

Reflection of Social Life in Bezbarua's short story

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Abstract

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Bezbarua is the central figure of modern Assamese literature, whose multi-dimensional talent had established Assamese literature for the future years to come. Bezbarua was known as playwright, storyteller, novelist, biographer, essayist, satirist, critic and philosophical writer and also a famous poet of Assamese literature. Bezbarua was a prominent and well known first Assamese short story writer. In his stories Assamese society was reflected in the tip of the fingernails. The scope of Bezbarua's short story is very widespread. He depicts a large society of Assam, Bangal and Odisha. As a result, the social customs, rites and rituals, habits and customs are being reflected within his short stories. Here we will discuss the society reflected in his short story.

Introduction:

Laxminath Bezbarua was the greatest genius of Assamese literature. Bezbarua spent his life abroad, married with Tagore family, but wholeheartedly worked for the development of Assamese literature. In the words of Banikanta Kakati 'wherever he stays, but his heart was in Assam, in the forest of Assam. Though he took the 'sandesh' of Bengal, but his interest in Assamese traditional food is not forgettable.' (Saikia 282) Neog remarkable Bezbarua as the co-ordinator between old folk-tale and short story. (Neog 307). Among all the outward and influence his short story gives some

reflection of Assamese social life with realistic nature.

Bezbarua did not give emphasis on theme and character, yet it is seen that he could depict a real picture of the British ruled Assam and its social system. The breakable social system of the later past of nineteenth century, the officials of the British rule and their corruption and the superstitious beliefs of the people of the villages who controlled the whole social system was recorded by Bezbarua in his short story. (Sarma 311) Bezbarua was equally well versed with the

social life of Bengal and Odisha, as he was associated with timber business, also reflected in some of his fiction.

While in Calcutta Laxminath meet with a group of like-minded Assamese student like Hemchandra Goswami, Chandra Kumar Agarwal, Ratnakanta Barkakati and others. They formed a literary organization entitled as 'Asomiya Bhasa Unnati Sadhini Sabha' in the year 1888. This organization tried to develop Assamese literature and they published a monthly journal named 'Jonaki' in the year 1889.

Laxminath Bezbarua was the leader of this literary movement and he published his first farce 'Litikai' in this journal. Later on he used to write short story, novel, essay, drama, biography, children literature are used the literary movement for which this age has been termed as 'age of Bezbarua'.

Like Rabindranath Tagore of Bengal Bezbarua was the pioneer of Assamese short story. According to scholars view, 'Seuti' was the first short story written by him. Later on he continued this practice as a result of which we were able to get 'Surabhi', 'Sadhukathar Kuki', 'Jonbiri' and 'Kehokali' as a collection of short story.(Neog 307)

The creative literature of Bezbarua is full with national consciousness along with the feelings of reformation of the traditional society. This traditional society belongs to Assam, Bengal and Odisha. He depicted the society of Bengal in 'Laokhowa' and 'Bhurukibou' and the society of Odisha has been reflected in 'Dasmantar', 'Ratanmurda' and 'Sibaprasad' etc.

Bezbarua took the help of satire to reform the society against the superstitious beliefs of the entire society. Those who couldn't adjust with the new administration started by the British Government and the other group who were being benefited through the new administrative machinery. Bezbarua draws the attention of the people by criticizing the social evils like casticism, nepotism, favouritism, ego etc. He use

the help of satire and give comic relief. 'Malak Guin Guin', 'Bhokendra Baruah', 'Dharmadhaj Faisala Nabis', 'Jatiramar Jat', 'Bhempuria Mouzadar', 'Dhowakhowa', etc. are some examples of his social reform. (Nath 28)

The problem of casticism played an important role in the society of nineteenth century, which made the society in distress. The characters like 'Lambodar Deka', 'Nistarini Devi' are such examples of this social consciousness of the author. (Saikia 308)

The male-dominated society was responsible for the unbearable pain of the women which has been reflected in a few short story of Bezbarua, entitled as 'Patmugi', 'Bapiram', 'Bhadari'. In 'Joyanti' he has depicted a courageous Assamese women who played an important rule at the cruel attack of the Burmese. The attack was so dangerous that made a pitiable condition of the people of Assam.

In 'Madhoi Maloti' and 'Jatiramar Jat' the author draws the attention of caste-system and its bad effect is the society. He took the help of satire in 'Pratham Darsanat Upoja Prem' and describe about the newly educated Assamese youth and their affairs of love and its reality. 'Nakou' is one of the most important short story of Bezbarua where he depict the faith in evil-spirits of the Assamese society along with the dominant nature of the masters towards their servants. 'Chenichampa' is another short story, where the social evil like use of drugs, wine and such products. Once the drugs was popularly used by the illiterate people, which hampered their mental growth. Such evil habits of use the drugs has been depict in 'Chenichampa' which shows the social consciousness of the author. He tried to educate the people by drawing such situation and made them aware about the evil of use the drugs.

