



THE CONTRIBUTION OF NABAKANTA BARUA'S NOVEL "KAPILIPARIYA SADHU" IN THE FIELD OF ASSAMESE LITERATURE: AN ANALYTICAL STUDY

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ABSTRACT

Nabakanta Barua, a well revered member of the Assamese literati, contributed to various disciplines of Assamese Literature including poems, novels, songs, articles and children's literature. Nabakanta Barua is revered in the Assamese literature world for his persona as a poet and a novelist. In addition to introducing revolutionary changes to the modern Assamese poetry, Barua has been admired for his contribution in the Assamese Novel literature. He presented Assamese literature with several well-written and uniquely flavored novels, which were based on real life. While the novels reflect the cultural heritage of the author in their chapters, the folk life resonates in the words. Nabakanta Barua encompassed a uniquely untrodden and vast area with his multi-genre novels. His writings, which have given Assamese literature more than one path to grow and flourish, provide much to study and to understand. This study attempts to analyze the various elements that has been reflected in his novel "Kapilipariya Sadhu". It is a qualitative analysis of the sample both as textual and content.

KEYWORDS

Assamese Literature, Assamese Novel, Nabakanta Barua, Kapilipariya Sadhu

INTRODUCTION:

In the history of Assamese Literature, Nabakanta Barua is a name well-revered. His talent showed in various disciplines of Assamese Literature including poems, novels, songs, articles and children's literature. He contributed to the Assamese literature for more than five decades. Nabakanta Barua is revered among the Assamese literati for his persona as a poet and a novelist. In addition to introducing revolutionary changes to the modern Assamese poetry, Barua has been admired for his contribution in the Assamese Novel literature. He presented Assamese literature with several well-written and uniquely flavored novels, which were based on real life. These novels were of various genre including regional, historical, religious and science fiction. The beautifully written novels, Kapilipariya Sadhu(1953), Kakadeutar Har (1974), Garama Kuwori(1980), Manuh Ataibur Dwip(1981), Apadartha(1982), Patsara(1990) and Ahinshar Jui(published in *Natun Siralu*, Unfinished upon death). These novels have won a special place within the audience's heart.

Aims And Objectives:

Nabakanta Barua encompassed a uniquely untrodden and vast area with his multi-genre novels. His writings, which have given Assamese literature more than one path to grow and flourish, provide much to study and to understand. While some study has been done on his novels, none of them possess the systematic analysis and required study. Thus this study attempts to analyze the various elements that has been reflected in his novel "Kapilipariya Sadhu".

Methodology:

This is an analytical study with qualitative elements. It is a qualitative analysis of the sample both as textual and content. This study limits itself to only one of Nabakanta Barua's Novels, viz Kapilipariya Sadhu.

The primary source is the novel Kapilipariya Sadhu, collected from the Utpal Dutta edited version of Nabakanta Barua collection, while the secondary sources are various research articles, books and magazines.

The Background of the Novel "Kapilipariya Sadhu":

The First attempt in writing a novel by Nabakanta Barua turned out to be an overwhelming masterpiece. He put the background in the banks of a river, the region being the banks of Kapili in Nagaon. He painted a real and compelling picture of the folklife of pre-independence period. Regarding the novel, the author himself reveals, "*The story is indeed a fiction. However, if someone finds some resemblance to any living person or dead, perhaps I myself am responsible for that since it was intended to be based on reality. I shall feel honored for the characters are alive and real for me. And I am confident that I have not embellished it much.*" (Dutta, U. (ed) *Nabakanta Barua Upanayay Samagra, Kapilipariya Sadhu*, p-193). The story wraps around the struggles of Rupai, who lives by the banks of the river. It encompasses the life of the protagonist Rupai, as well as the folk of Nagaon. Rupai was adopted by Dhirsing and Rangili after they rescued him as a baby from the Kapili Flood. Dhirsing is Raja Mansing's son. Mansing fled to

