

Balpakaram ! The Abode of the Spirits



The excitement to start a journey again did not bet me sleep well and I got up early in the morning and packed bag and started my journey without much delay to Tura . I was accompanied by a friend from Kolkata.It was a four hours journey from Guwahati to Tura. We were welcomed by our friend Dipu who had kept everything

ready including our booking in a hotel in the town. After having a cup of tea in the hotel lobby we all decided to take a round around Tura, so Dipu took us to a pelga falls located at a distance of seven km from Tura Town. It is a beautiful falls with clear and clean water. I saw many Young boys and girls enjoying the water near the falls, some were dancing and singing and were busy talking with their dear ones. The atmosphere was quite romantic. I insisted to cross Bamboo Bridge which was build across the Pelga falls. The bridge was built by



the local Garo people and to go to the local market to sell and buy usefully commodities of daily use I saw some ladies

carrying big bag of beetle nuts which was picked from the other village across the falls. I always feel very proud when I see ladies working no matter how big or small the work is, but As we were all out

to leave pelga falls my friend told me about a special fish which is considered to be very dangerous by the Garo people and the name is electric eel, so Fishing was strictly prohibited in the falls. As we were heading towards our hotel, sun was setting in the evening sky. One the way to the hotel we met our of tour guide Bikramjit A Sangma who invited us for a cup of tea and we all went to his home. I was quite surprised to see his collection of art, craft fossils musical instrument coins etc. being an art teacher himself Birkramjit had tried to preserve the heritage of the Garo people in what ever small way he could. As we were about to leave his house, suddenly my eyes fell in to a piece of cloth which was displayed on the wall, while asking ,my friend told me that it is a piece of blanket made out of bark of a tree. There is a village called Rongsugal in Tura where the people still used to make blanket by hammering the bark of a tree until the piece becomes soft to use. To make the blanket it is very hard and time consuming job but still it is worth for them because that way they are keeping themselves close to nature and preserving an age old tradition.

To sew the blanket the people use thread made out of bamboo and a needle made up of deer horn my friend offered me a small piece of blanket as a token of love. To me, it was one of the most valuable gifts that I have ever had. The next day we started early morning at around 5 AM from Tura town to Balpakram. with food, water and other useful commodities. We had to stop in the forest office in Baghmara to get the restricted Area permit. After reaching Baghmara we had to stay in Baghmara forest IB for the night. I knew that my two night stay at the IB was going to be full of little surprises. One of the first things that strike me about the place was the quietness. After a

tired journey from Tura, it was a relief. I tiptoed out of my room, in keeping with the silence that pervaded the crisp night air and took a stroll near the IB. My room was a cosy ensemble of wooden furniture, but post dinner, all I saw was the cushy bed. As I drift off to sleep, I heard an owl calling out from the forest nearby. The next day we started our journey early. The road condition was not so satisfactory but my friend Tinku took all the pain to drive us to the Balpakaram National Park. After reaching Balpakaram I felt like, I was in a different world free from a world of pollution, everything was so green within. We all become speechless because there was so much to see and feel about the place. The Balpakaram national park was inaugurated by late prime Minister of India Mr. Rajiv Gandhi on 27th December 1987. The National Park covers an area of 220 Sq. km. During 1985-86 an area of 220 sq. km has been declared as "Balpakaram National park". There are many legends and etymological concepts about the origin of the word "Balpakaram". It stands at the height of 3000 ft. above sea level.

As we went early in the morning, the rays of the sun fell right up to the Chitlang hills. The sunset was also beautiful and breathe taking. Away from human habitations, we were walking through lush green forest, a large bed of rock. Each fauna sighting was a new gift but the dominant experience is that of the park itself. Balpakaram is the treasure of flora and fauna. Like teak cane, bamboo. It is also the home of the pitcher plant (*Nepenthes Khasiana*) and the sundew plant. Various kinds of orchids are also found. Nature has bestowed generous abundance with an excellent wealth and unique beauty of the wilderness to Balpakaram. Among the fauna, all kinds of cats from the Royal Bengal Tiger, the clouded leopard, leopard cat, elephant,

Samba deer ,bison etc are also found in Garo hills. Balpakaram has also various species of birds and reptiles.

Tura is also a land of caves and my journey would be incomplete if do not mention about the Siju caves. The Siju cave is located near the Naphak Lake. It is 400 meters in length. It is the most reached and unique cave in Asia. Bats are commonly found inside the cave .The cave was so dark that the eyes of the bats were the only things we could see.



The Simsang river is the longest river which originates from Nokrek mountain and runs from the East Garo hills towards south Garo hills. The rivers have many deep pools and water falls. Towards the end of my journey, it was hard for me to say “goodbye” to such a place full of wonder but every good thing must come to an end, so did my journey end, with a promise of my friend Abhra to take me to another place in the time to come. On a personal note there are a few experiences in life time that remain indelibly etched in one’s mind and heart.

Rashmi Das