

Historical Evidences of Colonial Assam in Dhrubajyoti Bora's novel *Swargadapi*

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Abstract

As a branch of literature, Assamese novel deals with various field of Assamese culture, history and society. The first stage of Assamese novel can be considered as the stage of historical novel. In his first novel 'Bhanumoti '(1891) Padma Nath GohainBoruah places historical events of moamoria rebellion against ahom kingdom. Following him Assamese novels have a variation including lots of historical experiences by novelists like Lakshminath Bezbaruah, Rajani Kanta Bordoloi in nineteenth century. In post independence times novelist who has tried to link up historical images with social realism. Along with these writers in both pre and post Independence times Dandinath kalita, Hiteswar Borboruah, Troilukya Bhattacharya, Nabakanta Boruah, Ila borgohain , Devendranath Acharya, Purobi Bormudoi, Dhrubajyoti Bora, Rita Chaudhuri have mentionable contribution to the corn house of Assamese Historical Novel. Historical novel can be considered not a textual analysis of past, but a way paves in search historical evidences of Assam more than a imaginative story. Most of these novels represent different historical events as a fictional form. Aims of this study to evaluate the historical events are described by Dr. Dhrubajyoti Bora in *Swargadapi*.

Index terms: Colonialism, Imperialism, Tea tribe, Independent struggle, History

I. Introduction

Dhrubajyoti Bora is an eminent writer of Assamese literature has a remarkable position as a novelist. Professionally he is a doctor serving in medical colleges of Assam also. Dr. Borah awarded the Sahitya Akademi Award in 2009 for his for his novel *Katha Ratnakar*. Assamese literature is flourished by his novels, historical and socio-economic article. The story of *Swargadapi* is based on Biju Bauri , a freedom fighter belongs to the tea tribe, bounds from nineteenth century to pre independent moment of India.

Parallel to the life struggle of the anti-colonial leader novel reflects hegemonic character of the colonial authority on the tea tribe along with the socio-economic problems of Assamese society. Two major themes of this novel is the ruler colonial authority, tea industrialist and colonized tea labourers. Both were related to the tea industry which was developed after the colonial regime enforced in Assam. In this study it will tried to evaluate the changes in Assamese society occurred after the British entrance, its acceptance and effects. Because of which the novel has a chance to proof as a historical document of colonial time.

II. Aim of the study

- To find out the implemented imperial policy by colonial authority.
- Social problem and changes resulted due to colonial regime in Assamese society.
- Participation of colonized people in Indian freedom struggle.

III. Methodology :

The novel *Swargadapi* is chosen as primary data. Different resources like research paper, research articles are used as secondary data published in books, research journal, periodicals and internet. Historical and comparative methods are used to find the political, socio-economic and ecological aspects.

IV. Discussion

The novelist Dhrubajyoti Bora is starting the novel *Swargadapi* in search of the migration history of Bauri people to Assam Who was brought to Assam as a tea labour. Depending on the myths verbally told by this adivasi peoples, history introduces us the painful and distressing life that they faced in their homeland. Writer also judges the imperial policy of the British, how the adivasis were brought with tempting words to 'golden province Assam'. According to the novelist the Basic aim of the imperial policy to exploit the adivasis with the help of the feudal class including zaminder and mahajan. In the novel Biju Bauri introduces his father Kalicharan, mother Maya and himself as a labour of the Numaligarh tea garden-

Moi ajon ati hadharon manuh. Baganor bonua. Jak kunu luke baganor bonua bulio koy. Tini purukh dhoru ami numoligarh baganot asu. Mur koka Sivasankar arkothia salanot

jibonvoror babe baganot kam koriboloi gusi ahisil. Teu hei coolie asil. Teur putek mur baba Kalicharaneu hei eke kam korisil.moiu korisilu. (Bora 1)

(I am a simple one. Labour of tea garden, who is called as coolie too by someone. We are living in Numoligarh Tea garden for three generations. My grandfather Sivasankar came to do his job in tea garden through arakati recruitment system. He was a coolie , His son and my father Kalicharan do the same. I do the same job too.)

