

The short-stories of Bhabendranath Saikia: An Analytical discussion based on *Ramdhenu* journal

Dr. Nibedita Saikia
Dibrugarh, (Assam)

Abstract: *Bhabendranath Saikia is an outstanding short story writer who had contributed largely to modern Assamese Literature by his numerous writing. He had his literary debut in 1947 by his short story "Path Nirupan". His published short story collection are as follows: Prahari (1963), Vrindaban (1965), Gahbar (1969), Sendur(1971),Srinkhal (1975), Bhabendranath Saikia-r Srestha Galpa (1976), Ei Bandar-r Abeli (1988), Upakantha (1992) and Sandhya Bhraman (1988). He got the prestigious Sahitya Akademi award in 1976 for his Srinkhal. He was awarded The Axom Prakashan Parishad Award in 1973 for his short story collection named Sendur. A few of the short stories of Bhabendranath Saikia are found on the pages of Rmadhenu. These stories contain the characteristic and technique of the short story. The short stories of Bhabendranath Saikia published in Ramdhenu are Ranabhanga (Fifth year, 11th issue), Yatrabadh (Fifth year, 11th issue), Kashyavantri (Seventh Year, 2nd Issue), Upapatni (Seventh year, 10th issue), Antrasrut (Ninth year, 3rd issue), Swarthapar (tenth year, 3rd issue), Bandisal (Eleventh year, 10th issue), Rajmistri (Twelve year, 6th issue), Dhorasaap (Eleventh year, 10th issue), Vrindaban (Twelfth year, 1st and 2nd issue of Ramdhenu). All these remarkable stories of the writer are marked by his delicacy in description, simplicity in presentation, candidness in expression.*

Keywords: *Ramdhenu, Short story, Bhabendranath Saikia, Issue, Publish.*

1.0 Introduction:

Bhabendranath Saikia is an outstanding short story writer who had contribute largely to modern Assamese literature by his numerous writing. He had his literary debut in 1947 by *Path Nirupan*, a short story published at *Uday*, a magazine and apart from other creative works, carried out that zest until the nineties of the last century.

His published short story collections are as follows : *Prahari* (1963), *Vrindaban*(1965), *Gahbar* (1969), *Sendur*(1971), *Srinkhal* (1975), *Bhabendranath Saikia-r SreshthaGalpa* (1976), *Ei Bandar-r Abeli* (1988), *Upakantha* (1992) and *Sandhya Bhraman* (1998). He got his prestigious Sahitya Akademi in 1976 for his *Srinkhal*. He was awarded the Axom Prakashan Parishad Award in 1973 for his short story collection named *Sendur*.

1.1 Aim and Objective:

1. Discuss about the technique of short stories of Bhabendranath Saikia, published in Ramdhenu. Minute and lucid description of day to day life is one of the salient features of his short stories.
2. Discuss about the social consciousness of Bhabendranath Saikia which is visible in short Stories. His short stories are drawn from real life and his characters are representing the middle and lower class.
3. Discuss about Bhabendranath Saikia's knowledge of human psychology shown in some of his stories.

1.2 Method of the study:

In this paper, Descriptive and Analytical method has been applied for the discussion of the topic. This study is based on Primary and Secondary source.

1.3 Scope of the study:

This paper will discuss the short stories of Bhabendranath Saikia, published in Ramdhenu. It will throw light on the plots of the stories, protagonists and other characters and the society they represent. In this study, effort will be made to bring in to light the own and unique style of Bhabendranath Saikia's short writing.

2.0 The Short stories of Bhabendranath Saikia published in *Ramdhenu*:

2.1 It is remarkable that though most of the short stories of Bhabendranath Saikia are not found on the pages of *Ramdhenu*, yet the available limited few, contain the techniques of the short story. Though *Ranabhanga* (fifth year, issue no 10), the first short story published in *Ramdhenu* does not have a coherent narration, yet it is chiefly descriptive in nature. It contains a picture of quarrel between two village. Though there persists a long altercation in between the villagers of two villages names Telahi and Murani, yet they are ignited again. The root cause of this ignition is the thief named Madan who belongs to the village Murani. No sooner had it appeared the light of the day than he cut down, one

day, some of the branches of a bordering big mango tree. Having seen the entire activity of Madan, a villager named Sarupai informed the matter to the villagers of Telahi in much exaggeration. Along with the village head man, they had a meeting as to how to thwart such advances in future. Some of them turned revengeful and decided to cut down the mango tree. Almost thirty of them came to the mango tree. Twenty out of them climbed up the tree to cut its branches. The villagers of Murani came to know this. They too arrived at the spot in full warfare. They had weapons in their hand. Having seen this, the villagers of Telahi who had been under the tree fled from the scene while leaving others on the branches of the tree. Later, it is said that the leading persons of Telahi came into a negotiation with Jayram, the mediator from Murani to settle the problem. The subject matter of the story has a reality: areal picture of life is portrayed here. The language used in the society has been employed, and thus it has got a definite form. But Bhabendranath Saikia has said about the story as follows:

