly involved in organising poetry events for queer gatherings; her newfound experience of an atmosphere of “acceptance” did wonders for her.

In Assam she never saw herself as part of any queer collectives such as Xukia or Xommonoy. Something about Guwahati was not conducive for her expression. It was perhaps the suppression of her queer childhood, the constant othering in school, or the generational trauma she carried with her that made it difficult for her identities and desires to breathe in Guwahati. But it changed with the Guwahati Queer Pride Parade. She was away from the city for eight years, and it was exhilarating and revelatory to see a raging movement. Guwahati was thus immediately reframed in her experiences; now there was a sense of validation about her identity. Aparajita’s experience contextualises the Queer Parade as a moment not just for members of the community to express their queer identity, but also a moment to express anything viewed as “unacceptable,” even ethnic identities.

What Aparajita had witnessed in Delhi was the formation of solidarity with people from all over the country. The freedom of expression in university spaces had opened newer gates of exploration—agency over choice of clothing, creative expression, sexual and romantic freedom. To some these might seem banal, but to Aparajita they were significant. The idea of “home” that had eluded her for long as an Assamese Bengali, now found prominence, not necessarily in strictly spatial terms but in psychological terms. The newfound community spirit contributed to this meaning of “home”. This aided her mental wellbeing. Delhi became a space of interaction with people from diverse backgrounds, cultures and experiences. There were other “dislocated” people with similar histories of othering, migration and even citizenship who became points of embrace and empathy. The shared sense of homelessness became an anchoring point, mentally. Aparajita recalls this as a turning point in her life: when people converge from the same space of trauma, there exists an intimate, unsaid bond in relationships.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF APARAJITA

She felt more at ease in her interpersonal and sexual relationships with people from Guwahati. While a significant shift had occurred in her perceptions and comfort levels, when it came to intimacy there still was a lingering mistrust related to her Bengali queer identity adversely affecting her desire and psychological well-being.

The discourse of identity politics in Assam has never adequately considered the multiplicity of experiences and complex questions of belonging such as Aparajita's.

Throughout the years, related issues such as the living conditions, trauma and experiences of descendants and the othering they have been subjected to—have largely been ignored in favour of a strict indigenous-immigrant binary.

Aparajita is no less of an Assamese than anyone. She belongs to this community like anybody else, and was born here. She needn't qualify certain criteria to be accepted into the community. The hills are hers as much as they are anybody else's. She speaks the same language, crosses the same Brahmaputra, and enjoys the same *pitha*.

অসমৰ এক 'অন্য' : আতংক, পৰিচয়, ইতিহাস আৰু ৰাজনীতি

জ্যোতিৰ্ময় জিষ্ণু

প্ৰ

ৰোচিত সতৰ্কতা : আতংক, ৰক্তপাত আৰু হিংসাৰ
প্ৰসঙ্গ উল্লেখিত।

..... তেনে সময়তে মোৰ বংশ পৰিয়ালৰ লগতে বাংলাদেশৰ
পৰা অবৈধ ভাৱে সীমা পাৰ কৰা বঙালী লোকে আজি
আশ্ৰয়ৰ বাবে কম্পমান....

কম্পিত আৰু উত্তেজিত স্বৰেৰে কৈ উঠা অপৰাজিতাৰ এই
কথাষাৰে তেওঁৰ মন আৰু মস্তিষ্কৰ সমগ্ৰ বেদনা একেলগে
প্ৰতিফলন কৰিলে। অপৰাজিতাৰ এই এশাৰী কথাই দশক
জোৰা এক আতংকৰ মুক্ত প্ৰকাশ বুলি কলেও হয়তো বঢ়াই
কোৱা নহব।

২০২১ বৰ্ষৰ এপ্ৰিল মাহৰ কোনো এক শীতল সন্ধ্যাত
অপৰাজিতা দে ব আৰু মোৰ সাক্ষাৎ হৈছিল। নিৰ্ধাৰিত
সময়তকৈ অলপ পলম হোৱা বাবে তেওঁ ক্ষমা বিচাৰিলে।
কিন্তু, আবেলি লৈকে চাকৰিৰ বোজা শেষ কৰি আমাৰ এই
বিশেষ ঠাইডোখৰ লৈ অহাটোৱেই যথেষ্ট, তাতে অলপ পলম
হোৱাত মই অকণো আচৰিত হোৱা নাই, ই স্বাভাৱিক। যি
সময়ত তাতে ক'ভিডৰ দ্বিতীয় ঢৌ সমাগত আৰু আক্ৰান্তৰ
সংখ্যা প্ৰতিদিনে যিটো হাৰত বাঢ়িবলৈ ধৰিছে , তেনে
সময়ত তেওঁ মোক এইকন সময় দিয়াই যথেষ্ট বুলি মই
ভাবো। কিছু সুস্বাদু খাদ্য, কিছু কৌতুক, মোৰ বিশ্ববিদ্যালয়ৰ
আৰু তেওঁৰ চাকৰিৰ ব্যংগৰে আমাৰ কথাই পাতনি
মেলিলে। আমাৰ জীৱন, বুৰঞ্জী, ৰাজনীতি, সমস্যাৰে
ভাৰাক্ৰান্ত এই পৃথিৱী আদিৰ কথা অপৰাজিতাই সাৱলীল
ভাৱে যেতিয়া কৈ গ'ল অসমীয়া ভাষা আৰু ইয়াৰে স্থানীয়
অল্লীল শব্দ কেইটা তেওঁৰ মুখত খুব ধুনীয়াকৈ ৰিজালে।

তেওঁ মোৰ লগত কি ভাষাত কথা পাতিছে সেয়া আন
পৰিস্থিতিত হয়তো কোনো লক্ষণীয় কথা নহ'লহেঁতেন , কিন্তু
তেওঁৰ বঙালী পৰিচয় আৰু অসমৰ ভাষা আৰু জাতীয়
আবেগ ৰঞ্জিত উত্তেজিত ইতিহাসৰ বাবে তেওঁ সম্পূৰ্ণ শুদ্ধ
অসমীয়া কোৱাটো নিশ্চয় উল্লেখযোগ্য।

সেই সন্ধ্যাটোৰ কোমল ভাজত অপৰাজিতাই নিখুঁত ভাৱে বৈ
গল তেওঁৰ জীৱনৰ, তেওঁৰ পৰিয়ালৰ ইতিহাস আৰু
আতংকৰ আঁত হেৰুওৱা সুতাবোৰ। ক্ৰমাৎ যেনেকৈ
তেওঁৰ জীৱন খোল খাই গৈ থাকিল মই অনুভৱ কৰিলোঁ যে
তেওঁ কৈ থকা কথাবোৰ আৰু সময়ৰ যি ক্ষণত আমি থিয়
হৈ আছোঁ তাৰ মাজত কেইবা দশকৰো ব্যৱধান আছে।
সাৱলীল ভাৱে কৈ যোৱা তেওঁৰ কথাবোৰে মোক এইয়া
বিশ্বাস কৰাইছে যে তেওঁ এতিয়া নিজৰ পৰিয়ালৰ মৰ্মান্তিক
ইতিহাসৰ এক অবিচ্ছেদ্য অংগ হৈ পৰিছে।

অপৰাজিতাৰ ককাক - আইতাকে ভাৰত পাকিস্তানৰ
বিভাজন ৰ সময়ত বৰ্তমানৰ বাংলাদেশৰ কোমিলা
জিলাৰ পৰা শৰণাৰ্থী হিচাপে অসমলৈ আহিছিল। আজি
অপৰাজিতাহঁত যত থাকে সেই অঞ্চলটোত তেওঁলোকে
নিজৰ নতুন ঘৰখন সাজিলে। বিভাজন যে তেওঁলোকৰ
বাবে এক ভয়ংকৰ অভিজ্ঞতা আছিল, সেই অসহ্যতা
তেওঁৰ মাতত খুব স্পষ্ট হৈ পৰিছে। আতংক, ৰক্তপাত
আদিৰ স্মৃতি আজিও মানুহৰ মনত কেঁচা ঘা হৈ আছে,
যাৰ যত্ননা বংশানুক্ৰমে অপৰাজিতাহঁতৰ
কেইজনীমানলৈ নিঃসৰিত হৈছে।

তেওঁৰ ককাক আইতাহঁতৰ বাবে বিভাজন কেবল
পুৰনি ঘৰখন এৰি অহাৰ বেদনা এ নাছিল মাত্ৰ, লগতে
আছিল এখন নতুন ঘৰ সন্ধানৰ কষ্ট। শৰণাৰ্থী
স্থানান্তৰণ, গন্তব্যস্থানৰ সামাজিক ৰাজনৈতিক
বাতাবৰণ আৰু নতুন এক সংস্কৃতিৰ সৈতে অন্তঃকৰনৰ
দৰে এশ এবুৰি চিন্তাই ভাৰাক্ৰান্ত কৰিছিল তেওঁলোকক।
ইতিমধ্যে সমস্যাৰে জৰ্জৰিত হৈ থকা অসমৰ
ৰাজনৈতিক পৰিস্থিতিক এই বিভাজনে বেছি জটিল
কৰি তুলিলে। বিভাজনৰ ৭৪ বছৰ পিছতো এক
বাংলাদেশী হিচাপেএ গণ্য কৰা হয়।

ঔপনিবেশিকতাৰে প্ৰভাৱিত ঊনবিংশ আৰু বিংশ
শতিকাৰ অসম বহুতো অভিবাসীত তথা প্ৰব্ৰজিত
লোকৰ নতুন ঠিকনা হৈ পৰিছিল। এনে এক সময়ো
আহিছিল যেতিয়া অসমত বঙালী ভাষাক চৰকাৰী
ভাষাৰ মৰ্যদা দিয়া হৈছিল আৰু তাৰ বিৰোধ ত অসমীয়া
লোকে ভাষা আন্দোলনত জপিয়াই পৰিছিল। সেই
সময়ত অসমৰ সকলো চৰকাৰী উচ্চপদস্থ বিষয়া সমূহ
আছিল শিক্ষিত বঙালী লোকসকল। আৰু আমি যি
প্ৰব্ৰজনৰ কথা কৈছোঁ ই ভাৰত পাকিস্তানৰ বিভাজন ৰ
পৰা আৰম্ভ কৰি ১৯৭১ চনত বাংলাদেশৰ মুক্তি যুদ্ধৰ
সময়লৈকে চলিছিল। ই অসমীয়া মানুহ খিনিৰ মাজত
এক চেতনা জাগ্ৰত কৰি তুলিলে আৰু অসমতে
অসমীয়া সংখ্যালঘু হোৱাৰ আশঙ্কা স্পষ্টকৈ দেখা দিলে।
এই আশঙ্কাই জাতিগত সংঘৰ্ষৰ জন্ম দিয়ে, যাৰ বলি হব
লগীয়া হয় অপৰাজিতাৰ ককাকৰ প্ৰজন্মটো। ১৯৬০
চনত আৰম্ভ হোৱা বঙাল খেদা আন্দোলনত সকলো
অনা অসমীয়া বিদেশিকে ' বঙাল ' বুলি অভিহিত
কৰিলে। এই আন্দোলনৰ অন্ধ দেশহিতৈষী মনোভাৱে
ইতিমধ্যে বিভিন্ন সমস্যাৰে জুৰুলা অপৰাজিতাহঁতৰ দৰে
পৰিয়ালৰ বাবে অধিক ভয় আৰু শঙ্কাৰ সৃষ্টি কৰিলে।

দিল্লী বিশ্ববিদ্যালয়ৰ পৰা ইংৰাজী সাহিত্যত স্নাতক ২৭ বছৰীয়া অপৰাজিতা। যেতিয়া তেওঁ দিল্লীৰ কলেজত পঢ়ি আছিল, তেতিয়াই অসমত এন. আৰ. চি. ৰ নৱীকৰণ আৰু পুনৰীক্ষণ আৰম্ভ হৈছিল। এন. আৰ. চি. ৰ তথ্য ব্যৱহাৰ কৰি অসমত অবৈধ ভাৱে প্ৰব্ৰজন কৰা লোকসকলক চিনাক্ত কৰাৰ কথা কোৱা হৈছিল। কিন্তু এই প্ৰক্ৰিয়াটোত থকা ক্ৰটিৰ বাবে বিভিন্ন বঙালী ভাষী পৰিয়ালৰ নাম বহিস্কৃত হৈছে আৰু পুৰণি সেই যন্ত্ৰণা পুনৰ কুৰুকিবলৈ ধৰিছিল।

