

BOOK REVIEW: POETRY

Fragile, floating, enduring: Reading 'Fenaphul'

Review of Hamayat Ullah Emon's 'Fenaphul' (Oitijhya, 2026)



ILLUSTRATION: MAISHA SYEDA

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I read poems often, and recently I came across a book titled *Fenaphul*. The cover—painted with soft blue and white watercolour splashes—immediately caught my attention. I decided to read it when I learned that it had received the Oitijhya-Shantanu Kaiser Literary Award 2025 and was written by a young poet.

The title itself is intriguing. *Fenaphul* is a small flower that grows on the surface of muddy village ponds, often near homes in rural areas. The tiny

plants float on water, sometimes resembling the delicate spread of a peacock's wing. They are light and fragile, yet they never sink. Instead, they slowly multiply, and sometimes overnight, they cover the whole pond.

But why would a poet name his book after this flower? Is it linked to memories from the poet's childhood? Does it carry the nostalgia of a lost love? Or is it simply a metaphor for nature—quiet yet persistent, fragile yet enduring?

As one reads the poems, it gradually

becomes clear that 'fenaphul' is more than a flower. It seems to serve as a metaphor for the poet's mind itself. Just as the small plants spread silently across a pond, memories from childhood spread across the pages of this book. Almost weightless images—fields, rivers, prayers, family, animals, village rituals—appear in the poems. Yet they never drown under the heaviness of words. Instead, they float. Reading this book felt less like reading isolated poems and more like watching a long, continuous cinematic frame

of childhood and existence. Hamayat Ullah Emon does not seem interested in following strict poetics. His poetry rarely aims to impress with complicated vocabulary, yet it maintains a refined poetic rhythm.

There are 64 poems in this book. Many lines and thoughts linger in the mind, carrying a deep sense of belonging. Some poems seem to connect the poet with movement, labour, and ancestry simultaneously, as if the past itself propels him forward. Several lines awaken the reader's consciousness. For instance, in poem number five, the poet writes: "Dakho shomudrer dike, machher niroboti." (Look toward the sea—the silence of the fish). This line is haunting. It invites the reader into a quiet, meditative space. The effect reminded me of the eerie psychological atmosphere in *The Lighthouse* (2019) by Robert Eggers. Much like that film, these poems sometimes place the reader in a solitary inner landscape, where silence becomes louder than sound.

One of the most interesting stylistic features of Emon's poetry is the sudden appearance of the word "Tumi" (You) in many poems. This "you" constantly shifts its identity. At times, it feels intimate, almost romantic:

"Ami nogno, mathay dhorechhi alo, dinguote tomay"; "I stand naked, holding light upon my head, carrying you through the days." Here, "you" seems like a beloved presence.

In another poem, it represents something surprisingly mundane:

"Maash furale tumi eshe darabe jani, khule dibe boshobasher tension", which translates to "I know you will arrive when the month ends, easing the tension of survival." Here, "you" is salary—a deeply relatable reality of adult life.

In yet another poem, "you" becomes the poet's mother: "Khopa tule bhangchho keno tumio" (Why are you loosening your hair and breaking apart as well?)

Finally, in a striking moment, the poet writes: "Tumi fenaphul". The metaphor comes full circle. The flower becomes a person, a memory, or perhaps existence itself.

One of the strengths of this book is the poet's use of small cultural details: prayer, village life, harvest fields, Sufi devotion, family meals, childhood memories. These narrative fragments appear throughout the poems, but none dominates. They function as emotional anchors, evoking a profound sense of belonging.

Through these scattered images, a quiet existential emptiness slowly emerges—the emptiness many from rural Bangladesh feel when moving into modern urban life. Emon does not state this directly, but the sentiment grows visible between the lines. At times, the poet seems quietly dissatisfied with his present life, questioning adulthood, responsibility, and urban pressures. The poems occasionally feel like intimate practices of personal sorrow.

Despite these existential reflections, women rarely appear as objects of desire in Emon's poetry. Instead, they symbolise tenderness, calmness, and emotional shelter. The father figure is culturally familiar and subtly portrayed, often through small domestic images like a shirt or a piece of fish on a plate.

A small challenge for readers is that none of the poems have individual titles; they are only numbered. Titles often help readers connect with a poem's core idea and recall it later. This raises an interesting question: is *Fenaphul* one long poem in fragments, or a collection of separate poems?

Ultimately, the book is a collection built on small images and quiet reflections. Like the floating plants on a village pond, the poems appear fragile at first glance. But gradually, they spread, covering the reader's mind with memories, questions, and a subtle sense of human emptiness.

