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LAKSHMINATH BEZBORUAH, THE PIONEER OF ASSAMESE
SATIRICAL LITERATURE AND THE PORTRAYAL OF 18TH-19TH
CENTURY ASSAMESE SOCIETY IN HIS SATIRICAL WORKS

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Abstract

In regards to population, India is the second largest country and the seventh largest country in the world. The state of India displays diversity through different races and tribes. Similarly Assam shows diverse assimilation of the tribes and clans. The Ahom's adopted the adaptation and assimilation process in the multi tribal society of Assam. Instead of forcing their own religion, language or culture on other groups, the Ahom's contributed in creating a unified Assamese society by embracing the ancient language, customs and rituals. After the Burmese invasion and result of the signing of the treaty of *Iyandabo*, the British came to Assam. The consolidation policy of British made a significant change in the Assamese society, its geographical boundaries and the easy going relationship of the tribes with the passing of time, Assam only saw an increase in territorial disputes, murder, jealousy and political instability. The instability of the British colonial rules greatly affected the conscious people. Based on this instability, numerous literary works were produced later on. Lakshminath Bezboruah's satirical works are worth mentioning in this aspect because even though there were contemporary writers who wrote on the British imperial rule, they were not as influential as his. Bezboruah has succeeded in examining all the aspects that influenced the 18th-19th Century Assamese social system and criticizing them through his satires. It also emphasizes on the social amendments. This paper is an attempt to study Bezboruah as the creator of Assamese satirical comedies, and the reflection of the society of 18th-19th Century Assam in his works.

0.1 Introduction

Lakshminath Bezboruah was a pioneer of Assamese literature. With his contributions of short stories, novels, plays, poems, biography, autobiography, philosophical essays, satirical pieces to creative Assamese literature, Lakshminath Bezboruah became one of the most noteworthy person in Assam. The entire era is reflected in his works. While doing so, 'Jonaki', an Assamese magazine, became his first stepping stone in his literary journey. 'Litikai' was his first effort. Through this magazine, he strived to introduce modern literary thoughts and ideas into Assamese literature. He expressed himself mainly through satirical comedies. In the 6th-7th edition of the second year of 'Jonaki' (1890)s publication, Lakshminath Bezbaruah started writing under the pseudonym *Kripabar Barua*. But after the 11th edition of 1890, it changed to *Kripabar Borborua*. His works under the Kripabar pseudonym are-

1. Kripabar Boruar Kakotor Tupula
2. Kripabar Boruar Ubhotoni
3. Kripabar Boruar Bhabor Burburoni
4. Borbaruar Buloni
5. Kripabar Boruar Bhabor Burburoni (2nd Edition)
6. Kripabar Boruar Bhabor Burburoni (3rd Edition)
7. Borboruar Sintar Xilguti
8. Borboruar Sahityik Rahasya
9. Borboruar Hamoroni

For instance, even though 'Kripabar Boruar Kakotor Tupula' focuses mainly on the comical factor, it also gives an insight on the truth behind the Assamese society. The issues of politics, National Movement etc. are included in the essay, 'Kripabar Boruar Ubhotoni' and are critically analyzed. In 'Borboruar Buloni', the social life in the Satras, the differences between the higher class and the lower class, the religious rules and regulations, etc. are criticized by him. The 19th century Assamese society was economically unstable. So, in order to encourage the lazy Assamese people under the influence of alcohol to believe in their physical strength, he wrote articles in 'Kakotor Tupula' and 'Ubhotoni'. Moreover, Lakshminath Bezboruah also discusses the changes in Assamese culture, women's rights, the new Assamese language, influence of Bengali language, etc. They reflect his desire for social amendment.

0.2 Objectives

The important objectives of the research paper, "The reflection of 18th-19th Century Assamese society in Lakshminath Bezboruah's satirical works" are-

1. To discuss the scope of satirical works in Assamese literature.

2. To discuss the inherent social and historical scenario in Lakshminath Bezboruah's satirical works.
3. To discuss the social system of 18th-19th Century as reflected in Bezboruah's satirical works.
4. Some of the social customs of colonial Assam were not acceptable. To amend these customs, Lakshminath Bezboruah wrote satire. Therefore, the study of social amendment principles reflected in the works of Lakshminath Bezboruah is one of the main objectives of this paper.

0.3 Importance of the study

Satire is used to throw light into the different aspects of our society, chaos, changes, errors of human nature, their weakness etc. to correct them. Lakshminath Bezboruah emphasized on this genre and criticized the important issues of Assamese society in order to amend them. Hence, his essays are a lively description of Assamese social life. So it is important to discuss this topic.

