

The NEHU Journal

R KHONGSDIER
B T LANGSTIEH &
B M REDDY
K S NAGARAJA
KETSHUKIETUO
DZÜVICHÜ
ISABELLA LALL
S N SINGH
SUKALPA
BHATTACHARJEE

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The NEHU Journal

Editor : T B Subba

Associate Editor : Kynpham Sing Nongkynrih

Assistant Editor : Bedarius Shylla

Production Assistants : Surajit Dutta & Binod Rynjah

Layout and Design : Shongdor Diengdoh

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All correspondence related to the journal may be addressed to the Editor, NEHU Publications, Bijni Complex, Shillong-793003 at tbsubba@sancharnet.in.

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Editorial

With January 2004 issue *The NEHU Journal* enters the second year of its publication. During 2003, the year of its birth, we at the editorial office were successful in obtaining the ISSN for the journal, getting the editorial board approved by the Governing Body of the University Publications, and starting the process of

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every issue. We have one citation referee. We the first referee had not been fair to an author, but from the next issue we intend to have two referees. We are also doing book reviews, to at least two referees. Honestly, this might not always be possible, for we still need to solicit articles from friends and acquaintances, but we shall at least try and get back to the contributors for various clarifications, if and when necessary.

We begin this year with a regret about not being able to utilise the services of our very able copy editor, but are happy to announce that we have now an assistant editor who is on a full-time job related to the journal. With his editorial assistance, Kynpham Sing Nongkynrih, the Associate Editor, and I, hope to be able to pay some attention to the promotion of the journal both within and outside North-East India, which we realise is as important as raising its standard.

As we wish you all a very happy 2004, we would like to request you to kindly send your valuable articles, review essays, book reviews and academic papers for possible publication in the journal. We would also like to inform you that though we have revised our subscription rates, they are still much lower than the actual expenses involved in the publication. We shall be ever grateful if you consider patronising the journal not only by contributing to it academically but also financially by subscribing to it.

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T B Subba
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CONTENTS

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ISABELLA LALL

The Brontë Sisters as Poets of Faith

S N SINGH

Dialogic Space in Art : A Reading of Goutam Biswas'

Art as Dialogue : Essays in Phenomenology of Aesthetic Experience*

SUKALPA BHATTACHARJEE

BOOK REVIEW

The Lyngngams as a Hybrid and Evolving Population

CONTENTS

- The Lyngngams as a Hybrid and Evolving Population 1
R KHONGSDIER
- Ethno-historic and Linguistic Background of Lyngngams and their Demographic Structure 15
B T LANGSTIEH & B M REDDY
- A Lexico-statistic Study of Khyrnriam and Lyngngam Dialects of the Khasi Language 43
K S NAGARAJA
- Health Problems of the Aged among the Angami Nagas 57
KETSHUKIETUO DZÜVICHÜ
- Need for Counselling : A Study on Degree Students of Shillong 75
ISABELLA LALL
- The Brontë Sisters as Poets of Faith 91
S N SINGH
- Dialogic Space in Art : A Reading of Goutam Biswas' Art as Dialogue : Essays in Phenomenology of Aesthetic Experience* 117
SUKALPA BHATTACHARJEE
- BOOK REVIEW 127

The Brontë Sisters as Poets of Faith

S N SINGH

While Dickens, Thackeray and Trollope were writing novels on social change and national history, the cloistered Brontë sisters wrote novels “closer to the genres of Romantic poetry than to the realism of the mainstream novel.”¹ Charlotte’s *Jane Eyre*, Emily’s single superb *Wuthering Heights*, and Anne Brontë’s *The Tenant of the Wildfell Hall* stormed the town by surprise, won public applause, and the sisters were quickly acclaimed as successful novelists. But the fact that they were also poets of faith did not get adequate attention. Nor does their poetry enjoy the attention it deserves even today. I, therefore, intend in this paper to appreciate their poetry of faith, and ascertain their rightful place in Victorian poetry.

Although known as Victorian novelists, the Brontë sisters were primarily poets, and they had been writing poems since their early childhood, with occasional outbursts of their juvenilia in prose and novels towards the close of their life. The publication of *Poems by Currer, Ellis, Acton Bell* by Aylott and Jones, London, in May 1846 shows that the three sisters began their career with the belief that their first love was poetry. This is further confirmed by several poems of varied length, running into 140 pages included in the *Publication* together with Charlotte’s ‘Retrospection’, Emily’s ‘High Waving Heather’ and Anne’s ‘North Wind’, to name only a few. These are known to have been written in the third decade of the nineteenth century, i.e., much before they wrote novels and while they were still teenagers. Charlotte Brontë recollects in the following stanza of unique serenity and simplicity the product of their close partnership in poetry:

We wove a web in childhood,
 A web of sunny air,
 We dug a spring in infancy
 Of water pure and clear.²

The images of weaving and web and consequently of spinning suggest that while the other children of Haworth village in northern England were engaged in the process of spinning yarns and weaving them into cloth, the Brontë children engaged in spinning words and phrases to weave them into verses, mostly of faith. While the textile industries in northern England polluted air and defiled water, the Brontë sisters were busy in spiritual regeneration of mankind, for 'sunny air' symbolises the spiritual essence of God, and the 'Spring' embodies the attributes of the 'Water of regeneration' or 'living water' implying God's redemptive grace through Christ.

'We' in the beginning of the above stanza may be viewed as a prologue to the Brontë poetry of faith, and for its 'living-well-like' quality it may rightly be called a fountain of faith, which is perennial and pure, and which transcends time and space. It is concerned with the supremacy of spirit over matter, of the soul over the body. It is concerned with the greatness of man that he is, and man is great because he is an inner citadel, a spiritual soul within himself. Emily Brontë, like her two sisters, was concerned with the immortality of soul. She would therefore aspire and strive for reaching the shore of eternity safe and sure :

I know there is a blessed shore
 Opening the ports for me and mine ;
 And gazing time's water over,
 I weary for that land divine.³

That Emily was weary of the phenomenal world is a recurrent theme in her poetry, which is evident from the frequency of 'weary' and 'dreary' nearly sixty times in her poetry. That she was confident of the 'blessed shore' – 'I know' – characteristically

speaks of Emily as a woman of faith, of her belief in a blessed after-life. It is a strong theistic assertion of her subjective experience on the existential plane, but whether at all a deity would help her secure the 'blessed shore' or the 'land divine' is not clear. Or would the one, if any, be a Christian is not evident either. Some amount of cultural neutrality is present in Emily Brontë's poetry, which is her strength, and which is not evident in Charlotte and Anne. Anne's deity is clearly Christian and so is her conviction:

Though friends and kindred turn away

And laugh thy grief to scorn:

I hear the great Redeemer say,

Blessed are ye that mourn.⁴

This stanza from Anne Brontë is closely comparable with the verse that reads, "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted" (Matthew, 5: 4). Similarly, Charlotte Brontë's vision is explicitly and characteristically Christian:

More I recall not, yet the vision spread

Into a world remote, an age to come –

And still the illumined name of Jesus shed

A light, clearness, through the unfolding gloom –

And still I saw that sign, which now I see,

That cross on the yonder brow of calvary.⁵

The vision Charlotte had was of Jesus Christ who interceded for man on earth and who is ceaselessly interceding for him with God in heaven. Though the images of the 'cross' and 'calvary' ordinarily speak of the crucifixion of Jesus as a historical incident, the spreading of the vision into a remote world, and the appearance of 'light' dispelling the gloom speaks of something beyond the mere historicity of Jesus Christ. The vision is both timeless and mystical for her, as it projects in her heart "a Jesus as spiritually arisen within men,"⁶ who is relevant and significant not only for our time, but for all time to come. Unless he is experienced as spiritually

born in us, we may remain forlorn. He should be more intimate to our soul than the soul to itself. Believers should enthrone him in the shrine of their hearts. Charlotte reinforces this theme in the form of a longing for the fleeting vision in the following couplet :

Oh ! to behold to the truth – that sun divine,
How doth my bosom pant, my spirit pine.⁷

Grown and developed under the direct guidance and affection of the parents, especially of the father whose strongly held principles were to exercise such marks of discipline and determination on the children as to give them the distinction of the Brontë children, and later, of the Brontë sisters, the Protestant daughters of the Protestant parents, conceived and formed their religious faith “upon a personal apprehension of God” admitting no human mediator to distance the relation between God (in Jesus) and man. The awakening call to understand and realise God’s word, they felt, rests upon the individual with “no appeal to any authoritative body for dogmatic pronouncements.”⁸ The sisters were so bold and revolutionary as to detest and defy the repressive confines of the old faith, and go for the satisfying attributes of the new progressive faith,

The world advances; Greek or Roman rite
Suffices not the inquiring mind to stay;
The searching soul demands a purer light
To guide it on its upward, onward way.⁹

In all probability it was the complete failure of the slim publication to make any impression on the reading public and the literary world that drove the Brontë sisters to try their fortune with the novels. But this did not mean that they stopped writing poems altogether. Once undertaken the quest and identified their vocation, they were committed to it till death. Regardless of success and incidental failure, to persevere in the quest of God was the Brontë sisters’ Christian heroism.

Also, with their father's (Patrick Brontë's) interest in poetry, the sisters had accepted poetry-writing as a natural and necessary part of life. It was as inevitable as breathing. Anne in *Agnes Grey*, through the voice of the heroine, says: "when we are harassed by sorrows or anxieties, or oppressed by any powerful feelings which we must keep to ourselves, for which we can obtain or seek no sympathy from any living creature ... we often naturally seek relief in poetry."¹⁰ With Anne, the end of writing poetry could thus be purgative and therapeutic. Charlotte also means the same when she writes in *The Professor*: "I must cultivate fortitude and cling to Poetry. One is to be my support and the other my solace through life."¹¹ Poetry was an appropriate channel to relieve the sisters of their sufferings and anxieties. Emily realised that poetry "is ever there to bring"

The hovering visions back and breathe
 New glories over the blighted spring
 And call a lovelier life from death
 And whisper with a voice divine
 Of real worlds as bright as thine.¹²

Emily Brontë experiences the 'benignant power' of God with all his healing and solacing attributes, giving 'glories over the blighted spring,' and 'life for death,' and 'joy for grief.' Emily would then naturally pledge to

... Welcome thee, benignant power,
 Sure solacer of human cares,
 And sweeter hope, when hope despairs.¹³

The complete collection of poems written by the sisters (excluding those from Branwell, the only brother), testifies to the fact that they did not care for the nonchalance shown to their meritorious poems included in the publication. As a result of rigorous research of Brontë lovers such as T. J. Wise, Alex Symington, and Clement Shorter done in 1920s and 1930s, Tom Winifrith in 1980s,

and C. W. Hatfield in 1940s, we have 142 poems running into 388 pages by Charlotte Brontë, 54 poems running into 150 pages by Anne Brontë, and 192 poems running into 227 pages by Emily Brontë. While most poems of Emily and Anne reveal their agonies and religious faith, a few of them celebrate the theme of unrequited love, which ultimately sublimates itself to celestial love. With Charlotte the case is somewhat different. While most of her poems are on nature and frustration in love, a select few explore her religious crisis and faith. And it is faith fraught with crises and agonies that gives an identity to the Brontë poetry. It is in this sphere of poetic activity – where they complement and supplement each other – that they are seen at their best, expressing the quintessence of their religious life and experience. “No wonder that their religion should be part of the fibre of their being.”¹⁴ It is then only natural that Anne should write such hymns that express the grimness followed by brightness on the ascent a Christian makes :

Believe not those, who say
The upward path is smooth,
Lest thou shouldst stumble in the way,
And faint before the truth.

It is the only road
Unto the realms of joy;
But he who seeks that blest abode

Must all his powers employ
Bright hopes and pure delights
Upon his course may beam,
And there, amid the sternest heights,
The sweetest flowers gleam.¹⁵

While Anne suggests persistent efforts here, Charlotte in the following prescribes prayer and meditation. But the goal to be attained is the same — to attain ‘the realms of joy’ and ‘the blessed abode’ with ‘a life and a world to come’ :

Feel not untold and strange distress –
 Only a deeper impulse given
 By lonely hour and darkened room,
 To solemn thoughts that soar to heaven,
 Seeking a life and world to come.¹⁶

Anne and Charlotte talk of ‘pure delights’ and ‘solemn thoughts’ respectively without reference to the punishment for iniquity, if any. Though Emily does not refer to the punishment, she does not exclude its possibility, and yet she is sure of salvation, because the stern judge who could condemn is also the merciful God who condones, forgives and absolves :

What fortune may await thee there
 I will not and dare not tell,
 But heaven is moved by fervent prayer
 And God is mercy – fare thee well.¹⁷

Emily comes closer to Tyndale who believes that the law and the gospel are inseparable, and that where justice grows, grace grows greater. The function of justice is to remove the sore of sin(s). Once the sore is removed and the prayer made, God is all mercy, for his justice is not punitive, but corrective.

The Bronte poetry exuded a deep faith in God and the immortality of human soul, and an undeterred trust in His mercy in an age of doubt and incertitude posed by advancement of disciplines like Botany and Zoology. The scientific advancement brought about a sea-change in man’s attitude to Christian faith, questioning the existence of God and divinity in man, as a result of which there emerged a controversy called the Victorian controversy, which “finds well-known expression in Tennyson and Browning.”¹⁸ Browning begins the final section of his *Pauline* with shuddering questions on the dehumanising and despiritualising effects of science that gives rise to doubt opposed to faith :

O God, where do they tend – these struggling aims ?
 What would I have ? What is this ‘sleep’ which seems
 To bound all ? Can there be a waking point
 Of Crowning life ?¹⁹

These ‘struggling aims’ for mad pursuit, the poet experiences, drug us into a sleep of spiritual darkness, and the ‘Crowning life’ is denied. If faith fell asleep, the fallen humanity would tumble in the Godless abyss beyond recovery and redemption. Therefore the poet shrieks in agony for help from above – ‘O God’.

