

Exploring Fearism in Literature: A Critical Study on Select Women Writers of the North East India

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Abstract:

The present paper aims to study some of the prose fictions of the select Northeast women writers from a very new perspective in literary theory that is 'The Philosophy of Fearism'. Fearism, propounded by Desh Subba, is regarded as the first east-west dialogue, an emerging philosophy that deals basically with the issues of fear and its impact in human life.

Mamang Dai from Arunachal Pradesh, Temsula Ao from Nagaland and Arupa Patangia Kalita from Assam have been so vocal female voices from this region and this paper will study some select works by them from a fearist perspective. Their works highlight the concern about ecology, social issues and the traumatic conflicts in human life; nonetheless, we can delineate these philosophical visions of Fearism in the portrayal of characters. Desh Subba, the founder of Fearism asserts that human beings go through fearmorphosis, they are being watched by panopticons and sometimes man himself scapegoat not only the innocent people, even the nature with arms and gun powder. This paper will study 'Stupid Cupid' by Mamang Dai, 'The Curfew Man' by Temsula Ao and Arupa Patangia Kalita's 'The Girl with a long Hair' and will try to interpret with this perspective because the characters dwelling in different situations are the victim of a fear Sisyphus, who are always under the multiple eyes of fear and this fear destabilizes their life being.

Keywords: Philosophy of Fearism, fearmorphosis, scapegoat, fear Sisyphus, multiple eyes, destabilize...Etc

Introduction:

Desh Subba, the founder of Fearism, says-

"The beginning of 'Philosophy of Fearism' can be said to be accidentally emerged. In 1999, I prepared a novel entitled 'Ujad'(desolate). A friend of mine Sharan Subba after reading the manuscript, he underlined the word 'Bhayabad' with a red ink. I thought of it deeply for a quite a long time about the word. 'This can be different' I pondered." (2018, subba)

Fearism, founded by Desh Subba in 1999, a unique but mostly an eastern than western philosophy, emerged as a new critical theory in 2005 when it was first mentioned in *Tapu Magazine* published in Hong Kong. Desh Subba, a Hong Kong based, Nepali contemporary philosopher, writer, poet, published his book 'Philosophy of Fearism'(2014) to facilitate a new way of interpreting human life and values. "Bhayabad" is the Nepali term for the philosophy of Fearism, which was translated by Desh Subba into English for the Global society.

Subba points out that this revolutionary term got a new dimension with his brother Sharan Subba's kaleidoscopic observation on the term. Subba began to widen his thought on the term and kept ruminating over it and gave us the most dominating philosophy of the 21st century with the publication of the *Tapu Magazine* (2005) from Hong Kong, itself. Thus, Nepal has made this place a 'workmanship of a new philosophy' with a new vision of fearism. (subba, 2018).

Hong Kong happened to be a new hub for the germination of this new idea and the visionaries and followers of different strata had chosen Prof. Dr. Tanka Prasad Neupane, a Nepali scholar as the first installed chairman of the 'Fearism Study Centre' in Hong Kong. This study centre is committed to award 'Tilmati Fearism Award' to an author who expands the horizon of the philosophy of fearism, to authenticate it Subba has mentioned the scholars namely Rana Kafle of Assam, India and Rajendra Guragain of Nepal, B Maria Kumar of India and Osinakachi Akuma Kalu of Nigeria for his book titled "The First Stage of the Fearologist". (subba, 2018, 2 sept.) The *Fearologist Institute, Calgary, Canada* was founded by R. Michael Fisher to promote the fearism studies.

Defining Fearism:

Fearism is that first consciousness of living which govern us in every phase of life. Since the beginning of human civilization till today, no matter how much the progress in terms of science and technology to protect human being, has been done, fear has always affected humanity. We use everything for our safety purposes to make sure that we minimize fear; nonetheless, in the corner of the heart the looming fear destabilizes our peace of mind. The locks, passwords, security codes, alarms, CCTV, health care, Insurances, policies and so on are all results of the fear in us. These establishments are meant to minimize our fear, nevertheless, it still irks. Human being always have the fear of insult, fear of loss, fear of disease, fear of death, fear of society, fear of law, etc and this fear governs and controls every moment of life. Thus, fearism argues that "life is conducted, directed and controlled by the fear" (subba, 2014)

Jaques Derrida in his 'Of Grammatology' (1967) introduced the concept of 'deconstruction' to reject the notion of 'structuralism' given by Ferdinand de Saussure. Derrida points out that the meaning is unstable not fixed and it is always 'differ' or 'defer' to another level for the playfulness nature of language. Desh Subba (co-author) in the book 'Eco-Fearism' (2020) attempts to deconstruct the meaning of fearism to interpret the underlying multilayered meaning of the term. If we make an observation on the very term 'fearism' in the past before 'fearism thinkers', it is pertinent that in the past, thinkers, authors, spiritual leaders or typical Gurus had interpreted fear as a negative emotion or unpleasant feeling. Even some psychologist and motivational speakers sometimes exaggerate its negative impact on mankind without focusing much on its positive aspects.

