

# MOTHERS OF THE MIDDLE AGES IN ASSAMESE BIOGRAPHICAL NOVELS

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## Abstract

One of the important streams of Assamese literature is biographical novels which have evolved since the decade of the seventies. Novels based on the lives of people from the past or present are biographical novels are two separate genres. In a biography selected events from a person's life which highlights his then personality are narrated in a natural way. The scope of imagination hardly exists there. On the other hand, biographical novel is a creative act. The writer has freedom in this genre. A good intermingling of fanfare and reality makes the biographical novel very interesting.

**Key word.:** Biographical, Assamese biographical novel, Padmapriya

## Introduction :

The pioneer of Assamese biographical novel is Syed Abdul Malik. He has written *Ruptirthar Yatri*, a novel based on the life of Rupkonwar Jyoti Prasad Agarwala. In the Assamese language many biographical novels has been written based on lives of eminent personalities since them. Among them *Tore More Alokire Yata* by Chandraprasad Saikia, *Ferangodao* by Medini Choudhury, *Kalyan Kharman* by Babul Das, *Swarnalata* By Tilottama Mishra, *Abhijatri* by Nirupama Borgohain, *Jevan Premor Atandara Amal* by Suchibrata Roy Choudhury etc. are signification. The society reflected in these novels is not the reader. In such a situation control of imagination on part of the novelist becomes very important.

In Assamese language novels have been written also on the lives of historical personalities. Many novels have been written on the leaders of the Nava-Vishnab religion that contributed immensely to the religious and social life of Assamese people. Among them *Dhanya Nara Tanu Bhal* and *Prem Amritar Nadi* by Syed Abdul Malik, *Banduka Behar* by Medini Choudhury, *Jakeri Nahuke Upam* , *Sehi Gunanidhi* and *Jaison Gayan Biyapi* by Lakhinanda Bora, *Gayan Garaje Ghan* by Nirupama Mahanta etc. are important.

Presently several novels have been written on the barsi of lives of the mathers who have contributed to the cause of growth of Neo-Vaihabavite religion. Among them 'Padmapriya' and 'Radhika' by Dr. Amiya Mahanta, *Mare Bair Jiya Sur* by Dhiraj Das, *Aparajita* by Nirupama Mahanta etc. and significant.

The daughter of Bhabanipuriya Gopal Aata, Padmapriya is regarded as the first women poet of Assam. The character of Padmapriya bedazzles within the limited space in novels like *Jaisan Gayan Biyapi* by Lakhminandan Bora and *Gagan Garaje Ghan* by Nirupama Mahanta. Taking Padmapriya as the central character is protagonist, a few biographical novels have also been written. Such a well composed triton is *Padmapriya* (1918) by Dr. Amiya Mahanta. In *charita* literature like *Guru Charit* by Ramananda Dwija and *Gopaldev Charita* by Purananda Dwija – while describing the life of Gopal Aata, the *Chariakar* have also included Padmapriya in context. This woman of the sixteenth century had defied all social stigma and opposition to establish her as porters and while describing and ‘Satradhikar’. The charitakrs while describing the intelligence, knowledge, wisdom, poetic creativity, devotion and other virtues of Padmapriya also touched upon her private life to some extent. The personal life of Padmapriya is fascinating like the events of a novel. The novelist has taken *Gopal Aatar Charit* , a compilation of life charitas of Gopal Aata as the renounce book for the novel. The fact found in the book has been taken as the baris upon which the novelist has analysed the character of Padmapriya from her own viewpoint. Without distorting the historical facts the authoress has created the charactris and events or the situations.

The plot of the novel has covered from the birth to death of Padmapriya a huge expanse like a buildings roman. The novel starts with an enthralling boot journey. The teenager Padmapriya embarks on a voyage with her father on the river Padma to Tantikuchi to meet Aai Kalindi. Throughout the meeting with Madhabdeva and Aai Kalindi the authoress has very skilfully established the fright, pious and refined mental horizon of the protagonist.

