

# Economic Evidences for Assamological Study in Homen Borgohain's Novel *Matsyagandha*

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**Abstract:** Though the term Assamology (*Axom Tattva*) is a new coinage the aspects related to this are quite old and familiar. Maheswar Neog may be considered to be the profounder of this concept which deals with the aspects like culture, heritage, historiography, politics, economy and ways of life in Assam. It also focuses on reviving ancient Assamese art and architecture, religion, language and literature. Assamology pays attention to proper study of anything related to Assam. Novel may be considered to be one of the best sources through which such study becomes easier. It reflects almost all the social aspects in fictional way but vivid manner. The present study tries to find out some of the economic evidences found in Homen Borgohain's novel *Matsyagandha* that may help in Assamological study.

**Index Terms - Assamology, Homen Borgohain, novel, economy, society.**

## I. INTRODUCTION

Homen Borgohain is a veteran Assamese writer and journalist hailing from a small town named Dhakuakhana. He is working as chief-editor of Assamese daily newspaper *Niyomiya Barta*. He was awarded the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1978 for his novel *Pita Putra*. Borgohain wrote several other novels, articles, short stories and poems. His *Matsyagandha* is another celebrated novel based on socio-economic conditions of a particular group of people in Assam. It gives multiple socio-economic evidences for the researchers of Assamological studies. The true picture of rustic agrarian society has been portrayed in the novel well. Pathetic economic realities of the people who earn their living by fishing are depicted vividly. The present study analyses the factors behind such conditions and focuses on the evidences related to rural economy that are reflected in the novel.

## II. OBJECTIVES AND SCOPE OF THE RESEARCH

Data related to Assam have been preserved in different creative writings in various forms. Novel is also a dominant creative literary genre among them. It helps researchers to find out Assamological elements hidden within it. Homen Borgohain's novel *Matsyagandha* may be one of such sources. So, the main objectives of this research are-

- To find out how a novel as creative work may contribute toward the field of Assamological studies.
- To dig out some of the economic evidences and their possible sources that is reflected in novel *Matsyagandha*.
- To examine how the novel bears other socio-economic elements that are helpful in analyzing Assamological references.
- To depict a true picture of rural economy of Assam.

Assamology is comparatively a vast area. It is problematic to cover all the aspects in this limited research. So only economic evidences are tried to be discussed and analyzed.

## III. METHODOLOGY USED

The study is based on both primary and secondary data. Primary data includes chosen work of the author. The secondary data includes critical references, journals and internet sources. All the collected sources will be used to analyze the proposed objective of the study.

## IV. DISCUSSION

The novel presents not only contemporary social life of Assam but also the real scenario of economic life. The whole setting is rural. It narrates the life of fisherman's families. In the very beginning Menaka, the female protagonist is shown to be unable to sleep due to her inability to manage food and opium for night. Her mother Memeri brings *Dhan* (rice) from the nearby village by promising fish in future. The poverty of the community is reflected so vividly through such incidents. The economic ill-health of the village is narrated well through the novel as:

*Mohghuli noir paarot Goroimari ekhon dangor koiborto gaon. Manuhbur dukhia, kintu kothur porishram kori ontotoh dubela dumuthi protyekei khaboloi pai. Mas dhorai jeebikar prodhan upai jodiu xubidha buji chuburia gaonor manuhor ghorot morokia hoi ba chaporir habi bhangi bosoror ontotoh dumaholoi khabo porakoi hihote khetiue kore. Masor botorot masor uadani hoi, kintu bojarot hihote ketiau masor usit mulyo napai. (Borgohain, 639)*

(Goroimari is a big village of fishermen on the bank of river Mohghuli. People are poor but they manage their living with extreme hard work. Fishing is their main way of living, but some of them work on paddy fields in the households in the nearby village and collect rice at least for two months in a year. During the season of fishing they devote themselves into it, but they are always deprived of right price.)

The society is so backward. One of the major reasons behind this is poor transport and communication system. This is a vital picture that can be seen in most of the rural areas during the time mentioned in the novel. But the village that has been shown here acts as miniature for all. The novelist narrates the situation as follows:

*...ei kahinit jihomoyor kotha kua hoise hei xomoyot rasta-ghat aru jan-bahonor obhabot gutei Mohghuli anchaltuei bahiror jogot khonor pora bichinno hoi asil. Kitapor sobit dekhar bahire besibhag manuhei rail aru motor gari nij sokure dekhi pua nasil. Grahokor obhabot pasiye pasiye mas geli posi bhosmo hoi, kintu hubidhar obhabot bahirolo salan dibo pora nohoi. Tholua grahoku nisei kom, karon sariufalor gaonburor khetiok manuhbure kachithe mas kini ba dhanoloi holai khai. (Borgohain, 639)*

(Mohghuli area was completely dislocated from the outer world during the period that the story talks about. Most of the people did not even see a motor vehicle or train except on the pages of books. Export of fishes was difficult due to poor transportation facilities and tons of fishes got rotted as no customers to buy them. Number of local customers was very less as the people of neighbouring villages hardly bought or exchanged fishes with rice and other crops.)