সকলো নথি পত্ৰ সঠিক ভাৱে তৈয়াৰ ৰাখিবলৈ মাকৰ নিৰন্তৰ ফোন আৰু তাতে মাকৰ মাতত তেওঁৰ ভয়ৰ বস্তুবিয়তা ফুটি উঠিছিল। তেওঁৰ মাতৃ সেই সময়ত কিমান শিলিভূত হৈছিল, সেই কথা তেওঁ স্পষ্টকৈ কৈছিল। যদিও অপৰাজিতাৰ বাবে " পদ্ধতিগত পৃথকীকৰণ "ৰ প্ৰথম অনুভূতি, কিন্তু তেওঁ জন যে তেওঁৰ অভিভাৱকে হয়তো ইয়াতকৈ ভয়ানক দিন দেখিছে, বিশেষকৈ ১৯৭৯-১৯৮৫ চনৰ অসম আন্দোলনৰ সময়ছোৱাত।

তেওঁ নিজৰ মাকৰ লগত হোৱা অসম আন্দোলনৰ আলোচনা বোৰ বিস্তাৰ ভাৱে দাঙি ধৰিলে। উগ্ৰ-জাতীয়তাবাদী দল সমূহৰ ভয়ত কেনেকৈ তেওঁলোকে ঘৰৰ ভিতৰত নিজকে বন্ধ ৰাখি নৰক যন্ত্ৰণা ভুগিব লগীয়া হৈছিল সেয়া কলে। ঘৰখন ৰক্ষা কৰিবলৈ ঘৰখনৰ সদস্য বোৰে পাল পাতি পাতি পহৰা দিব লগীয়া হৈছিল। আজিৰ অপৰাজিতাৰ মনত সাঁচ বহুৱা সেই দাগবোৰ বুজিবলৈ এই বৰ্ণনবোৰ নিশ্চয়কৈ অপৰিহাৰ্য্য।

অসমত এক " অন্য " হিচাপে অপৰাজিতাৰ স্থিতি ২০১৯ ৰ ডিচেম্বৰ ত বেছি স্পষ্ট হৈ পৰিল। এন. আৰ. চি. ত যদিও তেওঁলোকৰ পৰিয়াল অন্তৰ্ভুক্ত হ'ল, মানুহৰ মনত চাগে আজিলৈ নহ'ল। ২৪ মাৰ্চ ১৯৭১ চনৰ পিছত অসমলৈ অবৈধ ভাৱে প্ৰব্ৰজন কৰা বাংলাদেশৰ লোকসকলক সচৰাচৰ ' মিয়া ' বুলি জনা যায় , যাৰ বাহ্যিক পৰিচয় এইয়াই যে তেওঁলোক ইছলাম ধৰ্মাৱলম্বী আৰু বঙালী ভাষী। এই ধাৰণাত তেওঁলোকৰ ভাৰতীয় হোৱা নোহোৱা কথাটো সাধাৰণ ৰাইজে আওকাণ কৰে আৰু বিভেদতা চলাই যায়। এন. আৰ . চি ৰ সাম্প্ৰদায়িক দিশটো যদি বাদ দিয়াও যায়, ২০১৯ ৰ "কা" বিৰোধী আন্দোলনত এইয়া স্পষ্ট হৈ যায় যে সৰ্ব ধৰ্ম নিৰ্বিশেষে কোনো বহিৰাগতকে আঁকোৱালি লবলৈ অসম সাজু নহয়।

এনে সময়তে অপৰাজিতা তাই হঠাতে নিজকে নিজৰ বন্ধু বৰ্গৰ পৰা ' অন্য ' হৈ যোৱাৰ অনুভৱ কৰিলে। হঠাতে তেওঁলোক বিদেশী আৰু বাংলাদেশী বহিষ্কাৰৰ প্ৰতি জাগ্ৰত হৈ উঠিল।

তেওঁৰ চোচিয়েল মিডিয়া বিদেশী দ্বেষী বৰ্তাৰে ভৰি পৰিল। যেতিয়া তেওঁৰ অতিকৈ পৰিচিত ব্যক্তি এজনে এটা এনেকুৱা কবিতা দিলে, যিয়ে তেওঁৰ অসমৰ প্ৰতি থকা আত্মীয় তাৰ উপৰত প্ৰশ্ন তুলিলে, তেওঁ নিজৰ ইন্টাগ্ৰাম একাউন্ট বন্ধ কৰাৰ বাহিৰে আন বিকল্প ভাবি নাপালে। পিছলৈ তেওঁ তাৰে উত্তৰত লিখিলে:

....." যেতিয়া মোৰ শ্ৰেণীৰ অসমীয়া ছাত্ৰ ছাত্ৰীবোৰে মোক " বাংলাদেশী " , " মিয়া " বা " বঙাল " বুলি জোকাইছিল বাকৰুদ্ধতা তেতিয়াও আছিল ... এটা সময়ত অসমৰ আমাৰ উপৰত দয়া উপজিছিল..... অসমে মোৰ ককাক এটি সৰু চাকৰি আৰু বাসস্থান দিছিলে। আমি সমাজৰ নিম্নতম বৰ্গৰ এজন আছিলোঁ আৰু আমাক সেয়া কোনো কালে পাহৰিব দিয়া নহয় যে আমি অসমৰ কেৱল শৰণাৰ্থী আছিলোঁ ".....

কা বিৰোধী আন্দোলন চলি থকা সময়ত অপৰাজিতাৰ বেংক বিষয়া মাতৃয়ে অফিচৰ পৰা ঘৰলৈ যোৱাত নিজৰ সুৰক্ষাক লৈ চিন্তিত হৈ পৰিছিল। যেতিয়া অপৰাজিতাই এই কথা কলে, তেতিয়া এটা কথাই মোক দকৈ আঘাত কৰিলে যে এই ৰাজনীতিয়ে আমাৰ দৈনন্দিন জীৱন বাৰুকৈয়ে প্ৰভাৱিত কৰে, লাগিলে লোকে যিয়েই ন্যায্যতা প্ৰতিপন্ন নকৰক কিয় । কৰ্মস্থানৰ পৰা বাসস্থান লৈ যোৱাত যদি অসুৰক্ষিত, তেন্তে ই যন্ত্ৰণাৰ চৰম পৰ্যায়।

বঙালী হিচাপে বাল্যকালৰ পৰাই এক ভিন্নতাৰ অপৰাজিতা ই সন্মুখীন হৈ আহিছে। স্কুলৰ আৰম্ভণি কালচোৱাৰ পৰাই তেওঁক তেওঁৰ ব্যৱহাৰিক আৰু খাদ্যাভ্যাস আদিৰ দ্বাৰা তেওঁৰ বঙালী পৰিচয়ৰ বাবে ভিন্ন ধৰণে উৎপীড়ন কৰা হৈছে। " বঙাল " এক অশ্লীল গালি ৰূপে ব্যৱহাৰ হোৱা দেখি অপৰাজিতাই নিজৰ বঙালী শিপাৰ কথা সদায় লুকুৱাই ৰাখিবলৈ চেষ্টা কৰিছিল। অসমীয়া সংস্কৃতিৰ লগত লগতে নিজকে ঢাল খুৱাবলৈ যাওঁতে কোনো পৰ্য্যায়ত কেনেকৈ নিজৰ বঙালী পৰিচয় ক মচিবলৈ আৰম্ভ কৰি দিলে , তেওঁ নিজেও নাজানে। তেওঁ যেতিয়া এই পৰিচয়ৰ কথা কৈছিল, মই নিজেও চাগে কোনো কোনো ক্ষেত্ৰত মোৰ নিজৰ অৰ্ধ অসমীয়া পৰিচয় ৰ সৈতে এই পৰিস্থিতিক ৰিজাব পাৰিছো। কিন্তু হয়তো মই কিছু পৰিমাণে এক উন্নত বাতাবৰণ পাইছিলো, যাৰ বাবে মই নিজৰ শিক্ষা জীৱনত নিজৰ পৰিচয় গুপ্ত ৰাখিব লগীয়া হোৱা নাছিল। এই বিভেদ ৰ কথাৰ পৰা অজ্ঞত থকাটোও এক বিশেষাধিকাৰ, যিটো অপৰাজিতাৰ নাছিল।

তেওঁ সেই সৰু সৰু ঘটনাবোৰ মনত পেলাইছিল, যিয়ে এই বিবিধতা তেওঁৰ জীৱনত আনিছিল। যেতিয়া বিদ্যালয়ত কোনো অনুষ্ঠান উদযাপন কৰা হয়, যেনে বিহু, তেওঁক বিহুৱা দলৰ পৰা বাহিৰত ৰখা হৈছিল। তেওঁৰ ঘৰত নথকা মেখেলা চাদৰ তেওঁৰ সমন্যিবোৰে স্কুলত পিন্ধি আহিছিল। তেওঁৰ মনত আঘাত নাপাবলৈ মাকে তেওঁক এঘোৰ মেখেলা চাদৰ কিনিও দিছিল। তেতিয়া হয়তো এই কথা কবলৈ তেওঁৰ পৰিয়ালত কাৰোৱেই সাহসেই হোৱা নাছিল যে সমাজৰ এজন হবলৈ তেওঁলোকৰ নিচিনা বস্ত্ৰ ধাৰণ কৰাধৰ কোনো বাস্তৱিক প্ৰয়োজনীয়তা নাই। হয়তো তেওঁ আজি নিজৰ শৈশৱ কালতো প্ৰতিফলিত কৰিলে দেখিব যে সেই সময়ত সকলোৱে এই অত্যাচাৰ ক স্বাভাৱিক কৰি পেলাইছিল। এই স্বাভাৱিকতা নিশ্চয় ইতিহাস আৰু আতংকই সৃষ্টি কৰা স্থায়ী আঘাতৰ এক প্ৰতিচ্ছবি।

অপৰাজিতাৰ আন এক পৰিচয় যাৰ লগত তেওঁ নিৰন্তৰ যুঁজিব লগীয়া হৈছে, সেয়া হৈছে তেওঁৰ কুয়েৰ পৰিচয়। আজি ২৭ বছৰ বয়সত যদিও তেওঁ নিজকে এক উভয়কামি স্ত্ৰী ৰূপে আত্মপ্ৰকাশ কৰিছে, নিঃসন্দেহে নিজৰ বাল্যকালত তেওঁৰ এই পৰিচয় ক তেওঁ ঢাকি ৰাখিছিল। নিজৰ প্ৰকৃত যৌন পৰিচয়ৰ লগত সহবাস কৰাত তেওঁ বিভিন্ন সমস্যাৰ সন্মুখীন হৈছিল, পোছাক পছন্দ কৰা তাৰ এক প্ৰধান সমস্যা। এক মৃদু হাঁহিৰ সৈতে তেওঁ মোক কয় যে সম্ভৱ হলে তেওঁ তেওঁৰ কিশোৰী অৱস্থালৈ পুনৰ উভতি গৈ নিজৰ বিভিন্ন পৰিচয়ৰ সৈতে অন্বেষণ কৰিব খোজে। গুৱাহাটী টো সেই সময়ত কুয়েৰ পৰিচয় ক লৈ ৰঠাওঁত বিশেষ সজাগতা নাছিল। স্কুল, ঘৰ বা যিকোনো অন্য ঠাইত এল. জি. বি. কু য়+ পৰিচয়ৰ কথা পতাটো 'ঘৃণনীয়' বুলি গণ্য কৰা হৈছিল। এক সৰ্ব দমনীয় পৰিচয়ৰ সৈতে জীয়াই থকাটো কিমান পিড়াত্মক হব পাৰে, সেয়া তেওঁৰ কথাত স্পষ্ট হৈ পৰিছিল।

যেতিয়া তেওঁ উচ্চ শিক্ষাৰ বাবে দিল্লীলৈ গ'ল, তেওঁৰ জাতীয় তথা যৌন পৰিচয়ে এক নতুন দিগন্ত পালে। নিজৰ চহৰ আৰু ঘৰৰ চাৰিবেৰৰ সম্পূৰ্ণ বিপৰীত বিশ্ববিদ্যালয়ৰ পৰিবেশে তেওঁক নিজকে প্ৰকাশ কৰাৰ বিভিন্ন মাধ্যম দিলে। তেওঁ তেওঁৰ জীৱনৰ প্ৰথম গৌৰৱ যাত্ৰা (Pride Parade) দিল্লীতেই অংশগ্ৰহণ কৰিলে আৰু বিভিন্ন অনুষ্ঠানৰ লগতে কাব্যিক অনুষ্ঠানৰ আয়োজক হৈ পৰিল। এক নতুন গ্ৰহণযোগ্যতাৰ পৰিবেশত তেওঁ যি নব প্ৰকাশ কৰিব পালে, সেই কথা কওঁতে তেওঁৰ চকুজুৰি উজ্জ্বল হৈ উঠিল।