For many men and women of Tennyson’s and Browning’s generation as also of Brontë’s, it was an awful time in human life, brought about by the conflict between science and faith. It was like the sky above, the universe a dead expanse, from which God himself had disappeared.²⁰ Though Tennyson expresses the Victorian spirit of adventure, exploration and expansion in one of his classic utterances: “To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield,”²¹ he does not support this terrestrial spirit in its exclusiveness from the spiritual. The absence of belief in God and after life makes meaningful life absolutely impossible. So while he desires the advancement of knowledge, he also suggests in *In Memoriam* a harmonious concurrence between the mind (the intellectual) and the soul (the spiritual):

Let knowledge grow from more to more,
 But more of reverence in us dwell ;
 That mind and soul according well,
 May make one music as before.²²

Tennyson’s preference and ‘reverence’ for the spiritual is characteristic of his love for God, but his use of ‘us’ in the stanza also imposes on him a social responsibility that he should inculcate in the people the same. The Brontës, unlike Tennyson, did not experience any conflict between religion and science, or faith and

unfaith; nor did they feel any need for working out a compromise, either for themselves or for the people around them. For them, faith was something ever present.

Though the sisters lived a cloistered life, they were not intellectually isolated or unaware of what was going on in the world beyond their Haworth parsonage in northern England. They read sciences, especially life sciences, and were regular subscribers to magazines and newspapers available then. Over and above, Patrick Brontë had provided them with a library of their own and helped them “improve their knowledge cheaply and conveniently.” If the study of “sciences and secular books” exercised “an impact on their intellectual development,” “the *Bible*, prayer books, Milton’s *Paradise Lost*, and John Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress* had a lasting influence on them.”²³

They believed that the satisfaction of spiritual hunger was the greatest human need yet and realised that “there is an underlying conflict between scientific and religious mentalities, the one dealing in testable, the other deserting testability for faith, the one relishing change as scientific understanding advances, the other finding solace in eternal verities.”²⁴ As is evident from their poetry, the sisters welcomed ‘eternal verities,’ and avoided the prevalent underlying conflict, for their sole concern and quest was for a poetry of faith.

The Brontës thought it was an artistic necessity to create their own imaginary worlds as substitutes for England. Therefore, Charlotte and Branwell founded the Kingdom of Angria, and Emily and Anne of Gondal as backdrops for their poems. These Kingdoms, unlike England, were free from what Tennyson called “ever-broadening Commerce” and “ever-brightening Science.”²⁵ Congenial to the heart and soul, the twain Kingdoms generated peace, tranquillity and serenity. To quote Emily:

Cold clear and blue Lake Warnas water

Reflects that winter sky,

The moon has set but Venus shines
A silent silvery star.²⁶

Uninterrupted internal rhythm in these lines reveal a calm and content mind that could produce such tranquil moments of uninterrupted solitude as one might experience in Gondal only. Anne also depicts a typical Gondal scenario of brightness and beauty but fails to sustain a comparison with the one in Emily. Perhaps finding it deficient in its impact on the spirit, as it "allured the gazer's eye" only, Anne rejected it and withdrew within from without :

... And I called my willing soul away
From earth, and air, and sky.²⁷

The withdrawal was not so much from Gondal as it was from a world of the senses, of change and decay. Similarly, the inclination to this withdrawal is a dominant theme in Emily's poetry, because "The World within", she says, "I doubly prize," for it is a world

... where guile and hate and doubt
And cold suspicion never rise;
Where thou and I and liberty
Have undisputed sovereignty.²⁸

"The world within" opposed to "the world without" is God's sovereign space wherein dwell "thou and I and liberty" undisputed. She explores this space, with a belief that she can ensure her release from the hostile phenomenal world. Whether in Gondal or in a non-Gondal world, Emily believed with her father Patrick Brontë in the sovereign existence of such a space in man, for "The mind in its own place"²⁹ immune from any external interference whatsoever.

Anne too, in a Gondal poem titled 'The North Wind' seeks her exodus into the world beyond here and now, and thus desires to break open her dungeon-like captivity in order to overcome her

spiritual agony:

Confined and hopeless as I am,

Oh, speak of liberty!

Oh, tell me of my mountain home,

And I will become thee.³⁰

Both the sisters strive for liberty from the visible world. While Emily experiences it in 'the world within', Anne seeks for it in the world from above.

Like Emily and Anne, Charlotte also looks into her Kingdom of Angria for spiritual joy. In an Angria poem called 'The Vision' she expresses her spiritual realisation of what others may term as a mere physical sensation:

I heard sweet voices, not like human sound,

But tuneful of articulate harmony,

I saw no shape, but oft their floated sound

A zephyr soft, and breathing from the sky

As if some unseen form in light wings flitted by.³¹

The 'sweet voices' she heard are spiritual and though tuneful of articulate harmony, yet in essence no tune, comes from above because it is audible only to the spiritual ear of the poetess. The incorporeal nightingale is always singing, but only Keats could hear her sweet song. Charlotte's experience compares well with Keats' and shows in her a truly romantic temperament inclined to seek beauty and truth in mysterious realms of experience. And she is able to find the same without any strain. She could have been a purely romantic poet like Wordsworth and Keats — so powerful was she in unravelling and enjoying the indefinable ultimate truth beyond external nature. But her love for romanticism was intermittently countered by a growing belief in God, which ultimately gave her work a new direction and distinction:

O God of Heaven! What now is Earth to me –
 What all the power, the grandeur, she can give?
 But for the joys of sweet tranquility
 I care not now to live.³²

In these lines, Charlotte's conception of Christian faith in the joys of sweet tranquility with God in heaven, and defying death, is not a creed of conviction, for though she seems to have forsaken earthly attraction, she still had to free herself from unlawful passion of listening to conscience and reason.

I cite here a romantically exciting incident from her fifth novelette, *Caroline Vernon*.³³ It was Zamorna's creed that all things bright and beautiful live [d] for him, and Miss Caroline was such a thing for him. He said what remained to be said to her, "If I were a bearded Truk, I would take you to my harem." Her guardian was gone, something terrible yet acceptable sat in his place. The silent, lonely library, far away from the inhabited part of the house, was getting a deeper shade in all its recesses. She grew pale with dread, she dared not stir. "You are Zamorna", cried Caroline, "but let me go." He entreated, "I have a little home, somewhere near the heart of my own kingdom, Angria ... it is a plain house outside, but has some rooms within as splendid as any saloon in Victoria square."