Fear, according to Subba, is very beautiful and positive consciousness of the world.

"Fear is a very similar (generally unpleasant) feeling (like anxiety) that arises as a normal response to realistic (or imagined) danger or threat...If you are rigidly attached to believing that fear is an emotion controlled by the amygdale of the brain (e.g. Le Doux, 1994), your scientifically-biased view will be challenged, .." (Subba, 2020)

Human civilization started with the concept of fear, primitive human being invented stone weapons to protect themselves, tree barks as a protection for the fear of cold and since then and till today fear is the basic to everything. Prof. Dr. Sanjeev Upreti Writes:

If we go on peeling the layers of an onion, new layers appear and there remain void at last. Meanings are also like solid things –they have existence till a certain period. Gradually, original meanings become extinct and new ones start. The meaning of fear is also the same. We fear due to the meaning that we have heard, understood, and known.(subba, 2020)

Derrida used binary oppositions to clarify meaning of certain thing, but according to fearism binary opposition is insufficient in interpreting the meaning of fear as Subba said fear has tripartite opposition, he states-

“The constitution, law and order, government, police, and court all have been established for peace, happiness, and prosperity. In the absence of these, people fear murder, violence, theft, and robbery. Therefore, fear has tripartite opposition.”(Adhikari, Akuma, Subba, 2020)

Fear-the Foundation of all Theories:

According to Desh Subba fear is a foundation for almost all philosophies and theories, most of the critical literary theories have their grounds consolidated on the very foundation of fear. Why the ‘Subalterns can’t speak’ or the **Subaltern Theory** is somewhere resulted due to the one power dominating the ‘other’ and it is possible only because the powerful always create fear in the mind of the ‘other’. **The Post-Colonial theory** is the outcome of fear created by the coloniser upon the colonised. The male dominated society was able to prove that patriarchy is always fearful and therefore, women became vocal through the theory of **Feminism**.

The book ‘Philosophy of Fearism’ with its publication in 2014 consolidated a foundation on a new discourse in intellectual level as well as on literary world, and perhaps for its realistic applicability in human life the book won 5 International Book Awards in 2015 from USA. Thus, the followers of Fearism Movement are increasing and Africa has got the highest in number. The reason for the increasing followers from Africa could be the fear of war, violence, and starvation that is prevalent in African countries. It can also be said that fearism might have its impact in the North-Eastern Parts of India since it was once under the grim clutches of insurgency, violence and racism.

Fearmorphosis:

Subba has coined the term ‘Fearmorphosis’ from ‘meta’ and ‘morphosis’ which means ‘transformation’ or ‘change of formation’. He adds that human being is also like metamorphosis from birth to death, changing biologically as well as mentally, baby to youth, youth to adult, according to the time. Language, literature, music, art, festivals, celebrations, rituals all have undergone changes with the passage of time and these changes are necessary and inescapable. Human beings adapt themselves into these changes unless they might lose the momentum of being in the race. So, this transformation or change is defined as fearmorphosis by Subba.

“We are pushing ourselves, religion, culture myth, belief, festivals which is called development but I call it metamorphosis caused by fearmorphosis”(subba, *fearmorphosis*, 2023, p.146)

According to Subba, our ancestors were first into hunting, then to agriculture and agriculture was metamorphosed to the system of capitalist. These changes are inevitable or human might get extinct, due to this fear of getting outdated human being cope up with the situations and transforms himself to adjust in this metamorphosed world. Subba refers to the different kinds of myth, for example *Sisyphus, the panopticon, the scapegoat, Das capital, and Metamorphosis* as the most powerful driving forces for humanity.

