

A REALISTIC PICTURE OF ASSAMESE SOCIAL LIFE AND BIRINCHI KUMAR BARUAH'S NOVELS "JIBONOR BATOT" AND "SHEUJI PATOR KAHINI"

Abstract

One of the greatest examples of excellence and perfectness of Assamese novels are the two novels of Birinchi Kr. Baruah . Both of the novels of Birinchi Kumar Baruah – "Jibonor Batot" and "Sheuji Pator Kahini" are full of humours. Throughout a few characteristic features of the two novels like – simple story, portrayal of the living characters, portraying contemporary picture and artful beauty as directly experienced by society, etc. The social background, society and even the nature and behavior of the heroes and heroines of both the novels are different from one another. The background of the first novel is an Assamese society and most of the characters of it belong to the rural society. But the background of the second novel is a Tea-garden society and most of its characters are the workers of the tea-garden.

Thus this paper tries to highlight how the Assamese novelist Birinchi Kr. Baruah brings before us a realistic picture of Assamese culture throughout his novels "Jibonor Batot" and "Sheuji Pator Kahini" His novel "Jibonor Batot" is a piece of full bloomed flowers consisting almost all the characteristic features of a novel. His novel "Jibonor Batot" proves not only as a sign of determining boundary of those novels written just before India got freedom, The story of the novel describes the story of the pathetic life of a woman who struggles a lot in her life. The writer of the book well portrays the happiness and sorrowful life of Assamese people, their expectations, desires, superstitions, good and bad, what they should do and what they should not, etc. all sides through-out his writing and through-out the story of the novel. . A deep thinking and realisation of Birinchi Kr. Baruah regarding contemporary society and culture is caught in his second and last novel ' Sheuji Pator Kahini '.The novel is story based . Of course, the background of the story of the novel is a tea garden. The tea garden

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community occupies a larger portion of the large Assamese Society. So, the story of the novel based on the tea garden society is metaphorical which is full of deep thinking and deep realization. Basically the life and culture of the tea garden workers is well expressed in his novel "Sheuji Pator Kahini" which is written in 1959 on the basis of Assamese tea garden society.

Keywords: Excellence, performance, humours, realistic, society, community, tea-garden, superstitions.

One of the greatest examples of excellence and perfectness of Assamese novels are the two novels of Birinchi Kr. Baruah . Birinchi Kr. Baruah wrote two of his novels by his pseudonym, his novel "Jibonor Batot" was written by the pseudonym Bina Baruah and his novel " Sheuji Pator Kahini" was written by the pseudonym Rasna Baruah. The first novel "Jibonor Batot" was composed in the year 1945 and his second novel "Sheuji Pator Kahini" was written in the year 1959. The social background, society and even the nature and behavior of the heroes and heroines of both the novels are different from one another. The background of the first novel is an Assamese society and most of the characters of it belong to the rural society. But the background of the second novel is a Tea-garden society and most of its characters are the workers of the tea-garden.

Both of the novels of Birinchi Kumar Baruah – "Jibonor Batot" and "Sheuji Pator Kahini" are full of humours. Throughout a few characteristic features of the two novels like – simple story, portrayal of the living characters, portraying contemporary picture and artful beauty as directly experienced by society, etc. The two works "Jibonor Batot" and "Sheuji Pator Kahini" are brightening in Assamese literature as pure artful works of Birinchi Kr. Baruah. Bina Baruah's novel "Jibonor Batot" is a piece of full bloomed flowers consisting almost all the characteristic features of a novel. His novel "Jibonor Batot" proves not only as a sign of determining boundary of those novels written just before India got freedom, but it has also become an example of eminence for the later novelists belonging to the period just after India got its freedom . As soon as the novel was published it brought in a new era in the field of novel writing. The story of the novel describes the story of the pathetic life of a woman who struggles a lot in her life. The writer of the book well portrays the happiness and sorrowful life of Assamese people, their expectations, desires, superstitions, good and bad, what they should do and what they should not, etc. all sides through-out his writing and through-out the story of the novel.