He smiled as Caroline looked at him with wonder and fear. His face changed to expression of tenderness, more dangerous than fiery excitement which had startled her before. He then caressed her fondly and lifted with his fingers, the heavy curls which were lying on her neck. She no longer wished to leave him, she clung to his side, for infatuation was fast overtaking her. The thought of separation or return to Eden was dreadful. The man before her was her guardian again, but he was also the Duke of Zamorna. She loved, she feared. Passion tempted and conscience warned her. But in a mind like Caroline's, conscience was feebler than passion. He began to reign supreme in her heart.

Passion and conscience were the two mutually opposing forces in Charlotte Brontë's life. During her youthful days, passion the expression of her real self, was naturally stronger in her literary utterance. Conscience was a warning guardian. Caroline is the replica of Charlotte herself, reading and writing in her own library. By way of catharsis she was trying to dislodge passion from her so that she could wake up to the call of conscience and devote herself to the cause of faith in her personal life and letters. But the exodus was full of agony:

My love is almost anguish now,

It beats so strong and true;

'T were rapture, could I deem that thou

Such anguish ever knew. ³⁴

But before she could ease herself of such romantic agony, she developed a romantic passion for her teacher, M. Heger, who taught her German and French at Brussels in Belgium. Her passion for this young magnetic married man was so irresistible that it led her into sexual relationship with him. To her, he was another Zamorna, of course, Brusselised, and not Angrian. Madame Heger impeded, and the passion remained unrequited, which Charlotte Brontë was to romantically transform and celebrate as the dominant theme of her two autobiographical novels – *Jane Eyre* and *Vellette*. The same theme, in some form or the other, pervades some of her poems, as for example, 'Frances':

Unloved – I love; unwept – I weep;

Grief I restrain – hope I repress;

Vain is the anguish – fixed and deep;

Vainer, desires and dreams of bliss. ³⁵

Though Charlotte had to court defeat and sustain the agony of emotional frustration, the eventful incident changed the course of her life. She later confessed that she had lost "sight of the Creator in idolatry of the creature,"³⁶ and therefore she longed

for “the pure fountain of Mercy”, and further hoped that “I might one day become better, far better than my evil, wandering thoughts, my corrupt heart, cold to the spirit and warm to the flesh, will permit me to be.”³⁷ This is an honest confession of a Christian heart in agony, which discloses her crisis of faith and her consequent resolve, to make her the poet that she ultimately became:

Come Reason – Science – Learning – Thought

To you my heart I dedicate;

I have a faithful subject brought:

Faithful because most desolate.³⁸

‘Reason’ awakes conscience, ‘science’ relates to theology and ‘learning’ leads to God and good thought. They collectively constitute what the disillusioned Charlotte called the ‘faithful subject’ and to dedicate herself to – the study of the relationship between God and man. Sexual aberration is reprehensible, but if the lover sublimates the passion of his love to God, he realises Him in him, for He is not an object of dread as an ireful judge, but the embodiment of undying love, who allows forgiveness and comfort and grace to the repentant and reclaimed devotee:

Now, Heaven, heal the wound which I still deeply feel;

Thy glorious hosts look not in scorn on our poor race,

Thy king eternal doth not iron judgement deal

On suffering worms who seek forgiveness, comfort, grace

He gave our hearts to love: He will not love despise,

Even if gift be lost, as mine was long ago;

He will forgive the fault, will bid the offender rise,

Wash out with dues of bliss the fiery brand of woe.³⁹

Charlotte’s as well as Anne’s poetry shows that the source of regeneration and redemption lies ultimately in God’s love and grace, freely vouchsafed on those who pray, repent and be obedient, with conscience as their guide. Both the sisters seem to believe in what is

called loving devotion, which demands total self-surrender and self-denying dedication and confession of inability, of lowliness and wretchedness in the humblest and tenderest manner possible. Then the loving and forgiving God would give strength to the strengthless and help to the helpless. As the Psalmist writes, "The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in mercy" (Psalm : 103:8). Anne Brontë, therefore, takes refuge in Him:

With this polluted heart,
I dare to come to Thee,
Holy and mighty as Thou art;
For thou wilt pardon me.⁴⁰

Unlike Charlotte Brontë, open and pious Anne did not experience any conflict between passion and conscience, for the passion she had for William Weightman was as immaculate as herself, the non-fulfilment of which, because of his sudden demise, rent her heart. Then she re-seizes her lost love as wish-fulfilment in *Agnes Grey* in the marriage of Agnes Grey and Edward Weston, for the emotional agony of lost love, remained an indelible mark on her impressionable conscience. But all was fair and lawful about it, except the heart-rending recollection of the relationship that went on paining her. The sense of loss finds its empathetic expression in her sweet memorial verses:

Yes, thou art gone! and never more
Thy sunny smile shall gladden me;
But I may pass the old church door,
And pace the floor that covers thee.⁴¹

The need for emotional relief expresses itself as a need for spiritual direction. She is therefore led to feel in the heart of her hearts that the loving God saves all those who believe in Jesus as their Redeemer, with undivided faith in him, even while experiencing the purgatorial fires of hell: "Lord Jesus, save me, lest I die:/Christ,

hear my humble prayer.”⁴² With her faith in universal salvation, opposed to eternal domination, she was confident that a despaired and defeated Cowper could be saved by his loving devotion to God that he rendered in his poetry, and her beloved William Weightman, a devout lover of God, must have been saved. She, therefore, expresses her hope and trust:

It must be so, if God is love,
Answers reverent prayer;
Then surely thou shalt dwell on high,
And I may meet thee there.⁴³

As a true believer in the religion of the heart, Anne was convinced of her love and devotion to God and rejected the conviction of her time that hell was an abyss of eternal punishment. She perhaps had, at the back of her mind, Dante’s conception of what he called ‘*purgatorio*’, a third possibility between heaven and hell. Helen, the heroine of her second novel, *The Tenant of the Wildfell Hall*, who lives by the sure existence of the Christian God of love, asserts that the threatening fires of hell are purgative rather than everlasting, and therefore even her dying, dissipated sensualist husband, she believes, must ultimately be saved, for

... how could I endure to think that the
poor trembling soul was hurried away to
everlasting torment? It would drive me
mad! But thank God, I have hope – not
only from a vague dependence on the
possibility that penitence and pardon might
have reached him at last, but from the
purging fires the erring spirit may be
doomed to pass, whatever fate awaits it,
still it is not lost, and [the loving] God

who hateth nothing that he hath made will
 bless it in the end.⁴⁴

This is Anne's finest and strongest "espousal of the doctrine of universal salvation" opposed to "eternal damnation", an example of how she combined an instinctive and personal philosophy of love with the dictates of her Christian conscience. She perhaps was a revolutionary, much in advance of her times, who could wound without care the sentiments of the Anglican clergy, for it was not until 1877, i.e., thirty years after the publication of Anne's novel that Dean Farrar in his book *Eternal Hope* startled the ranks of the orthodoxy by suggesting that "salvation was an appointed goal of all."⁴⁵ But Anne had to answer the enraged clergy and the laity, and she did so dauntlessly in the following words of a poem written at the same time as her second novel:

What matters who should whisper blame,

Or who should scorn or slight?—

What matters — if thy God approve,

And if, within thy breast,

Thou feel the comfort of His love

The earnest of His rest?⁴⁶

Whether or not the enraged were assuaged could well be a matter of concern for the historians of theology, but Anne successfully flouted what the enraged stood for. She stood firm in her relationship of love and trust with God. And her biographer Edward Chitham stands by her when he observes, "Her heart ... opened to the sweet views of salvation, pardon ... and peace ... and [was] welcome to the weary and heavy-laden sinner."⁴⁷ Anne's life and work reveal that she was an uncanonised apostle.