অসমত কিন্তু তেওঁ অসমৰ কুয়েৰ সামূহিক যেনে সুকীয়া বা সমন্বয় ৰ লগত কেতিয়াও নিজকে জড়িত কৰিব পৰা নাছিল। যিখন চহৰে তেওঁৰ প্ৰতিটো পৰিচয়কে দমন কৰিবলৈ চেষ্টা কৰিছিল, সেই চহৰে যে কেতিয়াবা সকলকে আঁকোৱালি ল'ব পাৰিব, সেয়া তেওঁৰ কল্পনাত আছিল।

কিন্তু ২০২১ বৰ্ষৰ গুৱাহাটী কুয়েৰ গৌৰৱ যাত্ৰাই সকলো সলনি কৰি দিলে। তেওঁ গুৱাহাটীৰ পৰা ৮ বছৰ দুৰত আছিল, আৰু এই ৮ বছৰত গুৱাহাটীৰ এই ঋণাত্মক পৰিবৰ্তনে তেওঁৰ মন পুলকিত কৰি তুলিলে। এই নতুন গুৱাহাটীখনে এতিয়া তেওঁৰ যৌন পৰিচয় ক আঁকোৱালি লৈছে, আদৰি লৈছে তেওঁৰ সত্ত্বাক আৰু সমাধান কৰিব বিচাৰিছে তেওঁৰ অন্তৰৰ নিভৃত কোণত কুৰুকি থকা সমস্যাবোৰৰ। এক প্ৰত্যক্ষদৰ্শী হিচাপে মই নিজেও কব পাৰোঁ যে কুয়েৰ গৌৰৱ যাত্ৰাই যে কেৱল নিজৰ ভিন্ন যৌন পৰিচয়ৰে মুক্ত প্ৰকাশ তেনে নহয়, ই সমাজৰ যিকোনো 'অগ্ৰাহ্যতা'কে আঁকোৱালি লোৱা বুজাই। অপৰাজিতাৰ ক্ষেত্ৰত এইয়া তেওঁৰ জাতীয় পৰিচয়ৰ স্বীকৃতিও আছিল।

দিল্লীত তেওঁ যি দেখিলে, সেয়া আছিল দেশৰ বিভিন্ন প্ৰান্তৰ পৰা আহি গোট খোৱা মানুহৰ এক সংহতি। এই পৰিবেশে তেওঁক বিভিন্ন ধৰণৰ বক্তৃতা স্বাধীনতা প্ৰদান কৰিলে। উপৰুৱাকৈ চালে সেয়া নিচেই সাধাৰণ যেন লাগিলেও, সেয়া অত্যন্ত জৰুৰী আছিল। সেয়ে নিজৰ সাজ পোচাক বাছনি কৰাৰ স্বাধীনতা, নিজৰ সৃষ্টিকামি মনৰ প্ৰকাশ, যৌন আৰু ৰোমান্টিক স্বাধীনতাই তেওঁৰ জীৱনত এক নতুন উৎসাহ জগালে। অসমীয়া বঙালী হিচাপে তেওঁৰ মনৰ পৰা 'আপোন ঘৰ' ৰ যি প্ৰতিচ্ছবি হেৰুৱাই যোৱাৰ উপক্ৰম হৈছিল, সেয়া স্থানিক ভাৱে নহলেও মানসিক ভাৱে পুনৰ উভতি আহিছে। আপোন ঘৰৰ এই অৰ্থত তেওঁৰ নৱ আৱিষ্কৃত এই সংহতিয়ে এক মুখ্য ভূমিকা পালন কৰিছে। ই তেওঁৰ মানসিক সুষ্ঠুতা উন্নত কৰিছে। বিভিন্ন পটভূমি, সংস্কৃতি আৰু অনুভৱ বহন কৰা লোকসকলৰ সৈতে আন্তঃক্ৰিয়া কৰাৰ এক মাধ্যম হৈ পৰিল দিল্লী। একেধৰণৰ পৃথকীকৰণ, প্ৰব্ৰজন আৰু প্ৰশ্নবোধক নাগৰিকত্ব ৰ ইতিহাস থকা বিভিন্ন 'স্থানান্তৰিত বিচ্যুত' লোক সকলে এজনে আন জনক আলিঙ্গন কৰিছে, সহানুভূতি দৰ্শাইছে। মানসিকভাৱে তেওঁলোকে যি গৃহহীনতাত ভুগিছিল, তেওঁলোকৰ সেই বেদনাদায়ক যাত্ৰাই একে ঠাইতে লংগৰ পেলাইছিল। যেতিয়া একেই আতংক ৰে জৰ্জৰিত ব্যক্তি সকল একত্ৰিত হয়, তাতে সূচনা হয় নতুন বন্ধুত্বৰ আৰু এইয়া আছিল অপৰাজিতাৰ জীৱনৰ বাবে ও এক নিৰ্ণায়ক মুহূৰ্ত।

তেওঁ মোক কৈছিল যে যদিও তেওঁ ভাৰতৰ বিভিন্ন মানুহৰ লগত পৰিচিত, কিন্তু যিকোনো অন্তঃব্যক্তিগত আৰু যৌন সম্বন্ধ ৰ বাবে তেওঁ গুৱাহাটীৰ মানুহৰ লগতেই তেওঁ বেছি আত্মপ্ৰকাশ কৰিব পাৰে।

অন্তৰংগ তাৰ সময়ছোৱাত তেওঁৰ মনৰ ধ্যান ধাৰণা আৰু আত্মপ্ৰকাশৰ স্তৰে এক নতুন দিগন্তৰ সূচনা কৰে। একে সময়তে তেওঁ এইয়া ও মানি লব লগীয়া হৈছে যে, তেওঁৰ বঙালী কুয়েৰ পৰিচয় ক লৈ সদায় এক অবিশ্বাস থাকেই, যিয়ে তেওঁৰ অভিক্ৰম আৰু মানসিক সুস্থতাত ধনাত্মক প্ৰভাৱ পেলাইছে।

অসম ত যি পৰিচয় কেন্দ্ৰিক ৰাজনীতি চলি আছে, সি অপৰাজিতাৰ নিচিনা বহুমুখী সমস্যা সমূহৰ কথা সন্ধান কৰিবলৈ এতিয়া ও বাকী আছে। প্ৰব্ৰজনৰ ঐতিহাসিক পটভূমি আজি তেওঁলোকৰ বংশ ধৰ সকলৰ সত্যতাত কৈ বহুত দুৰত। এই কেইবছৰৰ গোটেই সময় চোৱা ত জীৱন ধাৰণৰ পৰিস্থিতি, আতংক আৰু নতুন নতুন অনুভৱেৰে তেওঁলোক যি বহুমুখী পৃথকীকৰণ ৰ সন্মুখীন হব লগীয়া হৈছিল, তাক নাম মাত্ৰ থলুৱা - বহিৰাগত এই দুই ভাগত ভগাই খোৱা ই দেখা গল। ফলস্বৰূপে এইয়া জীৱন্ত মানুহৰ পিড়ীত বাস্তৱ হৈ পৰিল।

তেওঁৰ নিজৰ ভাষাত, অপৰাজিতা আজি কোনো মানুহতকৈ কম অসমীয়া নহয়। তেওঁ ও এই অসমীয়া জাতিৰ সিমানেই অংশ যিমান এই মাটিত জন্মা আন এজন। এই সম্প্ৰদায়ৰ বুলি স্বীকৃতি পাবলৈ, তেওঁ কোনো বিশেষ মানদণ্ড অতিক্ৰম কৰিব নালাগে। এই পাহাৰ, এই নদী তেওঁৰো সিমানেই আপোন, যিমান আপোনাৰ বা মোৰ। তেওঁৰো সেই একেই ভাষা কয়, এই ব্ৰহ্মপুত্ৰই তেওঁক একেই সমান উতনুৱা কৰে যিমান আপোনাক বা মোক। একেই পিঠা ভালপোৱা অপৰাজিতা আজি নিঃসন্দেহে এক অসমীয়া।

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*I'm Not Your Chink Kink.
F**k Your Mainland Gaze*

Ruth's Story

CHHANI

*People here in mainland India don't talk,
they just stare; I am the
exact formulation of what they
don't want their children to get
influenced by.*

Delhi wasn't the utopia I believed it would be. Leaving behind my tumultuous relationship with Aizawl for a new affair, I thought that I would finally find the freedom, independence, and acceptance that Delhi offered in my wistful daydreams. I didn't realise then that freedom came with loneliness; independence with overwhelming responsibility; and that my identity would never be fully accepted.

Uprooting my life and separating myself from family and friends back home made me feel like a small fish drifting alone in the capital's aquarium. It was the opposite of how I'd felt in Aizawl. There, I was a duck trying to float in a fish bowl, squeezed in at the sides by homophobic teachers and relentlessly conservative Christian-folk who preached God's love only to turn around and spread hate all the same. But I felt secure in my identity, never having to question what it meant to be Mizo, never really having to confront that part of who I was.

Leaving home meant leaving behind half of that Mizo identity; in a new environment, I didn't know who I was supposed to be, what the new version of Ruth would look like.

Not only that, I suddenly had to learn how to pay my bills, take myself to the hospital, and make sure I was taking care of my body and mind. The overwhelming sense of sudden responsibility and lack of self-clarity especially scarred my first few years in Delhi and made many days mentally and physically exhausting.

Everywhere I went, I was reminded that I was different, an exception, unwelcome. It didn't end at the invasive stares of the public - it followed me to private spaces where I was charged higher prices for rent, restricted from eating meat or "smelly" food by landlords, or taken advantage of because I didn't speak Hindi fluently. Trying to navigate both the uncertainties of my new life and the blatant discrimination I faced everyday scared me, but more than that, it angered me.

*Is it the colour of my skin or my
unconventional style?*

*Is it that my collarbone is
showing a bit?*

*Or is it my thunder thighs that
intimidates you?*

Why? More often than not, the question punctuated my thoughts. Why do people stare at me when I'm walking down the street? Why do they judge me before they know me?



ARTWORK BY RIVCA LALNUNGSANGI

I couldn't hide my facial features, especially not my "chinki" eyes. My style was too different. I was not the timid, soft-spoken Northeastern girl they thought I was and wanted me to be.

I was familiar with internalising another person's gaze, but I was observed in a completely different manner in Delhi than I was in Aizawl. Growing up, I was very self-conscious about my body as I was branded the "chubby" kid in school and was incessantly teased for how I looked. Clinging on to me like a piece of gum stuck in my hair, my insecurities followed me to Delhi, where I carried around this baggage of self-doubt wherever I went. In Delhi, the mainlander's gaze on my body, often filled with shameless desire or prejudice and hatred, added weight to my self-image anxieties.

My very strangeness both insulated and isolated me. I wanted to fit in, but also knew that I didn't want to lose myself by doing so. Rather than letting my differences shelter in a corner, I made sure my clothes, my piercings, and my opinions stood tall. My voice deserved a space to scream and be heard in the city, even if I had to lay the bricks of the place myself. Slowly, I chipped away at the layers of fear I had cocooned myself in and began to see the city for what it could be.

I came to love the sheer anonymity that Delhi allowed for and was exhilarated that I didn't have to cower at the discrimination I faced. If they stared, I glared back, and continued to lay the foundation, brick by brick, for myself

and hoped it would hold other Northeasterners too. I found supportive friends, formed exciting relationships, and learned that I could be tough and self-assured, not just a quiet Mizo girl hiding in the shadows of Delhi's skyscrapers. I didn't look for validation for who I was, neither as a Mizo nor as a bisexual woman, yet it was liberating to find people whom I could relate to, especially ones who cared and were not shy to talk about social issues.

Delhi was also where I found the space to start Nazariya, a pan-Indian gay-straight alliance and social movement. My friends and I formed Nazariya because we felt that educational institutions in Delhi needed to have a safe space for LGBTQ+ individuals. Through this platform, we have been able to make an impact by claiming a space and increasing visibility for the queer community.

*They stare at my lips. Pierced.
I look at them and stare at their
eyes, toes to head and then back
again
whispering to myself...
"I have the blood of headhunters
running in my veins and I will eat
you whole"*

A few years later, the space I had painstakingly built for myself slowly started closing down on me. I was constantly reminded that I was "just" a Northeastern woman, a token badge of diversity in the upper-caste, North-Indian dominated liberal spaces of Delhi. Older members of the LGBTQ+ community particularly felt threatened by me - a leader who was disadvantaged both ethnically and because of her gender - as they heard my voice in spaces that they once thought were solely theirs. In a community predominantly led by mainland cis-men, my identity was constantly used to negate my leadership, my young age to insult my experience, and my opinionated voice was clearly unwelcome by many.