The story of the novel "Jibonor Batot" can be divided into three stages: 1) Beginning ,2) Middle ,3) Ending.

The beginning part of the novel deals with the story of the young lady who is heroine of the novel 'Togar'. The hero of the novel Kamala Kanata brings a clash in the easy going life of the heroine by offering her secretly the ring of their very first meeting. The second and third i.e. the middle and ending part of the book describe the struggling pathetic story of the Togar, a housewife, her married life after she was married to Dharani Mastar. The fourth part of the book presents before us an indirect co-ordination of the shameful and disrespected widow Togar with her ex-lover Kamala Kanta and it also describes a picture of Kamala Kanta's realisation. The background of the story of the novel "Jibonor Batot" is "Marangi" of Golaghat district and "Raha Gaon" of Nagaon district. Togar is the daughter of Bapuram Borah of "Marangi" gaon (village). She met with an educated young Kamala Kanta belonging to city in the occasion of marriage ceremony of the daughter of Bhoga Dutta.

That meeting between the two turns into a love affair and being emotional Kamala Kanta secretly offers a ring to Togar and promises to marry her. But after returning home, Kamala Kanta chooses to become a barrister and so he decided to marry Suprabha , daughter of Rai Bahadur Manik Hazarika of the city as suggested by his father Mahi Kanta. Not only so, Kamala Kanta's father Mahi Kanta sends a letter to Togar's father Bapuram Borah informing him that Kamala Kanta can't marry Togar. Receiving the letter Bapuram decides

and also arranges Togar's marriage with the master Dharani. Then begins the sorrow and painful marriage life of Togar. Togar's life turns into hell by the mental torture given to her by not only her mother-in-law Ahini but also that of some other village women. Togar is able to get love and affection from her mother-in-law only after the birth of her daughter Kamali. But the sudden death of her mother-in-law, the joining of her husband in the freedom fight movement and his total irresponsibility towards the family, then his going to the jail and at last his death due to suffering from cancer, all of these makes Togar almost lifeless. Later on, lonely Togar begins to work at weaving for the sake of her livelihood but can't be relieved of the disrespects. On the other hand, she has to face a danger while she has gone to teach weaving to the wife of a nearly coming magistrate, in their home at Raha cycle. Suddenly, Togar observes the magistrate there and keeps silence for a while as if she becomes speechless knowing the fact that the magistrate is none other than his previous lover Kamala Kanta.

Togar now suffers a lot from mental trauma just remembering her previous memories. Even police accused her of theft and as a characterless lady. As while investigating the case of thieving of a ring and some clothes from the megistrate's house, the police now reach Togar's place and find there the ring which is already gifted to her by Kamala Kanta in the past. Society acknowledges her as being a characterless lady and also a thief. But just looking at the ring of Togar, Kamala Kanta remembers his past memories, and then he realizes his injustice done to Togar by him in the past, at that moment Kamala Kanta's condition was just like king Dushyanta of kalidasa's Sanskrit drama "Shakuntala" , when king Dushyanta also suffered a lot and realized his mistake or injustice done to Shakuntala just when he had seen the ring of Shakuntala long after both of them were separated from each other.

Literature is the mirror of society. Therefore, the picture of any society is reflected throughout the literature of that society. Birinchi Kumar was not only a researcher of folk culture but also a society oriented writer. Therefore, a lively portrayal of every picture of society is well expressed throughout his novel "Jibonor Batot" . The picture of two types of society is well portrayed in the novel- the first one is a traditional village society and the second one is a middle class society belonging to a town, which is called "Chahariya Babu Samaj"(City modern society) by Hiren Gohai. Almost every side of society including – Assamese marriage system, festivals, customs, occasions, birth and death, Superstitious belief, various evil practices, jealousy, backbiting , disrespect ,dress habits , cooking of dishes, nature and behavior , customs, rules and regulations , etc. are expressed throughout the novel "Jibonor Batot".

