

Meghamallar



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Stuti Goswami 23 July 2011 8070 views

Mustards in full bloom are a succour to the weary eye...

You know, on his beautiful evening, Majuli is swathed in green ink-- floating in the swirls of Aapong, the young S.D.O. made vain attempts at scooping out a few flakes of verse.

But then, its true—presently, Majuli is a riot of myriad shades of green.

That patch of mustard on my left is yet to blossom. facing me, the paddy fields that stretch out to the horizon, are luxuriantly green too.

I have indeed come to Majuli in a pleasant clime. It was here that I got acquainted with Pranay Dutta, the young S.D.O. of Majuli. Presently lodged in the Government Circuit House, Dutta helped me finish my work well ahead of time.

“Sir, is your work over?” It was Deben, the chowkidaar of the Circuit House standing beside me, bag in hand.

“Yeah...I’m leaving tomorrow. Are you going to the bazaar?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Then please bring me a pack of cigarettes” I took out my wallet and handed him some money.

“But I might be a little late sir. It is only after the evening ferry arrives that the cigarettes will be available”, with these words, Deben left.

This, is Majuli after all. From the man selling knick-knacks to the kerosene-seller, all trade subsists on the ferry that sails from Nimatighat on the other side of the river.

I relax my body on the arm chair. It feels good sitting out here in the verandah.

A warm afternoon in the month of Kati. A multitude of clouds hover in the blue sky above; clouds as white as the conch , ... Clouds..megh... meghdoot... messenger of clouds...

In the distance, a number of snow white storks hover about the beel. Lotus leaves float on its surface. There are no flowers.

Onto one of the branches of the giant barren sonaru nearby, two birds are perched ... languid, silent. Inside the compound, a black she-goat, along with her brood nibble away at the grass. Two of her little ones tug at the baby leaves of a plant in the unkempt garden; presently though they are seen pulling themselves away from the plant. Apparently, the leaves are not tasty.

Suddenly, the surroundings seem to close in on me—stifling me. Unlike Kalidas however, I am unable to extract even the tiniest drop of rasa out of the present moment. There's nothing to do, not a soul to be heard; the world is quiet and still . Deben has left already... nobody to share a word. I don't even feel like reading anything. Clouds, fields, beel till when can one possibly stare at an unchanging naturescape? O how I would cherish a some rain at this moment! Dutta will be back by evening. Even the cigarette supplies are exhausted. What to do...what do I do?

Suddenly I remember the unfinished pack of biscuits on my table. That should do for the moment. I bring the packet from my room and sit down on the verandah. I take out a biscuit and start munching it slowly. In the languid silence, the crunch of the biscuits sound pleasing. I eat as slowly as I can.... This time, I feel the heat. I go in and pour myself a glass of water from the filter. I return to the verandah and once again settle comfortably on my chair.

It is only now that I notice the leaden clouds hoarding the sky. From the west, a massive chunk of thick clouds draw near... As it sweeps the sky, it casts its enormous shadow over the paddy facing me—as though it were a gigantic hairy caterpillar. The sun has in the meanwhile hidden behind the clouds. A light breeze sails through nature. The leaves of the sonaru shiver gently. On the edge of the beel, two storks are fighting over a water snake. The paddy dances in the wind, sending tumultuous waves of green. A pleasant odour tickles my nose buds—I can make out the scent of unripe rice grains, wild flowers and of the mud of the river bank blended in sweet harmony.

Gir-gir-gir... the world reverberates with the thunder. This time around, I can easily smell the chaste intense rain that drawing closer. Gradually the clouds cast their shadow over the land--as far and wide as the eye can see. The wind is in a tumult. The firmament is illumined by incessant flashes of lightning; the sky rings constantly with bellow of thunder.

Outside the compound wall, a calf darts away--tail raised in fright. The family of goats hurriedly gets on to the verandah. The roar of wind drowns the frenzied bleating of the baby goats.

With a sharp creaking sound a branch of the sonaru breaks and falls down. A strong gust of wind forces open the wooden gate of the House. And at that moment in time, a rain descends. At first it falls in large droplets—tup-tup tup-tup. They fall on the tin roof of the Circuit House, evoking melodious notes of tin-tin-tin-tin. It feels as though I have long long awaited these magical notes—tup-tup tin-tin. How beautiful!!

The rain descends in increasingly heavier columns. Nature seems to have ensheathed herself in a sheet of misty silver. The rain, showing no signs of abating, showers over the green paddy. Once in a while a gentle flurry of the wind would unsettle the silvery droplets over the rice plants; making them sway and dance in the wind. Much of the paddy is by now immersed in water. There are puddles here and there, on which silvery raindrops play, like a bunch of toddlers splashing in the rain.

The showering rain sprays its mist over me...and I remain where I am. For the first time in life, I am witnessing such a rain, and I have already fallen in love with it...

It was indeed a heavy downpour ...

For a long time, I sat motionless thus, soaking in the rain, like sand dunes in a desert.

I was hardly aware when dusk fell, and darkness wove its curtain all around me. I could only hear the rain falling... jir-jir-jir... and the wind sweeping the world. I got up and pressed the switch; the bulb remained as it was--load shedding. I returned to my chair, and closed my eyes. In this ensheathing darkness, I tried to listen to the faint ektaala playing on the Rain God's instrument.

I'm not aware till when I was seated thus. Suddenly, I heard somebody clearing his throat; I gently opened my eyes. I could see nothing in the darkness.

"Is it Deben?" I asked.

"No sir, its me", a deep voice tumbled out, in response. I looked in the direction of the voice, and thought I could discern a man standing, umbrella in hand.

"Whom do you want?" I asked again.

"Isn't S.D.O. sir around?"