Emily Brontë does not seem to have experienced the passion of love for a lover outside herself the way the other two sisters did. "It is undoubtedly disappointing that no lover can be found for Emily Brontë, orthodox or unorthodox."⁴⁸ As a person

and writer she remains an enigma, an inscrutable member of the Brontë family. But the one who wrote *Wuthering Heights*, wherein she unlocks her heart, is also the one who wrote the poems cited in this essay. Her ideal object of love is Heathcliff, which sounds unchristian, and so is the behaviour of the person in the novel. And yet Emily makes Catherine express her feeling of love for him, to Nelly:

If all else perished and he [Heathcliff] remained, I should
 still continue to be; and if all else remained, and
 he were annihilated, the universe would turn to be
 a mighty stranger : I should not seem a part of
 it. My love for Linton is like a foliage in the
 woods: time will change it, I am well aware, as
 winter changes the trees. My love for Heathcliff
 resembles the eternal rocks beneath : a source of
 little visible delight, but necessary. Nelly,

*I am Heathcliff!*⁴⁹ (italics mine).

As forms of speech cannot accurately describe spiritual experience(s), Emily Brontë takes resort to symbols, signs and supplements, to arrest in her language the original and the real, for the “experience [of the original] is always mediated by signs, and the original is produced as an effect of sign, of supplements.”⁵⁰ Opposed to the perishable foliage-like temporal love of Linton, Heathcliff’s is eternal, like the rock, the imperishable essence, the ultimate reality, of which she is an intrinsic part. Away from him, she is in a state of alienation. It is the state of de-alienation she craves for, which, she believes would make in him her immersion possible. It is not identification she is talking about. What her soul is thirsting for, is her total dissolution in the super-sensible Soul,

exactly as the waves born of the ocean ultimately dissolve in the ocean. The waves are restless until they reach their destiny. Similarly, till such time as she remains estranged from him who is her essence, she suffers in agony as if she is in prison, for she is ultimately 'Heathcliff'.

Catherine is the focalizer for Emily Brontë's faith, i.e., the former speaks for the latter exactly the way Ramaswamy does for Raja Rao in *The Serpent and the Rope*, a novel based on the philosophy of non-dualism, called *advait* in Indian thought. At the height of his spiritual realisation, Ramaswamy would often rhapsodise, "Shivoham, Shivoham – I am Shiva, I am the Absolute,"⁵¹ meaning the self as part of the whole which is Shiva, the real, called God, dismissing the fascinating world as the unreal, called the serpent. Similarly, 'I am Heathcliff' means I am the integral part of the real whole, the ultimate reality and that the attractive Lintonic world with all its comforts and conveniences is ephemeral and illusive, appealing to the senses only. Linton does not exist in the sense Heathcliff does. That is why for Catherine, dying with Heathcliff is sweeter than living without him, or living with Linton. The soul craves for its soul-mate. Therefore, she yearns for her release from the sensuous world into the spiritual one, because relieved of "the dreary dungeon", she declares, "I am happiest when most away". Identifying herself with a free bird caged, she implores, "In dungeon dark I cannot sing". The dreary dungeon symbolises the corporeal body, and also the phenomenal world called 'the prison house' and 'the cave of darkness'. Naturally, she would wish for wings, "If I should break the chain, my bird would go". She would therefore turn to the Gondal milieu for liberty, which in fact is a vast, open moorland, aspiring in solitude for an ascent into the sky. It is here that she would enjoy the liberty to think and sink, to wake up in a sort of mystical vision:

But first a hush of peace, a soundless calm descends;
The struggle of distress and fierce struggle ends;

Mute music soothes my breast – unuttered harmony
That I could never dream till the earth was lost to me.

With the senses suspended, the visible world with all its unrest and sensuous manifestations ceases to exist to the mystic. S(he) experiences perfect peace which gives rise to the inward silence and soundless music of harmony to her spirit, which establishes contact with the Eternal. An ecstatic going-out takes place in the psyche of the mystic, and then s(he) realises therein:

Then dawns the Invisible, the Unseen its truth reveals;

My outward sense is gone, my inward essence feels –

Its wings are almost free, its home, its harbour found ;

Measuring the gulf it stoops and loses the final bound ⁵²

Freed from the senses and having forgotten the earth, the inward soul remains only the essence pure to feel the Absolute. As God is both hidden and revealed, the mystic finds Him revealed and seen in the mystical and visionary experience. And this is how the mystic's soul feels liberated while still alive. The imagery of 'wings' is again a reminder that the soul is a bird imprisoned in the cage-like body, which when liberated finds its harbour.

Unshackled from the body, the soul lives awakened which otherwise remains mostly dormant. This experience of spiritual awakening is the result for Emily Brontë of a mystical vision wherein the 'the Invisible' is revealed. Though the verb 'reveals' may lead us to believing that Emily's mysticism is exclusively Christian, yet it could be called a "religious ecstasy" under any denomination where the spiritual thirst of the soul is quenched, or which could be called "the spiritual marriage or mystical union" where the soul is the "bride" and God the "bridegroom". And here it is the bride who surrenders herself, and negates her 'self', for "Mystical love unites by negation of the self".⁵³ Now if we club together the central part of *Wuthering Heights* and these mystical poems, Emily's mysticism clearly goes beyond the confines of Christianity.

If the mystical union or spiritual marriage is participation in the divine life, alienation from it, gives the soul intense agony. Meeting pleases, parting pains, because the mystic comes back to the world of the senses and the soul feels the bondage of the flesh. Away from the bridegroom, the bride feels tormented and burns in the fire of separation:

Oh, dreadful is the check – intense the agony,

When the ear begins to hear and the eye begins to see;

When the pulse begins to throb, the brain to think again,

The soul to feel the flesh and the flesh to feel the chain.⁵⁴

Union in love would cease to be what it is, if it is not followed by separation. Perpetual possession would mean something else and not faith. Similarly, the mystic's state in the union is not permanent. Participation and separation in turn revitalise faith and mystical experience.

