

Her Spoken Words

Nari Katha - Her Spoken Words is a compilation of selected poems composed in Assamese and Bodo. These poems are expressed by grassroots women of different districts of Assam who are associated with Gramin Mahila Kendras (Rural Women Centres) of North East Network (NEN). The collection is an outcome of a series of creative writing workshops held with the women at different times. Since then *Nari Katha* has been an effective medium for women to reflect on their hopes and aspirations, pain and suffering, struggle and resistance. This poetry collection was first published in March 2023 during the Grassroots Feminist Convention: Towards Transformational Leadership organised by NEN in Guwahati, Assam.

Her Spoken Words
Grassroots feminist voices

Her Spoken Words
A collection of feminist poetry by grassroots women

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"Her Spoken Words" speaks volumes of women associated with NEN. They are survivors, farmers, home based workers, weavers and community mobilisers who have endured abuse and are leading from the front speaking up against injustice. The collection wishes to showcase new feminist voices from the grassroots through art and poetry. The collection is powerful, emits a strong sense of feminist energy and celebrates the enormous resilience they display by challenging stereotypes.

Women have expressed about themselves as a feminist through their lived realities as survivors amidst taboos, identities, love, prejudice, gender and patriarchy.

Some are funny, some are fearless but all convey meaningful messages.

Lets empower and inspire; there is cheer amidst despair.

Glory to our sisterhood !

Anurita

Executive Director (In-charge) and State Coordinator,
Assam
North East Network

Her Spoken Words *Verses of Protest and Resistance*

A long time ago, the pen was taken away from their hands to be replaced by the ladles and the spoons. Their lives were confined within the precincts of the kitchen smoke, the darkness of the cornered child-birth chambers, the front yards and the backyards. Yet sometimes, for the flicker of a second in the midst of all the pain, they would put the raging flames of their hearts to plain paper to console and heal themselves, to understand and discover themselves .

There are many who would quietly pick up the pen. They write for the sake of just penning down their experience or with the thought that their words would inspire someone someday. But the words remain cloistered somewhere and forget to make their way back. The language displays impairment. They go on to untangle the disorderliness of their words and get baffled on the way. But they are not tired.

How will they continue with life if they give up so easily...

This book is the result of all these endeavours.

This collection of thirty eight poems tells the stories of these women who have overcome tremendous pain and suffering to live life again — the stories where we live, we struggle, we resist and win.

"Her Spoken Words" is everybody's poetry, everybody's words.

Rashmirekha
North East Network



Pratibha Thakuria | **Tireless**

A strong woman am I
Do not judge me to be weak
When grave disheartenment
Engulfed to crumble me
I thought, nothing more was left to life
But just one word brought me consolation
'Ma!' For which sake I embraced life's struggle again

I wouldn't be weary
Instead of being beaten up
I am ready to stand on my own feet
I wouldn't be exhausted

What is it you think I am less worthy than?
I am the weaver—weaving dreams in the loom
I am the cultivator—nurturing hopes in the fields

Your cruelty cannot hinder my way
I soar aiming for the skies
I wouldn't be tired.

(Sarpara, Kamrup)



Swapnajyoti Baruah | **Dustbin**

Ma, my chest is aching so much
My throat is getting dry
I am missing you so much

Where am I? Where have you thrown me down?
How will I even live without you?
In this dirty dustbin
Oh Ma, for whose cowardly desires did you fall victim to?
For which you had to throw me like this into the dustbin
For which, even after coming to life,
I am waiting for the moment of death

Ma, did you get scared that I would be without a surname?
But I am born out of your flesh and blood
Your identity is my identity
I do not want that cruel father's name who left us all alone

Ah! What a deep inhuman wound
Each and every tissue of my body has come to a standstill
Obfuscating my breath
Pick me up from here, Ma
In this inconsiderate society
We will build our own family

(Haluwa Gaon, Golaghat)



Dipali Saharia | **Deprivation**

Don't think I am dead already
If you fathom that your envious resentment will kill me
Then it is your delusion

Every suffering that I received from you
Is but a blessing for me
It has made me strong
To fight against you
And to keep living my life

I am a woman, not weak
Fragile or scared
The deprivation you have caused me
Has made me more stronger

(Darrang)

Manju Mazumdar | **Where Do Aai's Dreams Hide**

We start dreaming from our mothers' wombs
We dream of seeing the world after coming out of it

But we do not understand our Aai's* hardships

We dream of becoming successful one day
But somewhere Aai's sufferings become unrecalled

We dream of marriage, to have our own family
But do not recognize the pain of her loneliness

Beneath our heavy dreams, where do Aai's dreams get buried?

