

Representation of Insurgency in Srutimala Duara's *Travelling With Dreams*

Travelling with Dreams set in Assam represents the fact of terrorism and insurgency which is widespread in the state. Jibon, the dominant character of the novel is a hard core terrorist and the novel exposes the arrogance and insolence of the society towards the terrorist organizations, the existence of the individuals who are a part of terrorist organizations with a distinctive emphasis on their anguishes and disenchantments. The writer reveals:

During and after the Assam Movement, the young boys began to lay more importance on the word LOCAL. The Assamese youths were to be given employment. It did not matter whether they knew how to work or not. What mattered was the fact that they were local people. Nirmal Barua had nothing against employing local youths provided they worked sincerely. But they had the trump card in their hand with the five-letter password LOCAL.”(7)

The novel also exposes the desire of the terrorist for the cry of a separate land which tends to become the major issue impelling individuals like Jibon who has become a hard-core terrorist from a boy of the yesteryears whose mind was “as soft as the kohuwa. When boys of his age aimed at birds with their catapults, he screamed and frightened away the birds. He became the brunt of their teasing” (23). Jibon and his friends were forced to plod on the immoral path towards freedom in order to attain employment and to get rid of their rural life. The picture of terrorism in this region is clearly and sensitively projected by the writer. She exemplifies the sufferings, troubles and disillusionment confronted by the inhabitants of this land with sincerity. Srutimala Duara confesses "My novel *Travelling with Dreams* was based on terrorism for which I needed to really get down to the roots of the problem. It had many facets, perceptions, notions, myths and was multi-layered. To knit all that into a novel requires a lot of toil and sweat”.

Insurgency has aroused in the state of Assam due to the problems of unemployment and poverty which dared to transform the state of Assam which was a quiet little village with no complexity, tensions or worries that gnawed away a person's mind like today. The young boys of this territory were forced to use arms and ammunitions in pursuit of their dreams and aspirations. Their sole dream was to attain a land of "Golden Assam" and for the attainment of this dream they were ready to face any type of challenges. "Boys running from the army took shelter in the woods of the village. Sometimes the armed forces would follow in search of the militants and break the peace of the village."(12)

Keith as a foreigner had only praises for the Assamese people. According to him Guwahati was a very beautiful city because he has not faced the disordered streets and also the brawls and the slacks of the city did not reach him. His praise for the people increased day by day:

One family or the other every day invited him and his father for lunch or dinner. They relished the fish tomato *tenga*, *dhekiya* fry which Keith called "fern fry" and the simple meat preparations of the Assamese. There were others who prepared elaborate Chinese, Mughlai or Continental dishes for the foreigners. Mr. Colman and his son Keith were gratified by the hospitality of the people – the food, the gifts and the love showered on them.

Keith would have taken back beautiful memories of Assam and its people. He would have always remembered the Assamese people as kind-hearted and hospitable. Wonderful people who had given such grand treatment to foreigners who were not known to them till a few weeks ago. Such love, such affection, such large-heartedness was rare."(17-18)

On the other hand Unmona, a daughter of a rich tea planter had never got an opportunity to confront the harsh realities of the Assamese society and her life was only a mantle of dreams where she has to prompt her wish and “like the jinn of Aladdin’s lamp”(40) her father Binode Chaliha would accomplish it. Once on their way to Jonbiri Tea Estate they had halted in a dhaba where Unmona had come across six boys who had AK47 with them. This was the first time Unmona had confronted with present reality around her which made her very nervous but at the same time also very excited.

Unmona had already thought of telling her friends and anyone known to her about her chance encounter with the boys. She had never seen any terrorist before. She had conjured up in her mind tough looking men with drooping lips and cruel lines around the eyes. Guns in their hands and haughty ways. But those boys were like any simple folk that Assam had. They did not look like any fighter. She wanted to tell everyone how ordinary and every inch human they looked.”(45)