If they didn't question my leadership, they expected me to be perfect and unproblematic in every way. If I made mistakes, they were broadcasted to everyone in the community. There was no room for me to breathe. I either had to be perfect or expect to be publicly scrutinised for my imperfection. It made me think, "why do I try? They will never be satisfied". I feared being vulnerable and kept my pain to myself even as other Northeastern activists reached out to me. "I am grateful for your kind empathy, but my struggles are mine alone," I thought, letting my anxiety simmer until the pressure ultimately made it boil over, forcing me to take a step back from leading and participating in the community.

Then there was the blatant homophobia. Trolls on our social media platforms called us slurs, insulted our work, and went as far as to threaten me personally. On one occasion, we were organising a protest when someone threatened to dox me, to publicly expose my personal information and location. I had to hide at a friend's place for a week. That incident made me reflect on the fragility of my life and privacy, and a fear so profound took over and left me numb. The sheer fear and immense pressure that accompanies being a young queer leader does not get talked about enough. More often than not, it is thankless, unrewarding, and downright dangerous. In such moments, I thought, "who do I have but myself to turn to?"

In 2019, the silent but constant violence I faced as a queer leader led me to my breaking point. My mental health gradually worsened and I no longer felt hope or saw purpose in what I did. I simply drifted and existed, not living and not really wanting to either - not for long anyway. Finally putting myself first, I decided that it was time to take a step back and let others take the lead while I took time to regain my health. I wanted to get better and was fortunate to find a young, queer-friendly, female therapist whose professional guidance helped me navigate my jumbled thoughts and tangled wiring. My family's endless support also enabled me to seek the psychiatric help they recognised and respected that I needed.

I don't believe I have "healed" or been "cured" of my mental illness, but I have gradually built up resilience and learned how to better deal with my trauma and deeper issues. Therapy helped me, but it is not the ultimate solution. It helps if you are cooperative and have access to medication that suits your needs, but it also depends on who and what surrounds you. The people, situations, and environment around us are often out of our control and can negatively affect how we recuperate. Through all this, I am glad I have a supportive family and friends who genuinely care. I no longer loathe waking up to the mundane things that every day offers and most importantly, I see myself growing old.

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I have every right to be hostile

Despite the challenges I have faced because of who I am - a radical, queer, chinky Northeastern woman - I have made it this far because I know my worth. I will speak out, express myself, and continue to be unapologetically me. I have been silenced for too long. I have a right to be hostile.

Ka Nihna Avangin Ka Zam Lovang

Ruth's Story

TRANSLATED BY ZUALI

Khawpuiah chuan mi biak ka hlawh lo; min en liam ringawt thin

An fate tih hmuh atana an duh loh zawng zawng chu keimahah a kim

Zalenna, ka thlakhlel theih em em chu beiseiin Delhi khawpui panin Aizawl chu ka chhuahsan a. Delhi erawh chu ka rin ang a ni hauh lo. Zalenna in a ken tel, mawhphurhna sang tak leh khawharna tuar har zet mai chu Delhi ka suangtuahna mawl takahte chuan an lo lang pha ngai reng reng lo a ni.

Chhungkhat laina pawh nei lova Delhi khawpuia chen chu Aizawl nena tehkhin ralah chuan chhun leh zan anga inthlau a ni. Aizawl ah chuan zirtirtu min zah lotute leh Kristian, Pathian hmangaihna thu sawi bang lova, nunpui leh si loten hmun tin atangin min rawn nek luai luai a. Delhi ah erawh chuan tuifinriat zau taka sanghate pakhat, tui chungang lang ve tawk tawk ang maiin ka inhria a ni. Aizawl a ka nun kha zim viau mahse ka nihnaah ka Chiang a, Mizo ka nihna chu ka rilruah chuan a nghet em em mai a ni.

Mizoram ka chhuahsan rual khan Mizo ka nihna lai lian tak ka kalsan tel a lo ni reng a. Eng ang mi nge ka nih dawn a, eng ang takin nge ka la inthlak danglam dawn tih te chu ka hre lo va. Tin, a hmaa ka la tih ngai loh, mahni senso ngaihtuah te, damdawiina kal te leh ka rilru leh taksa enkawl te thleng khan ka mawhphurhnaah an lo chang vek a. Delhi ka awmtir chu harsatna min siam nasain ka rilru leh ka taksaah nghawng a nei thui hle bawka a ni.

Khawiah pawh kal ila, mi danglam, vantlang mipuiin an enhran leh an duh loh ka nihzia chu ka hrechhuak lo thei lova. Min enhranna chu khawlaiah chuan tawp mai lovin, ka nun kil tin ah min zui a. A chang leh in luah man te min chawi san tir bik thin a, a nih loh leh chawhmeh 'rimchhia' leh sa ei te min khapsak a. Hindi tawng ka thiam nal loh avanga min bum pawl te pawh an awm fo. Ka nun inbingbilet karah miin min hmuhsitna chu nitin ka hmachhawn a ngai ta mai si a. Ka thil tawn te chuan min ti hlau viau mahse, ka hlauhna ai chuan ka thinurna chuan ka rilruah hmun a luah hnem zawka a ni.

Ka vun rawng hi nge, ka inthum dan dangdai bik hi?

Ka kawr awm zau deuh hi nge ka mal a len vang?

Eng ber hian nge ti hlau che?

Engvangin nge kawnga ka kal ringawt kha hmuhnawm ber awm ziazanga min en zui vung vung thin? Engvangin nge min hriat chian hmian ka nih dan turah ngaihdan an lo neih fel der thin? An beisei leh an duh ang North-eastern nula zaidam leh inkiltawih ka ni lova, ka nihna, ka hmel a lang reng chu ka thup thei bawka hek lo.

Ka naupan lai atang tawhin midangin min hmuh dan chu ka rilruah a lian viau va, naupang dang aia ka len deuh bik vanga chhah ka nih thin in a hrin chhuah a ni a.

Mahse Delhi ah chuan min hmuh dan a dang daih a ni. Min entu te hmel ah chuan Chiang Takin itna te, chapona te leh huatna te ka hmu thei a, mahni ka inhmuh danah pawh min tibuai pha a ni.

Enhran nih chu duh lo viau thin mah ila, ka danglamna lai tak kha ka hloh phal leh si lova. Ka inchei dan te leh ka ngaihdante chu huaisen taka pholan ka thlang a, ka danglamna te kil khat a thukru mai lovin. Ngaithlatu nei lo mah ila, ka aw kha ngawihbopui mai mai atan ka phal tawh lova, Delhi chu hlauhna leh hmuhsitna hmun ringawt ni lovin a mawina lam thlir zawk ka tum a. Tichuan a tahtawl te tein ka hlauhna chu ka hneh chho a.

Tuma hriat loh leh ngaihsak hlawh lo ka nihna kha ka tana malsawmnaah ka chantir zawk a. Kawnga ka kal te hmuhdawm ti taka min entu te chu ka melh rum let mai a, zawi zawiin ka tan bakah Northeast midangte tan Delhi chu hneh zelin, kan awmna turah bu ka khuar a. Rilru tuarchhel leh mahni inrintawkna te zir chung zelin thian thate ka siam a, midangin min ngaihdan chu ngaihsak loh ka zir.

Nazariya, India ram huap gay-straight alliance (insuihkhawm) chu kei leh ka thianten kan din bawk a. Delhi a zirna inahte LGBTQ+ zirlaite an lo him zawk theih nan lan thawk a, kan hmalakna te chuan chung zirlaite tan aw a siamsakin a tanpui a ni.

*Ka hmui ka verhna an en in
Kei chuan an lu chhip atanga
an ke thlengin ka en let a
Zawitein*

*'Ka thisen zamah lu la tute thisen a luang a, a pumin
ka ei ang che'
Ka ti a.*

Kum engemawzat a han liam chuan harsa tak chung a bu ka khuarah chuan ka leng ta lo tih a rawn lang tan a. North Indian, caste sang awmkhawm kara Northeast hmeichhia pakhat 'lek' ka nihna kha min hriat nawntir fo va. Ka nihna ringawt bakah ka kum a naupan avangin hruaitu tling lovah min puh a, ka thil tawn tawh te an ngaihniam phah thin.

Ka ngaihdante ka auchhuahpui thin chu mi tam tak hnen atangin lawm a hlawh lo fo thin bawk.

Ka hruaina an sawisel loh leh mifel famkim ni turin min phut a. Thil ka tihsual hlekin mi zawng zawng hriatah tlangzarh a ni a, an duh dan ang chiah chiah ka nih loh leh min sawisel luai luai thin. Eng ang pawhin thawk nasa mah ila an lungawi dawn chuang lova, eng vangin nge an beisei ang chu phak ka la tum luih tlat le? tia inngaihtuah chang ka nei fo. Northeast atanga activist ten min tanpui an tum pawhin mahnia tuar tlawk tlawk ka thlang zawk a. 'min ngaihtuahna avangin ka lawm e, mahse ka harsatna chu mahnia ka hmachhawn tur a ni' ka ti rilru a.

Tin, pawn lam atanga sawiselna khan min chim hneh hle bawk a. Social media ah kan hmalakna te an sawichhia a, tawngkam chhe thei ang berin min rawn vin a, chang leh a mimal zawngin min rawn bei thin bawk a. Tum khat chu protest(duh loh lantirna) kan huaihawt laiin mi pakhatin ka chenna hmun leh ka mimal chanchin min tlangzarh sak dawn tiin min vau a. Min vauna avang chuan ka thiante inah kar khat bihruk ka ngaih phah. Chu thil thleng chuan ka tan fimkhur a tul lehzuai zia min ti hrechhuak a, ka la hriat ngai loh hlauhthawna chuan ka thinlung a luah khat a ni. LGBTQ+ tana rawngbawltu chan chang ten harsatna an tawh hnemzia leh an tana a hlauhawm theihzia hi sawi a hlawh nasa tawh lo. Tiang hun harsa ah hian mahni bak tu nge rin tur ka neih?

Kum 2019 ah chuan hun rei tak chhunga miin min sawiselna leh diriamna te chu ka tuar theih chin bak a thleng a. Ka rilru lam hriselna a tlakhniam tial tial rual khan ka rawngbawlinaa ka beiseina neih kha a tlakhniam tel bawk. A hlawkna ka hmu thei ta lo hial a ni. Hun eng emaw chen chu awmze nei lem lova ka vah vel mai mai hnuah chuan ka rilru lam hriselna dah pawimawh nachang ka hrechhuak a. Ka vanneih asiamin, ka rilru buaina min chin felpui theitu tur mi thiam ka hmu a, ka chhungte tanpuina chuan min pui hle bawk a ni.

Ka rilru lam buaina atanga fihlim famkim ah chuan ka inngai lova, amaherawhchu chhel te ka zir chho zel a, a hmaa ka thil tawn te leh min tibuai theitute hmachhawn ka thiam sawt bawk a ni. Mi thiam pan chu ka hlawkpui ngei a, amaherawhchu inenkawl dan tha ber a ni kher lo. Mamawh ang damdawi kan hmuh theih chuan min tanpuiin, mahnia thahnemngaih nachang hriat a tul bawk a. I awmna hmun, a boruak leh i bulhnaia mihring awmte chuan danglamna thui tak a siam thei. Ka chhungte bakah thian tha, min lainata min ngaihtuah thintu ka nei hi vannei ka intiin ka lawm hle a ni. Ka nun hi heng ka malsawmna dawnte avanga awmze nei thar a ni si a.

Ka thinrim hi a thiang a ni.

Northeast hmeichhia ka nih avangin harsatna tam tak tawk mah ila, ka inngaihhlut tawk avangin tuna ka thlen chin hi ka thleng thei a, nakin zelah pawh zam lovin ka ngaihdante ka auchhuahpui zel ang a, ka nihnaah ka zam ngai bawk hek lovang. Midang kutin ka ka hi a hup rei tawk tawh, ka thinrim hi a thiang a ni.