** Aai- another name for mother in Assamese; synonymous to Ma*

(Sarpara, Kamrup)



Bhanu Rabha | **I Won't Get Tired**

No matter what I do I wouldn't be weary
I am raising four girls without their father
And surviving with courage
Still I am not tired, I won't be
I will work my way ahead

Even if someone misleads me
Even if someone harms me
I wouldn't pay a heed or tire myself
I will go on working

I won't get weary until the day I live
I won't get tired

(Nizdola, Udalguri)



Bhabani Deka | **Winner**

A strong woman am I
Who likes to remain firm
But will my dreams and aspirations
Remain alive like the burning flames
To come to fruition one day

The struggles of everyday will I overcome to win
For I am all vigorous

(Sarpara, Kamrup)

Eliza Begum | **Ma**

Ma, your image is etched in my mind
I can feel your sacrifice
Every moment that you have lived
Remain fresh in the embrace of my eyelids

Ma, it is only now that I understand
Why you would push your plate of food towards us
Saying you are not hungry

Expressing it was time for father's arrival
You would hastily soothe us to sleep
Now I realize why you did so
For I still remember those terrible nights

Why did you endure so much
What did you get from it
Only that you had to leave us so untimely

Now, it's not like before, Ma
So much has changed with time

(Jackson Grant, Golaghat)



Bhadreshwari Saharia | **Poem**

I had forgotten myself
All I wished was to die

No, I wouldn't be weak again
The fruit of sorrows and struggles will be sweet one day
Being patient for happiness to arrive
If I ever feel maimed by sorrow
I sit in the loom to balm my gloom

(Ganakpara, Udalguri)



Purnima Bodo | **Simalu**

When the Simalu* tree in my front yard
Abounds in blossoms
My mind is elated with joy
As if a new hope is blossoming

The hope that you will return again
Back to me

** Simalu- an Asian tropical tree with red flowers; blooms during spring before the new foliage*

(No. 2 Kalaigaon, Udalguri)



Gita Mazumdar | **Life**

Even when one measures life on the onus of smiles
One day everyone will turn to dust
Life means being the object of ridicule for someone
To sacrifice one's whole life for someone
And be the victim for someone's violence

When dreams break
The soul breaks too
Like things, dreams too float away with the waves
Just like the bhela ghar* burns to ashes in Magh

It takes a lot of time to rebuild a broken house
But it takes more time to dream
after dreams have been shattered
Life, still does not halt!

** Bhela ghar- is a house or structure built with hay during the month of Magh (December- January) in Assam, especially in rural and sub-urban areas and is burnt on the occasion of Magh Bihu as a ritual.*

(Sarpara, Kamrup)

Pramila Nath | **Melancholy**

I was scared to go on living
I had lost all sense of direction
Instead of forgetting those monstrous days
I am losing myself to oblivion

I ventured with vibrant dreams in my heart
To a new home with innumerable hopes
With the bond of a new relationship
To build a new life

No, no
Why am I thinking of all this
I have to survive
If not for me, then at least for the society
I have to go ahead in this war against tortuous violence
I won't think of myself to be weak anymore
I will have to wash away my despondence
with my own tears

(Narikali, Darrang)



Binita Saikia Devi | **Rights**

The day I became all alone
I suffered from despair and disappointment
And I thought
I am dejected than anyone else in this world

I didn't know where to go and what to do
From that very day began my first struggle of life

I fought for my rights
And I gathered the courage
To establish myself by being me

With my disposition to stand in dissent
I came out to the streets

(Debigaon, Swetmodar, Darrang)