But Unmona’s world of fantasy was gradually transforming into a world of horror when she started coming into contact with the dreaded realities of the people of Assam. There were bomb blast and explosions here and there. The Doordarshan local new always had to display one or the other news of explosions, kidnaps and assassinations. When once her father was out to the city and there was a bomb blast Unmona’s heart started beating rapidly and she suddenly remembered of the local news which voiced that eight dead bodies were left on the street. A woman had lolled in the road with her legs approximately at a distance further and the tiny leg of her yet to be born child penetrating out from her womb. Then there was also one more woman who was holding the affected body of her husband and horribly crying with disappointment. The newspaper in the morning paper conveyed the news of the suspected extremists thus: “Suspected extremists of the outlawed outfit lobbed a powerful

Rocket Propeller Grenade at the second floor of the six storeyed residential housing complex 'Kamini' mostly inhabited by surrendered activists at the busy G.S. Road of the city at 8 p.m. Arun Das and Simanta Nath, both members of the surrendered militant group were killed. The surrendered militants displaying sophisticated arms in their hands have cordoned off the entire area. The grenade, believed to be lobbed from the building opposite to 'Kamini' Complex, plunged the second and third floor of the building into darkness and a portion of the building immediately caught fire under the impact of the blast. The extremists, soon after lobbing the grenade, also fired several rounds with AK 56 pressure bullets. Police is tight-lipped about the whole incident. A massive combing operation has been launched to trace the culprits. Today's incident is a clear example of the militants targeting their former colleagues. (59-60)

Jibon chose the life of militancy because he always had a tough bitterness against the people of the city. He believed that the city folks were not able to understand the difficulties and miseries of the people of the village because they have never experienced flood, famine and the other dearth of life. Jibon has always craved for a life of wealth and belonging. Therefore he preferred to have a life of an insurgent with a gun in hand to attain everything very easily. Added to this thus his dreams remained somewhere in infinity where there was no connection with his reality. The writer writes in general: "Yes. Dreams were just dreams. Then what had made him travel with a dream? It had taken him so far away from his village, from his own people, from his home, from his Jonali" (99) and therefore as he was deprived of his dreams his sole reason was for search of an independent land which will serve his purpose thus: "Yes, cause. They are looking for an independent land. A golden Assam. Independent. Self-sufficient." (107)

The cruelties of the insurgents have increased in the rural life of Assam. Amar when he was playing carom with his friends, the soldiers suspected him as an insurgent and dragged him into their vehicle and took him away. On the other hand

Sonmai had returned after fetching water from a near-by pond. Two soldiers caught her and dragged her to the house. Her mother ran after them, but they kicked her and left her lying on the ground. When the soldiers left with Amar on the jeep, Sonamai was found lying on the bed almost totally naked and unconscious. She was trembling violently. Her mother screamed for help and the neighbours came running. There were bruising and bite marks all over her body. Saliva was dripping from the sides of her mouth. The poor girl died soon after”(109).

The country dwellers were fed up by the murders, extensive hours of incarceration at army posts and agonies and torments of the innocent people, molestation and rape and also gang rape by the army employees and militants. The army in search of insurgents has also looted homes and granaries of the villages. The young youths of the village were frustrated of the enormous incursions and invasions in every house of the villages. The army employees in the brand name of “search operations” harassed and tortured the rural innocent people of Assam. Jibon had preferred a peripatetic life of his own in search of totality. He contemplates:

I wonder if we will ever get out of this jungle alive...

How long will we have to flee like this from one strange land to another?”

Jibon asked quietly almost to himself. “When will we reach our goal?”....

Yes, a land where scientific socialism would be the way of life, where our natural resources would be exploited for the benefit of our own people – all

our people and where we would not be exploited by the unscrupulous power elite of Delhi for their own benefit.” Jibon said slowly. “But when will such a day dawn?”

Once the whole of Assam was ruled by us, but today we Ahoms have been forced to assert our identity. We, the one-time rulers, have been classed under OBC.”.....

Yes, but why do you think they had? The other communities got themselves classed as Backward Classes or Scheduled Classes, etc. and got all the benefits. But our people? They had nothing. No benefits, no incentives, no job opportunities, nothing....Today we are a ruler without a kingdom (134-135).