Purpose of the study:

The main purpose of the study is to study about the reflection of social life in Bezbarua's short story. Bezbarua was the founder of Assamese short story and his 'Seuti' is the first Assamese

short story published in 'Jonaki'. Like Rabindranath Tagore in Bengal and Fakir Mohan Senapati in Odisha, he is not only the founder, but also he established this new kind of art in the history of Assamese Literature. The researcher will limit its study within the range of the main theme.

Limitation of study:

The short story written by Bezbarua covers vivid aspects of human life. Bezbarua writes on different aspects of school, psychological, environmental and cultural life of the people of Assam. Our study will limit only in social life only.

Methodology:

The author will adopt analytical method in this research paper.

Review of literature:

Bezbarua being the central figure of modern Assamese literature, various works has been done on his multi-dimensional contribution of Assamese literature. 'Asomiya Sahityar Itibritta'(1959) is one of the most remarkable history of Assamese literature, by Saytendra Nath Sarmah, has given vivid expression about Bezbarua's short story 'Asomiya Sahityar Ruprekha'(1962) is another remarkable historical works on Assamese literature by Maheswar Neog, whose the author elaborates the creativity of Bezbarua with systematic way.

'Laxminath Bezbarua'(1968) edited by Chandraprasad Saikia covered vivid aspects of Bezbarua's literary contribution is really remarkable book on his works. 'Sahityarathi'(2013) by Prafulla Kakaty covers different aspects of Bezbarua's contribution. 'Adhunik Golpa Sahitya'(2009) is one of the most remarkable literary criticism on Assamese short story on the historical prospective where the author reviews in historical perspective. Apurba Bora edited 'Asomiya Chutigalpa Aitihya Aru

Bibartan'(2012) where criticisms about short stories of Assamese literature by different authors were included.

'Asomiya Chutigalpar Adhyayan'(2008) by Prahlad Kumar Baruah is one of the historical book on Assamese short story, where the author analyse the major works of different fiction writer accordingly. Parag Kumar Bhattacharya also analyse the Assamese short story in analytical method in his work entitled as 'Galpar Prasanga aru Asomiya Galpa Sahitya'(1998). Prafulla Kumar Nath elaborated the short story of Assamese literature as creative literature in his work 'Chutigalpar Srijansilata Aru Asomiya Chutigalpa'(2021).

'Bezbaruar Sahitya Prativa'(1960) edited by Harichandra Bhattacharya is also one of the remarkable compilation about the contribution of Bezbarua. 'Prasanga Sahityarathi' is another book as the contribution of Bezbarua. 'Laxminath Bezbarua Srijan Aru Maran'(2013) edited by Madan Sarmah is also one of the most authentic academic contribution of Bezbarua. Hridayananda Gogoi compiled and edited the complete short story of Bezbarua entitled as 'Laxminath Bezbaruar Galpa Samagra'(2011).

Reflection of Assamese social life:

Bezbarua draws the Assamese social life including the social evils, superstitions, problem and caste-system, imitation of foreign style and forgetting the tradition by the natives and so on. He took the help of humer and satire and criticize the newly grown up society to remind them about the cultural tradition and the heritage of the people. This is the reason for which Bezbarua took the help of satire. He believed that only education can change the society and the people must be motivated towards modern and scientific thinking. (Saikai 231)

In 'Lambodar Deka' the problem of casticism has been getting priority. Lambodar while travel to Gauhati he was suffered for illness for which he has to survive by the food offered by lower caste

people and for this he was punished by his society. Lambodar being a child of brahmin was liable to take the help of food offered by the non-brahmin boatman for which he was declared sinful and to spent his life separately from their society. According to the author –“As regards to Hindusim he lost his own race and have no chance to uplift, where Brahmin keep their purity after being taking meal from lower class.” (Gogoi 21)

In ‘Malak Guin Guin’ and ‘Bhokendra Baruah’ Bezbarua aimed at the newly educated youths of nineteenth century and took the help of satire as they have forgotten their own tradition and social dignity. The imitation of the western life had made the newly educated youths ambitious, ego-centered for which they feel the traditional culture of the state is valueless. Malakhu, who imitate the style of the British in dresses and fooding and as such he has already changed his name from Malakhu Gogoi to M. Gogoi and later on known as Malak Guin Guin. Bezbarua has criticized him –