There are so many books written and published by different authors across the globe as a testimony to prove that the Fearism is really an emerging philosophy. Canadian author, Michael Fisher, *Nigerian authors* Osinakachi Akuma Kalu and *Michael Bassey Eneyo*, have already published books on Fearism, Indian authors B.Maria Kumar and B.S. Susmita have recently written the book '*The Youth Dont Cry*',(2018) is a critical commentary on the youth about their fears. "*Philosophy of Fearism ' - a First East-West Dialogue*" (2016) authored by R. Michael Fisher and Desh Subba takes a specific focus on this philosophy pioneered by Subba from the east and Fisher from the west. A couple of years before published book '*Eco Fearism*'(2020) co-authored by Bhawani Shankar Adhikari, Osinakachi Akuma Kalu and Desh Subba plunges into a profound analysis , prospects and burning issues of fearism to eco-fearism.

Aims and Objectives:

This paper will concentrate to delineate the elements of Fearism immanent in the select works of Mamang Dai, Temsula Ao, and Arupa Patangia Kalita, especially with regard to finding the philosophy of Fearism in the fiction of these three women writers.

Methodology:

A systematic study of the selected literary works written by these three women writers has been undertaken to explore this philosophy of Fearism.

As secondary sources dealing with the theory of Fearism different research articles, journals, books, and interviews have been referred to.

Scope of the study:

The proposed research article has immense potentiality because no scholar has come out to deal with this philosophy of Fearism especially in terms of literature. Thus, it can be a new area for the research scholar to explore for some significant conclusion.

Textual Analysis:

Mamang Dai, a journalist and the first woman civil servant based in Itanagar who She recieved the Padma Shree in 2011 and Sahitya Akademi in 2017. She has published several works of fiction, non-fiction, poetry and children's book that includes 'The Legend of Pensam '(2006) 'Mountain Harvest Food of Arunachal' (2004)' River Poems' (2004) Children's book, 'once upon a Moon Time', 'The Sky Queen' (2003).When she began writing, she wrote romantic verse and stories. She then moved from the home of the self to focus on a larger reality. She reflects upon the sense of a close knit community living in remoter towns and villages.

The novel that the paper is going to analyse with the theory of Fearism is 'Stupid Cupid' which came in 2006. Mamang Dai in this novel brings out a variety of women characters belonging to Arunachal Pradesh tribe. The migrant women tribes experience multiple oppressions and the marginalization in the hands of city dwellers and they became the victims of fear in every phase. But these women are unique, strong and fearless who long for freedom and independence. Mamang Dai has envisioned the advancement of tribal's though they are victims of brutality, segregation, and exploitation.

Adna, the protagonist is a woman from Arunachal Pradesh who comes to Delhi leaving her hometown Itanagar. She completes her Hotel Management in Guwahati and Calcutta and ventures out in search of

some settlement. She wants to prove the people in her places that a tribal woman like her can go to any metropolitan city and start her own way of dignified living. She comes up with an idea to provide a decent meeting place where men and women, lovers and friends could spend some quality time.

“I had set up as an agent. For want of a better name let’s call it a love agency, to provide a decent meeting place where men and women, lovers and friends, could rendezvous without too much sweat.” (p.1)

Adna’s character is just like a fear Sisyphus always under the influence of fear as she is a stranger to the new world of metropolitan city, Delhi and the apprehension of being rejected by that urban society for not being able to accustomed to the metropolitan norms is another fear factor for her.

“They say Delhi is a very rude city. If you have money and buy expensive things people are very nice to you...It is a crumbling city...” (p.12)

Adna feels that she has been watched out by the people, neighbour and relatives of her home town, in the family get-together and picnics she was a matter of discussion thus, and she is being watched by Panopticans. According to Desh Subba, *“Man is fear Sisyphus being watched by spiritual and physical Panopticans.” (subba,2023)*. Adna now has to go through this fear consciousness and must live up to the expectations of her people back home.

“From our hometowns news would reach us about family get-together and picnics, and elders asked us when we would return.” (p.14)

The life in the city doesn’t seem to that easy for a girl migrated from a remote region of Arunachal Pradesh. Adna tried hard to settle amidst all the ups and down in Delhi but every time there were challenges for her to overcome, Adna cannot ignore fear logical fact about her look, her identity which has become a taboo for her. The people hailing from North East had to go through a severe criticism only for their look and Adna with her friends have the similar fear of being insulted any time.

The life in the metropolitan city, for Adna and Jia was not that easy because of the fear of being bullied or harassed by anybody including a cab driver and to protect themselves they used to carry stones or small knife in the bag.

