

Western Influence in the works of Lakshminath Bezbaruah: A Study

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Abstract

Considered to be one of the literary stalwarts of the Jonaki era, the age of Romanticism, Bezbaruah gave a new impetus to Assamese literature. Bezbaruah was able to establish himself as a renowned literary figure through “Jonaki kakot”, which in fact begins the period of Modern Assamese literature. Lakshminath Bezbaruah devoted himself to revive the lost glory of the Assamese language and literature where love for one’s own land always plays a dominant role in his works. Born towards the end of the 19th century, Bezbaruah established himself as a poet and novelist at the beginning of the 20th century. He excelled in all branches of literature including poetry, short story, novels, essays, satires, and occupies a unique place in the history of Assamese literature. *Kadam Kali* (Kadam Buds) and *Padum Kali* (Lotus Buds) are his poetry collections. *Kadam Kali* contains forty eight poems whereas twenty-seven poems were published in the volume *Padum Kali*.

Keywords: Assamese literature, Poetry, Western Influence, Lakshminath Bezbaruah, Romantic Poetry.

Introduction

Hem Barua calls the history of modern Assamese literature “the history of a new growth under the impact of western literature”. This impact grew more from the last two decades of the 19th century, i.e, from the beginning of the Jonaki era. The impact of the west was more accelerated from the time of publication of the Jonaki. Lakshminath Bezbaruah who says “kobita hoi Jodi houk nohoi Jodi nohouk” was also influenced by the western writers and this influence is very clear through his writings. To speak about this influence, he writes in his autobiography *Mor Jibon Suaron*.

“Mur monor bohool potharkhon Byron’r kobitai kumolale, Shelly’r kobitai hal bale, Keats’r kobitai moiaale, Rabindra’r kobitai ene korile je tat lahi dhanar kothiaro kothai nahe,Bihmona,Kutkura,Pothorua Bihlongoni, aru Suratoke adi kori jihore houk guti porilei ;siyei bhor-bhor kori goji ‘muk sa’ ‘muk sa’ koi uthibo”

The Modern age in Assamese literature starts from the beginning of the British regime in the 19th century. The impact of the west was felt in Assam as the British introduced the western type of education. In other words, beginning of the British rule, the establishment of the printing press at Sivasagar, publication of the “Arunoodoi” and other periodicals are the major sources through which Western influence flowed into Assam. The assimilation of India and British culture took place during the colonial period and modern Indian or Assamese literature is a result of this assimilation. Rabindranath Tagore rightly says in one of his poem:

Pochim aaj Khuliase dyar
 Setha hobe sobe aane Upohar
 Dibe aaru nibe, milabe-milibe
 Jabena fire
 Ei bharater Mahamanobei

In the 19th century, the lyric emerged as the principal poetic form in Europe. The Romantic lyric writers of the period include Wordsworth, Coleridge, Keats, Shelly, Byron. The Bengali poet Rabindranath Tagore was praised by Yeats for his lyric poetry. Moreover, Yeats compared himself to the troubadour poets when they met in 1912.

Influence of the west made Assamese literature in a way more humanized. Thus we can consider that the emancipation of our literature is because of the impact of the west. The western influence makes the writings more systematic and gave Assamese literature a new shape and direction. Although we cannot say that Assamese writers continued only because of the Western influence but English still serves as the window in the world. With the influence of the Western writers, the Assamese poets tried to bring a new change or to pave a new path in the history of literature. The way Keats was influenced by reading the *Iliad*, in the same way, the writers from “Junaki jug” were influenced by going through the works of the Western poets.

Great range of subjects, development of new ideas, freedom of imagination, nature and its relationship to man, sense of humanism has marked the Romantic period in English literature a different one from the period of classicism. Assamese literature also imbibed the Romantic spirit after coming in contact with the English literature and as a result, Assamese literature took a new pattern in the later half of the 19th century. Importance of imagination always stands as a distinctive feature of the Romantic poets whereas love for nature always serves as a source of inspiration. In the realm of nature, the common place or unnoticed objects always attract the Romantic writers. Moreover, nature with all her beautiful objects is a never ending source of joy and inspiration. This idea is clearly depicted through the words of Keats:

“What mad pursuit?
 What struggle to escape?
 What pipe and timbrels?
 What wild ecstasy?”