0.4 Scope of the study

The contents of Lakshminath Bezboruah's satirical works differ from each other. The use of appropriate language according to the content also makes his purpose clear to the reader. For convenience, only the satirical works that reflect the 18th-19th century Assamese social life are included in the study. The topics are- the love of the Assamese people for all things foreign, the changes in social and cultural branch of Assam, women education, women's rights, the colonial ruling policy of the British, the new stage of Assamese language, the influence of Bengali language.

0.5 Research Methodology

This paper uses the descriptive and the analytical method of study. We can find the influence of the social system in the satirical works. Here, psychoanalysis and sociological methods are used.

1.0 Satirical works and its scope in Assamese Literature

1.1 Satirical Works

The Assamese substitute for 'satire' is 'byongo'. Its dictionary meaning is – a humorous way of criticizing people or ideas to show that they have faults or are wrong, or a piece of writing that uses this style accompanied by humor.

According to Dr. Prafulla Kotoky, The dictionary meaning of the English word 'satire' is the form of writing where a person's faults, his actions, thoughts and ideas etc are ridiculed through exaggeration and mockery.¹

According to Madan Sharma, Satire can contain irony, a forced comparison between two opposite persons or things, an attempt to explain a completely different idea through an opposite idea, etc.²

Based on the above definitions it is clear that in satirical works an important social or any other aspect is focused and its faults are criticized. Even though it consist humor, satire focuses mainly on criticizing the person or work. It uses special language, ornamentation techniques, hatred, strange comparisons etc to express its idea.

1.2 Background of Assamese Satire

The satirical works written as an effort to social amendments are an important literary genre. Due to the seriousness of the literary ideas and the focus on religious writing in ancient Assamese literature, the writers of that period disnot focus on creating satirical comedies. Even though humor was used in Assamese literature in the 4th Century by the poet, Madhab Kandali's 'Ramayana', later on in Sankardeva's 'Dasham' and 'Kirtan', Ram Saraswati's 'Bhim Charit', Sridhar Kandali's 'Kankhuwa' and 'Ghunusa Kirtan' etc., its main aim was to entertain the readers. Later, humor became more objective and began to be used with different literary forms to express satire. Satyendranath Sharma's saying is important in this aspect-Due to its religious and idealistic form, the ancient literary works lacked abundance of humor. Although 'Bhim Charit', 'Shishupal Badh', and other epic poetry contained humorous scenes in between, it was not as prominent as courage, compassion, and adirasa (romance); its flow is stagnant and thin. Its use was not clever and satirical. The first clever, satirical and social awareness humor was used in Hemchandra Boruah's works.³

The first genuine satirical Assamese literature was written in the 'Arunodoi' period. Hemchandra Barua's satirical play 'Kania Kirtan' published in 1861 is the first published satirical work. Another satirical play, 'Bahire Rong Song Bhitore Kuwabhatari' by Hemchandra Barua was published in 1866. Other Arunodoi period writers also used satire in their works such as Gunabhiram Boruah in 'Kathin Shobdar Rahasya Byakhya', Lambodar Bora in 'Sadananda's Kolaghumoti' etc. Lakshminath Bezboruah was able to establish Hemchandra Boruah's trend of satirical comedies into the most prominent genre in Assamese literature. The 19th century Assamese society influenced him a lot in creating satirical works. His idea was to portray the changes in Assamese society during the colonial rule.

Lakshminath Bezboruah gave great importance to the status of women. He emphasized on the child marriage, the problem of widow marriage, women's position in the contemporary society etc and was discussed in his literary works.

the pre independent Assamese society, girls and women had strict boundaries. They were always placed below men and were only responsible for household works. Also, there were no provisions for education of girls. Either the lack of communication, or the restrictions imposed by the society, these factors made it difficult for the women to receive education. It was believed that educating the women would lead to deformation of their character. Lakshminath Bezboruah criticizes this idea and speaks for the education of women. As a result of child marriage, many girls became widow at a very young age but their hardships were never mentioned in the society. In Bengal, Ishwarchandra Bidyasagar and Raja Ram Mohan Roy tried to ban child marriage and encouraged remarriage of women. Inspired by their work, Bezboruah, too, encouraged widow marriage.