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Withdrawal

PAVEL SAGOLSEM



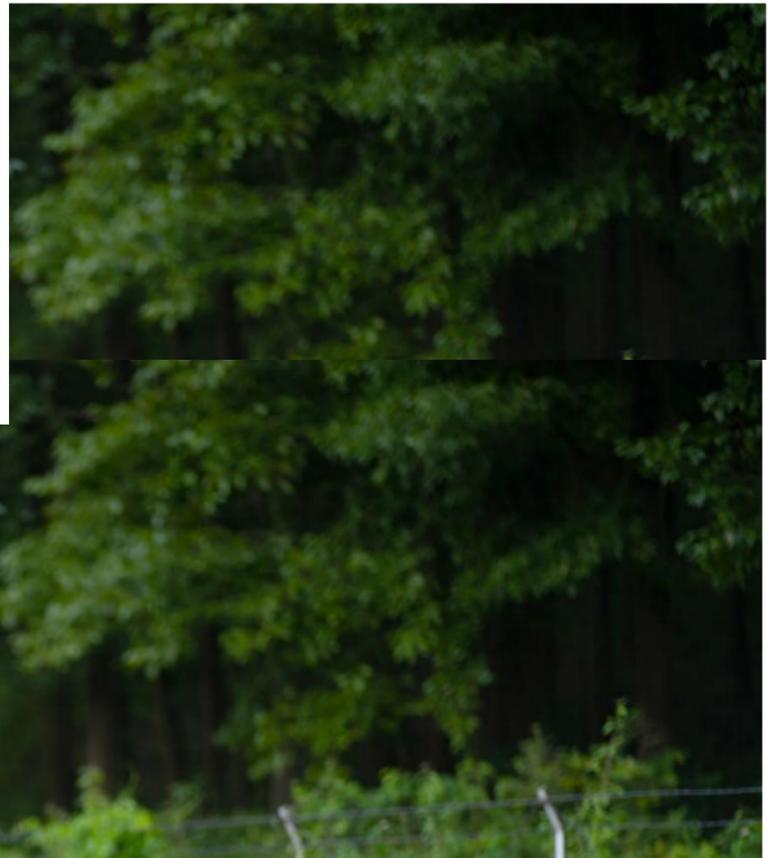
What do you do when you feel punished for no fault of yours? Or when people, you call your own, betray your wish and desire for the sake of upholding tradition and social customs and sacrifice your well-being and happiness to the “pride” of every other person around you. Every day is a constant battle for Dusk (name changed) being reminded of a past she wishes she could change but can’t, and the urge from within to leave it all behind and build a new life. She also feels trapped and crushed, wishing and waiting for people that she calls her own to stand by her.

When she was just about 16 years old, a boy she was dating at the time plotted a fake elopement, and she was forced to marry him. It was their first date. On their way back, instead of dropping her back home, he took her to one of his relative’s house, far away from the city. She asked for help from the boy’s relative to help her get back home.

The relatives didn’t comply with her demand, as they were afraid that such a thing would ‘hurt the pride and ego of the boy’. Eventually, once she returned to her house, she told her family that the entire episode was against her wish, pleading them to not marry her off. Her family and relatives were more apprehensive of the stigma of housing a daughter who had allegedly “spent a night with a boy” or in other words, “eloped with a lover.” Even her confession that it was against her wish was met with victim-blaming - “You agreed to go for a date so you brought it upon yourself.”

She had been a good student and tried to gain their empathy on the grounds of her career, but she was silenced saying that the boy’s family had agreed to let her study even after the marriage. When asked to describe how she felt then, she said she was too young and powerless and felt like a ‘puppet controlled by a remote control’.

During the days leading up to the wedding, she remembers sharing her trouble with her friends and feeling motivated to fight for herself as they sympathized with and encouraged her. She also remembers the sense of strength and confidence that her sympathizers gave waning away because of her family's continued neglect and indifference.



She kept her marital status hidden. Like her, there were a few other students who were also married. She heard fellow students talking behind their backs. The fear of shame and stigma haunted her throughout the two years of high school. In a school where hundreds of students studied, and a classroom of about a hundred, she had just three friends. She didn't want to reach out to others, and she didn't want anybody to know her or get near her.

Her teachers and mentors suggested the idea of taking legal help as she was a minor. However, she dropped the idea assuming it would add more injury to her family's feelings. She clearly remembers how the lack of empathy from her own family made her give up the hopes and wishes she had for herself.

Soon after the wedding, she was admitted to an all-girls high school. It soon became her escape from reality. She recalls how depressed she used to get as the day's classes came to an end. She was constantly triggered, and hated the auto-rickshaw parking from where she had to commute back to her marital home. Sometimes she would just go sit in a park. Even on days when the school was off, she would still put on her uniform and go to a park and sit alone. That being said, high school too was not that wonderful of an escape for her.

In the months that followed, she felt very betrayed. Her in-laws began plotting to make her quit school- loading her with more household work and cutting off her travel allowance. They spread rumours accusing her of looking for other suitors under the pretext of going to school. Her then-husband became verbally abusive, which to her felt unfair. First of all, the elopement and marriage were against her wish. She had been juggling the role of a married woman, a daughter-in-law and a student. It wasn't easy. Instead of supporting her and trying to understand her struggle, they backing out on their promises and shifted the blame to her.

She started feeling increasingly disconnected from the world, realizing how heteronormative stereotypes and gender norms do not fit into her worldview. She got more and more enraged to see how girls are always expected to give up on their dreams and lay down their life in service of the family, forced to follow tradition, and be blamed when they have an opinion and a mind of their own. The other daughters-in-law of the house would often get together to chit-chat. She never felt any resonance with and avoided such gatherings. She also avoided going out of the house as all these expectations and performance pressure started suffocating her. Soon the people of the locality started talking about her antisocial nature, making her even more reclusive. Her then-husband also didn't make her feel any better, forcing himself and his authority on her instead of treating her with love. This made her angrier. Two years passed; she completed high school and passed her board exams in first division. She was 18 then, stronger and wiser. At 16, she had no idea what marriage was, not to forget she was fighting social and filial obligations too.

Those two years had taught her the reality of marriage. She started planning her escape. She strategised on falling back on her good performance in her board exams and the pretext of wanting to prepare for the medical entrance test. She convinced her parents to ask her in-laws to let her come home and prepare for the entrance test. Finally, her parents came over one day. But, her in-laws rejected the request and her then-husband got furious and threatened to attack her with a knife in front of her parents. That incident shook her parents, and they took her back home. Her in-laws visited many times asking her to return. She appreciates her parents for finally stepping up for her, but there remain disappointments. They are not ready to listen to the ordeals she had to go through.

She has tried many times to tell her parents that she is never going back, but they seem to be waiting only for that day when she gives up and gets back together with her husband. Till date, no formal conversation regarding a legal divorce has been settled.



This also creates a sense of anxiety for her. Right now, she feels safe and protected, but what is the assurance of the future? The unpredictability of the separation and the lack of a formal divorce creates fear and apprehension in her, hampering her future plans.

All these years have changed her life completely. An outgoing girl, who loved to be surrounded by friends during her school days, always in pursuit of her interests and dreams has become a recluse seeking isolation. She says, “Back in my school days, I wanted to go to school even on Sundays just to be with friends. Now I don’t like talking to anyone, and most of the time I am lost in my own world and my phone. It feels like a battle of my own in my own world.” When she is exhausted from overthinking, she goes to a park, sits, and watches strangers go on with their lives. She says it provides her a temporary escape from her own reality; it helps her disconnect from her life. And she prefers to be alone. When I asked if she wished to share her story with people, she said, “No one has ever heard me out or tried putting themselves in my shoes. I’ve been silent for too long and now I am used to it.” She feels that even if anyone asks her now, she wouldn’t know where to begin and what to share. She feels that even if she tries to make people understand, it is easier for them to label her ‘mad’ rather than lend an ear. She adds, “Majority will always win. When you differ from the majority, you will be labeled as mad.”

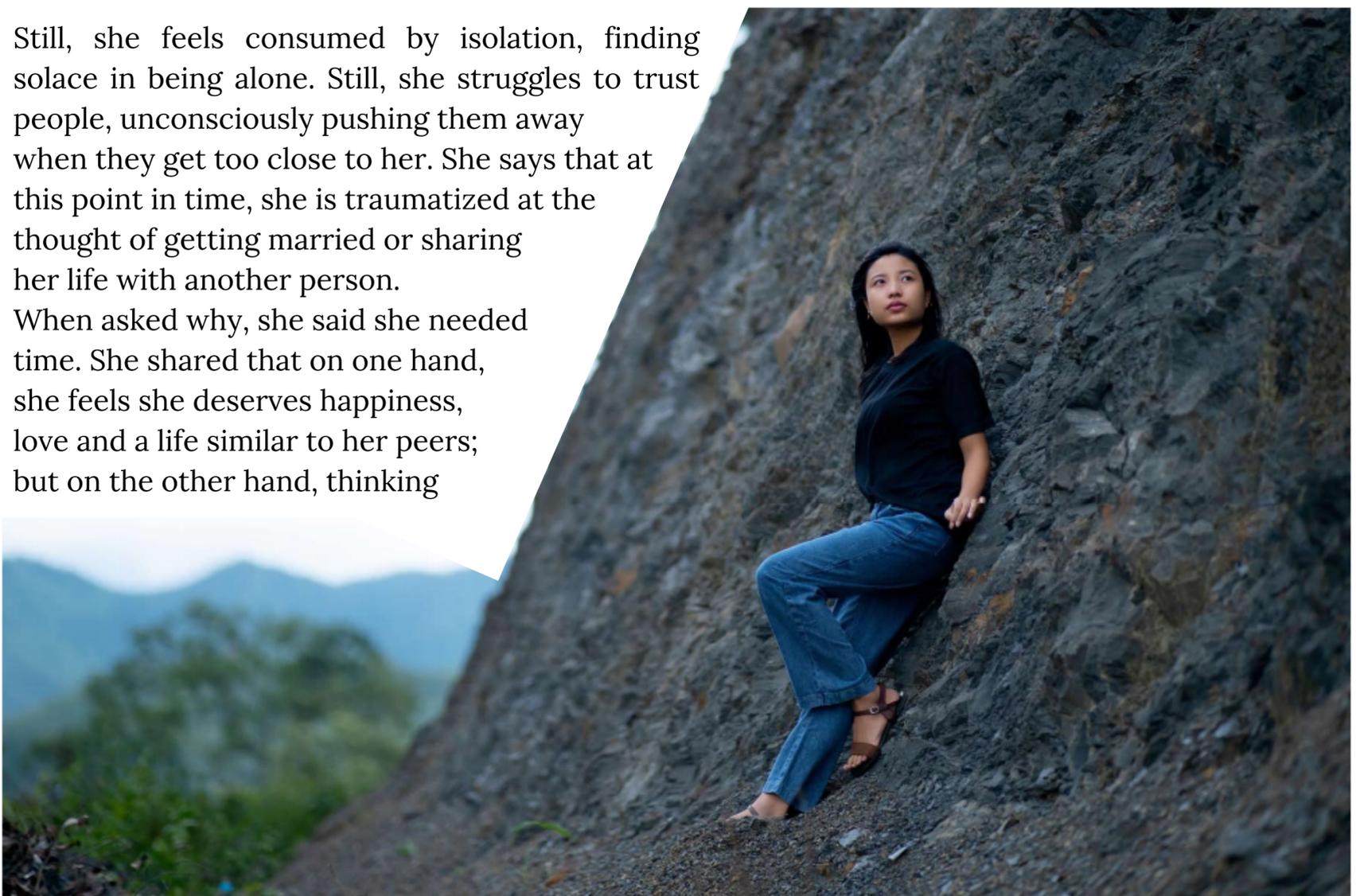
Still, she feels consumed by isolation, finding solace in being alone. Still, she struggles to trust people, unconsciously pushing them away when they get too close to her. She says that at this point in time, she is traumatized at the thought of getting married or sharing her life with another person.

When asked why, she said she needed time. She shared that on one hand, she feels she deserves happiness, love and a life similar to her peers; but on the other hand, thinking

about marriage or a relationship fills her mind with apprehensions and fear. On one hand, she wants to tell her story and make everyone understand; on the other hand she is afraid to be disappointed again as she has been so far.

Her family keeps strict surveillance on her even now. The stigma of her past haunts her. She can’t go out and mingle with friends without being called multiple times by her family. She can’t join her friends in sleepovers. When she tries to discuss her future plans with her family, they never pay her attention or engage in discussion; as though her future is nonexistent. The only thing that everyone and anyone can ever imagine about her is her past. This traps her in repentance and a sense of powerlessness. At the end of the day, the only thought that remains is that it all happened because she let others do it to her. It all happened because she was weak and a coward. It makes her very angry at herself. Added to the trauma of being married against her consent, she struggles with the stigma of a broken marriage. Amidst all this, the wish to live as an out and proud queer person seems like a distant dream. She wonders how she will ever tell her parents, and whether she will ever have the confidence to come out and face the world.