The impact of Mahapurushiya(of Vaishnava Religion) culture is deep rooted in Assamese village society. Even some homeless people are found to recite and sing with beauty lines from "Ankiya Nata" and "Kirtana Dashama" etc. The novelist presents such song and lines throughout the voice of a few characters as found in various places of the novel.

Assamese ladies are expert and perfect weaving masters. The novel also presents or reveals nicely Assamese ladies and their picture of working as weaving master. The widow Togar earns her livelihood by her work of handloom. Even Suprava, wife of the magistrate is found to have some interest towards weaving. The ugly beauty i.e. the real identity of a woman as indulged in the traditional superstitious beliefs and evil practices is also well-

expressed through the story of the novel. Not only so, the village ladies' backbiting and the mental torture they provide to Togar also plays a remarkable role in turning the life of the good charactered Togar full of torture and suffering. As a result of this, Togar's father Bapurama thinks the matter to be real and believing in the existence of the affair between Togar and KamalaKanta, arrange her marriage with Dharani immediately in a hurry. After her marriage when she reaches KamalaKanta's house, the criticism of the village woman against Togar reaches its highest level. The novel also gives a description about the danger meet by the farmers and their life struggle. The writer also doesn't forget to draw a realistic picture throughout the story of the novel before the readers about how the argumentories of society rules over the farmers and controls them in such a way so that there is no option left for them either than they become totally silent from almost every side of their life. Scarcity of food, clothes etc ; unhygienic condition and absence of good medical treatment – all of these turn the Assamese poor village farmers to embrace death after they suffer a lot due to the absence of all these. As if, marriage is a general or casual incident for them. And this was the destructive condition of the Assamese farmers of that period of course, the novel also depicts before the reader a picture of the happy days of the Assamese farmers. As for example, it depicts how the farmers begin to dance with pleasure out of happiness, when they are finally able to collect grains from the field after the ending of a great hard labour and harvesting.

In this way , Bina Baruah portrays a picture of Assamese village society throughout the story of the novel on the basis of his realistic experience of Assamese society belonging to that period.

On the other hand, the novel clearly depicts and portrays not only Assamese village life but also Assamese town or middle class life. KamalaKanta , MahiKanta , etc. are representative examples of middle class people. KamalaKanta learns the art of cheating and taking advantages of others from his father Mahikanta. MahiKanta , after completing eight class moves towards city to become rich by earning wealth by fowl means and he is a government employee. MahiKanta dreams of becoming connected with higher or rich class or city society by arranging the marriage of his son KamalaKanta with Manic Hazarika's daughter Suprabha, and to make his this dream to be fulfilled in reality he even doesn't hesitate for a second to break his son's marriage with the girl Togar.

The mentality of middle class society is also reflected through the marriage of KamalaKanta and Suprabha. In rich middle class society , husband wife relationship is also rich or wealth oriented. Such is the relation between husband and wife in middle class society. But both of Kamalakanta and Suprava behave and present themselves in society as good husband and wife. KamalaKanta was not happy in his married life, but he couldn't raise his voice against the likes or dislikes of the powerful rich Manik Hazarika's daughter, his wife , as he lost the power to oppose his wife long before and it is an example of town of middle class city people. One of the characteristics of middle class town is vindictiveness and cheating. KamalaKanata represents this class of people. Though he feels deep love in his heart for Togar ,at last he doesn't give value to it, only to fulfill the greed of a mirror job and attracted by the physical beauty of Manik Hazarikas's daughter and for indulging him in the brightness of high and rich class. Just like this Mahikanta is another example of middle class society. In the hope that his son KamalaKanta will become city centered acquiring the job of a magistrate, Mahikanta doesn't hesitate and forced his son to break his relation with Togar and thus he introduces himself as a proved and ambitious person of city life. By arranging his

son's marriage with powerful and rich Manic Hazarika's daughter Suprabha, he brings before us an example of his own character to claim himself as a character belonging to city life.