Apart from Menaka and Memeri another significant character in the novel is Duryudhan. He is quite different from other characters. His hard work is incomparable and with this he has achieved another level of economic success in comparison to others. The narrator tells about him as, "...manuhjon bheekhon porishrmi asil, kewol mas mari pete vate khai thokate hontusto nathaki Duryudhone chaporir otobyoro ononyo bhangi bosortu jurai khabo porakoi dhan-mah-horiyohor khetiue korisil. (Borgohain, 639)

(...the man was extremely hard working and he was not satisfied with the ordinary life where managing the next meal always remains a big tension in mind. Duryudhan cleaned up a part of the forest and used to harvest crops, beans and mustard for the whole year.)

From such narration readers may get to know about various seasonal crops and how some people became economically independent with their hard work and perseverance. This signifies the agrarian economy of Assam.

The women of the village worked in the paddy fields of nearby village and harvested crops. They got enough money during the particular season. This culture of working in the paddy field by the women shows the empowerment in the field of economy. The narrative portrays vivid picture of Assamese paddy field and its overall environment in the novel:

*Aghunor majbhagor pora dhan duar botor arohbho hoise. Bosortur bhitorot kewol eikhini xomoyote Goroimari Koiborto gaonor dal-doridro adhapatia manuhburor mukhotu dudinmanoloi hahi biringe, karon xei xomoyot tirutabure usoror Kaargaon aru Mohghuli gaonor sohoki khetiok keighoror potharot dhan duar thika pai. Mojuri dine adun dhan. Jiburor din bhikhya pran obostha hihote pundhoro din ki amahor prapyo dhan agotei adai kori chaul uliai loi ba dintur dhan dine ane. Jiburor obostha hamanyo bhal hihote pauna dhan khini bhobisyotoloi joma rakhe. (Borgohain, 641)*

(Harvesting of crops has started from the middle of Aghon month in Assam. During this time of the year the poorest of the poor people of Goroimari Koiborto village bear smile at their faces as the contract of harvesting crops are given to their women by rich peasants of nearby Kaargaon and Mohghuli gaon. The wage is one doon, a particular unit of measurement, of rice. The poor people take their wage in advance for fifteen days or one month and sometimes daily basis and those who are quite better preserve their wage for hard times in future.)

Some bad habits of the people also led them into poverty. Use of opium acted as a hindrance behind slow economic growth in the society. Some people of the village always remained immersed into opium. The character like Gagan is one of them. The novelist describes him as follows:

*Godhuli ghor humuar agote he bahire bahire Purnia mahajanor dukanoloi jai. Mas besi pua tokare he ratir bhat xajor karone chaul aru nimokh kine. Purniar dukanor pora he jai sorkari kani mohololoi. Godhuli aru puar babe tak lage aroti kani...Ghor pai hator borokhi keita saloloi doliai di bhitor xumayei he kani-pan prostut koriboloi arohbho kori diye. Thik xei muhurtotur karone he gutei dintu byakul bhabe opekhyia kori asil, kewol eimuhurtotur karonei he gutei dintu jiyai asil...aru batot ji manuhei bheta-bheti nohouk kio, xodai he akhar matro kotha koi- akhribad koribo prabhu, dorobkon kiniboloi aji jen ishware sakti diye. (Borgohain, 643)*

(In the evening, before going home he enters the shop of Purnia Mahajan and buys rice and salt for the meal with the money he earns by selling fish. Then goes straightly to the government opium mahal and buys one roti of opium for night and next morning...As soon as he reaches home he keeps his fishing equipments on the roof and starts preparing opium. He was waiting the whole day for this moment only. He lived the entire day for this solace getting from opium...and whoever he meets on the way he always says one thing- pray for me so that god may help me today in buying my medicine.)

The novel *Matsyagandha* unveils some more pathetic pictures of the poor community. They had to fetch water from the river only. They had to drink the contaminated and polluted water as they had less option and less knowledge of hygiene. They drank the same water in which they bath, wash clothes and bathed the cattle. *Mohghuli River* was the only savior for all of them. They were compelled to be dependent on that. Their economic condition was such that they could not think of digging a well for pure drinking water. They were compelled in such a way that even after seeing pollution in the river they could not think of another option. Even the narrative says that they once witnessed that dead bodies were floating on the river.

Agriculture is a very important aspect in the society. Ploughing with bell in the village is portrayed in the novel. Maniram is a character who creates a source of income by adopting this rural technique. He makes money by selling vegetables and mustard as he is going to marry very soon. The narrative says, “*Aji Maniramor olop deriei hol. Jua keidinman he aakakhot tora thakutei chaporit hal jurisegoi. Oha fagunot tar biyar din-bar thik hoise. Biyar khoros uliaboloike eibar horiyoh keitaman besikoi paboi lagibo.* (Borgohain, 663)

(Maniram is little bit late today. He had started ploughing at dawn in last couple of days. Date of his marriage has been fixed in the month of Fagun. It is approaching. To afford the cost of marriage he will have to harvest large amount of mustard this time.)

## V. CONCLUSION

From the above discussion we may conclude that,

1. The economy of Assam is based mostly on agriculture. It depicts rustic life so vividly.
2. The contemporary Assamese society and its economy have been degraded by the influence of opium as depicted in the novel.
3. The poor transportation and communication system affected then society badly in economic growth.
4. The society presented in the novel is dependent on production and circulation of *matsya* (fish) but this occupation seems to be in threat.
5. The novel *Matsyagandha* gives readers abundance of evidences related to economic condition of a particular part of Assam. So it is significant for researchers in the field of Assamological studies.

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