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নাঐবা

TRANSLATED BY SAPAM SWEETIE

নাহাঙ্কী নরাল করিসু লৈতনা চৈরাক ফংলবদি নহাক করি ফাওগনি? চৎনবী অমসুং খুনাই অমগী চৎন-কাঙলোন লৈরিবা অসি ঙাৰুবগীদমক নাহাঙ্কী অপাষা খুদিংমকপু কখোক্তুনা ময়ামগী অপাষা খুংনবগীদমক্তা হিংলবদি করি ফাওগনি? দস্ককী (অশেংবা মমিং নত্তে) মফমদদি নুমিং খুদিংগী হৌখিবা পুল্লিগী তাংকক অমনা তত্তনা তম্মরি, কাওখোক্তুনা অনৌবা পুল্লিগী ময়োন অমা চোংহ্নিংলবসু করিসু তৌবা ওমদরি। মহাঙ্কীনি হায়না লৈরিবা ইমুং মনুংনা মহাঙ্কীদমক লেঞ্জীকখিগদ্রা হায়না খল্লুরবদি চমম্বা অমসুং নীংবা কায়বনা পীক থল্লি। দস্ক মশাগী চহি ২০ শুরবী ইম্ফালদা লৈবী বাইসেক্সুএল নুপী অমনি। মশুং মমান্বীশিংনা মখোয়গী ইমুং মনুংগী অয়াবা অমসুং অশেংবা মশক ফোংদোকচবগী তাঞ্জা ঙাইবগী রাজবা অদুগা দস্কতি হৌখিবা তম্মলাই অমগা লাহ্লেংনরি।

মশাগী চহি ১৬ তমক শুরকপা মতমদা মহাঙ্কা খঙনজবা নুপা অমনা অহানবা থেংনবা নুমিত্তা দস্কপু নমখাক তৌবীরগা চেন্দুনা লুহোংবীখি। নুমিত্তুদা দস্কপু য়ুমদা থিনবীবগী মছত্তা নুপা অদুনা মখোয়গী অরাপ্পদা লৈবা মরী মতা অমগী য়ুমদা দস্কপু পুৰীখি। য়ুমদা থিনবীযু হায়না দস্কনা কয়ারক হ্না নুপা অদুগী মরী মতাশিংদুদা হায়জখি। অদুবু নুপা অদুগী "ইকাই খুম্বা অমসুং মায়" শোক্কনি হায়দুনা কনানসু তাবীখি। তুংদা য়ুমদা লাক্সবা মতুংদা মহাঙ্কা মশাগী অয়াবা যাওদনা মহাকপু নমদুনা ফাবনি, লুহোংবা শুকঙম ঙল্লোই হায়জরফাওবা "চেল্লুরবী নুপী", "নুপা অমগা অহিং অমা লৈমিন্নরুরবী নুপী," অমবু য়ুমদা লৈহনবা হায়বসি মীনা করি হায়নখিনি হায়না মহাঙ্কী ইমুং-মনুংনা মহাঙ্কী রা অমত্তা তাবীখি। মহাঙ্কা কয়ারক হ্না হায়জরবসু মহাকপু হঞ্জিন-হঞ্জিন ইকাইবা পীবীখি, "নশানা যানা চৎলুবদগী খোকহনজবনি" হায়না চৈবীখি। লাইরিজ্ঞা থরাই যাওবী মইরোই অমা ওইরকখিবনা মশাগী তুংগী পুল্লিগীদমক খল্লগা মহাকপু ঙাকপীযু হায়জরবসু য়ুম পাল্লবা মতুংদা লাইরীক মখা তমহনগনি হায়না নুপা ময়ুম্মা হায়রকখি। মতমদুদা করি ফাওখিবগে হংলুবদা মহাঙ্কা মতমদুদা মহাক মশাগী অপাষা অমত্তা মপুং ফানা লেপচবা ওমদ্রিবা মরম্ম "রিমোংনা চলাইবা শান্নপোং " অমা ওইখি হায়না খুল্লকখি।

লুহোংবগী মতম নকশিল্লকপদা, মহাঙ্কী অরাবা, নুংঙাইতবা, মহাঙ্কী মরুপশিংদা তমখি অদুবু মখোয়গী রাইশিং অমদি মীনুংশিনা থৌনা হাঞ্জীরবসু ইমুং-মনুংগী মীওইশিংনা থওইবীদবনা থৌনা অদুগী কান্নফম করিসু লৈখি। লুহোংবগী চহি শুদ্রিবা মরম্ম ওজাশিংনা মহাকপু আইনগী ওইবা মতেং লৌ হায়না পাউতাক পীরক্সবসু অচাকপা মৈদা থাও হৈজিনবগুম থোক্কনি হায়না মহাঙ্কা তৌখি। মশামকী ইমুং মনুংদগী মতেং, মীনুংশি রাংপদগী মশাগী মঙলান, আশা কয়া লৈখা তাখি।

য়ুম পাল্লবা মতুং নুপীমচা ঙাক্তা তম্মা স্কুল অমদা মিং চনখি। মহাঙ্কী অরাবা পোখাফম ওইখি, নোংমগী ক্লাস লোইরনি খনবদা অরাবা ওইরম্মি। গারী তোংফম ওতো পার্কিং যৌবদা চরাংনবা নুংঙাইতবা পোক্কম্মি। পার্তা চঙদুনা ঙাইহাকসু পোখানবা হোৎনৈ। স্কুল শুতী ওইরবসু য়ুমদগী য়ুনিফোৰ্ম শেতুনা থোক্কক্সগা পার্কতা চঙদুনা মতোমতা ফমদুনা মতম লেনখি। স্কুলদ চৎপা ফংলবসু মহাক নুংঙাইফম, পোখাফম লৈখি। মাগুমবী ময়ুম পাল্লবী মইরোয় খরা যাওই হায়দুনা মখোয় খরনা তুংদা তোইনা ঙাঙনরকপদগী খঙলকখি। মসিনা মরম ওইদুনা দস্কনা মহাক য়ুম পাল্লে হায়বা কনামত্তদ খঙহনখি। হায়স্কুলগী চহি অনিদু ইকাইবা অমসুং মীনা হন্থনা খনখিগদ্রা হায়বগী অকিবনা মহাক নুংঙাইফম খঙখি। য়ামথ্রবা মইরোইশিংদুগী মরক্তা, মী চাম্মা হেন্না ফম্মা ক্লাসরুমদুদা মহাঙ্কী মরুপ অছমখক্তমক লৈরম্মি। কনাদসু নকশিল্লনা তিল্লবা পামখি।

লুহোংলবা থা খরগী মতুংদদি নুপা ময়ুম্মা তাখী তাওইনা তৌবা হৌরক্সম্মি। স্কুল কাদনবা য়ুমগী থবক মকুপ মতা হেন্না শিল্লদুনা, চখোক-চৎশিনগী পৈশা ফাওবা পীদনবা হোৎনরকখি। লাইরিক তম্মা চৎপগী মিৎদা ইরাং তৌবা চৎপনি হায়না মহাকপু মরাল শীবীখি। মপুকচেল শেংদবা মাগী নুপানা অথীবা রাই কয়া শীজিল্লদুনা তোয়না খৎনবা হৌরম্মি।

যুম পাল্লবদগী হোনা তাইয়োন্নরবা পুল্লিগী খোঙচৎতুদা মইরোই অমা ওইনা ইমুং অমগী মৌ অমগী খোদাংসু লৌখিবা শাখীনা বারম্মি। মতেং পাংবীবগী মছত্তা, মহাকপু মরম চাদব মরাল কয়া শীজন্দুনা মহাক্কী অশোয়বা খিনবা হোৎনরম্মি।

'হেতেরোনোমেতিব স্তেরিওতাইল্ল' অমসুং নুপা-নুপীগী মরজ্ঞা শমাজনা থমলিবা খেৎনা য়েঙবগী চৎনবী অসিগী মরজ্ঞা মহাক্কী অনীংবা অপাম্বা অসি তাইবংশিদা চন্নফম লৈতবগুম ফাওহন্দুনা তপ্পা তপ্প শমাজ অমদি ময়মদগী লাপথোক্করকখি। নুপী ওইবীশিংবু খুন্নাই অসিনা চৎনবী অমগী মখাদা নমখদুনা মখোয়গী অনীংবা অপাম্বা থুংহন্দবা কয়া অসি উরগা মহাক পেন্দবা ফাওরকখি অমসুং শাউনিংখি। ইমুং মনুংগী মৌ অতোপ্পা মখোয় মশেল তোয়না পুল্লবসু নোংমতা য়াওনীংবা ফাওখিদে। খুন্নাই অসিদা মৌ অমনা চৎকদবা চৎন-কাঙলোন ময়াম অসিনা মঙোন্দা অফা-অপুন ওইহনখি, যুমদগী মপান ফাওবা থোক্কিংখিদে। কৈরোল-লৈকায়না মহাক্কী মতৌদা ঙাঙনবা হৌরকখি, মসিনসু হেন্না ময়ামদগী লাপথোকনিংখি। মতমদুদা মহাক্কী মপুরোইবনসু মহাকপু নুংশিবগী মছত্তা কয়ামচাওবনা লাকশিন্দুনা নমখনবা হোৎনরম্মি। মসিনা হেন্না-হেন্না অশাওবা পোকহল্লম্মি।

লুহোংলবা চহি অনিগী মতুংদা বোর্দ পরিখ্যাদা ১৮ বা দিভিজন্দা য়াওদুনা মায় পাঙ্ককখি। মশাগী চহি ১৮ মপুং ফারে। চহি ১৬ তমক ঙাইরিঙৈদদি যুম পাল্লবা নুপী অমগী শকতমখকত নত্তনা যুম পাল্লবী নুপী অমনা সমাজ অসিদা লৌরিবা মশক করিসু উবা ফংলমদে। চহি অনি অসিনা যুম পানবা হায়বসি করিনো হায়বা ময়েক শেংনা খঙবা হৌরকখি অমসুং মশাগী ফিরেপ লেপচবা ঙল্লকখি। মহাক্কী নুপাগী যুম খাদোক্কুনা চৎলগে হায়না চপ যুংনা খনবা হৌখি। পরিখ্যাদা মায় পাঙ্ককপদগী অমুক হেন্না হোৎনদুনা মেদিকেল এল্লাল্ল থানিংবগী অপাম্বাফাওরকখি। মতম খরা যুমদা লৈদুনা মেদিকেল এল্লাল্ল থানবগীদমক লাইরিক পাগে হায়দুনা মমা-মপাদা হায়জখি। বারফম অশি খন্ননবা মমা-মপানা মাবু লৌব লাকখি। মনেম-মকুনা য়াখিদে, মাগী নুপানা থাঙ পায়দুনা ময়ামগী মমাংদা মাবু কিহন্দুনা নমখনবা তৌরম্মি। মসিগী খৌদোক অসিনা মরম ওইরগা মহাক্কী মমা-মপা রাখল খংতা তারকপগুম তৌখি, মচানুপী যুমদা পুরক্কম্মি। নুপা ময়ুমগী অহল লমন্না কয়ারক হেন্না মহাকপু যুমদ হল্লক্কব হায়জবা লাকখি। চিরবা তাংকক অসিদা মমা-মপানা মহাক্কীদমক লেপ্পীবগী দম্ব পেনজখি, অদুবু নীংবা থুংদবা কয়া অমসু অদুমক লৈখি।

মহাক্কী অরাবগী বারী মখোয়না তাবীখিদে, অমুক হেন্না চৎলরোই হায়বসু মহাক্কী রাখল হোংলকপা ঙাইবগুম তুম্মিন্না লৈনখি। ঙসিফাওবদা, আইনগী ওইবা মীংয়েংদগী খাইনবগী বারী অমত্তা হৌদোক্কুদি। মসিনা মাগী অরাবা অমদি ওইরি। হৌজিকমক মহাক্কী চংজফম অমা লৈরবসু, তুংদা করি? আইনগী ওইবা দিভোর্স ফোর্মেলিটীশিং লৈতবা অসিনা মহাক্কী তুংগী ওইবা পুল্লিদা অচৌবা অপনবা অমদি ওইরি।