In the stanza above Emily Brontë appears at the pinnacle of cultural awakening. This is not seen in Charlotte or Anne, for with all their spiritual intensity they could not come out of the confines of Christianity. Emily is equally Christian in her world-view, but she would not mind going out of the closed system and experiment deviance rather than conformity. And if her deviance, personally so close to her, was not relished, she would come out with her defence:

Let me be false in others' eyes

If faithful in my own.⁵⁵

Charlotte criticises old faith, and Anne flouts predeterminism. Similarly, Emily Brontë, cutting across the limits of Christianity or of any religion, would boldly say, "Vain are the thousand creeds", for "No coward soul is mine [hers]". And yet, under all circumstances, the sisters would remain the poets of faith and so would Emily Brontë abide by the dictates of her conscience and

conviction. She would sum up her faith in the following most powerful stanza of universal import that she ever wrote,

Though earth and moon were gone
 And suns and universes ceased to be
 And thou were left alone
 Every existence would exist in thee.⁵⁶

He existing, everything exists. The sun shines, so does the moon, or do the stars, because all that which is seen as living and lighted, is lighted, by Him alone. This can be viewed as a strong monistic belief in the existence of God who is the most essential existence of all seeming existence. Ultimately what remains is "Shivoham", "I am Heathcliff". Perhaps, she could never forget the relationship that she experienced between Catherine and Heathcliff. She was not myopic. She could see much more than others could. She, therefore, did not feel the need for being 'faithful' in 'others' eyes', who perhaps suffered from what could be called a sort of spiritual myopia. The quintessential stanza quoted above reveals that Emily Brontë's faith could transcend the closed confines of Christian culture.

In fine, the Brontë sisters were poets of faith. Their faith, unlike Matthew Arnold's, was never shaken by faithlessness nor was it fraught with doubt like Tennyson's. Tennyson and Arnold were controlled by the changing spirit and the progressive temper of their age. They were in the mainstream of the Victorian scepticism, and they plunged themselves into the social, political and scientific matters which shook men's faith and belief. Fact was taking the place of faith. The all encompassing science could devour religion and the advancing materialism could replace Christianity. The Victorian world felt the sea of faith receding, leaving the mother earth spiritually naked. But the Brontë sisters stood firm, and remained unalloyed in their faith, and in this sense they stand close to Browning who asserted:

The world is not blot for us,
 Nor blank; it means intensely and means good:
 To find its meaning is my meat and drink.⁵⁷

The Brontë sisters knew that the meaning of this world was dependent on the world *beyond*. They could not live in this world without believing in the other world. They believed in a God-governed world here and beyond. Hence, their poetry was a theocentric poetry that was different from Tennyson's and Arnold's, a poetry of eternal values whether we respond to it from the Western or Indian perspective.

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Book Review

Elizabeth Dell (ed), *Burma: Frontier Photographs: 1918-1935*, James Henry Green Collection, Merrel Publishers Ltd, London, 2000.

The British presence in the Brahmaputra valley loomed large from 1825. This thinly populated, little exposed, and highly forested region was destined to be the pioneer tea plantation of the empire. The tea industry attracted numerous fortune seekers, influential industrialists and even some British bureaucrats preferred planting tea bushes to serving the empire. These potential tea-growing areas were also the play fields for the various tribes in search of slaves and trophies of human skulls. These tribal raids in the later British tea growing territories led to numerous pacification expeditions to the hills resulting in carving out of the various hill districts as loosely administered 'excluded areas'. That is how Garo Hills, Mikir Hills, Naga Hills and Lushai Hills districts were created in the province of Assam by the turn of the nineteenth century. Through the same process the northern triangle of Upper Burma, soon to be known as Kachin Hills, were carved out as a distinct administrative arrangement in 1895 in the northernmost part of the British Indian Empire. The book under review refers to the region, its resident Singphos of classical British ethnography (now Jingphaw) and their past heritage.

James Henry Green (1893-1975) was a soldier of the British Indian Empire in its waning period. He joined the Burma Rifles as its recruitment officer and worked up to 1935 in the 'Excluded Areas' Kachin Hills, northern Burma. He left Rangoon (now Yangon) in 1937 for Singapore to take up the post of military intelligence officer. After the fall of Singapore in 1942 during the World War II, he returned to London, where he remained for the next ten years in the British Foreign Office. He was a photographer

par excellence, who used classical ethnographic technique as a tool for military intelligence and recruitment. In course of his nearly twenty years of stay in the Kachin Hills, he took numerous photographs, collected ethnographic exhibits, and wrote his tour diaries containing priceless data on the lives of the people and events of the region. The James Henry Charitable Trust placed 1600 photographs, 200 textile exhibits and diaries with the Royal Pavilion, Library and Museum, Brighton, England for up keep and research. *The Burma: Frontier Photographs: 1918-1935* is based on photographs and accompanying texts, spread in five chapters and contributed by four scholars. These chapters are lavishly illustrated with appropriate photographs from Green's collection. The book contains 230 photographs of different sizes, a priceless collection of photographic album running into 90 pages. Biographic note on J H Green, bibliography and index at the end enhance the utility of the book for the readers.

Elizabeth Dell in her 'Introduction' to the book, titled "Mapping Burma: the James Henry Green Collection of Photographs", found that the photographs formed a part of a particular unequal transaction between peoples, and stand as a record of those transactions and points of contacts. They also have a life and meaning beyond intentions, skill, luck and vision of the photographer and as archival evidence they are witness to an era, events and institutions long gone by (p.9). As a recruiting officer with the Burma Rifles he travelled to remote northern hills previously unmapped by Europeans. His fascination with the people of the region aroused a life long interest culminating in a fellowship of the Royal Anthropological Institute in 1928, and a diploma in Anthropology from Cambridge University in 1934 on "The Tribes of Upper Burma North of 24 degree N and Their Classification". He studied the nuances of the customs, beliefs, languages and physical attributes that distinguished neighbouring groups and recorded these according to the anthropological practices prevalent in those days.

On the basis of Green's archives of notes, diaries, speeches, publications and photographs, the volume under review records his role as military intelligence officer and an amateur anthropologist, his observations on peoples and collection of artifacts—specially textiles. Green's photographs should be seen in the line of photography as a tool of descriptive ethnography and as a part of the colonial anthropological heritage since 1860s, which began with E T Dalton's *Descriptive Ethnography of Bengal*. This ethnographic collection of strong visual record of Kachin State also highlights the tension between the past and present of Kachin people engaged in negotiating the place of these records within the contemporary construction of their national identity. Burma proper was administered as a province of India and frontier areas were identified as 'excluded areas'. Even in 1935 the residents of this region had not heard of Burma or Burmans, leave alone of India. Green was aware that many of the ethnological problems were baffling, but thought that "a study of physical anthropology, technology and mythology will solve a good many of them" (p.15). Physical attributes were clearly of importance in recruiting 'types' for military as well as for racial classification of the people, a pet project of the colonial days. He advocated a general knowledge of the culture of people to be of greater importance to the administrators than that of the language.