Champa Baruah | **You Wouldn't Understand Who a Woman Is**

You wouldn't understand who a woman is
So you tie me in iron chains
But you won't win keeping me in confinement
Remember these words at every step

Now I will not be bounded in chains
I will carry on with life's struggles
All the physical and mental turmoil you have given
I will tolerate no longer

We have come back to life again
You won't be able to dominate any longer
We are no longer petrified of the dark
We will find our own destination
With our own enterprise

(Kobeisuba, Darrang)



Meenakshi Saharia | **Struggles**

Breaking countless shackles of forbiddance, I have come out
This sick body pulls me down
Still the indomitable desires of the soul
I keep alive

In between all duties and responsibilities
I carry on with my fight
I keep on struggling for my existence

(Sitalabori, Darrang)

Pranjita Deka | **Poem**

The dreams of first love broke halfway
Love wouldn't understand the diversions of caste
Or the lure of money

The bygone days were filled with such joy
But I made the mistake of loving someone
with my heart's purity
And now I am all alone
For you were the one to deceive me

(Makelikanda, Udalguri)



Kanika Nath | **Broken Dreams**

With all the love stored
In the deepest corner of my heart
When I came to you
My heart was filled with passion
The warm welcome from your heart
Won me all over
Your courage, your enthusiasm,
Your inspiration had just started to lead my way

But that news of you came
That you are no more
You went far away from me
My dreams had shattered to innumerable pieces

(Swetmodar, Darrang)





Pranita Mazumdar | **Anguish**

Happiness is escorted with woes
The world is weighed by sorrows
And yet I dream to be alive

My mind is frenzied
My mind takes flight
Still like the Simalu boll*
The broken dreams too fly
In their desire to live

*The Simalu flower produces a boll of fibre when it is ripe. It gets carried away by strong winds.

(Sarpara, Kamrup)

Mrigakshi Saikia Bora | **Ma**

Ma, you bore so many hardships to bring us to life
You brought us up at the cost of your own hopes and aspirations
You too had some dreams, some passions and thrills
That you did not fulfill for the sake of us

We grew up to learn how to fly
And came ahead in our way
Leaving you alone

Don't cry, Ma
I will repay your sacrifices
By being your child

I will move ahead in the path of life
And even if I stop suddenly
With the wisdom from your teachings
I will walk ahead again with double the courage
Remembering you always

(Pongkiyal, Golaghat)





Runa Bora | **Woman**

Everyone says you are greatness; you are a river, a banyan tree
But you are the one who is always humiliated, always raped,
always oppressed

Again you are called a man's better half
Yet you are the one who do not possess any rights

Do not get befooled by anybody's sweet words again
Build the core where women embrace women

(Purabangla, Parvatipur, Golaghat)



Bandana Deka | **Venturing from the Well of
Despair**

I venture from the well of despair

When I go searching for a new hope away from worldliness
And strive for its fulfilment

But every time there are obstructions
Disruptions at every step
My hopes fail to proceed
Familiar acquaintances become strangers

(Makelikanda, Udalguri)



Anjali Deka | **Broken Dreams**

I live with innumerable hopes and dreams
Countless desires but the embankment beholds my utterance
Dreams remain unfulfilled

Yet I wouldn't stop
I will move ahead relinquishing all distractions

(Nizdola, Udalguri)

Jayarani Das | **Struggles of Life**

We are born on this earth
Our life's struggle revolve around our joys and sorrows
To learn how we ought to
Step ahead with courage
Is the core of our struggle

To be remorseful in another's sorrow
To spread happiness
And to spread joy by being happy for someone else
Is the struggle of our life

Such is the struggle
That to die would be to denounce life

(Sarpara, Kamrup)



Chinu Kalita | **When I First Met You**

When I first met you
My heart started fluttering

Like the bolls of Simalu and Palash* in the Fagun** season
My mind too took flight towards you
But the sorrow of not having you was tumultuous

When you came closer
My mind in merriment danced
Like the waves of the ocean
As if I had discovered the whole sky in the bosom of my
heart
And began playing with the stars

**Palash- tree found in tropical and sub- tropical South Asia and
SouthEast Asia with bright orange-red flowers*

***Fagun- the month of Fagun in the Gregorian calendar falls be-
tween mid- February and mid- March and heralds the arrival of the
spring season*