The novel begins with a picture of celebration of a marriage ceremony of the daughter of Bhogadutta held at Nagaon's "Raha". Rich Mahikanta's son KamalaKanta, the educated young of city life and Bapuram Barah's daughter Togar meet with each other in this marriage ceremony only, so, it is clear from this fact that the novel depicts pictures of two society throughout its story- one is the society of good and bad, rich and poor, educated and uneducated class; another one is the self centered but selfish middle class city life that is called by Hiren Gohain "The Chahariya Babu Samaj"(meaning "City Aristocratic life")

Birinchi Kr. Baruah wrote his novel "Sheuji Pator Kahini" by his pseudonym Rasna Baruah. The gap between the two novel writing is almost fifteen(15) years. The place, society and manners and behaviors of the portrayed heroes and heroines are different in case of both the novels. The place and background of the first novel is a Assamese society and its characters mostly belong to village society. But the place and background of the second novel is a tea garden and most of its characters are workers in tea garden.

A deep thinking and realisation of Birinchi Kr. Baruah regarding contemporary society and culture is caught in his second and last novel 'Sheuji Pator Kahini'. The novel is story based. Of course, the background of the story of the novel is a tea garden. The tea garden community occupies a larger portion of the large Assamese Society. So, the story of the novel based on the tea garden society is metaphorical which is full of deep thinking and deep realization. Basically the life and culture of the tea garden workers is well expressed in his novel "Sheuji Pator Kahini" which is written in 1959 on the basis of Assamese tea garden society.

Though Manager Rautrimiller is a prime character of the novel, he is seen rarely in the story of the novel. His character is drawn with a unique technique throughout the grief, suffering and distress of his wife Eli Cheimur. Eli Cheimur is also a principal character. Though she was not happy in her lonely married life with her director husband, she could achieve reader's sympathy belonging to manager class of white skin. Not only so, the white man of the director class was oppressive from very beginning. Reserved Manager Armstrong and along with him characters belonging to the working class - Budhu, Mahuwa, Alorman, Shukhram ect. are some of the characters of the novel.

The main hero of the novel is Nareshwar, a very simple adult belonging to a ancient family of long distance village, one who takes shelter in natural tea garden instead of some other place, who can't tolerate the moral hypocrisy hidden behind colourful curtains of modern culture and who also can't adjust himself with the modern culture. The heroine of the story, belonging to this tea garden is Saniya, who is the daughter of a lady coolie who was previously seduced by one of the proud and oppressive white managers of the tea garden. Though she is the daughter of a working lady, being a coolie she is carrying the blood of a whiteman in her body. She is also sent to a convent school by a white priest on the basis of order of her white father. But when Saniya understands everything, she decides to quit the systems of the whites, the life specified by the whites etc, and enters to work as a coolie in the tea garden. Though, her skin was white and hair curly, she begins to create a soul to soul connection with the

workers in the tea garden .But her blood doesn't permit her to stay anywhere with peace out of the two societies - the white society and the working class society . Just thinking about her production or birth as a result seduction and rape of her mother a coolie , a white manager , she sometimes begins to burn in hatred towards her own body and youth .Though both of Soniya and Nareshwar love each other greatly , Soniya can't propose her love towards Nareshwar due to this reason . So , at last she decides to leave the garden . Soniya can't tolerate the fact that her mother is raped by a British manager and she is the production of that seduction . She also can't tolerate that the blood of a rapist British manager flows in her blood . That is why , Soniya sometimes get fired out of hatred towards her own life ,own youth and beauty , and that is why she even dosen't hesitate to tell Nareshwar the following words – *'Mor dehot tez nai , asey bih . toy janoi , ai bagichar pratijopa chaho gasskey moy pran vari val paon , bagichar pratyek deka gavru key apon buli bhabo tathapi bagichakhanor oparat mor hingsa . iccha hoy pratyek jopa chaho gass uvali pelaon kalghar vangi diu . chahabor banglat juin jolaon Milar chahabok khun koro . deka gavruhatak nij nij gaon loi ghurai pothaon '*

(Meaning ,“ There is no blood flowing in my body ,but poison .You know well to what extent I love each and every tea tree of this garden whole heartedly , how I think and feel each and every young boy and girl of this garden as part of my own life . Then also ,I hate the garden .I wish to destroy each tea tree and also every tea garden machines .I want to fire the British house , murderer Miller,the white manager . I wish to move back each and every young boy and girl worker of tea garden to outside from this tea garden.”)