‘Mr M. Gogoi turned into Malak Guin Guin. In the circular path of B.A. examination rolled down and it arrived in the same place, and could not progress at all, that means he couldn’t passed.’(Gogoi 35)

Bhokendra Baruah who went to read in Calcutta and he changed his name. He also tried to change his parents name along with his sister and their village. Even he hesitate the small business of his father and tried to introduce as a gentleman. So he suggest that his father should not do his business of selling the milk. ‘Bhokendra think the business of milkman is very shameful and he suggest him to do other business. Whatever you were, but now you are my father. Therefore you must behave like a gentleman.’(Gogoi 258)

Here the author describes how the imitation of British style has made the Assamese youth selfish and out of tradition of the state. In ‘Bapiram’ the ill effect of child-marriage has been depict for which the young widow has to suffer. Bapiram being a servant was wide-hearted and very

dutiful. He saved Tilaka from the evil eyes of Mr. Scott who was associated with a tea Garden.

‘Bhempuria Mouzadar’ is a typical character of that time. Who by dint of power ruled the society and their special qualification was oiling to district magistrate or sub-deputy collector. Though, they were not at all educated, they could get the job through bribe and oiling nature. Bezbarua has rightly remarked —‘The name was there, where has father kept; it couldn’t develop through branch and leaves.’(Gogoi 124)

Slowly and silently Bhempuria Mouzadar engaged himself in touting the ordinary people in the name of Govt-tax. He imposed higher tax as used and lived a comfortable life. Bezbarua has drawn his religious ideology irrespective to the worship system of traditional Assamese society. Accordingly he wrote —‘Mouzadar is not a person of empty power. A great Brahmin. He shaved his hair and use red-chadar in his forehead. His face is well-shaved. He fallowed trisandhya regularly; do not take any diet in others house- etc.’ (Gogoi 126)

The purity of Assamese women has been depicted is the attractive short story ‘Bhadari’, where tolerance of Assamese woman and their purity of mind and devotion to their husband has been focused. Her husband Sisuram punished her very seriously but she instead of taking rancher, forgive him and asked the administrative authority to make him free, as the injury was due to her own fault. (Saikia 295)

Women psychology has been focused in ‘Patmugi’ very tastefully. Patmugi, daughter of a Kumar community was married with a Brahmin youth, but the youth betray her and later on married a Brahmin girl according to their social custom. Patmugi filed a case against him but withdrawned the same by seeing the behavior pattern of her relative uncle and felt that the nature of all human being are always similar. Assamese social life was then combated by casticism, superstitious beliefs and so on. Women were suppressed anyhow by the male-dominated society, as such they have to carry out the t

traditional customs and rites and rituals. Due to illiteracy and social evils negative sentiments grown up within their mindset which results social backwardness.

In 'Seuti' Bezbarua tried to draw the suppression upon the women which results their distress. The traditional social system had made their condition pitiable for which they suffered very much. Here he described how Seuti had to lost her life due to depression and social superstition. The child marriage was also a factor of such untimely death of women child. Social stratification and caste-system was so deep that the higher caste people even hesitate to take meal at the lower caste peoples residence. As a result, Seuti's lower caste, her husbands family remarked –'...you have no any power upon your daughter now. We have married a girl of lower caste, so we couldn't take any kind of food offered by your parents.' (Bhattacharya 145)

Child marriage and illiteracy was remarkable social evils prevailing the society of the nineteenth century for which young girls like Seuti has to sacrifice her life. The ambition of making social status by matrimonial relationship with royal family was an urge within our internal mind throughout ages. In 'Malati' it has been seen that Malati's parents wasted to made her relation with royal family. But, as Malati was not accustomed with the standard of life of the royal family had to lost her life.

In 'Jayanti' Bezbarua had depict the courage of Assamese women, where Jayanti fought against three Burmese soldier and killed them to save her husband, who was captured by them. The short story was written to show the marvelous attacks of the Burmese and their cruel behavior.

Reflection of the Social Life of Bengal:

Bezbarua went to Calcutta and spent there a few years and made matrimonial relationship with Tagore family. He also engaged himself with Bholanath Baruah and continue timber business in Bengal and Odisha. That is why social life of

Bengal was automatically reflected in his short story. The caste system prevailing in the state of Bengal has been focused in 'Nistarini Devi' or 'Fatema Bibi'. Nistarini Devi, a young girl of a Hindu family attend the idd celebration near her village for which she was to punished and to married with a Mahmadian youth. But, unfortunately her husband expired and she had to faced trouble in her life. Superstitious belief and the caste system turned Nistarini Devi with Fatema Bibi. The author described the episode through the mouth of Fatema like below: "Caste system destroyed our country. The hate of each-other in the name of Hindu and Musalman has bring down our state." (Bhattacharya 11)

Due to the Kaulinga system prevailing in the society of Bengal in the nineteenth century was responsible for the sorrowful condition of women's life. The dowry system, use of drugs, child marriage, superstitious beliefs, illiteracy etc. were responsible factor for the pitiable condition of women in the society.