(Debananda, Darrang)



Kabita Baruah | **Woman**

The life of a woman is but a struggle
They are too cruel to understand
For a woman everywhere exists turmoil
Will a man be able to manage
What a woman manages with such discipline
Finishing all household chores to the end

A woman is the homemaker, a woman is the weaver
A woman is the sower and the reaper of the field
Even after accomplishing every chore and task
She becomes the target of physical and mental abuse
If someday she dares to cross the *laxman rekha*
Without the patience to understand where she is headed to
The society judges her

They only accuse
That she is an immoral woman

(Hatigarh, Dhemaji)

Bhanu Saharia | **Bihu**

Bohag implies enamoured manifestations
The green trees change their leaves
The rigorous beats of drums and flutes
Have made the dancer girls lose their steadiness

The dancers are waiting for the drummer boys to arrive
In the courtyard of their houses
With gamosa in their hands

With the monsoon came the rains
Thoroughly saturating the earth
The hardy farmer got down to the field
Labouring every sweat of his body to earn his bread

The sower and the reaper, everyone will together
Cultivate in the field
Their hearts and minds will find solace
Upon seeing the fields filled with green

(Nizdola, Udalguri)



Dipali Bora | **Daughter of the Village**

I am the daughter of the village
And its daughter-in-law

The loom is my companion
A part of my heart
I weave dreams here
Heedless of my poverty
I tread ahead carving golden pathways with my efforts as witness

Without the indulgence to trust anyone
I labour hands-on
To reach the world stage one day
I embark upon the journey from home

(Nizdola, Udalguri)



Mridula Handique Konwar | **The Posuwa***

The whistling sound of fagun gushing by
With the coming of spring,
nature has led out cascade of new leaves
The queen of the forest is dancing while singing along
Is jumping and running ahead with joy
And all the women are awe inspired

Come everyone, hurry up
Come fast holding hands in hand
Let us be bathed in the colours of fagun to sing songs of
liberation

* *wind that blows from west to east during fagun*

(Hatigarh, Dhemaji)

Usharani Devi | **When Dreams Break**

Always be lively
Don't lose courage
Even though trees shed leaves one by one
You do not lose your hopes and aspirations

Your body is yours
And you have the right over it
Do not be a slave to someone's whims
For this body of blood and flesh is only yours
You have the right to live a life of blissful merriment
Your dreams are exclusive, only to be dreamt by you

If anyone ever
Tries to break your dreams
Do not be docile
Be vocal to stand in protest
Never think that you have been defeated

We are all here with you to stand together in dissent

(Kobeisuba, Darrang)



Aparna Chutia | **Desolation**

How will one surmise what it takes
To harden the heart to the core

One atop a boat, one who rows a boat
Only understands the depth of the river
Even without committing a mistake
Why one is blamed every time

Sometimes I wish to shout out loud and ask
Where is my mistake?
But even if I wish to
I cannot speak out my heart
Still I wish to live my life to the fullest

(Bhoralisuk, Dhemaji)



Junumoni Das | **Evergreen Me**

I am arid but like the jetuka* leaves
I come along like the winds of Bordoisila**
Like a changing season

The one that posuwa wind destroys
The young saplings sprout in monsoon
I am that evergreen

** jetuka- a plant whose leaves are used for dyeing skin, hair, leather
etc*

*** Bordoisila- represents the feminine spirit of Nature, that is
accompanied with heavy winds, rain and thunderstorm and marks
the arrival of the spring season*

(Sarpara, Kamrup)



Mamoni Pathak | **Nature**

Hopes of a lifetime
Fail to accomplish
I wish to laugh
But fail to find joy

(Sarpara, Kamrup)



Karabi Nath | **Father**

When I parted away from you
I lost all hopes of my life
Perhaps you thought I would become a good daughter-in-law
But I never forgot you
Your sweet words, your cheerful nature
Are unforgettable in my life