“Rather than a story it should be called an image. It has not got right place in the collections edited by myself. It has been allowed to be printed in an upcoming collection named *Sandhyabhraman* along with a note as it had been my first short story published in *Ramdhenu*.”¹

His short stories are marked by conventional narrative style. Yet they have got a better place owing to their analytical techniques. The slices of ordinary day to day life are made pictorial in a distance form and small structures of events. Of course, he is not free from excesses in description. Most of his characters are drawn from middle or lower middle class of the society. Most of his short stories are artistic in quality. The basic features of the short stories are not ignored in his creations. The Interest and anxiety of the readers in a particular situation is kept intact to the very end. They touch the heart of the readers for their emotional unity and suggestiveness along with delicacy in description, simplicity in expression, spontaneity and delicacy. The amalgamation of small incidents does not destroy the beauty of emotional unity, but help them to be touchingly suggestive to the end.

2.2 Unlike the language, the style of presentation of the short stories of Bhabendranath Saikia is very simple. He tries to bring any situation in a familiar form to the readers. He allows his characters to run in their own refinement according to the situations they are involved. While doing so, the aim of his characters are something deviated, yet the ignorance, meanness and the bogusness of bad characters are mocked at. In *Yatrabadh*, published at fifty year and eleventh issue of *Ramdhenu*, no attempt is seen in delineation of special characters. The mentality of different characters, their reactions according to the class they belong to, are presented realistically. Generally such kind of realistic images are not found in short stories. For example –

‘Certain space is kept on the other side of the entrance of the *chu-ghar*. There some little boys have taken their seats, they bear different identities. It is their nature to keep away from home during the puja and to make a quarrel to form mole like a plum out of the torn pieces they get while standing at a secured distance from the seven-year-old son of Madan doctor who puffs air to his balloons. They sleep on the empty benches under the canopy and purchase sweets very instantly from the money they somehow manage to get. To the other side of this space, one third of the canopy is covered with a sikjaal made of the slabs of bamboo. The need of this sikjaal is enormous, its importance very remarkable, but its effectiveness is under suspicion. To the other end of the sikjaal, arrangement for the seats of the woman folk is done.’²

In short, the tale in his story sometimes becomes more suggestive than the story told. Nothing sort of message related to life is found in *Yatrabadh*. It has not become remarkable in theme, flexibility in characters, and owing to the shallowness in emotions. It is much more akin to the short stories of *Abahan*.³ On the nature of the pictorial description of the short stories of Bhabendranath Saikia, Homen Borgohain opines as follows:

‘Unlike Maupassant and Chekov, he pays special attention to detailed description of the things related to life. Therefore, the description of life become very lively indeed in his short stories. Brevity, which is one of the salient features of both of them, is lacking in his short stories. Instead of the suggestive details, he has a natural inclination for the detail. Many a time this leads the reader into partial boredom.’⁴

2.3 The philosophy, characterised by individual style, which is found in his short stories, is possible for extra-ordinary writers only. The subject matter of his short stories no longer expands in search of doctrines or conflicts in ideology. *Kashyavantri* (seventh year, second issue) which was published in *Ramdhenu* in 1953, speaks of the deviation towards the end which the name already suggests. Kalyani, a girl, is there in the heart of the main protagonist. The storyline develops with a hope of returning to the circle, that too in suggestive description. But the plot of the story describes how the principal character loses his way and arrives at a wrong place while visiting Dakhshinpat. It describes in length the

¹ Bhabendranath Saikia, ‘*Sakshatkar*’, p.522.

² Homen Borgohain (Edited), *Ramdhenu (a collection) fifth, sixth and seventh year* p.728.

³ Prahlad Kumar Baruah, *Axomiya Cuti Galpar Adhyayan*, p.268.