This Romantic fervour and sentiment is highly reflective in Bezbaruah’s poem

“Notun pranor no sakujuri
 Dipiti dhali de tat
 Puroi prithibik no’ koi sai lou
 Hei bin ekhari maat”

William Wordsworth was a major English Romantic poet and the most influential figure. The Lucy poems, the most representative work by Wordsworth are a series of five poems composed between 1798 to 1801. Although youth, maturity, loss and grief are the major themes in the poems, but the Lucy poems attempt to display a confluence between human and nature. Wordsworth in the poems treats the relation of man and nature where nature is like a great teacher, guardian and nurse. The speaker compares Lucy with the beauty of nature especially with a flower and says:

“Three years she grew in sun and shower
 Then Nature said, “A lovelier flower
 On earth was never sown;
 This Child I to myself will take;
 She shall be mine, and I will take;
 She shall be mine, and I will make
 And lady of my own.”

Wordsworth’s Lucy poems have influenced the poem ‘Maloti’ by Bezbaruah. In a similar manner, Bezbaruah is also using the device of comparison when he says:

“Parbator jiori sundori gourir
 Xasot mur malati nai
 Nushuna phultir nupfula kolitit
 Malotir tulona pai”

The critic and poet Bhaben Baruah claims that the poem ‘Maloti’ is a result of the influence and inspiration from the works of poets like Robert Warn, Bidyapoti, Rabindranath Tagore and William Wordsworth.

The poems written by Bezbaruah are very much Romantic in its nature having deep feeling and artistic virtues. Poems composed in the early part of his life are thoughtful whereas his later poems are very much humorous. There are some poems by Bezbaruah where love is the dominant force.

For example 'Priyotoma' is a notable poem which is an excellent specimen of Assamese love poems. In this poem, the poet compares the physical beauty of Priyotoma with the beauty of Nature. This poem is influenced by Thomas Campaine's "There is a Garden". Love is one of the important theme in the works of Romantic poets like Wordsworth, Shelly, Herrick, etc and this theme also plays a very sensitive role in the works of Lakshminath Bezbaruah. For instance, the theme of love plays a very influential role in the poem '*Biroh*'

“ Nisuk ragini stombhit nasun

Premor probah thir

Malaya batak hiyat thomokil

Suthin tez seer”

The Element of melancholy or sorrowful is so influential that it can decline the presence of love in this poem. The Fourth line of '*Birah*' reminds the readers of the poem '*Tintern Abbey*' by William Wordsworth.

“In which the affections gently lead us on,-
Until, the breath of this corporeal frame
And even the motion of our human blood
Almost suspended, we are laid asleep
In body, and become a living soul:”

William Wordsworth is one of the greatest Romantic poet as well as a poet of Nature. He believes that poetry is the outcome of personal spiritual or mystical experience. This love for nature was boundless which plays a very dominant role in his works. Nature was the source of joy for Wordsworth and a living Personality like a teacher, guardian and nurse. According to him, Nature appears to have an influence superior to anything and even the essence of physical beauty declines in front of his treatment of nature. In the poem "Tintern Abbey" Wordsworth is exploring how change has happened over time and this is how the presence of melancholy declines the element of love.

In a similar way, the works of Bezbaruah also has the influence of Shelley. Bezbaruah's poem "Oboxesh" is very much similar with the poem "Music when soft voices die" by Shelley. The idea nothing is permanent and everything is temporary in the world is very much reflective in the poem 'Oboxesh'. Everything is temporary and nothing remains with the passage of time. The only immortal thing is poetry which can restor even the physical death of human being.

Bajok doba

bajok sankho

Bajok mridang khul

Axom akou

Unnatir pothot

‘Joi aai Axom’ bul’’

Conclusion: By analyzing the works of Bezbaruah we can say that his works are influenced by Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelley and Scott. Any writer of creative art always becomes immortal because of the work and if we are to take another name after Sankardeva undoubtedly Lakshminath Bezbaruah stands next. Although the Western influence is there and his number of poems are less but in style, tone, use of language and literary devices his works are purely Assamese in its nature as well as structure. Lakshminath Bezbaruah was able to establish himself as a unique figure and so he is considered to be at the summit in the history of Assamese Literature.

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