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BOOK REVIEW: NONFICTION

Homage to Rani-ma on her centenary year

Review of 'Shotoborshe Ila Mitra: Onno Chokhe' (People's Book Society, 2026),
edited by Omar Tareq Chaudhuri and Subhasis Mukhopadhyay

SUBHORANJAN DASGUPTA

TW: Mention of sexual abuse, rape

Some names act as a spark—for example, Ila Mitra—along with those of Rosa Luxemburg, Pritilata Waddekar, and Matangini Hazra—who is much better known and acclaimed as 'Nachole-er Rani-ma' (Queen Mother of Nachole). Inspired by her indomitable communist husband, Romen Mitra, who had been the zamindar of Ramchandrapur in Rajshahi district in East Bengal, Ila Mitra also declassified herself and fought like a tigress leading the impoverished peasants against the landlords and their henchmen. Though the sobriquet 'Rani-ma' clung to her, she, in the words of co-editor Subhasis Mukhopadhyay, "could speak Santhali with admirable fluency [...] she simply merged with the landless peasants, Hindus and Muslims, and challenged the landowners as well as the repressive East Pakistani regime armed to the teeth."

Indeed, the glorious Tebhaga movement, which began in 1946-47 and continued even after Partition, is crystallised in the valour and defiance of Rani-ma. Not a single book nor an essay on the topic forgets to mention her name. Perhaps, the best chronicler of this movement, the leftist icon of East Bengal, Badruddin Umar, emphasised in particular that even after the movement had ebbed somewhat in other districts of East and West Bengal, it continued to glow in Rajshahi, especially in Nachole. In his remarkable essay, "Peasant Uprising Nachole", which forms the second essay of the book, this indefatigable Leftist wrote, "Tebhaga came to an end in entire Bengal in 1947, but Nachole remained the only exception. Indeed, the region which came under Nachole Police station bristled with persecuted Santhal peasants and they persisted doggedly with their struggle from 1948 to 1950; that was the new phase." And who led the uprising? Of course Rani-ma and her husband, along with others like Azhar Hosain, Shuku Koramudi, and Brindaban Saha.

What is so exemplary about this book is its meticulous documentation. In the fourth



ILLUSTRATION: MAHMUDA EMDAD

chapter, for instance, co-editor Omar Tareq Chaudhuri has compiled newspaper reports on this subject which were published from 1950 to 1955 in the two Bengals and even beyond. In 28 pages, he has provided the complete history based on news coverage, and, as we read, our eyes remain fixated on the report filed by Shibdas Bannerji, the roving correspondent of Blitz, which carried the heading "East Bengal Court sobs as Ila Mitra bares her wounds". Bannerji wrote, "When Ms. Ila Mitra was asked by the Court to give her statement, she narrated a story which made the aged pleaders, Muslims and Hindus, weep. They hung their heads down

in shame and heard Ila in rapt and sorrowful silence."

Though those present in the courtroom sobbed, Ila Mitra, herself, when she recalled her revolt after many years, said "I, in my humble way, tried to play my part, for which I have nothing unusual to speak of. Time generally helps a person to take up a role. For me, the time that I passed through has left its indelible marks, may be majestic, or heroic, or cowardly. For peace in this country, I look for a signal from my star." I wonder how she could attain this amazing grace after the horrendous torture inflicted on her at Nachole Police Station when she was

arrested, which included multiple rapes and finally pushing up four redhot boiled eggs through her vaginal passage.

As a student of literature, who had delved into the subject of gender and Partition in the East, I emphasise: the creative articulation of Tebhaga is, by no means, insignificant. I recall Manik Bandyopadhyay's incredible short story "Haraner Natjamai" that had been converted into a gripping play by one of our great thespians, Arun Mukhopadhyay; Selina Hossain's dedicated political novel Kantatara Projapati as well as Maleka Begum's excellent biography; Saukat Ali's novel Narail, which ended with a Muslim and Hindu peasant

joining hands and advancing to fight for Tebhaga; and, above all, Akhtaruzzaman Elias's masterpiece Khwabnama, which posited Tebhaga as the redemptive counterpart or utopia to the disjunctive dystopia of the Partition. These texts, literally, incited me like the poem on Rani-ma by the famous communist poet, Gholam Qudus, who hailed her as 'Stalin-nandini' and also the intense though raw and rough sketches of Somnath Hore which were included in his Tebhaga Diary.

In fact, I was waiting for the documentation to serve as a basis for the creative expression I have outlined above, and that is what I have acquired in this book. It includes almost everything—questions and answers on Ila Mitra as well as discussions held in the Indian parliament; statements which Ila Mitra made in the West Bengal Assembly as an MLA of the Communist Party of India; fervent recollections penned by Pravash Chaudhuri Lahiri, Anisuzzaman, Mahbul Alam Chaudhuri, and Satyen Sen. Equally moving are the memories of her son Mohan Mitra in two separate chapters, one titled "Amar Ma" and the other recalling the indispensable connection between her mother and the peasant uprising in Nachole, in an intimate interview. The last lines of this dialogue are memorable, even educative: "She didn't indulge in intricate theorising on whether the revolution should be 'national democratic' or 'people's democratic.' Nonetheless, she was a brilliant orator."

Somehow, I feel that Bangladesh, where she fought, remembers her more vividly than West Bengal. In 2005, the well-known Bangladeshi, director, Syed Ahiduzzaman Diamond, made a film on her titled Nachole Rani and in as late as 2025, Zakir Hossain paid homage to her in his short story titled "Akhono Ila Mitre-r Naame Choto Golpo". A museum dedicated to her was inaugurated on February 17, 2024, in Nachole itself.

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