The strongest part of Green's photographic collection is the portraiture, though there is little in his diaries or route notes that refers directly to the process of capturing images of people. The images of people show Green's interest in physical types, their costumes and their evolution. He was clearly a product of his time and of beliefs and motivations of the empire. His Anthropology, like his photography, was in harness to his official role in military surveillance and control. However, the images collected in the book can point to an understanding of modern construction of identity, nationhood and unity as they are analysed, incorporated, rejected or used as evidence in contemporary Burma. After all, Green's is

part of a tradition of ethnographical documentation through photography, which stretches back to mid nineteenth century. That was the time bulky camera was considered indispensable documentary tool for the benefit of colonial ethnography and useful to the administration.

It goes without saying that publication of the *Peoples of India* between 1868 and 1875 containing 500 photographs of racial, ethnic and caste types was part of an ideology to tabulate, synthesize and ultimately control the culture of India in the aftermath of the mutiny of 1857-58. In spite of the individual photographers' skill to overcome the limitations imposed by the cumbersome camera, the photographs were invariably unsatisfactory: "the people always seemed nervous, their expressions were invariably stupid or stolid and they posed very unwillingly". By 1920s the camera was improved to the extent that its intimidating size was reduced; its portability was increased and its intrusive features were minimized. But by then science of ethnography itself had changed and thus postures and intimacy of camera began to be questioned.

David Odo notes that Green's images attest to the unprecedented access he had to his subjects. Perhaps he was the first European to encounter many of the people he had photographed and studied. Through out the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries photography was largely considered a simple recording, truth revealing, mechanism. Photography played a major role in Salvage Ethnography of the period and much of Green's work can be located within this tradition. Heavily influenced by existing anthropological paradigm of race and evolutionism many of his images are of the homogenizing and dehumanizing 'physical type'. "This is evident from large number of images in which body functions as an object of study. His photograph of two Naga men is one the more extreme examples of this position (No. 0625). Two men are posed in naked and are shown in full length... it nevertheless reduces its human subjects to mere physical specimen...the men's facial expressions attest to their distress at the time they were photographed. They

are pictured without clothing. The subjects are located in 'nature', employing none of the signs such as material artifacts or built environments, typically used to provide information about cultural context. Rather, it is absence of clothing that here serves as cultural marker, for Nagas were stereotyped as 'lazy', preferring to go naked than weave cloth... We learn virtually nothing of the conditions of their lives from this photograph, rather it is informative of the photographer's intentions and ideology and unequal power relation that enabled Green to create it" (pp. 43-45).

For David Odo, Green's photography suffers from two qualities: dehumanising physical types and images of exceptional intimacy and sympathy. Through these photographs of physical typing not only could the subjects of dying races be studied, but they could also be preserved. For him authority also provided a way to salvage the subjects' culture, which was highly paternalistic. Green did not work within Malinowskian model: rather he favoured close-ups and portraits, posed his subjects and tended to eliminate context from his images. By 1920s, the view that photography afforded an objective window to reality that had largely been discredited. These changes contributed to a decline in the anthropological use of photography, as new anthropology was interested in culture, now constructed, and not as visible.

Mandy Sadan's two chapters on 'Contemporary Context' and 'Documentary Record of Contact' raise the issue of the relevance of colonial anthropology to ethnic groups and nationalities on the one hand, and negotiating a relationship with the animistic heritage by contemporary Christian nationalities such as Kachin, Naga and Mizo on the other. She began her research on a selection of Green's archives in Rangoon in 1996. Kachin State emerged as a political entity after the Burmese independence in 1948 and Kachin identity is itself largely political in origin. However, it was the British who initiated the process in 1895 through the Kachin Hill Regulation, an Act labeling hill tribal villages as 'Kachin' for the use of administration. It is also a fact that Kachin soldiers were mainly

drawn from Jingphaw (Singpho) community besides Lisus and others. In this way, the term 'Kachin' was artificially created, like the word 'Nagas' some two decades before that and an ethno-political composition of six parts such as Jingphaw, Lisu, Maru, Nung-Rawang, Zaiwa and Lacid was imposed on northern Burma.

The world of Green's photographs, taken 75 years back, is not only difficult, but also discomfiting and contemporary Christian Kachin nationalists would like to dissociate themselves from their animist past. For many Kachin Christians, their animist cultural context displayed through these photographs can be immensely disturbing. The Kachin theologians frequently cite the oppressive burden of animist rituals as the main reason for their rapid conversion to the Christianity. Against the Burmese attempt to make Buddhism the official State religion, Christianity was drafted as the symbol of Kachin nationalist resistance against the Rangoon regime. Kachin missionaries emphasised on the superiority of Christianity to animism. However, there is a deep-rooted insecurity about how the animist relates to the Christian present and whether such photographs should ever be considered more than simply a record of a degenerate culture. To advance the worth of Green's photographs exposes danger of undermining the foundations of unity expressed through the symbol of Christian faith. Modern Kachin nationalist discourse demands a level of 'standardization' of ethno-cultural uniformity and a level of quality in cultural practices and symbols free from potential ridicule from others. Odo rightly identifies ambivalent interpretations of Green's photographs of the animist past and its role for future (p. 61).

The commonest social and economic opportunities that existed for ambitious Kachin youth in recent years were to enter theological college to train as pastors or priests or to enter K (aching) I (ndependent) A (rmy) as officers. For these young and articulate leaders Kachin identity is a current obsession. In this context, Green's archive seems to offer little towards enabling evidence to them. There are very few Kachins who still believe in animism and

still fewer who practise it. Choosing this as an area of study is to illuminate a world that no longer exists, and few mourn its disappearance. It can also be a potential bone of contention between the past and the present. Green's collection presents a heritage, which is difficult to disown and embarrassing to own up by the contemporary Kachin people.

Green chose to remain a career soldier in preference to a career in anthropology. Green's work in Kachin hills was mainly oriented to military related survey or recruitment or to provide slave-release campaign of the civil administration. The British identified the pre-eminent Kachin socio-political structure as prop to their need in the form of Jingphaw hereditary chiefs - *Duwa*. However, it was not always clear whom to delegate local power as the *Duwa*, because of conflicting over-lap of institution of hereditary chiefs and hereditary headmen. The case of *Duwa Htingna Khuma* (p. 74) is an illustration. The British administration would opt for the enhancement of powers of those chiefs and headmen, who could demonstrate willingness to be co-operative. The District Commissioner would stand as *Duwa Kaba* (great /big chief) to the then Kachin power structure with Union Jack flying atop. Was it not reminiscent of the Red Indians terming the President of USA as the big father/ chief? Here also the administration gets embroiled in the chiefs' demands for communal dues from the Christian villages for animistic festivals as it happened in the Naga Hills District.