2.0 Lakshminath Bezboruah's satirical works and the Portrayal of 18th-19th century Assamese society

The 18th-19th Century Assamese society was not economically stable. Mostly, the people became lazy under the influence of alcohol. During the colonial rule, the British people encouraged the Assamese people to drink alcohol and exploited them. To save his people from this deadly situation, Bezboruah started writing satirical pieces to remind them of their loss of identity, working ability, self dependence etc.

Lakshminath Bezboruah, through his literary works, tried to portray the vicious nature of a group of people of the society and also criticizes them. This criticism was also aimed at the welfare of the society. The article from 'Borboruar Buloni', 'Khohota Dimoru Satradhikar' and 'Dighola Kinaram' shows the egoistic behavior of the religious gurus. In 'Khohota Dimoru Satradhikar', the exploitation, frauds by the Satras or the Satradhikars; and in 'Dighola Kinaram', the jealousy, dishonesty, and untouchability among the gurus of the satras are criticized. During that period the satras treated the common people with contempt and even the disciples were treated as unworthy. Even when he criticized the gurus of the satras and revealed their deeds, he was mindful not to hurt or differentiate between any religion and community. Moreover, Bezboruah exposed the misdeeds of the high caste Brahmins, the system of keeping slaves by the wealthy people, the discrimination of caste while eating, etc. through his satires to amend them.

Lakshminath Bezboruah was also inspired by some of the historical events of Assam to write satire. Thus, they too, aimed at social reformation. During the reign of the Ahom king Gaurinath Singha, the British occupied Assam by saving Assam from the Burmese attack. To stabilize the economy, the British authority introduced the 'revenue' system. But the mauzadars exploited this system by collecting heavy amounts of tax from the people. In his article, 'Mur Jonmo Rahasya', Bezboruah mentions the unethical exploitation by the mauzadars to strengthen their economic condition. On the other hand, with the experience gained by associating with the tea companies established by the

British, the Assamese people ventured into business. Generally the Assamese people's weakness for jobs and disinterest in business are criticized by Bezboruah in the article 'Jagannath Boruah' where a highly educated student, Jagannath Boruah, starts his own business instead of looking for job.

As soon as the East India Company established its roots in Assam, the Bengali traders who were already doing trade and commerce in Assam, supported them for their own benefits. The traders conspired against the Assamese language and compelled the East India Company to spread the use of Bengali language in Assam. And eventually, Bengali language became dominant over Assamese language. As a result the Bengalis demanded the remote villages such as Rangpur, Dinajpur, Kochbihar as their's and thus Bengali language was included in these areas. It was a danger to the Assamese literature and language. In this situation Bezboruah made efforts to reestablish the Assamese language.

Bezboruah also used satirical comedies to establish and develop the Assamese language. At that time, a group of Bengali people were deliberately trying to use Bengali language by replacing Assamese, on the other hand the Assamese people were embracing Bengali in the hopes of acquiring a government job and another group of people were hampering the growth of Assamese language, literature and culture. Bezboruah portrays these incidents in the article 'Mur Jonmo Rahasya' included in the book 'Kripabar Boruar Kakotor Tupula'. Here, Bezboruah compares the Assamese literature and language with the termites that produce wings to fly before they die and calls the enemies of the language, mosquitoes. The influence of Bengali language on the Assamese language was so strong that later on the Assamese language was reformed in the structure of the Bengali language. The evidence can be found in the article 'Bangaj | Goalpara| Oxomiyal' from 'Kripabar Boruar Hamoroni'. For example-

Goalpara. "Bola nai, kowa nai, sulit haat!

Er! Er! Boli bhal hobe na, chadi deo!"

Assamese. – "Moshai Chede din! Chede din! Aapni amader luker chul dhore tanen kene? Ei desher kotha? Na charen toh aapnar name adulate natis ruju hoibe."

(Bangaj | Goalpara| Oxomiyal, P.587)

Bezboruah gave all his efforts to reestablish Assamese language even though he was staying in Kolkata. When the Bengali people tried to include Assam's Goalpara with Bengal, many Assamese people including Lakshminath Bezboruah were angry with this decision. As retaliation to that incident, Bezboruah gave a hateful speech against the Bengalis in the *Assam Sahitya Sabha* meeting of 1926 held in Guwahati. However we cannot personally

blame him for his hateful speech because the situation of that period encouraged him to be a nationalist. Bezboruah wanted to acquire higher education to establish a new, refined Assamese culture and society, and that was his promise as a student.

