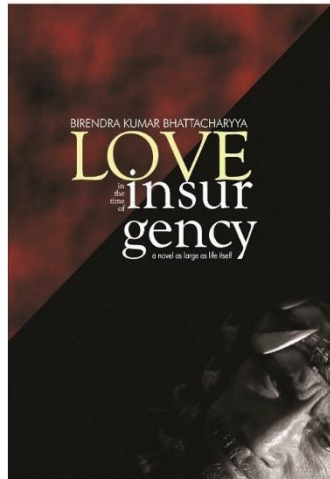


## BOOK REVIEW

Apurba Bhuyan\*:

***Love in the Time of Insurgency* by Dr Birendra Kumar Bhattacharya**

***Love in the Time of Insurgency* by Dr Birendra Kumar Bhattacharya translated by the author himself from his original work *Yaruingam* (2005)**

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Dr Birendra Kumar Bhattacharya (14 October 1924 – 6 August 1997) was an Indian writer. He was the first Assamese writer to receive the prestigious Jnanpith Award conferred by the Bharatiya Jnanpith in 1979 for his historical novel *Mrityunjay* (Immortal, 1970). In this novel, he depicted the commitments and involvement of the Assamese people in the 1942 freedom struggle in India. He also received the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1961 for his novel *Yaruingam* (1960) and this novel he translated to English as *Love in The Time of Insurgency* in 2005. His other prominent novels are *Aai* (The Mother, 1960), *Sataghni* (1965), *Pratipad* (1970), *Cinaki Suti* (Acquainted Stream, 1971), *Kabar aru Phul* (Blossoms in the Graveyard, 1972), *Ballari* (1973), *Ranga Megh* (The Red Cloud, 1976), *Daaini* (The Witch, 1976), *Munichunir Pohar* (The Twilight, 1979), *Kalar Humuniah* (The Sigh of The Decades, 1982), *Rajpathe Ringiyai* (The Call of the Road, 1982). His short story collections are *Kolong Aajiu Boi* (Kolong is Still Flowing, 1962) *Satsori* (1963) and *Khiriki Kakhori Ashon* (A Seat near the Window, 1994). Basically, he was a novelist and story writer, but he penned some perennial poems too. His only poem book is *Sandhyaswar* (Notes of the Dawn, 1990). His Travelogues are *Simai Amani Kare* (1975) and *Russia Yatra* (1984) are his China and Russia travel respectively. He wrote plays for Radio and translated a few books into Assamese from English and Bengali such as *Introduction to the Study of Indian History* by D D Kasumbi, *For Whom the Bell Tolls* by Hemingway and *Short Stories of*

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Ravindranath Tagore. *Samvad Sahitya* (Literature of Discourse, 1975) and *Dersa Basarar Asamiya Sanskritit* (150 Years Culture of Assam, 1978) and *Amar Svadhinata Andolan* (Our Independence Struggle, 1986) are his remarkable works. He contributed to and promoted Assamese literature as the Editor of the prominent literary journal *Ramdhenu* (The Rainbow) in 1960. The magazine, published from 1950 was a breeding ground for Dr Bhattacharya and other prominent Assamese writers for more than a decade. This literary platform created several new writers in different domains of Assamese literature who elevated Assamese literature up to the 21st Century and beyond. Moreover, Dr Bhattacharya was active as a leading Indian literary critic and contributed to discovering new literary talents. He was the President of *Assam Sahitya Sabha* (Assam Literary Society) from 1983 to 1985. He served Sahitya Akademi of India as Vice President in 1983 and as President in 1988. In this year, 2024 his birth centenary is celebrated by literary forums of Assam earnestly.

Dr Birendra Kumar Bhattacharya's novel *Love in the Time of Insurgency* is the translation of the original novel *Yaruingam* written in Assamese by the author in 1960 and for which he got the Sahitya Akademi award in 1961. This novel deals with the life of Tangkhul Nagas based on a Naga village Ukhrul, near the Burma border which he wrote during his stay in that village as a teacher for three years. *Yaruingam* means 'Rule of the people' in Nagamese. The territory of Nagas was not included in the British-ruled Northeast province and they maintained a separate identity. After the independence, this area was included under Indian rule. However, Dr Bhattacharya noticed that the common Naga people were scared and felt dejected by the people of the other parts of India. There were genuine reasons too, as the poor, less educated and isolated Nagas were judged as ignorant and uncultured by average people of the plains. The separatist movement of the Naga people was not exactly political, it was a humanitarian issue as presented by Dr Bhattacharya in his novel. Noted critique R K Dasgupta writes- "Birendra Kumar presents the Nagas as a part of the human situation in our country with an imaginative sympathy and understanding which go into the making of a great work of art."