Along with the labour recruitment system, British brought educated bengli people to Assam .Starting with the colonial time new economic policy was Implemented in the province that results the migration of a lot of people including bihari and kabuli as cloths, foods, nick-nack shopekeepers . As they gather with villagers in local market, day by day they become closer. In the novel bihari Niranjan Sahu starts his business of mustered oil and then build a shop of grocery later. In the shop the available food materials are likely rice, spilt-pulse, salt, onion, potato etc. It is to be noticed that before this time Assamese people were not known about such different foot items. Also just after the jet boat and ferry boat services begins,on the bank of the river Dhanshiri at Numaligarh, the bihari and Bengali people begins there business of shopkeepers.

Imperial policy was too much strict in case of the tea garden labourers. Tea garden authority put hard hearted sight on them that they would not escaped. If any labour were caught, they were physically punished .The workers had no freedom movement. Communication with neighboring tea gardens and villages was under strict control, even prohibited. In many gardens the coolies were virtually prisoners under guard, night and day.¹

For the labourers , The weekly market is one and only medium for the communication with the outside world. Taking rest after coming from their regular duty they liked to spend their time joyfully taking alcoholic drinks. Kalicharan notices that most of the labourers in the tea garden wishes to live inside of the coolies lines. He recognizes the whole system of the labour life style as a jail.

¹ Amalendu Guha, *Planter-Raj to Swaraj Freedom Struggle And Electoral Politics in Assam 1826-1947*, p.45

Hehotor jibontu ratipuwa kamjarir sairenere aromvo hoy aru kam sutir sairenot hekh hoy. Tarpisot ghar, khuwa-buwa aru hunkale hui pora.hukurbaror bozarkhonei hihotor ekmatro bahiror prithibir logot jugajug korar thai . (Bora 49)

(Their daily life starts and ends with the sound of working hour blows by the siren. Then go to their home. Takes the dinner, and go to the bed. Weekly market of Friday is the only way that then can communicate with outside world.)

To avoid the effects of the Mahatma Gandhi's satyagraha or the anti-colonial struggle. Tea garden authority sets up the garden area as a restricted fort keeping Hindustani Gatekeeper with staff in front of the garden and the managers Bungalow . Unknown persons are not allowed to entry into the garden area. Kalicharan takes initiative to starts rice cropping agricultural jobs taking rescue from tea garden. In Assam within 1920-21 tea garden labours held 100,728 acres of tea garden lands as tenants, 10,376 as tenants of other landlords and 15,874 acres as direct settlements under government, according to official Source². Kalicharan and his partners breaking up the relation with tea garden to the set up a village on the bank of the river Dhanshiri.

Tea garden authority used violence as a tool of exploitation. Their basic aim was to create intense fear in labour's mind. For any issue or a simple fault they punished the labourers. One manager is punishing child Biju as he refuses to salute him while passing across the road. But nobody protest against it, even no more discussion within labour society.

Hihote voyote nital mari asegoi.kaku eku kua nai. Homvob. Heituweu hamvob. Voyote hihote kaku eku kobo nuare. (Bora 12)

(Calmness is spreading among them. Everyone is silent. It is a habit. Feeling fear they even do not talk to each other.)

Kalicharan was also punished on his back side of his body while he tries to prevent the manager who was going to punish their Sardar Jadu.

Discrimination of law and order was followed by the government. Specifically in case of native debtors, who took participated in Anti colonial struggle and then arrested. British government is criticized by the author. It is likely to be as usual incident that they were not serviced with minimum facility. Native debtor falls in fever and stomach disease. Dirty drinking water and smelling sanitation is become like the hell for them .The environment of the kitchen was too unhygienic. To provide

² Ibid,p.102

the facilities to the victims it is seen that better opportunities was given to them who has a good relation with the jail authority as spy. Freedom fighter Biju Bauri is forced to put a signature in a bond signed paper that he will be released from jail if he promises not to take part in anti-colonial struggle. To impress him, jail authority promises him to provide better health care in hospital. But Biju refuses it and died inside the jail later.

The planters needed an improved infrastructure, particularly communications.³ There was a tremendous growth of tea industry during the last decades of the nineteenth century. Development of transport system in Assam was directly related to the tea industry of Assam. In the novel the writer describes the implementation of jet boat. It was mandatory to transport the tea-boxes from Dhanshiri to Brahmaputra ship port. In the novel the writer also explains the socio economic changes relating to dress pattern, playing games among the Childs, seen in the Assamese society. The novel also depicts the social problem of the society in nineteenth century.