Lakshminath Bezboruah did not participate in any political movements. He understood that political constraint is much better than cultural constraint because the former will only take away one's birth right but cultural constraint will kill one's soul. The colonial rule of British not only took away India's independence, but also destroyed literature and culture. Therefore, Bezboruah reminds the Assamese people of the status of the society to encourage them to be patriotic towards their motherland-

Assam is incomparable in terms of unity! Unity means one or a group that acts as one. Assamese people are one with a big heart and are known to all. Assamese people are strong, and will never rely on others.

(Asomiya Jati

Dangor Jati, P. 24)

Bezboruah had strong thoughts and ideas and great imaginations. It had a logical significance. Compared to other developed countries; Indian women are not given equal status to that of men. To form a successful society, one should develop mental intellect. The absence of women in the event organized for women or for the education of women proves that the status of men and women in our society is not equal even at present. So, Kripabar Boruah while trying to explain about 'women education'; gives a vivid description of the status of women in India and calls it 'Ramayana without Rama, Brindaban without the Gopis'.

In 'Samajik', an article in 'Kripabar Boruar Kakotor Tupula', Lakshminath Bezboruah tried to draw a picture of the contemporary Assamese society with its faults and errors, social differences, rules and regulations etc. Kripabar Borua, under the influence of alcohol, travels to Hell and while describing the scenes included in 'Samajik', describes the need for purification of the society. Even though he belonged to a higher class society, Bezbaruah created relatable circumstances and events to show the extortion of the Brahmins-

A fearful Yama was making a healthy man sit over a hot bed of sand. The man's buttocks were starting to fall off in pieces due to the heat from the hot sand. And even the trees and animals were crying at his screams of pain. How strange! A group of people were kneeling around the hot sand bed and there were no signs of grief on their faces. Instead, it felt as if they were enjoying the man's heart wrenching screams.

(Somajik, P. 10-11)

Although the incidents described in ‘Samajik’ initiates laughter, the inherent criticism is evident. Kripabar Borua describes one such incident that happened to a Guxai(priest). In the traditional Satriya religion, the teacher-student relationship is given the highest position. But in most of the circumstances, it is seen that the satradhikars exploit their position and ignores the problems of their students. In ‘Samajik’, he shows beforehand the consequences that the satradhikars and the gurus will have to face for the injustice. This circumstantial description clearly states the social difference between the teacher and the student and also criticizes the Assamese people for being ignorant in accepting the guru’s selfishness without protest.

The satirical works of Lakshminath Bezboruah are full of such incidents and circumstances. Most of these circumstances are social which sometimes does not match with the humor or are completely mismatched. But Bezboruah’s ability to create a circumstantial reality by covering all the aspects around the satire provides a platform to portray the 19th-20th Century social system of Assam.

3.0 Conclusion

The most significant genre used by Lakshminath Bezboruah in literature is satire. Through his satirical works Lakshminath Bezboruah was able to expose the social system of 18th-19th Century Assam. The study and influence of Dhrupadi or Classical Literature in his family, the influence of western literature, the constant access to Bengali language and culture inspired him to write. His works for national awareness and political views greatly influenced the society. The conclusions that we can draw after studying Lakshminath Bezboruah as the pioneer of satirical comedies and the works is that- through his satire, Bezboruah was able to portray the true face of Assam’s social system. Sometimes he uses deep satires and sometimes humor for dramatic effects.

3.1 Decision

In this research paper titled “Lakshminath Bezboruah, The Pioneer of Assamese Satirical Literature and the Portrayal of 18th-19th Century Assamese Society in His Satirical Works”, we have come to the conclusions that-

1. Assam’s social background especially helped Lakshminath Bezboruah in creating satirical works.
2. To save the exploited, neglected Assamese society from the British rule, Bezboruah wrote numerous literary works based on the glorious history of Assam.
3. He wanted to amend the social, cultural and political changes introduced by the British Imperial government and therefore criticized the social system through his satires.

4. He wrote to display the religious and communal differences, freedom of women, etc.

5. To throw away people's disrespect for their mothertongue, he mocks the mentality of the Assamese people. Under such circumstances, Lakshminath Bezboruah wrote satire to reestablish Assamese language in Assam.

End Note :

1. Prafulla Kotoky, Sahitya-Sangya kosh, P. 185

2. Madan Sharma, 'Byanga-Shitya', Pankaj Thkur (ed.) Nirbachita hasya-byanga golpo sankalan, P. 41

3. Satyendranath Sharma, Asomiya Sahityar Samikhyatmak Itibritta, P. 265

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