Jibon very beautifully describes why he chose to live a life of insurgency forbidding a beautiful social life. He describes: Yes. But do you know why I had joined the organisation?” Nandan asked looking at Jibon. “I was in Guwahati with my uncle. I was looking for a job. After passing out from the university I had been sitting idle. There was no job for me in the city. I did not want to go back to the village and lead the life of a farmer. I hadn’t studied so hard to get my post-graduation degree to hold the plough. There are no other opportunities in the village. So I stayed back hoping that one day I would get a job. I had thought that that I’d not go back to the village till I get a job. I waited and waited. But there was no job. It was then that Nagen Kalita told me of an independent land where there would be plenty of jobs for all of us. A Golden Land. No starvation. No exploitation. I was frustrated. The dream of such a land tempted me and I became a militant. It was much better than the long wait for a job. (157). Today he was there somewhere in Bangladesh taking refuge. He had committed so many crimes that perhaps his own soul refused to take refuge in surrender. And here he was. Jibon Barua, the hard core terrorist. Still running. He did not

know where he would have to flee next. He did not know where he would have to flee next. He did not know whether he would get shelter or food tomorrow. All he knew was that life was one continuous run for him now. (157-159)

Jibon was the person who in want of a new land and identity had gunned down even the security men alongside with the minister's brother. He had also deprived a young woman of her husband. He had taken away the father of the unborn child before it could see him. Jibon got involved in this type of violent attacks in order to attain wealth, property, and identity for himself. He did not think of anything else but only self-attainment. Imon, a six year old boy was kidnapped from the school gate and murdered for no reason of its own but only because he was a son of a bureaucrat. His name and photo appeared in the news-paper and on the television screen. The militants knew that this was one of the acts that had brought in condemnation and criticisms from the people of all walks of life but Jibon did not think of anything. But Imon's mother was still waiting for her little son as such: "Imon's mother was still waiting for her little dimple-cheeked boy hoping that one day he would run into her bosom and she would ruffle his mop of hair (167).

The individuals, residing in Guwahati, did not have a decent outlook towards the submitted activists. When they surrendered they were permitted to retain their weapons for their own protection but they misused them for their selfish motives. In fact, it was a terrorism that had the support of the government. The submitted revolutionaries necessitated maximum of the government indentures. If any local entrepreneur ventured and got the business contract, he was either endangered to take back his tender or shot down without any warning. The protagonist once recalls:

She remembered the telephone call that had come as a shock to them. Her cousin, Ronjoy was missing since morning. He had gone to Fancy Bazaar to give his clothes...and he did not come back.

A week later Ronjoy returned home....After Ronjoy returned, he became a quiet person. His sunshine seemed to have got lost in some deep gloom. He remained in his own world most of the time. Those militants had tortured his body and maimed his mind.(176).

Duara also portrays a beautiful conversation between Banalata Chaliha and the Jibon, a resilient activist. Banalata Chaliha articulates: "We had the same spirit when we were fighting for our independence. But, of course we were fighting for our own country as a whole. We too wanted independence. An independent India. Thousands of people gave up their lives for this free India. Kanaklata died for the Indian flag. We had been imprisoned for wanting to fly the flag on our Indian soil. And today, you have no regard for that flag."(189).

But now the scenario has changed. The militants of Assam are searching for a new land of itself an independent nation but which is not possible in reality. Srutimala Duara rightly writes in her novel: that today's, Assam is full of frustration, and it is also wounded by the militants. She describes: "A section was suffering from melancholia, others were deeply wounded. Melancholia was a dangerous disease. People suffering from it either committed suicide or revolted. The boys were suffering from a deep melancholia. Something had to be done to cure these boys of this dreadful disease (193). At last Jibon understood the real meaning of life and what Unmona wanted to make him understand. The novel discloses the call for the isolated terrestrial as a major issue and also manipulating the lives of people like Jibon and provoking them to tramp on the wrong track. The depiction of terrorism in the region of Assam is clearly and delicately portrayed by the writer. Duara exemplifies the

anguishes, dilemmas and disappointment confronted by the inhabitants of Assam. Thus the novelist in her novel portrays the disheartened narrative of the people of Assam.

Works Cited

Duara, Srutimala. *Travelling with Dreams*. Guwahati: Spectrum Publications, 2001. Print.