I was so heartbroken
When I had to leave my beloved home

Dear Father, don't ever forget me

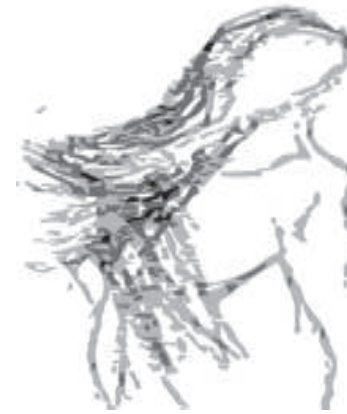
(Kobeisuba, Darrang)

Namita Gogoi | **Emotion**

It is difficult to keep one's emotions suppressed
Who would understand the struggles of a woman's life
The darkness that lies in the path of her life

Who would understand the joys and sorrows of a woman's life
Everybody wants to heap and pile pain and sorrows
On top of her

(Hatigarh, Dhemaji)



Anjali Bodo | **My Wasted Dreams**

(Translated from Bodo by Babli Basumatari)

Time has come and gone by
And the years of my life have passed one after the other
But my dreams remained unfulfilled

By educating myself I thought I would become a wise woman
And would work for society's well being
I will bring happiness to my parents and brothers
But there were hindrances in my way
And my dreams came to a halt

Yet I am no longer fearful to proceed
I will succeed one day

(Nizdola, Udalguri)

Boby Konwar Gogoi | **Brave Woman**

I am a modern woman of the twenty-first century
I am not weak, lowly or voiceless
Neither am I an object to be overshadowed

I conduct myself with elan
I wouldn't sanction anybody's abuse upon me
I know how to take responsibilities
In the hardships of the vast desert called life
I wouldn't become exhausted
With steady steps I will move ahead
Compelling and irresistible that I am

I hoard the moonlight, a handful at a time
Without fearing the dark
I am a modern woman of the twenty-first century

(Hatigarh, Dhemaji)



Mridula Handique Knowar | **Woman**

Don't think of yourself to be weak
Never think that you won't win the battle of life
Think about it once
Think about the responsibilities you are carrying
You embrace so many tasks with these two hands
You balance the entire household from dawn to midnight

Turn to see the pages of history
Countless women's contribution remained unnoticed

There lay immense power in your hands
Don't ever think of yourself to be weak

(Hatigarh, Dhemaji)





Dipti Bodo Rabha | **Strong**

I am strong
I would not be tied up by any hyperbole
I aspire to take my home and society forward

I am a woman
A multitude of strength hides within me
Nobody will ever be able to stop me

(Nizdola, Udalguri)

Lalita Mazumdar | **I am the Daughter**

I am a daughter
I have many aspirations
I dream to live
I have immense courage
Where smiles and tears are accompanied by deep affection

I will go on, breaking a thousand shackles
And many old norms
But by no means will we be caged

I am a daughter
I carry the strength of Mulagabharu*
And Jaya's** determination of character

Even if my mind is violated
By a fierce hailstorm
I will come back to life
And will again weave new dreams

** Mulagabharu (1486- 1532)- female warrior of the Ahom kingdom known for her grit and valour; stands as an epitome of courage and bravery*

*** Jaya- or Joymoti Konwari was the wife of Ahom prince Gadapani who died at the hands of the royalists under Sulikphaa Loraa Roja, without disclosing her exiled husband Gadapani's whereabouts in the Naga Hills, thereby enabling her husband to rise in revolt and assume kingship*

(Kamrup)

Song

With burning passion in my eyes
And outstretched wings upon my shoulders
I am starting this journey today
Yes, I am venturing out

Breaking all chains of subjugated bondage
Shedding the garb of helplessness
Let us seek liberation from the
Hammering attack of patriarchy
Let us seek freedom from the clamps of
Exploitation and suppression
O' dear friend, come let us seek liberation

Half the sky, half the fields
Have always been ours since birth
So much oppression have we endured
Now it is turn to possess back our rights with might

There is no time to wait, O' friend, there is no time to wait
Far away from the horizon, the new clan beacons us

With burning passion in my eyes
And outstretched wings upon my shoulders
Come out for the new odyssey ahead

(Lyrics- Rashmirekha Borah, Music- Humayun Choudhury)