

## **Bodo Poets: A New Beginning**

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**Dr. Anil Boro**

Courtesy: <http://www.nezine.com/info/Few%20Poems%20of%20Anil%20Boro>

### **The Question of Ethnicity and Identity**

The northeastern part of India is formed with seven states which include Assam, Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram, Meghalaya, Tripura, and Sikkim. All these states are known for its natural beauty, its exotic food, its vibrant culture, and its tribes, but when it comes to the question of literature and literary understanding of the writers from this region no one can trace a single and specific flavor of literature of this region. It is mainly because different tribes from this region carry different sentiment for this region. Difference in culture and language never allowed them to thrive towards a common goal but it may be said that literature from north-east often carry the question of ethnicity and identity.

From writers like Laxminath Bezborua to Hemen Borgohain carry a legacy of projecting Assamese “Tholua Sanskrity” - that can be translated as “ethnic culture”. Within this ethnic cultural space of Assamese literature, many writers are writing in Tribal languages of greater Assam.

Within this well nurtured ethnic cultural space of Assamese literature, like many other tribes such as Bodos are trying to secure their space. Dr. Anil Boro is one of such writers, who writes in the language Bodo and he himself translates them into English. Before going deep into some of Dr. Anil Boro’s writings, here the need to explore a bit on various aspects of this particular tribe can be felt. Without understanding the background in which these Bodo writers are writing, it will not be possible to justify any reading on either their language or their literature.

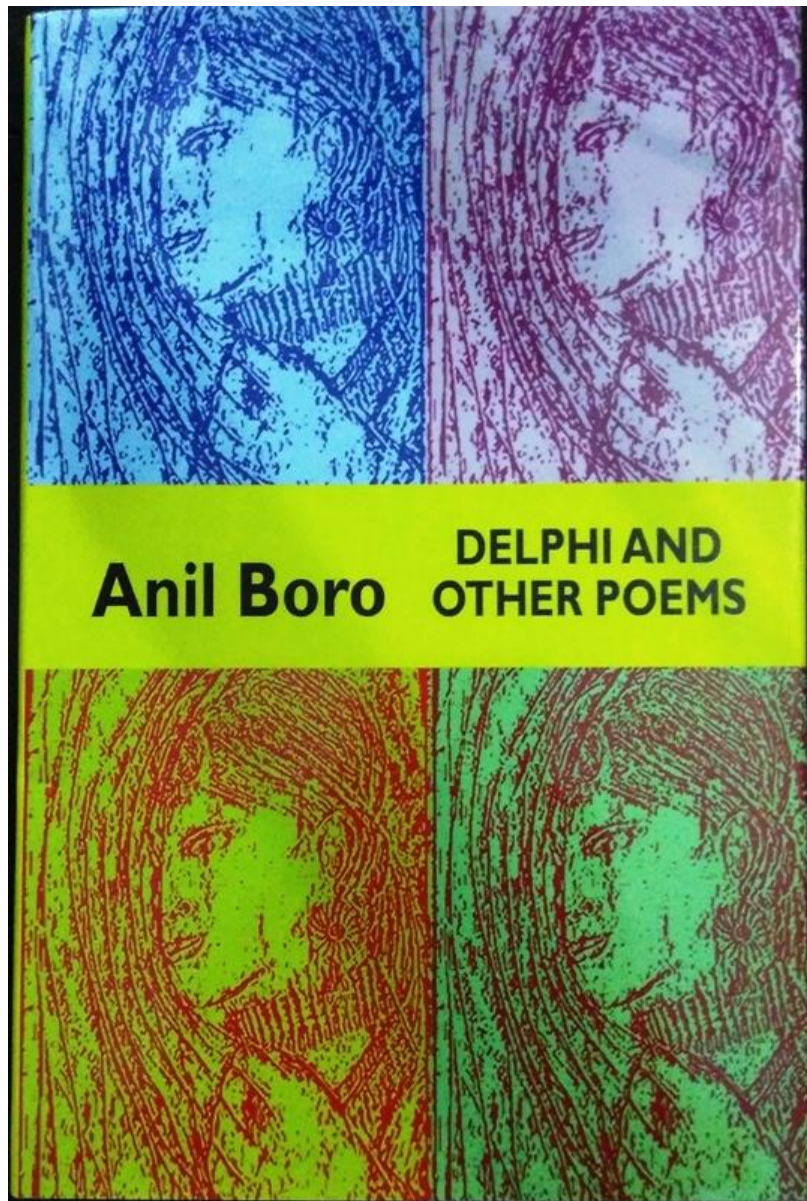
### **Bodo**

Bodo are considered to be the largest plain Tribe of Assam. After the formation of Bodo Territorial Council (BTC), Bodos of Assam could get their ground for asserting their identity. This particular tribe of Assam like many other tribes followed an oral tradition. The written literature of early Bodo writers before independence was in the language Bangla but after independence it slowly started following Assamese language and its script. It is only after 1963 Bodos started using Devanagari script after a long battle. *Bodo Thunlai Afat* the most influential literary forum of Bodos was established in the year 1952 had taken important role in establishing Bodo literature. It is only after the inclusion of Bodo language in the 8<sup>th</sup> Schedule of Indian Constitution that Sahitya Akademy Award has been given in Bodo literature.

### **Role of Translation**

Thus it may be said that the literature written in the language Bodo is still in its primary level compared to literature in other languages. In such circumstances, translation can play a crucial role in promoting literature to a larger reading public. It is through translation that these Bodo writings can enter into the larger sphere literature where their voice will be heard. When

readership will increase, automatically the regional literature will cross its boundary of language to enter into the new world of acceptance. In the present context the long struggle of Bodo's to claim their Social, cultural and political rights is echoed through their literature and thus when these literary works get translated , their long withdrawn identity reaches out to the common people.