The characters of this novel are realistic as stated by the writer himself. He picked up the characters from the society he noticed closely to visualize the true pictures though he imposed dimensions to the characters as per the demand of the narrative. Here *Yaruingam* was the name of the son of one of his Naga friends, who strongly believed in the independent rule of his community. The Naga man named his son as *Yaruingam* to represent his ideology and thinking. A nurse Sharengla who lived a sorrowful life was made an important character of the novel imposing humanitarian aspects of Christian philosophy that spread by the American missionaries during the British invasion period.

Thus Phanitphang, an immature but simpleminded youth was made a popular native missionary. Another two characters Ngazek and Videssellie were also picked up from that society. The character Videssellie is the replica of Phizo, the leader of the secessionist movement in Nagaland. Rishang, Khating, and Khutingla are the other important characters. Dr Bhattacharya made the presence of a Dog meaningful as a Dog is an essential domestic animal for Nagas as the Cow for the other village dweller communities of India. Though Dr Bhattacharya narrates the political scenarios as the prereferral structure of the Novel, the core theme is dealing with humanitarian empathy. This novel certainly helps to understand the root of the separatist movement of the Naga people since the independence of India. This novel for which Dr Bhattacharya got the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1961 was translated into English by himself as *Love in the Time of Insurgency* in 2005.

The Second World War trampled the Naga habitats like the other parts of the Northeast region and it affected tremendously the political and socio-cultural fronts. In this novel, Dr Bhattacharya depicts the story of Tangkhul Nagas, which is a major stream of the greater Naga community. The abstract of the novel is like this - the Japanese invaded the region during the world war and a native nurse Sharengla was the victim of the atrocity of a Japanese soldier Ishewara and she surrendered to the foreigner. She was ashamed and downgraded by society as a courtesan. But Rishang a youth engaged her in the noble work of nurturing the needy of the society as a volunteer under the guidance of the missionary Dr Broke and tried to elevate her position. Rishang also thought of educating the ignorant villagers about modern medical therapies instead of primitive methods based on superstitions. Rishang thought of taking education in Calcutta, which was adjudged as a prominent educational hub at that time to enrich himself and to enrich his society with his knowledge. He left for Calcutta for higher education. He thought of setting up a high school in his village. Amidst the diverse political motivations of some separatist leaders of Nagas, Rishang was advocating assimilation with the greater part of the Indian territory. He was dreaming of a new society of greater humanitarian values with his lover Khutingla and wanted to name his son in the future as Yaruvingam which means the dream of the people. He wanted to bridge the underdeveloped hill territories with the relatively developed plains. Dr Bhattacharya indicates this syndrome by introducing the character Koncheng, who was the son of Jibon, a man of the plains. The nurse Sharengla adopted Koncheng as her son after the demise of her own illicit son. Rishang played a key role in spreading the view of assimilation, but he had to face the obstructing force of Videssellie who was advocating armed revolution in the name of protecting and uplifting the values of the Naga society.

Dr Bhattacharya discretely describes the conflicting stimuli of the Naga society, post-independence tussles for power among divergent groups, the oppression and arrogance of the governing authorities, superstitions, and stereotypes of the common people to establish the novel as a tested pool of document. He also portrays the faith, rituals, food habits, attire, and unique fashions of the Naga people. Dr Bhattacharya represents the character Ngazek who was a community healer with a typical traditional outfit. He was a practitioner of a cult with a garland of human heads around his neck. Based on this character the writer describes the religious faith and rituals related to death practised by the Naga community. The Naga community was demoted for such faith by the so-called elite society. Dr Bhattacharya illustrates this issue through the conversation of Rishang and Shyamali who was a fellow student in the college in Calcutta. After the introduction with Rishang, Shyamali exclaimed- “Oh, you are from the community of head slaughters”. Rishang got irritated and said angrily “Don’t worry, you are safe “

Shyamali immediately realized her fault and said - “Actually we have a concept that all Nagas are savage and accustomed to cut heads.”

Dr Bhattacharya was successful in illustrating the conflicting issues of the Naga people and this novel can be considered as a tested document to understand and solve long pending Naga issues politically as well as socially.

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\*Apurba Bhuyan is an engineer and presently serving as a senior executive in a prominent oil and gas exploration company in India. From childhood, he has kept a keen interest in literature. He also belongs to the *All Assam Sahitya Sabha*, a well-known literary organization of the state. Building his roots as an Assamese poet and writer he has written in various literary magazines, collections and e-magazines like *Muse India*, *Setu magazine*, *Pratilipi* etc. Besides Assamese, he writes in Hindi and English and translates his works. His four poetry and two story books have been published in Assamese so far. A few of his representative works in Hindi can be accessed in Indian online editions “*Kavita Kosh Hindi*” and “*Gadya Kosh Hindi*”. E-mail: bhuyana7@gmail.com