হৌখিবা চহি কয়া অসিনা মহাক্কী পুল্লি মথক মখা ওলহনলে। মরুপশিংগা নুংঙাইনা লৈবা পামজবা, মঙলান, আশা কয়া শাগৎচরম্বা মীশক অদু ঙসিদি কনাগসু থেংননীংদবা মী অমা ওইরে। "স্কুল তল্লিঙৈ মতমদি নোংমাইজিং ফাওবা ইমান্নবীশিংগা উননিংবগী স্কুল কাল্লিংখি। হৌজিক্তি ইখন্তা লৈনিংই, কনাগসু বারী শানিংদে। ফোন অমসুং ইশাগী ওইবা রাখলদা লুপতুনা লৈনিংই। ইশাগী শাগৎচরিবা তাইবং অসিদসু লান অচৌবা অমা মাইয়োঙ্কবগুম ফাওই।" রাখল হেন্না খনজিন্দুনা বারকপা মতমদা পার্কতা মদোম ফমদুনা মীতোপ কয়ানা চৎপা য়েংই। মখোয় ময়াম য়েংদুনা ঙাইহাক্তং ওইরবসু পোথাবগুম ফাওহল্লম্মি অমদি মশাগী ওইবা তাইবংদুদগী ঙাইহাক লাপথোক্কুনা নাইতোম লৈবনা হেন্না পাল্লকখি। ঐনা মহাক্কী বারী অসি মীয়ামদা পুথোকপদা করি ফাওই হংলুবদা অশুম্বা হায়রকখি, "ঙসিফাওবদা কনা অমত্তনা ঐবু তাবীখিবা লৈতে, ঐগী অরাবা মশক খঙবীনবা কনানসু হোৎনখিদে। কুইরে ঐনা তুম্মিন্না লৈরকপা, হৌজিক্তি মসিনা হৈনরে।" হৌজিক মী অমনা হংলকপা মতমদা কদাইদগী হৌরগা করি করম্বা তাংকক্তগী মহাক্কী বারী অসি লীগনি হায়বা মহাক তশেংনা খঙদে হায়না ফোংদোক্ককখি। মহাকপু মশক খঙবীনবা হোৎনবগী মছত্তা মহাক অঙাওবীনি হায়না হায়বা মীনা হেন্না য়াম্মি। "মান্নবা মশেলদি অদুম লৈমিন্নগনি, ময়ামদগী তোঙান্না তারবদি নহাক "অঙাওবা" অমনি।"

তোঙান্না তুম্মিন্না লৈজবা অসিনা মাগীদি শান্তি হায়বদু ওইরি। মী অতোপ্পা অমবু খাজবা থম্বা ঙম্দি, নকশিল্লকপা মীকুপ্তা খঙহৌদনা মশানা ওইনা লাপথোকচৈ। যুম পাল্লগা পুল্লি চুপ্পগী ওইনা মী অমগা লৈমিন্নবগি রাখল খল্লুবদা, মীঙোন্দা

থাজব ওমদবনা মরম ঔইরগ মিপাইবা অমদি
অকিবনা পিক থল্লি। ময়ামগুম্মা নুংশিবা, হরাওবদা
শরুক যানিংই অদুবু যুম পানবা নত্ৰগা মী অমগা
মরী লৈনবা অসিগী রাখলদি মহাক্কী মফমদা অদুমক
অরাবা অকিবা ওইরি। অমরোমদা মহাক্কী বারী
অসিবু ময়ামদা লীদুনা খঙহনবসু পাম্মি, অদুগা
অমুক মানা ফংগদবা অরা-চৈথেং অদুদি মহাক
পামদে।

ঙসিফাওবা মাগী ইমুং মনুংনা মহাকপু য়াম্মা কুপ্পা
শেই। হৌথিবা পুল্লিগী নীংঙমদ্রবা থৌদোক কয়ানা
মাহকপু তৎতনা তম্মরি। মরুপ মপাংশিংগা
কোয়থোকুবদা যুমদগী ফোন হঞ্জিন হঞ্জিন
তৌরকপনা কোঙ্গাই। মমান্নবীশিংগা লেকমিন-
চামিন্নবসু য়াওবা ফংদে। মশাগী তুংগী পুল্লিগীদমক
তান্নিংলবসু মাগী তুংগী পুল্লি লৈত্রবগুম মাগী ইমুং
মনুংনা থৌইনা তাবীদে, মতম পীবীদে।

মীপুম খুদিংমক্কা উরিবা অমসুং খঙলিবসি মহাক্কী
হৌথিবা পুল্লিদুখক্তনি। মসিনা মহাক্কী নীংবা কায়বা
ওইহল্লি, শোন্তহল্লি। খঞ্জিনলুরগদি থোকথিবা ময়াম
অদু মহাক মশানা থোকহঞ্জবনি হায়না খল্লকই।
মহাক্কা অশোনবা, তৌবা ওমদবা মী অমা
ওইথিবগীদমক্তা থোকথিবনি। মসিনা হেন্না অশাওবা
পোকহল্লি। মশানা যাদনা লুহোংথোকপীবা অদুগা
মথোং মরম খঙদবা যুম্মাল অমা পাল্লুবনা অরাবা
অমগী মথক্তা অরাবা অমা ওইরি। মসি ময়াম অসিগী
মরক্তা "ক্কাইয়র" অমা ওইনা চাওথোক্কা হিংবগী আশা
অদুদি য়াম্মা তামথ্বে। মমা-মপাদা করম্মা ফোংদোক্কনি
অদুগা মীয়াম মাওদা মহাক "থোক্কপা" ওমথিগদ্রা
হায়না বারৈ।

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Someone to Call my Own

PAVEL SAGOLSEM



On lazy afternoons in Shillong, Donna usually drifts off to a space of contemplation and time for herself. She sits on the balcony by the window, feeling the tender breeze brushes her face, and watching the world outside; loneliness and longing for her family revisits her mind. She is in her early twenties and lives alone in a rented house in Shillong. Working as an outreach worker at a community-based organisation (CBO) that works for the Transwomen and LGBTQ+ community, she feels happy she is able to earn enough to rent a space for herself and occupy respectable space within the society she resides in. Despite being friends with me for years, Donna admits she is a bit nervous about these interviews/conversations and she doesn't know where to begin. Nonetheless, she wants to tell her story, she confirms.

In the many conversations that followed, Donna constantly reiterated her loneliness. When she is on her own, away from work or company, she often thinks of her family. She admits that they have their faults and limitations, yet she adores them. She believes they were her first connection to the world and life itself. Without them there is a large void in her life, a void that remains unfilled and unseen. She appreciates how different members of her family have been there in different parts and points of her life. What she misses the most is her mother's embrace, her tight hug. During her childhood, her mother would be away from family for days looking for odd jobs in the city (Shillong). Back then she used to live in a village away from Shillong. She was very young and she craved her mother's embrace desperately. But she understood that her mother had no choice but to work away from home, and Donna appreciated whatever she did for her family. She had two siblings, a sister, and a brother. They still live in their native village even today. She and her siblings would wait, clinging to the assurance that when their mother came back she would bring money - the most important thing the family needed.

As a young child, she knew she couldn't complain about care and togetherness in the face of poverty. In her mother's absence, her sister took on the role of a mother of the house.

She would do all the housework and tirelessly maintain the house and also look after Donna. Her grandmother used to live near them and would take care of her too. Donna recalls how she was fond of women's clothes as a child. She would admire women and the way they dressed or the jewelry they adorned themselves with. Her grandmother would let her put on dresses and heels as a child. Her brother, for the most part, was not around. According to her, her grandmother and sister were more tolerant and accepting of her femininity as compared to her brother, who seemed embarrassed of Donna. But after her sister got married, they grew distant as her sister became more engaged in her own family. Her brother visits her regularly in Shillong and they have grown closer to each other now.

Donna doesn't have much to say about a father figure. In Khasi society, it is the mother who runs the household and who earns for the family. Her biological father who left her mother had no significance to Donna, she felt not even a sense of loss. But the stepfather who then gave her mother the companionship she needed is someone she remembers. She appreciates him for sticking with her mother. However, she didn't have much expectation from him and she is happy that he accepted her along with her mother.

When asked about what made her proud and strong, she presented her inner warrior. As early as her junior school days, Donna had learned to earn for herself. She worked as a salesperson in a local departmental store, as a house help, and as a caregiver to children from time to time, to support her education and other expenses.

By working during the day and studying in an evening school, she managed to study till high school. Despite her struggles, she scored high marks in board exams. She was a bright student, but she regrets that she couldn't pursue higher studies due to family problems. Being good at studies was her pride back then—her defense against the sense of solitude and helplessness. As a child, she was pressured to present herself as a boy. Of her days back in her village, she fondly remembers a transmasculine person who used to own a departmental store where Donna used to work as a part-time salesperson. In his company, Donna found the space to accept her femininity, her queerness. However, it was short-lived. He passed away unfortunately and his store was taken over by his family, and Donna lost her job and safe space.

As she grew up, she became more and more uncomfortable presenting herself as a boy and started drifting towards a life of living as a woman. Then, the social stigma against trans people crept in between her and her family. The sister and grandmother who accepted her femininity as a boy couldn't accept her as a trans woman. It still baffles her how everyone in her life was willing to accept a homosexual feminine boy but if that boy wanted to live as a woman, it became an offense. More and more she witnessed families disowning people like her and how local groups organized themselves on the pretext of preserving traditional and indigenous cultures, resorting to violence as extreme as killing. Donna herself faced such threats. She remembers one day hearing about a transwoman found murdered. She used to live near her and was affluent and had a government job.

Those who murdered her had not taken the money from her purse, even though she had just gotten her salary and her purse was found full of money. The message was clear; her gender identity was not to be tolerated. The same day, someone approached Donna in the street and called her a “Hijra”, a slang often used to abuse transgender people, and told her that she would be next if she didn't change her ways.

These incidents and experiences still make her shudder and often make her feel insecure being in the with the community she was born and raised in.

Determined to leave her past behind and start a new life, she decided to move to the city in search of a safe future. That worsened the ties between her and her family. Her family would seldom contact her. She felt even more abandoned. She also realized that the city wasn't so different when it came to popular sentiments against transgender women. Donna considers herself very lucky as compared to other Transwomen she knows as friends. As she had been a bright student she was able to secure a job for herself as an outreach worker. Because of her job, she didn't need to get into sex work and invite strangers to her place.



PHOTO BY KUMAM DAVIDSON

Hence, her landlord and the society where she lived accepted her. She is very confused though, whether to see it as luck or misfortune. On one hand, she was respected and was able to live as a woman as she always wanted. On the other hand, when she got the job, her family withdrew from their responsibility and care. Earlier they were embarrassed of her but at least felt they had to be there for her. She feels that if she were able to provide financial assistance to them, she could regain their intimacy and bonding. And she did as much as she could, but her salary wasn't enough to support herself in the city as well as look after her family. It also acted as a barrier between her and the community, a barrier raised by society about who is "good" and who is "bad." She feels that the transwomen community can't say much about it as they are able to survive only because the people around them allow them to live. The threat of violence still looms over their head.

She agrees that many transwomen resort to sex work or alcohol and drugs to escape the harsh realities.

Yet she firmly believes that if a transwoman is given the due support and care that anyone deserves from their family, they can very much be a "respectable" and "dignified" person- what society often claims they are not. When asked how she or other trans women could make herself/themselves happy in order to protect herself/themselves from all the stress, she said- she/they have to become stronger. When she was asked if trying to become stronger and more resilient would make her suffer more, Donna replied, "What can I do? What other options do I have?!"

When asked if she knew about "mental health", she said she did not.

But when asked if she had any trouble in her life and how it had impacted her, she had all the mindfulness and awareness of her struggles and what she wanted for herself and her community. When asked what her biggest wish in life was, she said, "I want to be with my family. I want them to love me and care for me!"

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Kiba Long Ki Jong Nga

TRANSLATED BY JOBETH ANN WARJRI

Ha ki nohphai sngi kiba kham jlan, Ka Donna ka shong ban pyrkhath jylliew shaphang ki por kiba lah leit. Haba ka shong ha ka baranda hajan ka jingkhangit, ka sngew ia ka jingbeh pyngngad jong ka lyer bad ka peit ia ka pythei kaba iaaid hakmat jong ka. Ka jingtmang bad ka jingangnud ia la ka long iing long sem ka shon ha ka jingmut jingpyrkhat jong ka. Ka long ka kynthei 'wei brieve kaba im ha ka iing shong wai ha nongbah Shillong. Ka Donna ka trei kum ka nongtrei ban iarap ia kiba kham poh ka ioh ka kot (outreach worker) na ka bynta ka seng kaba peit ia ka long brieve man brieve ha ka im lang sah lang khamtam lei ia ki ba dei na ki kynhun Transgender bad kynhun LGBTQIA+. Ka Donna ka kmen ba ka tulop jong ka ka ai lad ia ka ba kan ioh ia ka jaka shong ha kaba ka lah ban leh katba ka mon bad ruh ba ka don ka kam ka jam kaba i don burom ha khmat ki paramarjan. Hynrei, wat la ka don ki paralok ki parajor lah bun snem mynta, ka phla ba ka sngew khih khuslai shaphang ki jiniakren jong ngi. Wat la kata, ka kwah ban iathuh ia ka jingiatuhkhana shaphang ka jingiashem jong ka.

