



Representation of rural Assam in Assamese novels – a study of ‘HalodhiyaCharayeBaodhanKhai’

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Abstract: Homen Borgohain is an illustrious Assamese literary personality who has equal hold over almost all the genres of literary writing. He has excelled over all types of writings – poetry, novel, short story, autobiography, literary criticism and journalistic writings. The specialty of Borgohain lies in the fact that he is equally expert in representation of both urban and rural scenario. As he himself hails from a rural background, the rural Assam achieves its most perfect representation in the works of Homen Borgohain. More particularly, the reality of the socio-economic issues and its impact over the rural folks gets its candid expression in his novels.

Keywords: Homen Borgohain, Assam, Rural, Novel.

I. INTRODUCTION

Homen Borgohain is an illustrious Assamese literary personality who has equal hold over almost all the genres of literary writing. Borgohain has already established himself as one of the powerful, influential and introspective voices of the contemporary Assamese literature. It is his brilliant command over language, sharp socio-political consciousness, equally prolific hold over psychological ups and downs that make him one of the strong voices which can make one feel the real pleasure of reading literature. He has excelled over all types of writings – poetry, novel, short story, autobiography, literary criticism and journalistic writings. Borgohain, who has been relentlessly writing since his early youth days, has explored all possible aspects of human life and society in his fictional and non-fictional works. His fictional works like *Subala*, *Mashyagandha*, *Astarrag*, *Pitaputra*, *HalodhiyaCharayeBaodhanKhai*, *SaudarPuteke Nao Meli Jay*, *Bishannata* are well acclaimed documents of diverse aspects of human life. All these works are already recognised as classics and have gone through numerous editions.

The specialty of Borgohain lies in the fact that he is equally expert in representation of both urban and rural scenario. As he himself hails from a rural background, the rural Assam achieves its most perfect representation in the works of Homen Borgohain. More particularly, the reality of the socio-economic issues and its impact over the rural folks gets its candid expression in his novels. *Mashyagandha*, *Pitaputra*, *HalodhiyaCharayeBaodhanKhai*, *SaudarPuteke Nao Meli Jay* are some of such fictional works where readers can reveal the realities of the rural Assam in the most authentic manner. Most of these novels are set on the early and middle years of the twentieth century. It was a period of socio-political and economic turmoil. The rural Assam has gone through certain changes in both political and economic fields which ultimately changed the social fabric. It also led to certain changes of the traditional pattern of the society, the way the lives and relationships are viewed, understood and interpreted. A newly raising political awareness and its means to achieve those goals changed the traditional pattern of rural Assam. Spread of education, awareness over educational benefits, neo-liberal economic trends, rise of ethnicity and ethnicity based conflicts are some of those changing trends that led to twists and turns. Among those, economic changes and economic conflict is the primary sector where such twists are mostly visible. As literature also captures the social realities in the most prolific manner, the novels of Homen Borgohain were not exceptions. Borgohain, with his sensitive creative self, could feel how rural Assam was in a dilemma to embrace this clash between the tradition and modernity. The chiefly agrarian economy of Assam, its mostly illiterate rural folks sometimes found it difficult to cope up with the changing dynamics. Educational ignorance, exportation of the newly rising capitalists and the increasing gap between the rich and the poor are some of the major aspects of the erstwhile Rural Assam.

The story of the novel is set on a tiny rural village in agrarian Assam steeped in feudal exploitation. It revolves round the two major characters Rashewashar and Sanatan Sharma, who respectively stand for the poor and

the rich, the landless and the capitalists. The minimal amount of land, the sole ancestral property and the only earning source of is gradually whisked off and snatched away by the landlord. Here stands for all those poor, helpless marginal rural Assamese folks who is made the pasty of harrowing feudalism that by nature exploits the poor in bestial nature. In spite of knowing the illegal nature of the possession, Rashewashar could hardly speak against it. Rather he even had to send his son as a child labour to the house of the same landlord. The protagonist was falsely assured to be helped by almost all the officials he met. A close analysis of the novel reveals that this helplessness or insecurity is result of many factors that are the realities of rural Assam. Among them educational backwardness, silencing of marginal voice by the so called social hierarchy, lack of economic power, indifference to certain issues by the mass, indifference of the political or social leaders are some of such naked realities of the rural Assam. This novel also reveals those issues for which could not raise his voice the way he should do.