⁴ Homen Borgohain, ‘*Patani*’, *Axomiya Galpa Sankalan*, vol2, p.21.

road, the rural areas concerned, the mannerism of the spoken language and the position of Nature. Even the reactions and the mentality of the children of the household that he had mistakenly stepped into, the uproar of the children to have a look at the bicycle of the unknown visitor, have been placed in length here. It is remarkable in its characterization, balanced movement, simple language and simple rustic descriptions. Readability and curiosity have been able to cater to the need of the readers.

2.4 *Upa Patni* (seventh year, tenth issue) published in *Randhenu* by Bhabendranath Saikia is an outstanding short story known for detailed description and delicate presentation of the inner world. It depicts the pain of the protagonist who happens to lose his wife, has to live with Amar, his son, and the desire to keep alive the memories of his dead wife. It is free from the exaggeration of description. His stories become very long owing to the mixture of vivid characters and sub-plots. Yet the single aim of the story is never lost. *Upapatni* is the best example. Mahendra Bora said about his short stories as follows:

‘A fountain of detailed description is found in the short stories of Bhabendranath Saikia. The same pleasure one finds out in the films of Satyajit Roy, can be discovered in the short stories of Bhabendranath Saikia.’⁵

Saikia himself has stated about his stories,

“while planning a short story, I lay stress on the plot and the character and try my level best to make them most lively”.⁶

2.5 *Antrasrut* (ninth year, third issue), by the author, is a remarkable short story that dwells on the inner world of man. Once the mother of Makoni used to feel sympathy for Rukmini. At the time of her distress, she stood by Makoni but subsequently ignored her out of jealousy. That the woman turns into a hindrance to the progress of another woman is the theme of this short story. The same woman who used to treat Rukmini as her own daughter or daughter-in-law, finally feels irritated at her presence and says, ‘I have no time to talk to you, my daughter-in-law. When I would be free, I will call you for the same. You should not come this way in vain.’⁷ It finds a delicate outlet of the inner world of man and characters like Rukmini and Makoni show spontaneous movement.

2.6 *Swarthapar* (tenth year, third issue), published in *Ramdhenu*, is an emotive short story by Saikia. Through the letters written to the protagonist since her childhood, the woman character Lakhimi indirectly expresses her feelings of love. She makes him informed of the would be doctor bridegroom. The protagonist finds Uma suitable for his brother, but Uma is in love with Biren since early childhood. So the protagonist has to write letters to his brother saying that Uma is not suitable for him. The conflicts in the mind of the protagonist is more prominent here. It sustains the desires of Lakhimi and the painful emotions of Uma. The story is remarkable in its presentation, detailed description of things and the single-mindedness in its aim.

2.7 *Bandisal* (eleventh year, tenth issue), published in *Randhenu*, is an outstanding short story by another. It sustains the image of book-seller named Chittaranjan being chained. The curiosity of the readers run towards the end of the short story. Chittaranjan lives in a small household with his widowed mother. There is a small tea stall run by a man named Rajani nearby. One day a girl came to the shop in search of books. Chittaranjan gets enamoured of the girl who is fond of books. Now the desire to get free from the chains dawns upon him. But the reality turns hard on him. Rani, the girl, informs him that she is going to Shantiniketan for study. The very desire and imagination of Chittaranjan mingle with dust. There is no deep philosophy in the short stories of Bhabendranath Saikia. The philosophic outlook or the conscious sociological approach to life evident in some of the short story writers, who had their debuts in *Ramdhenu*, is absent in his creation. ‘..I don’t think that I am influenced by foreign writers.....it is mental reaction related to consciousnessthat attracts me the most’.⁸

Bhabendranath Saikia offers a vivid picture of the small yet thought-provoking things with minute details. Balance in the subject matter, lucid description and unflinching desire are the characteristic of the short story of Saikia. So his short stories were very successful.

2.8 *Rajmistri* (twelve year, sixth issue), another short story of Saikia published in *Ramdhenu*, bears the mark of a complex mind. How an unseen wall can be erected in between two household has been described through the characters of Pradip Dutta, Preetirani, and Basanta. Basanta enjoyed a normal relation with Pradip Dutta and Preetirani, the newlywed couple, who came to stay at his nearby room. Though he is put to shame by an unsolicited gesture of a garrulous old lady, Basanta becomes aware of the attachment grown at the core of his heart for Preetirani. Basanta doesn’t have any desire to put thorns at the relation of the couple, yet he has romantic attachment for Preetirani----- he is seen to be enamored of her beauty especially watching her after a recent bath.