“...we used to carry stones in our bags in case a cab driver acted funny or some guy tried to accost us....Jia carried her small knife, just out of habit, complete with its decorative sheath of copper wire and carved bamboo root...” (p.116)

Adna falls in love with a married man. Mamang Dai projected her as a liberal woman, with modern views and attitude about life since she is fearless as she dared to fall in love with somebody non-tribal from Delhi. She breaks the social tribal norms and lives in a world of love, romance and tenderness but it doesn't last long. Adna's boyfriend leaves the country for Canada without giving a reasonable explanation, he said,

“Listen, I have to tell you something. But you mustn’t take it otherwise.

” I have to go away for a while,’ he said.

‘Go where?’ I said.

Well to Canada,’ he replied in a tentative voice. (Dai, 2009, P116.)

R Michael Fisher comments that *‘we have all been mis-educated about fear, and we have to deal with this problem as well as just learning better how to cope with our fears.’ (Fisher, 2022)*. Adna can be seen as an example to this, she being in an open relationship with a guy for a long period of time doesn’t lose her nerves when the man declares that he is leaving to Canada alone. Adna is able to manage her

pain, fear of separation at this moment and accepts the challenge as it comes to her though she' *had begun to feel fear and pain for him. Fear, pain, vague hurts, unexplained happiness'* (Dai, p-117).

Temsula Ao, the Padma Shri from Nagaland is a poet, novelist, storyteller; ethnographer has a good number of literary works to her credit. She was a professor of English at North Eastern Hill University, Meghalaya and got retired in 2010. Her work *Laburnum for My Head* (2009) received the Sahitya Akademi award for English writing in the short story category. Temsula Ao's story 'The Curfew Man' from the collection 'These Hills Called Home' (2006) can be analysed from a fearist perspective because the title of the story itself points out the fearist aspects because 'curfew' doesn't mean there is no fear. The beginning of the story with the lines,

"The night curfew was still on because these were troubled times for all in the land. Everything had been plunged into a state of hostility between two warring armies." (Temsula, 2006) stand as the testimony to the fact that the people of this region are under the grip of fear for they are being watched by panopticians in the form of Indian Armies as well as the underground militants who defy the commands of the government and who call the Indian army illegal occupiers of sovereign Naga territories. The villagers were caught between the two and had to bear the brunt of the many restrictions imposed on their lives.

One of the Fearist thinkers Samuel Nathan Gillian jr. from USA viewed that *'(T) here is no life without fear...Reality or life in an overwhelmingly powerful and dangerous universe is truly terrifying for each and every one of us each and every second that we are alive.* (Gillian, 2005, p.66-67).

Satamba, a constable in the Assam Police plays football for his battalion, wins trophy and fame but gets his knee cap shattered in a particular final game and terribly he has to undergo through an everlasting fear about his life. He is just a Fearmorphism since he has to opt for a 'premature retirement' as suggested by his wife Jemtila and the survival of life with a pension of Rs. 75 per month was another reason of fear. Satamba can be seen as an 'employee scapegoat' because he was recruited to play football for his regiment and if he succeeds to score, perhaps his position and job was secured. So, under the pressure of this fear Satamba exceeds little too much in his effort inside the play ground and breaks his knee cap. With the passage of time Satamba is transforming himself from a constable to footballer then to a farmer to try his luck, and all these changes is just Fearmorphism as explained by Desh Subba. The fear factor in Satamba's life seems to be so attached that it keeps on haunting him because the piece of land that was acquired by him as an ancestral piece from his clan turned out to be unsuitable for cultivation. *"...The piece of land that was given to him turned out to be unsuitable for any kind of sustainable farming."* (Temsula, 2006, p-36)

Satamba's wife now ventures out for a livelihood and settles as house maid in the house of a Sub-Divisional Officer with 100 Rs. salaries per month. Now the fear and insecurity of livelihood somehow vanishes at this point of time, even Satamba was also given a job of undercover informer to the police about the underground outfits. Satamba takes up the job of that informer earns his bread and butter, on the contrary, nourishes fear in his mind, the fear of being caught by the underground, a threat to his life, and he can feel that pressure. His wife is equally horrified so, warned Satamba not to do such 'hanky-panky' job. She said-

'just wait and see, one of these days the other guys will come for you' (Temsula, 2006, p.38). Thus, the life for both of the couple does not seem to be bed of roses even though they are earning handsomely to run the few days of life. Desh Subba said *'People are always sandwiched between two stones: fear and fearlessness. There is no option except rescue from being hit by a boulder'* (Subba, 2023, p.7).