Thus it can be said clearly and strongly that the heroine of the story of the novel Soniya is a rebel heroine.

Just because Nareshwar could not tolerate the hypocrisy behind the curtain of aristocracy of the culture of basic Assamese society , he quit the society and was fascinated greatly by the extra charming tea garden . But he got peace in his closeness to Soniya though temporarily . Feeling bored of the so called traditional society , Nareshwar left that society and then could observe an example of chaos free and superstition free society in the tea garden society itself . He was also fascinated greatly by that sort of attitude of the workeing class belonging to tea- garden community .

So, the representation of two societies can be seen in Rasna Baruah's " Sheuji Pator Kahini " , one of them is the society of the manager class ,the white shaheb and another one is the society of coolie of the tea – garden .

Now Soniya says good bye to the tea –garden which she thinks previously as her own tea – garden , she says good bye to her heartiest lover Nareshwar and then she goes out of the tea –garden in search of a new society that will be totally freed from all sorts of Superstitios beliefs , oppressions, torture, seduction ,of females etc . It seems so as if the author tries to clear this point or this fact only throughout the character of Soniya .

The following words of Soniya explain how she tries to give example of such a society (the coolie society) where superstitions belifes, customs, oppressions , tortures, seduction of females are practiced each and every day ---

“ *Bia karai coolioni khota di khatibo hey . mota tu sui thakibo , tiratajoniye puai uthi randhibo baribo lagibo . akou mota jonor lagotey chahopat tuliboloi jabo , akou ghuri ahee randhi bari khuabo lagibo . aru basoror murey murey dibo kolat etakoi kechua . eney abostat bia kora maney soniyar matey letar dorey nijor bahotey bandi hoa* ” (Meaning, though married , a lady must work as a coolie , the male will continue to sleep , but the females should get up early in the morning and involving herself in cooking . There after, she must go again with the male to work in the tea garden as a coolie and after coming back to home , cook and arrange for dinner again . And at the end of every year , the female must give birth to a baby “

This was the condition of a female in the tea – garden society of that time. On the other hand , one young British Manager of the tea - garden , Rautri Miller after marrying Eli Cheimur in London , both of them came to Assam . But just after two years passed , Miller is attracted to another lady, his girlfriend and so he begins to neglect his own wife Cheimur . Just leaving his wife all alone in the middle of forest , in the tea garden , Miller now begins to visit many places like --- Calcutta , Darjeeling etc. with his girlfriend and enjoys his life with her in totally full freedom . Out of jealous , feeling grief and deeply depressed, Mrs. Miller now becomes out of control to take revenge on them being a rebel .

Thus, the female characters are exposed as rebels , whereas , the male characters in the novel are shown as torturing and exploiter, though the character of Nareshwar is an example of a good and sober human being representing the upper middle class Assamese society . The low status and very bad condition of the females in society are shown or revealed in the novel in such a way by the novelist so that it has a great impact on the reader turning them sympathetic towards such ladies .

In short , the novelist wrote this novel to describe about the social life of the working or labour class or coolie and along with this , he also describes how the workers are living in a very pathetic condition at the attack of the British manager of the tea-garden that time. With the hope to build in a pure social system, the novelist uses the characters of Nareshwar and Soniya. Though there is not any clearcut mention of Assamese society in the novel but Nareshwar represents Assamese society only. It can be said that in the novel , the novelist compares Assamese society and culture with the coolie society and culture of tea – garden of Assam.

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