⁵ Mahendra Bora, “Ek Generation Galpa”, *Prakash*, p.196

⁶ Nagen Saikia (Edited), *Adhunik Axomiya Sahityar Avilekh*, p.153

⁷ Homen Borgohain, op. cit., p.1611

⁸ Nagen Saikia, op.cit., p.154

‘Having taken her bath, Preetirani has worn a new pair of dress. The lock of hair has extended over her whole backside, the golden colour of her body has become more intense and brighter. Her face is brightened as if it has not been touched after water washed away the mark of Sindur from her forehead and head. Most probably she will stand in front of the mirror and take another new blem of sindur. May be she will not smear it for some time now.’⁹

2.9 *Dhorasaap*(eleventh year, tenth issue), published in *Ramdhenu*, is another successful story by Saikia. It dwells on the agony of a rustic girl named Janeki. Many a male character like Rudra, Tapodhan, Manmohan etc. had come to her life but all abandoned her. Leelakanta Deka, a youth from the same village, came to her life once, he too abandoned her and got married to Chandrika. One day, it so happened that Leelakanta asked Janeki for the silk *sador* he gave her once as a token of love and made Chandrika wear it for a photograph. After a joint snap, the sador was returned to Janeki. The small iota of Sindur attached to the sador created a sea of pain at Janeki’s heart. On the other hand, when Chandrika too came to know that that sador was given to Janeki as a token of love by her husband, she used to feel a great displeasure at her heart. There is a suggestiveness in the very name of the short story. The story sincerely depicts how two woman are deceived by Leelakanta who can be compared to a poisonless snake called dhorasaap. The very heart of Janeki pinches at the small iota of Sindur attached to the sador: ‘It is as if a party is held at the next door, and she is not invited, yet remnants of the eatables are thrown over the fence towards their house.’¹⁰

Janeki herself is a woman. Sindur is the emblem of a married Hindu woman. Though her heart is after it, she has not got scope to step into marital life. She becomes restless, her heart breaks at the very thought, ‘it reminded her of the times how starvation turned in to a sort of punishment for Manmohan, Rudra and Tapodhar, they all wanted to suck the essence of her body, Leelakanta while trying to embellish her put poison to her bones.’¹¹

The mind of Janeki is burdened with the feelings of loss and gain, a tune of desperation runs throughout her heart, nobody should promise Janeki for marriage who is thirty two years old now, she even doesn’t need a sador embroidered in red flowers. So she returns the sador to Leelakanta and says, ‘hey, your dear thing should not be here, it should not be in my box, such scattered fellings are not so nice, it should be collected, isn’t it?’¹²

The embroidered sador turns into two signifiers in this short story. To Janeki, it turns in to a dhorasaap. On the other hand, to Chandrika, it becomes a snake that rapes her throughout her body which can’t be thrown away. Chandrika too loses her heart,- ‘she could not throughout her body.’¹³ The automated response of Leelakanta reacts significantly at the beauty of sador and turns the two woman apart. In this way, the resonance of the original problems or conflicts in life has been heard in the story.

2.10 *Vrindaban* (twelfth year, first and second issue of *Ramdhenu*) is one of the magnificent stories of Bhabendranath Saikia rife with detailed characterisation. Nijara, an orphan, is brought up at the care of Upen, her maternal uncle and Subarnalata, her grandmother. But the very arrival of Rupali, her aunt, has taken away her peace of mind. The realistic as well as charming characterisation has made the short story more readable. Nijara is seen all happy as a new aunt is coming home. She has all works to do as it is the marriage ceremony of her maternal Uncle.

‘Nijara is all breathless. Whoever does anything, she has to touch upon, to make it to a line. Surama is going to cook very well, all items are going to be delicious. But she doesn’t know that her grandmother doesn’t take fried brinjal and her maternal uncle takes food only on the embroidered dish. So Nijara will have to make Surama understand these.’¹⁴

Thus, the writer is all successful in his characterisation to reflect the mental world of a small girl. The description of her toys related to bride and bridegroom is very charming:

‘Not just one or two, but some fifteen bridegrooms and some seventeen to eighteen brides are sleeping inside a coarse wooden box willy nilly. The leg of a certain bridegroom is lying over the neck of a bride without any complaint. Only the two who got wed yesterday are standing at the corner of the box. They are staying in a mood as their creators Nijara told them to do. No one is extending the hand to the other. Nijara decides who will wed out of them. Sometimes she takes advice from her father. The one who wed yesterday has to look at the marriage ceremony of others for some days. Of course, he gets something to eat for the occasion. If Nijara fails to mark well, he will wed again, within four to five days. But if that error is discovered the ceremony is cancelled. Many a naughty bridegroom lose his opportunity at the very start of the ceremony. Nijara may be saying him to stand while keeping his back to the wall, but he inclines to sleep very often. “Why not listen to me?” If Nijara happens to glare and

⁹ Homen Borgohain, op.cit.p.2965

¹⁰ *Bhabendranath Saikiar Galpa Samagra*, p.47

¹¹ *ibid*, p.53

¹² *loc.cit*

¹³ *loc.cit*

¹⁴ *ibid*, p.86.

thrust on him, it simply means his design is useless. The good marriage fled from his forehead even though she meditated for it a long time. There is no certainty while that good will come back to him.’¹⁵

Nijara becomes alone after the arrival of her maternal aunt. ‘Will you come back again, my aunt?---- Nijara asks her maternal aunt Rupali when the letter endearingly touches upon her cheek while starting for her home, on the day of *aathmangala*. The mindsets of Subarnalata, Vrindavan, Upen and Rupali become all clear in the short story. The helplessness of the characters has touched the hearts of the readers. The agony collected at the heart of a small child becomes prominent here. After all, though a long one, the short story has detailed description of the realities of life.

3.0 Different aspects found in the short stories of Bhabendranath Saikia :

- ❖ The detailed yet lucid description is one of the salient features of the short stories. *Ranabhanga, Yatrabadh* come under this category.
- ❖ The short stories of Bhabendranath Saikia published on the pages of *Ramdheni* are all reflective of social consciousness and realities. The plots of his short stories stem from the very heart of the society.
- ❖ A peep into human psychology is seen in the short stories of Bhabendranath Saikia . Yet he is lacking in any sort of ideology whatsoever. *Bandisal, Antrasrut, Rajmistri, Vrindavan, Dhorasaap* etc. are some of his short stories that depict different shades in human psychology.
- ❖ Delicacy in description, simplicity in presentation, candidness in expression are some of the salient features of his short stories. The balanced and the lucid description in the stories touches the core of the reader’s hearts.
- ❖ In short, the different waves in human life, the problems in the society, the real picture of time, etc. are presented in a way that becomes a matter of easy comprehension of the readers.

4.0 Conclusion :

Bhabendranath Saikia is a skilful short story writer. He is expert in creating a central emotion even in a limited scope. Humanistic consciousness is his prime diction. The appeal of his short stories sometimes lose its vigour owing to over indulgence on situation and details, yet the delicacy of his language is the pivotal attraction of his short stories. So, since the era of *Ramdheni* down to modern times, he has been considered an artist par excellence the reputation of whose stories has never dwindled

Bibliography:

- Ramdheni (a collection)*.Ed .Homen Borgohain. Guwahati: Banalata,2009
- Bhabendranath Saikia-r Galpa- Samagra*. Guwahati: Banalata,2007
- Baruah, Prahlad.*Axomiya Cuti Galpar Adhayan*, Dibrugarh: Banalata,2005
- Borgohain, Homen (Edited). *Axomiya Sahitya Buranji*(Vol 6) ABILEC, 1993.
- Borgohain, Homen (Edited) *Axomiya Galpar Sankalan*(Vol 2). Axom Prakashan Parishad,2004.
- Gogoi, Hridayananda.*Ramdheni Srestha Galpa*. Guwahati : Jyoti Prakashan,1999.
- Gogoi, Hridayananda. *Galpa aru Silpa---Dr Bhabandranath Saikia-r Chari Dasakar Srestha Galpa*. Guwahati: Jyoti Prakashan, 1997.
- Nath, Hiren Chandra and Praneswar Nath(Edited). *Srastha aru Drashta: Dr Bhabendranath Saikia*. Guwahati: Kunti Devi Trust, 2005.
- Saikia, Nagen . *Axomiya Galpa Kaumudi*. Banalata on behalf of Dibrugarh University, 2005.
- Saikia, Nagen(Edited). *Adunik Axomiya Sahityar Avilekh*. Jorhat :Axom Sahitya Sabha, 1977.
- Thakur, Prapti. *Ramdheni Chuti Galpa*. Golaghat : Jagaran Prakhan,2008.

¹⁵ ibid , p.88