Satamba and his wife are now the fear Sisyphus always scared about life because the boulder may crush anytime in the form of army or the underground militants. R. Michael Fisher says –

“Fear is not easily knowable, says the transdisciplinary fearist-but fear is more easily careable, which may be more important in the long run.” (Fisher, 2022 b)”

According to Subba, Philosophy of Fearism teaches the solution to the problems of life. Subba believes that man must learn to minimize the amount of fear and moderate fear can solve the problem. Satamba and Jemtila now search for a mechanism to minimize their fear and decide to give up the job of that informer so that the threat to life can longer make them a fear Sisyphus. At the end of the story, the S.D.O. releases ‘the two smashed knee-caps’ informer from his job and looks for an alternative service for future strategies.

Among so many other writers from Assam, one of the most vocal from is Arupa Patangia Kalita who has a good number of works to her credit. She is one of the leading voices in contemporary Assamese literature who won the Sahitya Akademi Award in 2014. Arupa Patangia Kalita’s story collection ‘*Written in Tears*’ (2015), which contains six stories, can be best read applying the theory of Fearism and one of those stories is ‘*The Girl with Long Hair*’ which narrates about an indigenous tribal girl *Mainao* who is the product of her tribal culture and traditions. She is a cheerful girl with her small twinkling eyes and rounded limbs taunt with the sun and rain and she loves to be in close connection with the nature around her. *Mainao* is so attached to the soil, a happy-go-lucky girl but she is always under a grip of fear that does not have the liberty to enjoy her blooming days as the restrictions are imposed on her by the terrorist organisations living in the forest.

‘The boys engaged in the andolan announced the ban and warned that those who defied it would be punished. Their word was law’ (2020, p-11)

Mainao doesn’t remain remorse during Durga puja festival, and enjoys it to the fullest even if there is a restriction from the agitators hiding in the forest nevertheless, a fear of being the target can’t be ignored. According to Subba there are some fear factors or fear agents responsible for triggering fear in human being.

‘They are simply known as objects of fear or fear factors. They are the agents responsible for triggering fear.’ (2020, p-6)

For *Mainao* the fear factors could be the people residing in the forest giving the orders of ban, or the Army forces patrolling in the villages who might interrogate her for providing food stuff or asylum to the members of the outfits. According to Desh Subba if we look through Fearism lens, we see everywhere some Panopticans, here in the story, *Mainao* has been watched by those underground agitators in the form of panopticans which she ignored. *Mainao* is seen caught in fear dilemma whether to defy the ban or to overcome the fear and plunge into the mission of joining her friends to celebrate the Durga puja. But she was enticed by her friends to join the party of the puja, consequently, she had to go through the unjust trial of the movement leaders.

The meeting that was called in the courtyard of her own house by the movement leaders declared the verdict that *“her hair should be snipped off. A girl who defied the diktat should be taught a lesson” (2020, p.13).*

The revolutionary protesters are scapegoating an innocent girl, *Mainao* to create more fear Sisyphus who is always under the fear of being crashed by the boulder. We find so many innocent people becoming political scapegoat under the influence of such incidents. *Mainao* has nothing to do with the revolution, these protestor were against the policy of the government and demanded political power for themselves.

Mainao's long hair was snipped off and the unfolding of the event was witnessed by Binuma and her friends with terrified hearts. Everyone in the society is rolling a boulder all the time like the Sisyphus and sometimes it just rubs and some other times it strikes; it does have impacts in different shapes and dimensions.

Conclusion:

Fear is a basic biological instinct ingrained into not only to human being but also to animals and it has been cultivated since the human civilization in different forms or shapes. Therefore, a particular perspective must be recommended to make a wider and deep study on the heterogeneous aspects of fear and the most conclusive and schematized parameter can be Fearism. The literature from the Northeast India can be found vocal in highlighting the theme of philosophy of Fearism which is the 'power of all power'.(subba,23). The characters in the stories are somehow the victims of fear and their lives are influenced. They are being watched by panopticians they sometimes remain united into one structure to minimize the fear. The profounder and the believer of the theory of Fearism argue that we have to learn to "fly with the term fear" and to bring it to life to bear new fruits. Mamang Dai, Temsula Ao and Arupa kalita are the powerful women voices from the region and a systematic and scientific study their writings from a new perspective like Philosophy of Fearism can bring into light the unexplored aspects of literature helpful for the new research scholar in future.

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