"No"

"I have come with hopes of some monetary help from S.D.O. sir. In the earlier deluge, I had worked hard on his behalf", the man said

“Kindly wait awhile. He will soon be here..”

“No I can’t. I have a long way to go. Its ok sir, I’ll take your leave.”, without showing any interest in extending the conversation, the stranger turned to leave.

I offered-- “Then please tell me about yourself. May be I could pass on the message when he comes.”

The man paused. In the dark, he fumbled for something, and drew closer—“Here is my address.”

He placed a coarse paper on my outstretched palm. I put it carefully in my pocket. Will have to give it to Dutta when he returns, I thought.

Meanwhile, the man dissolved into the darkness.

Just then, the rain too lightened. I went inside, lit a candle and lay down on my bed. I felt tired, and at once fell into a deep slumber. It was only when Dutta shook me hard that I woke up with a start.

The candle had almost extinguished. Dutta quickly lit it a new one. He took out his bottle of Brandy and pouring some measures into two glasses, offered me one and settling comfortably on my bed, began—

“So, how did you spend your day?”

Just then, Deben arrived with the cigarettes. At Dutta’s order, he hurried to the kitchen.

“Well...tell me—how did you spend your day?” emptying his glass at one gulp, Dutta repeated his question.

“what else? enjoyed the rain...that’s all.”

“Rain!!where...and when?” Dutta seemed surprised

“Since afternoon. Such a heavy downpour!”

“What?? were you dreaming?”, Dutta laughed out loud

“No, I’m not joking. I’m serious. Where were you in the afternoon?” I questioned.

“That is precisely why I’m asking you. Were you dreaming ?I had been at my office since morning. And you know, it’s hardly a furlong from here. Wouldn’t I know if there was rain?” Dutta broke out into peals of laughter.

It felt really awkward. I tried to read Dutta’s expression in the flickering candle light, but couldn’t tell whether he was having fun at my expense.

This time, I elaborated before Dutta the entire experience of the afternoon. I told him, how the rain fell heavily, and how long it lasted. I told him about the broken sonaru branch , the family of goats taking shelter in the verandah, the gate that had opened by itself in the wind. I even told him about the frightened calf that sprang hurriedly in the rain.

But Dutta was in fits. He laughed till he could laugh no more. Controlling himself with some effort, he asked—“ok, if there had been a heavy downpour—as you say—there must be puddles on the ground outside.”

“Yes—definitely” I was confident.

This time, Dutta eyed me with suspicion. Nonetheless he continued —“ok, then let’s go out and see.”

Both of us went.

The night sky was illuminated with a thousand stars. Dutta looked up and smiled. He switched on his torch—its powerful beam swept across the ground beneath his feet. The grass was dry!! He then tore a few leaves from a flower plant in the garden and showed me—a thin film of dust layered the leaves. He next shone his torch on the green corrugated roof of the Circuit House. It was virtually caked with dust.

“Satisfied?” Dutta said.

“One of the branches of the sonaru had broken off!”

“It can break in the wind anyway. Is it necessary to check that?” I was desisted.

Just then, hearing somebody humming a tune just outside, Dutta shouted out—

“Hey—who’s that?”

“Its me—S.D.O. sahib” a crude voice replied.

“Who me?”

“Anil Kamaan--the cartpuller”

“Did it rain here today?”

“What does sahib say—ha ha ha”, laughing, Anil Kamaan moved on pushing his pushcart

This time, Dutta shouted out to deben. He came running out of the kitchen. He too gave a similar answer—

“Rain!!today?where, when? not at all!!”

“Forget it, I suppose you were dreaming.... It happens sometimes though.... Let’s go inside--”with these words, Dutta walked in. Wondering whether I was actually alive, or long dead, I too followed.

Dutta became busy pouring a new peg, while I started scrapping the caverns of my memory to retrieve the experiences of the afternoon.

That beautiful firmament— the firmament hoarded with dark clouds, the incessant falling rain streaks, Nature dancing to the rain’s melody—all this...were all this not there? a mere figment of my imagination?

At about ten that evening, we had our dinner. Candle in hand, Deben took Dutta to his room.

“I suppose the current won’t return tonight after all.”

I changed into my nightshirt. After that I took the candle and went up to the dressing table. Terrified I peered into the mirror. Am I indeed the person standing in front of the mirror?

Suddenly, a lightning struck inside my mind. –“That man!” Of course, there was that man, who had come to meet Dutta. He had come when it was raining heavily. With an umbrella in hand, that man had stood amidst the dark—right there--before my eyes. He’d given me a piece of paper with his address on it, and had left in the rain itself. Yes—that paper, that coarse bit of paper. Where was it now... where had I kept it?

I searched frantically for that paper. That man will certainly know about the rain. He had come amidst the rain itself.

But if it was indeed raining heavily, how come the paper was so dry? How did it dry so easily? Why was there no trace of rain? I was bewildered.

Whatever—the most important thing at the moment was to get that paper with the man’s address on it...where had I kept it?

I remembered—it was in my pant pocket.

I almost hauled the pant from the cloth stand. Thank heavens!!The paper was still there...

At once, I put my hand inside my pocket, and drew it out. At the same moment, I was taken aback.

It was not a piece of paper—but a lotus leaf, folded in the middle. A pleasant scent tickled my nostrils once again—it was the scent of unripe rice grains, of wild flowers and mud of the river bank mix’t in sweet harmony.

Slowly, I opened the folded leaf. On the leaf, with scratch marks made by a light stick, was written in a beautiful hand—“Rainseller”

By Tapan Das

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Stuti Goswami

BY STUTI GOSWAMI

Talk on digital journalism

Munin Barkotoki memorial seminar

Our World

Antique Thumri

Poetry conclave in Guwahati

ON THIS DAY

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Congress demands CM's resignation

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Award for BVFCL Daily Bazaar Puja

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