Impact of slave-release should have been one the most rewarding exercises for historians and anthropologists with a view to understand the modern Kachin social formations. But for obvious reasons, it is one of the most impenetrable areas of study (p.85) Green's photographs may be seen as one of the personal response to the British encounter to the Kachin primitive world. It was the pattern of Kachin relation building that enabled Green to be intimate and sympathetic to the people. As a result, he developed a uniquely rich heritage of records that is still relevant for a proper understanding

of the lives and vanishing world of the northern Burmese frontiers. A similar situation may be noted from Kachin's western neighbouring Naga Hills, where one finds M/S J H Hutton, J P Mills, Charles Pawse, and Furer Haimendorf empathising with the Naga cause. Green's collection presents a highly romanticising image of tribal life from a distant frontier in to a typical Kipilinsque style of paternalistic approach to simple societies. Inadvertently, the Empire through its omission and commission laid the foundation of nationality formation among the distinct ethnic groups such as Kachins, Nagas and Mizos. In the final analysis, Green clicked his camera for the cause of the Empire, but inadvertently, he contributed to the preservation of the Kachin heritage and priceless source of data for the 'science of man'.

Prof. A C Sinha,

Department of Sociology, North-Eastern Hill University, Shillong.

Temsula Ao, *The Ao-Naga Oral Tradition*, Bhasha Publications, Baroda, 2003, 185 pp, Rs 125/-.

Temsula Ao's study is an attempt to understand the culture of the Ao tribe of Nagaland in North-East India through their oral tradition. The book is divided into eight chapters. Chapter 1 introduces the Ao civilization as oral tradition, textiles and artefacts. Chapter 2 discusses the indigenous Ao society. In Chapter 3 the "authentic" Ao belief system is presented. Chapter 4 forms the main part of the book and presents some Ao myths and tales. In Chapter 5 a large number of tales are given under various headings such as "Transformation tales", "Some animal tales", "Some tales of the Supernatural", "Some other tales", and "Some heroine-oriented tales". Chapter 6 provides some linguistic details on the

Ao language and a few paragraphs on Ao time reckoning, numbers and weights and measures. In the concluding chapter (Chapter 7) a few words are devoted to changes in contemporary Ao society.

The study is based on the author's personal knowledge and experience as an Ao, her frequent field trips to the Ao area and a writing-up phase at the University of Minnesota. It is a thorough and serious study of oral tradition of a small scale but dynamic culture. The book has an important documentary value as it gives a large number of Ao narratives. Being an Ao herself and a Professor of English at NEHU, the author deserves all praise for her sincere effort to gain insight into her own culture. Not being trained as an anthropologist the result of her work is a well-written historical document for which the Aos have to be grateful. It will be of interest to all those interested in Ao culture as well as to linguists and anthropologists.

My perspective in reviewing this work is that of an anthropologist. For me the importance of this work lies in bringing together cultural data and narratives of the Ao tribe by a native speaker. The collection of texts shows a high degree of variation, often subtle, which makes oral tradition so rich, so beautiful, and so relevant for both modern Aos with an interest in their own culture and contemporary anthropologists. The study is a rich source of data, but its analytical framework is weak. For example, the data on society, civilisation and belief system are presented without a connection with those of the stories. The structure of the book, by and large, follows that of the early scholar-administrators such as Hutton and Mills. A truly integrated analysis would have helped in mapping out the original Ao mentality.

In her attempt to grasp the totality of the Ao culture and to make it understandable to contemporary readership, the author imposes two sets of classifications on the data that seems to me arbitrary. The oral tradition is divided into Primary, Secondary and Tertiary. This division presented in the first chapter does not serve

any purpose, not even in the rest of this book. Another division relates to worship and sacrifice. These are classified as “regular” and “irregular”. This division also does not add to our understanding. The intention might have been to demonstrate historical developments or the dynamics of the Ao culture. On page 29 Ao society is called ‘loosely’ democratic in its structure. This is, however, contradicted by the description of the Village Council (*Putu Menden*) as being a legislative, executive and judiciary power all in one institution (p.34) as well as by the existence of patrons and slaves (p.59). The “highly egalitarian society” (p.29) is thus not so egalitarian having slaves and a strict hierarchy of three high and many lower ranking clans.

While a beginning of an integrated approach to culture and narratives is made on page 15ff about names and narratives, such an approach is missing in the presentation of all other myths, legends and tales. In most cases the author’s comments do not go beyond a kind of functionalistic comment: the myth is told to justify a particular practice or custom (for example on pages 54 and 56). This is rather surprising for the Select Bibliography mentions the works of Claude Levi-Strauss, Brenda Beck, Stuart Blackburn and A.K. Ramanujan who all have analysed oral traditions with a structural rather than a functional approach.

This is a pity for the author shows great sensitivity while commenting on some myths. Commenting on the belief system, for example, she remarks, “their belief about tiger-souls is more akin to the concept of a person having more than one soul” (p.66). Indeed, the Ao concept of personhood needs to be studied on the basis of their narratives. The Ao view on another important cultural aspect – mortality – lies between the lines of the narratives entitled “A girl who was Loved by a Tree-Spirit” (p.122) and “Revenge for a Father’s Death”(p.135).

This book lies at the junction of two traditions. The old tradition of scholar-administrators is followed in its structure and

descriptive nature. At the same time it falls under a recent tradition of anthropological activities by other than anthropologists. The author frankly states in the Acknowledgement (p.iii) that she is "yet only a tentative amateur". As such she displays an emotional involvement. Striving for objectivity she leans on her training and experience in literary criticism. The lack of anthropological knowledge, for instance, appears in the use of the term patriarchal instead of patrilineal; distinguishing clans as major and minor is not incorrect, but it is a more common anthropological convention to describe their ranking in terms of high/low social and/or ritual status; the observation that the family is the first social unit in any culture (p.43); the absence of information on dates and methods of data collection and the years in which the field trips were undertaken.

Notwithstanding these critical comments, I wish to recommend this book to all anthropologists. I sincerely hope that Professor Temsula Ao will continue her journeys into Ao culture while making them anthropologically stronger so that her desire to "understand the intricate interweaving of the oral tradition with the culture" can be truly fulfilled.

Dr. S.N. Singh is Reader, Department of English, NEHU, Shillong.

Prof. Jan Brouwer,
Department of Anthropology, NEHU, Shillong

Dr. B. M. Reddy is Professor, Anthropology & Human Genetics
Unit, Indian Statistical Institute, Kolkata.

Contributors

Dr. Romendro Khongsdier is Reader, Department of Anthropology, NEHU, Shillong.

Mrs. Banrida Langstieh is Lecturer, Department of Anthropology, NEHU, Shillong.

Dr. K.S.Nagaraja is Reader, Department of Linguistics, Deccan College, Pune.

Ketshukietuo Dzuvichu is a research student at the Department of Anthropology, NEHU, Shillong.

Mrs. Isabella Lall is Selection Grade Lecturer at the Centre for Supporting Learning Systems, NEHU, Shillong.

Dr. S.N. Singh is Reader, Department of English, NEHU, Shillong.

Dr. Sukalpa Bhattacharjee is Lecturer, Department of English, NEHU, Shillong.

Dr.B. M. Reddy is Professor, Anthropology & Human Genetics Unit, Indian Statistical Institute, Kolkata.

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