Although children took a vital role in the tea industry production there were less importance given in child education. Due to social discrimination it was rare to read in school. But Sivasankar and Dukhi feel its importance. The environment within the garden not encourages the people to get education facilities.

amar baganot atiao school khula nai. Maje maje kunubai koy, babubure koy, iskul ata hobek. Kintu nai, karu mon kan nai. Kisuman babur lora-suali skulot pohibo pai, kisumanok ador kori pothiyai diye, mama bari, aan ist-kutumbor bari pothai diye. Tat thaki pohe, babuhotor ghorotu pohabo jane. Kintu amar majot pohabo jona kunu nai.
(Bora 82)

(There is no school in our tea garden area till now. Anyone says occasionally, Babus too, a school will be founded. But nobody has interest. Babu's children go to school, goes to maternal uncle's home or to their relative for education. Babu teaches them at home also. But nobody is here from us to teach)

³ Ibid, p. 34

Rather than, British authority arranges alcoholic food combination among the labourers so that they can finish their earned money, but opposes the opium which may cause laziness. Writer also explains that how opium demands is increased in villages. Death of the labour people due to unhygienic system and attacking by tigers also indicates the insecurity of labour life.

Image of women's participation in Indian independence struggle is another important aspect of this novel. Refusing the control of patriarchal society and colonialism, the women characters in the novel inspired with nationalism. Among these women freedom fighters writer puts examples of Dwariki Das, labhita Sonowalni, Navami Sonowalni, Bidyawati Bauri with their activities. Through the images including effects of Chaura-Chouri incident on Assamese society, boycott foreign cloths, volunteers flagging with Triranga in the villages, Keshob Sonowal and Kanak Das's journey to Dandi-Yatra from Savarmati Ashram, Anti-colonial activity by Sankar baruah the writer is able to stand up with straightforward influence of independence struggle in Assam.

The novel also depicts environmental history in colonial Assam. As imperialism pushes the relation of human life and nature into a critical situation, Alfred W Crosby termed it as the Ecological Imperialism. The environment of colonized societies has been physically transformed by the experience of colonial occupation. Imperialism not only altered the cultural, political and social structures of colonized societies, but also devastated colonial ecologies and traditional subsistence patterns.⁴ In colonial India, due to establishment of different tea and coffee industry and to fulfill the demand of wood supplement, colonizer ruined Indian wildlife resources at very high rate. For gardening of tea in a large agricultural land, huge area of forest was ruined. Produced teas were exported in a tea box, for which Large amount of wood were brought from forest. Here 'babu' Dharmeswar Gogoi, the supervisor of tea garden who is belongs to native Indian does not feel it comfortable when the labourers are going to cut the trees of the forest. The novelist also draws natural conflict between animal and human being occurred due to human interference in the open areas of animals. About the hunting of tiger by British official is explained in the novel as below –

Tat sahabor bonduk asil. Deupaharor kakhot aru uporr heelburor majote baghiniye soong haji puwali disil. Kintu baganot bagh humale tak tate sahabe guliyai marisil.

⁴ Astrid Eril, Astrid Eril, Bill Ashcroft Bill, Garath Griffiths and Helen, Tiffin (Ed.) *Post colonial studies* p. 69

Dui tinta dangor bagh marisilu. Borsapori baganor sahabtu dosturmot sikari asil. Habir majot gosot masan bandhi tolot sagoli bandhi thoi bagh ohaloi ratir pisot rati khap piti bohi asil. (Bora 142)

(Sahab had gun. Below the mountain and the stony area tigers were lived. But two or three tigers were killed by Sahab when entered in the garden area. The Sahab of Borsapori tea garden was the expert one. Arranging a camp with a fastening goat inside the forest he was waiting for tiger night to night.)

Conclusion:

From the above discussion we may conclude that the novel depicts following historical evidences as a whole –

1. Imperial policy implementation, exploitative action taken by colonial authority for their survival in Assam province.
2. Life and social problems of subaltern class in colonial Assam special reference to the Bauri tribe.
3. Contribution of Assamese society to Indian independent struggle including women and tribal leader Biju Bauri.
4. Industrial, economic, social and ecological effects of colonialism in Assam.

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