kapilipariya Bhurbanhda gaon after being displaced in the chaos of Burmese invasion. Although Rupai started his studies in the '*Patsela School*' run by Betharam Pundit, his mind and soul only yearns for the river Kapili. And thus he escapes to the river every time he can scrape some time for himself. Rupai was sent to the town for the scholarship examination, even put in the house of a Bengali lawyer for pursuing higher studies, despite Dhirsing's poverty. However, the malevolent spirit of poverty bars the boy from higher studies. Rupai was introduced to the Swaraj Movement while in town. He was arrested and sent jail, where he first met Tilak Gasain. The saintlike figure Tilak Gosain opened Rupai's eyes to a greater purpose, he was introduced to the higher callings, and the greatness of Ahimsha. Yet, his soul still yearns for the river Kapili. Once set free, Rupai returns to his own Kapilipar. Once returned, he started various social constructive works including re-opening the old school and appointing Tilak Gosain's Nephew Basu as the teacher. He puts himself in relief work once flood leaves the village devastated. In this flood he meets the beautiful Sonpahi and her father who takes refuge in their village. Soon afterward Rupai was left distraught as his father Dhirsing dies and the truth about his birth comes into light. Overwhelmed with grief, Rupai tries to commit suicide and jumps in the river Kapili, but Sonpahi and her father saves his life. Thus Kapili brings together two souls who both once floated downriver in search of a better life. Both fall deeply in love and they make love near the ancient Jayar Pukhuri. Once Sonpahi gets pregnant, she asks Rupai to marry her. However, Rupai has ideas of a heavenly love which he thought was impossible to be bound by the bonds of marriage. Sonpahi refuses to look through Rupai's glasses and jumps in the river. The tragic death of Sonpahi and his unborn child forces Rupai's eyes wide open and he finally comes down his high and mighty horse. Finally he asks Basu Gosain to find him a bride. Thus ends the bitter-sweet story of Rupai. In this novel, the author has made impressive use of background and plot as well as characterization, folk customs, heritage, food, religious beliefs, superstitions and folk customs, folklife and nature to transform a simple story into something more. His touch adds some *Je-ne-sais-qui* to the simple narrative of the novel which adds to its appeal.

Characterization :

The novel introduces many characters, the protagonist being Rupai. The narration advances in Rupai's point of view from the start to the finish. The author has pictured a beautiful scene with rupai and his attraction to the riverside folklife as well as the morals, beliefs and duties of a simple village life. The author introduces some compelling arguments for Rupai's character, as he selflessly comes to help the flood ravaged people. Rupai is jolted to reality as Sonpahi takes her own life. The author also crafts some beautiful characters and weaves their lives in and out of our protagonist's life. Every such character such as Tilak Gasain, Dhirsing, Rangili, Betharam Pundit, Minaram Dokani, Gaonburha, Bengali Lawyer Dinabondu, Bowmbaba, Tularam Gayan, Samguriya, the prison guard, the ration shopkeeper, Basu Gosain etc. are expertly crafted and introduced to the narrative. These characters add to the beautiful picture of the riverside folklife painted by the author. The novel introduces the river Kapili as a valuable character and that is very important in the narration as the

novel is set in the banks of the river. The story starts and ends with the river and paints a poignant picture of the intimate and loving relationship the folk has with the river. The novel touches upon both avatars of Kapili, the calm and loving one and the angry one who does not hesitate to devastate the homes of the riverside folk. *"They say... Kapili is the tears, shed both in joy and sorrow... She is our lifeblood. Kapili is alive, she feels all our lives and deaths."*(p-14)

Folk life, language and linguistic nuances:

While the novel reflects the cultural heritage of the author in its chapters, the folk life resonates in the words. The culture of the riverside folk and the realistic picture painted in the novel is saturated with the colour of cultural appreciation. It is as if the novel revolves around the culture of the riverside folk. What the river takes away during the flood, she also gives back a thousand times. The life of the river is entwined with the life of the riverside folk. *"This is Kapili. The tears of Nagaon. The news does say that, but the riverside folk know the truth- Kapili is the tears, shed both in joy and sorrow. She kills them with flood, waters their fields and gives them water to slake their thirst. Kapili is the livelihood for them. She is the lifeblood."*(p-13-14) Going through the languages and the nuances of the oral literature reflected in the novel we can find some gems hidden in plain sight. While the author humorously articulates the blend of Hindi spoken by the Bihari workers and Assamese spoken by Rupai to reflect the ridiculous language that the Assamese people come up with, the scene is poignantly based on reality.

As for the nuances of linguistics, the novel is surprisingly rich for one that is based on a rural setting. The novel reflects the characterization with poetic, metaphorical, and dramatic elements. The narration is full of statements and descriptions that can only be described as poetic. The poetic narrations, instead of tarnishing the flowing narration, somehow blends together to form a rich style that keeps the reader engrossed.