In 'Laokhola' Bezbarua described the grief of women is the male-dominated society. The position of widow in Bengal was very pathetic. This was spoken by the female character of the short story: "What kind of argument of your gentleman. What kind of justice. You are very selfish. It is your habit to show your highness before women. The old social system rejected in the past has been come into law..." (Bhattacharya 30)

The protest against traditional social system of the male dominate society has been come to light in this episode. Another short story written in the social life of Bengal by Bezbarua may be said as 'Bhuruki Bou'. The attraction towards opium has been focused here, which was a technique of the British for revenue collection. The addiction for opium made the Assamese people idle for which they have to faced many negligence in the society. In 'Pandit Mahasay' it is described that the relationship between teacher and taught were not cordial for which a student had to sacrifice his life due to the cruelty of his teacher.

'Jalkuwari' is another short story where natural settings had been given preference. A girl's love for nature was totally dismissed after marriage, while she went to enjoy natural setting in the moonlit night and suddenly she was drowned in Rupahi. "She couldn't sleep in dream. It was a moonlit night. She left the bed and went to the bank of river Rupahi. Suddenly all her thoughts were existed with the strong current of the river Rupahi." (Bhattacharya 157)

'Kanya' is another short story, where the death of a young couple has been described by Bezbarua. The boy engaged in the fishing couldn't give attention in his business as he show beautiful girl in the opposite side of the bank of river who came there in collecting water. Suddenly he jumped in the river and was drowned. Later on, the young girl also commit suicide. The natural setting gets more priority in 'Kanya' and along with the natural setting, the deep love of the young boys and girls were come to light.

Reflection of Social Life of Odisha:

Bezbarua spent his life in Sambalpur for his timber-trade and wrote a few short story in the light of the society of Odisha. 'Ratan Munda' is one of the most remarkable short story written in the festival of Magha celebrated by the hole people of Odisha.

There was a tradition of dancing by girls in the festival also puts nupur, but the heroine of the short story was so poor that she couldn't collect the same but her friends understand the economic condition of zumuri and gifted her, so that, she can dance. The dowry system of Col society has been focused by the author along with same superstitious beliefs within the Col community.

'Sivaprasad' is another short story written with the episode of Odisha, particularly the Col tribe of Odisha. Sivaprasad had a beautiful wife, but due to poverty, he sold his wife to the British. Here the author tried to show that poverty is one of the factor for which women has been treated as a marketing product by the illiterate people.

Bezbarua depict the character of a young boy in 'Dasmantar' who have none except his grandmother. But due to the superstitious beliefs Dasmantar have to lost his grandmother. In this way Bezbarua try to depict the traditional social system, which is governed by superstitious beliefs, illiteracy, poverty and other social evils.

Conclusion:

From the above discussion, it has come to light that Bezbarua was a visionary author, who tried to reform the traditional Indian society and therefore, he focused the illiteracy, social evils, superstitious beliefs, use of druggs, faith on evil spirits, and so on. The nineteenth century was full with illiteracy within Indian society and for this Bankim Chandra Chetterji, Raja Rammohan Roy, Debendranath Tagore and others tried for social reform. The 'Arya Samaj', 'Prathana Samaj', 'Brahma Samaj' and theosophical society along with Ramkrishna Misson worked for the welfare of the society. In Assam Hemchandra Baruah and Gunabhiram Baruah followed the footsteps of Raja Ramohan Roy and Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar respectively.

Bazbarua who was educated with western education and inspired by the social reforms of Bankim Chandra and others, realized the major defects of contemporary Indian society and tried to motivate them against illiteracy, exploitation of women, superstitious beliefs and other social evils. Therefore he tried to draw the attention of the people by creating consciousness among them about the unhealthy social system in the light of modern education.

Bezbarua was a social scientist and his association with the people of Bengal and Odisha was due to his business as well as his matrimonial relationship with the reputed Tagore family. Bezbarua stayed for a little time in Assam, but he realized the reality of the Assamese people, particularly motivated by the new administration policy of the British and the changing character of the newly educated youths and the zarocrates of that time.

In conclusion, it may be summarized that Bezbarua is the pioneer of Modern Assamese Literature and the reflection of social life in his short story is very realistic and it may be said as the real portrait of the contemporary Indian society.

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