**Dr. Anil Boro**

Dr. Anil Boro, is an associate professor in the Department of Folklore, Gauhati University, Guwahati. He is the winner of Sahitya Akademy Award for his writings, specifically

for poetry. He was awarded Sahitya Akademi Award in the year 2013 for “Delphini Onthai Mwdai Arw Gubun Gubun Khonthai”. Dr. Anil Boro is engaged in creative writing for a long time. In his writings, readers can easily locate a writer’s anxiety in establishing a distinctive identity of Bodo literature. He said “it is a voice still unheard in midst of multiple dominant voices, it is the duty of the Bodo poets and authors to make their poetic voices audible” (Boro, 2004).

Here for this write up four poems of Dr. Anil Boro has been chosen which are translated from Bodo to English by the poet himself. The selected poems are as follows:

*A Sky: Poetry, The Peace Bird, What’s Your Worry, and Fire in the Forest.*

### **Anxiety and Emotion of the Poet**

These above mentioned translated poems of Dr. Anil Boro truly reflect his sentiment as a Bodo poet. In all these poems the anxiety and the emotion of the poet is captured. It is evident that the poet cannot run away from the truth, the violence, the struggle, the oppression and the agitation. For him poetry is the only possible medium to transcend his soul to that height where he will be able to search for truth.

In the poem *A Sky: Poetry*, the poet has clearly stated -

I have a sky of my own  
A Sky;  
Poetry  
A garden of solitude

For him it is in poetry, where he can search for ‘a garden of solitude’. Poetry is considered here as his own share of sky. It appears that he had searched a lot and it is in poetry that he can get the freedom that he longed for. This longing is expressed in much vivid words in the last two lines of the poem:

Words kiss words as  
One heart embraces the other

In these last two lines of the poem, the poet expresses his ability to reach out to that extent through his words and through his poetry where he will be able to find peace. He wants to reach to that place where ‘one heart embraces the other’, and the road through which he will reach to that place is “poetry”. It seems that the poet knows it very well , it is only through poetry, it is only through words that he will be able to talk about peace and ask for his own share of sky.

### ***The Peace Bird***

In the poem *The Peace Bird*, the poet extends the same kind of emotion as he had expressed in the *A Sky: Poetry*. In this poem it is evident that the violence in the society is making him upset. He is hoping that the “peace bird” will fly to him “after the dark smoke of blast”. He is hopeful that the “innocent smiles bloom on the lips of children” after the “animal brutality of merciless killing”. The poet is again hopeful in restoring a “dying generation”.

“who pretend to wear steal heart--

A heart made of machines”.

A generation of youth, having the orientation of living amidst fear, violence and oppression, pretends to be less emotional. It seems that they have developed a heart which mechanically beats and which has stopped feeling. The long struggle of Bodos for claiming their own identity and their own land has withdrawn life and peace from a generation of youth. In this poem the poet has talked about his concern for this generation of youth who are deaf with the sound of ‘Blast’ and who are mechanized to believe in violence. But what is important here is that the poet is very much positive in his approach, as he is really hopeful for a future when peace will be restored in this land. The world that he imagines is that of a pristine tribal world where man and nature co – exists and he wants to believe that world can be saved with genuine effort.

### ***What's your worry?***

In poems like *What's your worry?* The poet tries to give an answer to the question - often asked to these natives of North East, a question about their anxiety, about their struggle, which is not familiar to those who never cared for them. This is the reason why the poet has firmly stated

“Your worry  
Can't be mine”

The agenda of struggle for these people is very different and thus it cannot be understood by others. The “worry” is very much specific to these people and their question of identity and existence. Within very few lines of this small poem, Dr. Anil Boro, engages his readers with a very crucial question and comes up with a very apt answer, through which it can be understood that people in general can never realize the critical socio-political agenda of these natives from Assam.

### ***Fire in the Forest***

In poems like *Fire in the Forest*, the poet again comes up with the idea of identity of Bodo's and their affinity with nature. Nature is the home of the poet, it is in the forest that he can find his refuge. It is nature where he can listen to the music of *Sifung* and *Kham* but this music can no longer be heard as these people are uprooted from their original place that is nature. He writes “the virgin fields leaped up to the tune of *Sifung/ now they have built tall buildings/ and built their capital here.*” The poet deeply regrets the fact that he is writing in an age where people remain busy in mundane reality away from nature. Thus the melancholy of this poet can be heard clearly. The poem ends with these lines: “There is fire, fire everywhere/fire in the virgin forest” – where the poet has again provided a vivid picture of the condition of the indigenous people who totally depend on the forest which is now set on fire. It is again the question of home and land that haunts him. He cannot move away from the questions related to the life and existence of Bodos, thus poetry is the only weapon in his hand with which he can counter all such questions.

## Representative Voice of Bodo's

All in all it can be said that in these select poems, Dr. Anil Boro appears to be the representative voice of Bodos. It is for his deliberate portrayal of the condition of this ethnic community from North Eastern part of India, Bodo literature has moved towards a much brighter position. His contribution in enriching the literature written in Bodo language is a milestone. Another most important aspect of his poetic career is that he translates his own poems in English so that his voice can reach out to a large number of readers throughout India. He affirms his position in the literary scenario of Greater Assam through his truthful projection of feelings and sentiment of Bodos, the largest plains tribe of Assam.

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