Meanwhile as befits the rural setting the author has used very simple languages and sentences in the narration. While the short and simple sentences add to the beauty of the narration, the simplicity of the language establishes the fact that this is indeed a story of simple rustic folk. The metaphors the author used also adds to this illusion and enhances the charm. The author has used sentences of various languages as befits the situation. Thus we witness sentences of local folk language, Assamese, English and the mixtures of Assamese-Bengali and Assamese-Hindi. Along with these, we also see the well-deserved and well placed uses of proverbs and idioms in the narration.

Heritage and History:

The history described in the novel is compelling and factually accurate. The first example that comes into mind is the description about the families with royal blood. *"Barapujari, Gobha, Neli, Khola, Dimoruwa etc. seven and five more makes twelve of these families with royal blood. The surname is Singha(aka Lion), but is written as sing. Few of them was honoured during the Ahom reign. These royal families aided the Ahom army with arms and ammunitions to fight the Kacharis. While sticking to the folk religion, a few of them has embraced the new Vaishnavite Saran. They add Raja(king) to their names. Like Mansing Raja. Years after the assembling of the history that was disrupted during the Burmese Invasion, we find Mansing Raja in the Kapilipariya Gaon. Despite the turmoil in the human lives, Kapili still flows the same. The eddy that was there in the place where Barnadi and Kapili met, they all are still same. Till date two boats would go down there every year."* The novel describes the Swaraj movement as accurately as possible. This very movement introduced the Swadeshi concept and induced the common people to discard the foreign goods. Rupai understands the importance of these acts from Tilak Gosain while he is in jail. The novel flawlessly describes the movement and how such steps effect the life of the common people.

Reflections of Nature, Socio-Cultural and Socio-Economic Elements :

The descriptions of nature in the novel is especially vivid as the author describes the horrors of a flooded river Kapili. In the descriptions the pictures of flood water bringing schools of fishes to the flooded fields, the courtyard turning into a sea, the villages ravaged by the flood come to life in the imaginations of the reader. The horrors of people dying, struggling to hold on to life is described in simple but powerful languages in the novel. The novel paints a compelling picture of the lives of those who live on the day's earnings. Rupai had to stay with Lawyer Dinabandhu as his father Dharsing is financially challenged.

Due to poverty, Rupai couldn't even finish his education. We can see a sea of difference between the two classes in the society, when Rupai buys his favourite cheap sugar balls and attempts to share it with Khuki, the daughter of Lawyer Dinabandhu. Khuki, who was brought up in a richer household, declines to eat what Rupai offers, saying it might have germs of cholera.(p-26) Thus the social, cultural and economic elements of a rural society is beautifully and flawlessly reflected in the narration.

Reflections of Folktales and Folk Beliefs

The novel has presented a blend of folk tales and also the beliefs of a rustic folk. The novel is itself like a folktale, describing the intimate bond between a human and a river. The mention of various folk tales, proverbs, idioms, fairy tales and animal tales are a big part of the descriptive narration of the novel. While talking about Kapili's flooded waters, the tale of Kamala Kuwari is mentioned. The belief, entwined to the story compels the simple folk to offer Tamul-paan before starting on a boat. *"Kamala Kuwari lives therein. She was human once and was given to the god of rivers for the god of the people. Sometimes she feels lonely and wishes to meet other humans, then the god abducts some humans from Kapili. Once she sees those humans, she is soothed and the crop turn golden from green."*(p-14) The superstition that evil spirits can be sent away with 'Raamnaam' and iron tools is mentioned in the novel. The narration also deals with folk beliefs of black and white magic. There is a character, Bawmbaba, who people believes that can peer into the future. Another folk custom is described in the event when Rupai is not allowed to do the last rites of his father, because he was adopted.

CONCLUSION:

Nabakanta Barua has contributed a great deal to the Assamese literature. His literary works will be among the crown jewels of Assamese literature. The first novel 'Kapilipariya Sadhu' is indeed a masterpiece in every sense of the word and can be named as a successful river-centric novel. In this novel we see the protagonist Rupai bond with the river, even as the magical narration binds us with the fate of Rupai. The different elements of the novel, all together has blended to give an ethereal experience to the reader. We can safely say that Nabakanta Baruah will be remembered as long as the language Assamese breaths.

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