Ha ki jingiakren jong ngi, Ka Donna ka shon ia ka jingsngewtmang ka jong ka. Haba ka don marwei, haba kam don kam lane ym don brieve bad ka, ka pyrkhath bha shaphang ka long iing long sem jong ka. Ka phla ba ki ba ha iing ba ha sem ki don bun ki jingduna, hynrei ka ieit bha ia ki. Ka ngeit ba ka long iing long sem jong ka ka long ka jingiasoh ba nyngkong eh hapdeng ma ka bad ka pyrthei bad ka jingim ruh. Khlem ma ki ka don ka jingthylli kaba palat liam, ka jingthylli kaba ym lah ban pyndap bad kaba kiwei kim lah ban iohi. Ka sngewthuh ba ki kynhun long iing long sem jong ka ki la don ha bun ki khep jong ka jingim jong ka. Kaei ba ka angnud bha ka long ia ki jingkdup jong ka kmie jong ka.

Haba ka dang rit, ka kmie jong ka ka la ieh ia ka long iing long sem ban wad kam ha nongbah Shillong. Ha kito ki por, ka Donna ka ju im ha ka shnong nongkyndong kham pajih na ka nongbah Shillong. Ka long tang ka khynnah bad ka ju thrang ia ka jingkdup jong ka kmie. Hynrei, ka sngewthuh ba ka kmie jong ka kam don lad da kawei lait tang ban wad kam jngai na la iing bad ka sngewnguh ia kaei kaba ka kmie jong ka ka leh na ka bynta ka long iing long sem. Ka don arngut ki para, ka hynmen kynthei bad u para shynrang. Ki dang shong hi sha shnong haduh mynta. Ma ka bad ki para jong ka ki ju ap bad khmih lynti ba ynda ka wan ka kmie jong ki, kan wanrah ruh ia ka pisa—ka jingdonkam kaba tam eh jong ka long iing long sem jong ki. Kum ka khynnah rit, ka ong ba kam lah ban khñium shaphang ka jingsumar sukher haba ki don hapdeng ka jingduk. Haba ka kmie kam don bad ki, ka hynmen jong ka ka shimti kum ka long kmie jong ka iing. Ka ju leh ia ki kam iing kam sem baroh bad ka ju peit ruh ia ka Donna. Ka meieit jong ka Donna ruh ka shong marjan bad ka ju iarap ruh ha ka kam sumar sukher ia la ki jong ki khun ksiew.

Ka Donna ka kynmaw kumno ka ju sngewtynnad ia ki jingriam jingbeit jong ki kynthei ha ka por ba ka dang khynnah. Ka ju itynnad ia ki rong phong jong ki kynthei bad kumno ba ki riam lane deng kpeng bad shohshkor. Ka meieit ka ju ai lad ia ka ban phong sopti bad juti jrong khongdong ha ka por ba ka dang khynnah. Bunsien, u para shynrang jong ka um ju don lang bad ka. Kat kumba ong ma ka, ka meieit bad ka hynmen ki kham iaishah bad kham pdiang ia ka jingling kynthei jong ka ban ia u para shynrang uba lahraiñ ia ka Donna. Hynrei, ynda ka hynmen ka la iathoh, ka la jngai na ka namar ba ka hynmen ka la kham buh por ban don bad la ka long iing long sem lajong.

Ka Donna ka khlem iathuh than shaphang ka jingdon jong u rangbah ha ka jingim jong ka. Ha ka long iing Khasi ka dei ka kmie kaba peit ia ka long iing long sem bad kaba pynbiang ia ka jingdon jingem hapoh ka iing. U kpa jong ka Donna uba la ieh noh ia ka kmie jong ka, um don jingkordor ei ei ruh ha khmat jong ka Donna, ym wat tang na ka liang ka jingduh ruh. Hynrei, u kpa nah u ba la ai jingshngaiñ ia ka kmie jong ka, u long u briew uba ka Donna ka kynmaw. Ka sngewnguh ia u ba u ieng skhem bad ka kmie jong ka. Tangba, kam don jingkhmihlynti ei ei ruh na u bad ka sngewkmen ba u pdiang ia ka bad ka kmie jong ka.

Haba la buh jingkylli ba kumno ka long ka briew kaba sarong bad khelaiñ, ka la pyni ia ka bor khlawait kaba buhrieh jong ka. Naduh ka por ba ka dang shong skul rit, ka Donna ka la hap phikir hi ia la ka ja kpoh. Ka trei kum ka nongdie mar mata ha dukan, kum ka shakri ha iing briew bad kum ka nongpeit khun rit ha por ha por ban kyrshan ia ka pule puthi jong ka bad kiwei kiwei de ki jinglut. Da kaba trei mynsngi bad leit skul meit, ka la kot haduh ba kan da lait matrik. Wat la ka don bun ki jingialeh ha ka jingim jong ka, ka Donna ka ioh ia ki marks kiba heh ha ka exam matrik. Ka la long ka khynnah skul kaba stad bad ka sah nud ba kam lah ban pule shuh shuh namar ki jingiashem kordit ha ka long iing long sem jong ka. Ka jinglehbha ha ka pule puthi ka long kaei kaei kaba pynsngewsarong ia ka ha kito ki por—ka jingiada na ka jingsngew marwei bad ka jingsngewtmang. Kum ka khynnah, ka sngew ia ka jingpynbor halor jong ka ban long kum u khynnah. Haba ka kren shaphang ki sngi jong ka ha la shnong, ka kynmaw da jingieit ia uwei u briew uba la iehnoh ia la ka jinglong kynthei (transmasculine person) uba ju don ia ka dukan die mar mata ha kaba ka ju trei kum ka nongdie mar mata. Ha ka jingdon ka jong u, Ka Donna ka la ioh ia ka jaka ha kaba ka jinglong kynthei jong ka la lah ban pdiang. Hynrei, kane ka la long kaei kaei kaba tang shi por. U la khlad noh bad ka dukan jong u ka la hiar pateng sha ka long iing long sem jong u bad Ka Donna ka la duh ia ka kam bad ka jingda kaba la wan na ka kam ka jong ka bad u.

Haba ka nang heh nang san, ka la wit ia jinghap pyni ia kiwei pat ia ka jinglong shynrang bad suki pa suki ka la sdang ban im kum ka kynthei. Ynda kumta, ka jingibein ia kito ki bym bud ia ka jinglong doh kynthei ne shynrang (transgender) ka la pynwit ia ka jingiadei hapdeng jong ka bad ka long iing long sem jong ka. Ka hynmen bad ka meieit kiba la pdiang ia ki jingleh kynthei jong ka kim lah ban pdiang ia ka kum ka briew kaba la ieh noh ia ka jinglong shynrang hi baroh kawei (trans woman). Ka ju sngewbiria ba kumno ki briew ha ka jingim jong ka ki lah ban pdiang ia uba ieit shynrang (homosexual man) uba leh kum ka kynthei, hynrei ia u shynrang uba kwah ban im kum ka kynthei pat, ki sngewdom. Kham bunsien, katba dang iaid ka por, ka iohi kumno ba ki long iing ki kyntait ia ki briew kum ma ka bad kumno ba ki kynhun shnong ki phla ba ki iada ia ki riti bad dustur da ka ba khñiot bor haduh ka jingiap ruh. Ka Donna ruh ka ju ioh mad ia kum kita ki jingpynsheptieng. Ka kynmaw kumno ba ha kawei ka sngi ka iohsngew ba kawei ka briew kaba la iehnoh ia ka jinglong doh shynrang (transwoman) ka la mad ia ka jingiap. Kiba ba la pyniap ia ka ki khlem shim ia ka pisa ba don hapoh ka pla kieng jong ka. Ka la dang shu ioh tulop bad ka bun ka pisa hapoh ka pla jong ka. Ka jingmaham ka long kaba shai: ka dak kynthei ne shynrang jong ka ka nym long kaei kaei kaba kiwei kin lah ban pdiang. Ha kajuh ka sngi, la don ba khot ia Ka Donna ka “Hijra”, ka ktien mynraiñ ba pyndonkam pyrshah ia kito kiba iehnoh ia ka jinglong doh shynrang ne kynthei (transgender people) ki la ong ruh ba kan mad ia ka jingiap kumba la long ia kata ka kynthei. Kine ki jingjia bad ki jingiashem ki pynlong ia ka ban khñiuh bad bunsien ka sngewsheptieng wat la ka don hapoh ka im lang sah lang ha kaba la kha bad pynsan ia ka.

Ka kut jingmut ban ieh ia ka ba la dep shadien bad ban sdang ia ka jingim ba thymmai. Kumta ka la kut jingmut ban leit shong shnong sha ka nongbah Shillong. Kane ka jingkut jingmut jong ka ka la wanrah bun ki dieng pynkiang ha ka jingiadei jong ka bad ki long iing long sem jong ka. Kiba don ha ka long iing long sem jong ka kim ju da kham kren lane long bad ka. Ka sngew ba ia ka la shah iehnoh.

Ka la shem ruh ba ka sor kam da pher than na ka shnong nongkyndong ha ka liang ki jingsngew shaphang kito kiba ba la iehnoh ia ka jingling doh shynrang (transgender women). Ka Donna ka sngewthuh ba ka long kaba donbok ban ia nujor bad kiwei pat ki paralok kiba long kum ma ka. Namar ba ka long ka khynnah kaba proh jabieng ka la ioh lad ban trei kum ka nongtrei ban iarap ia kiba kham poh ka ioh ka kot. Na ka daw jong ka kam jong ka, ka khlem hap ban long nuti bad khot ia ki briew kiba kam ithuh sha ka jaka sah jong ka. Kumta, u trai iing bad ka im lang sah lang ha kaba ka shong ki pdiang ia ka. Tangba, ka sngew lamwir jingmut lada kane ka dei ka jingdonbok lane ka jingsniew nusip. Ha kawei ka liang, ka ioh burom bad ka lah ruh ban im kum ka kynthei, kumba ka hi ka kwah. Hynrei, haba ka la ioh ia ka kam, ka long iing long sem jong ka ki la ia iehnoh ia ka jingsumar sukher ia ka. Mynshwa, ki ju sngewlehraiñ na ka bynta jong ka tangba wat katta ruh ki don lem don ryngkat bad ka. Ka sngew ba lada ka lah ban iarap ia kin a ka liang ka pisa kan jynda la ioh biang ia ka jingsngewjan bad ki. Hynrei, ka ka tulop ba ka ioh kam dap ia ka ban kyrshan ia ka shimet bad ka long iing long sem jong ka. Ka long ruh kum ka jingwit hapsedng jong ka bad ka im lang ka sah lang, ka jingwit ba ka im lang ka sah lang hi ka tei hapsedng kito kiba ka khot “kiba bha” bad “kiba sinew.” Ka sngew ba ki kynhun kiba la iehnoh ka jingling doh shynrang kim lah ban ong ei ei namar ba ki sngewthuh ba ki lah ban iaaid ban ieng tang namar ki briew ha syndah jong ki ki ai lad ia ki ban im. Ka jingsheptieng ba wan na ka jingkhñiot bor ka ker tawiar ia ki.

Ka mynjur ba kito kiba la iehnoh ia ka jinglong doh shynrang ki kylla long nuti ne ki dih kyiad bad drok ban kynran dien na ka jingim bajynjar. Hynrei ka ngeit ba lada ka khynnah ba iehnoh ia ka jingling shynrang (transgirl) ka ioh ia ka jingsumar sukher bad ka jingkyrshan na la ka long iing long sem, ka lah ban long ka briew kaba don burom—kaei ba ka im lang sah lang kam pyniahap bad ka jingling jong ki briew kiba iehnoh ia ka jingling doh shynrang. Haba la kylli ia ka kumno ma ka bad kiwei kum ma ka ki lah ban long ki briew kiba dap da ka jingkmeh khnang ba kin iada ialade na ka jingim saja, ka la ong ba ma ka/ma ki ki dei ban pynkhilaiñ ialade. Haba la kylli ia ka ba lada ka jingpynkhilaiñ bad ka jingiaishah ka pynlong ia ka ban shah shitom kham bun shah, Ka Donna ka ong, “Nga leh kumno? Kiei pat ki lad ki lynti kiba don ia nga ban shim?!” Haba la kylli lada ka tip shaphang ka jingbha jingmiat ka jingmut jingpyrkhat, ka phla ba kam tip. Hynrei, haba la kylli ia ka lada ka don ki jingeh ha ka jingim jong ka bad kumno b akita ki jingeh ki trei ha ka jingim ka jong ka, ka pyni ia ka jingsnewthuh ia ki jingiaishem jong ka bad kumno ka lah ban iarap ialade bad kiwei pat kiba kum ma ka. Haba la kylli kaei ka jingkwah ba kongsan ha ka jingim jong ka ka long, ka ong, “Nga kwah ban long bad ka long iing long sem. Nga kwah ba kin ieit bad sumar ia nga!”

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ILLUSTRATIONS FROM MOKOKCHUNG, NAGALAND

ONEN

Social, religious and moral expectations in Naga society that is caught between globalness and tribalness while gender-based discrimination and conservative ethos prevail, cause extreme distress to people who don't conform.

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