The novel is an authentic representation of the rural Assam. It includes almost all the aspects of a rural setting –the description of the household structures, the livelihood mechanisms, the colloquial language, the relationship between nature and the villagers, food, rituals, religious practices to name a few. The houses of the rural Assamese villagers are kuttcha houses, they hardly have any proper sanitation facility. The interdependence between nature and human beings is a fundamental characteristic of rural Assamese folks. The bamboos, the river or the nearby forest are like human presence for the village folks. The characters speak in native, colloquial language, full of the characteristic phrases, idioms, stress and tone. The protagonist also frequently uses slangs and Assamese phrases or idioms. *Halodhiya Charaye Baodhan Khai* deals with the agrarian economic background. The protagonist is a poor farmer who knows nothing but ploughing, harvesting and reaping. The tools of an Assamese farmer is frequently mentioned throughout the novel. The emotional attachment with the paddy fields, the joy over raindrops, the beauty of a full rice paddy field are brilliantly described by the novelist. A major portion of the conversations of the characters centre round the matters of weather, harvesting paddy, ploughing etc. Rashewashar got severely hurt when he came to know that the landlord was going to snatch the piece of land away from him. His entire family was in a trauma when the news was informed to them. It shows how the rural folks share an eternal emotional relationship with the land. It also reflects how rural Assam cannot be imagined without the agrarian aspects. Borgohain is an avid observer and commanding narrator. So his novel minutely narrates the scenes of preparation of traditional food, weaving, cleansing of houses, traditional games practised in the rural Assamese villages etc. Such picturesque descriptions can easily take the readers to the rural Assam, which was the crystal reality during the early decades of the twentieth century Assam. Readers can also know how the rituals, both cultural and religious, are performed in an Assamese novel. The novelist also makes reference of the influence of alcoholism over the villagers. The nature of family relationships, the relationship among the village folks are realistically portrayed in the novel. Readers find how Rasheswar and his wife have to cope up with the sudden disaster of the illegal possession of his land, which was his only hope for his future. But the greedy landlord took the land away from the poor farmer. In this context, the novelist also indirectly exposes how due to lack of education, lack of knowledge over legal procedures, the poor rural folks have to face unexpected complications in their lives.

This novel can be treated as a pragmatic document on the socio-economic aspects of the rural Assamese people. From a theoretical perspective, it can be located under the Marxist or Subalternists framework. The novel captures the eternal clash of the bourgeois and the proletariat- the clash between the rich and the poor. *Halodhiya Saraye Baodhan Khai* is a very strong allegorical representation of the exploitation over the rural poor by the landlords. The characters of *Mahajan* and Rasheswar transcend the boundary of their specific role and emerges out to be the symbolic figures of the rich and the poor. Borgohain has beautifully revealed how justice or law are nothing but farcical myths for the helpless folks like Rasheswar. It is a tragic saga of the every poor farmer, every poor man who always has to be the victim of a rich owner. The moments like Rasheswar beating his wife out of utter frustration over the sudden loss of the piece of land, Rasheswar postering for the Landlord or his son postering for the landlord are wonderful literary moments to expose the helplessness of the subalterns like the protagonist and his family. It reminds us the very famous question of Gayatri Chakrabarty Spivak –Can Subaltern Speak? A Marxist analysis of the novel reveals how the novelist actually portrays the history of the conflict between the bourgeois and the proletariat. Sanatan Sharma stands for the former class while Rasheswar represents the latter group. The oppressed class always gets dominated in all aspects by the people in power, one who tops the list of social

hierarchy .This authoritative control hardly provides any scope for the commoners to raise their voice. Rasheswar is running after justice. He even snatched away the jug of curd from his son and offered it to the lawyer with the hope of getting justice. Such suggestive narratives make the readers compelled to feel the helplessness of the poor in a chaotic socio-political process where equality or justice are nothing but written codes.

II. CONCLUSION

Though at the climax, the protagonist gets his land back, the entire narrative stands for the naked reality of the hollowness of democratic justice and the condition of the common men like Rasheswar. *HaladihayaSarayeBaodhanKhay* is an epic narrative of the reality of rural Assamese mass where suffering and dilemma is the only reality .Leaders who keep on shouting “ *garibihatao*” (eradicate poverty),in reality are the ones who dominate the poor farmers. Indian politics has a long history of manipulation and oppression of the innocent and uneducated poor villagers. All the political leaders turn out to be manipulative oppressor who hardly offer any solution to the problems of the common mass .*HalodhiyaCharayeBaodhanKhai* is a strong record of this manipulation and oppression where poor folks like Rasheswar has been repeatedly cheated by the so called leaders and officials. Borgohain is found to be very concerned about such practices which, according to him,is a major factor behind the static socio-economic position of such people .The oppressed ones do not even get a justified platform to raise their voice .Rasheswar gets entangled between his hope of regaining his right over the piece of the land as wells as the complex intricacies of the official trappings. The last scene where the protagonist stabs on a tree in a paranoid manner is one of the very artistically represented narrative moments of the rebellious voice of the protagonist.

REFERENCE

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