The events narrated are not linear and are narrated from the third person perspective. In the first chapter while introducing Padmapriya her father Gopaldeva is brought into fore with use of retrospection. In the second, third, fourth and fifth chapters the eventful and struggling life of Gopaldeva has been entailed. From her father Padmapriya inherits the virtues of honesty of character been valence, dutifulness and emotional restraint. There were no opportunities for women education in Assamese society in the sixteenth century. Although it is not very clear about from whom Padmapriya got inspiration for pursuing education, the movelist has described this to her father. In the novel Gopaldeva is the supporter of women education and bearer of radical thinking. By dramatically enacting these fact in the charitas realism.

The novel has been written from a feminist view point. Padmapriya shines her as the torch bearer of freedom for women. Padmapriya could not accept the taboo against women education prevalent in society. Even Madhavdeva is overwhelmed by the insurmountable logic put forward by Padmapriya. But neither Gopaldev nor Madhabdev possessed the courage to defy the custom prevalent in society. So Gopaldev arranges for education of Padmapriya at home. Padmapriya learns to think about women’s rights and dignity being education. A rebellious attitude starts to engulf her mind. After the untimely death of Sankardevas two sonis Kamallochaon and Ramananda Aai Kalindi was passing through a period of great mental remerge living

with the two young widows of her sons. Seeing their plight the rebellious inner self of Padmapriya is awakened.

“Priya has been drowned in a sea of thought. Why god should do this. The god has created only the living being. The society of human beings, laws, custom, culture, tradition etc. all are the creation of humans. They have crated laws and customs can decide and convenient for their selfish interest. All the taboos and prohibition are against the women. It the wife I dead what are the rituals that the husband of serve? In such a young age all the colours from the life of that women has been lost.”

Some of the very personal matter of Padmapriya too never left from the attention of the written of the charita. Those things have become memorable with the use of imagination of the novelist. In her youthful days Padmapriya feels affection in her heart for Jadumani, her father’s favourite disciple. When her parents chose Jadumani as her groom whom she has already accepted secretly in her heart, she become ecstatic. But Jadumani’s strict decision has broken the imaginative sanctuary that she created. Jadumani’s reason for rejection that if he choose Padmapriya as his attachment with religion was an eye opener for Padmapriya. She could realize that Jadumoni had hatred for woman. To show the position of women in the Assamese Vaishnavite society of the middle ages the writer has brought in the fried after giving consent for marriage and later rejection of Sankerdevas proposal for marriage these two stories are highlighted by the novelist. These two stories have broken the heart of Padmapriya. This disregard of femininity gave birth to a rebellious attitude in her heart.

“From her grandmas talks Padma Priya hears about portion of life history of Madhabdeva and she was astounded. She thought about the ignominy of woman in society. In the patriarchal society women are like commodities. Suddenly, like a person getting up from her slumber, Padmapriya said, “Grandma, I will never marry.”

Although she grew disinterested in marriage, respecting her parents wills she starts her conjugal life. But her rebellious self-surfaced to create problems. Having seen the differences regarding their religious ideals she leaves her husband Chinmrg’s home truncating the marriage. To build an identity for herself she starts to live with the women disciples establishing “Satra” on the banks of Barhoimora rivulet. This ‘Satra’ of Padmapriya is almost like a silent protest to the Barpeta Satra.

Padmapriya is very sensitive regarding women’s right and dignity in the novel. The authoress has inked her own ideas in such topics. Priya has abstained herself from *Ramvijay Bhuona*. It is because in there *Bhaonas* male actors take part of female characters. Women are not allowed to part in there plays. The imprisoned Padmapriya of the charitas written by the patriarchal writers has forcefully declared her identity and existence in the novel.

It is necessary for the contemporary society to be replicated exactly in may be said that the novelist has become successful. The portrayal of political, economic, social, cultural aspects of the sixteenth century Assam is a very important aspect of the novel – the kalita Kingdom and Ahoms of upper Assam and Koch Kingdom of lower Assam and the historical incidents have contributed to the creation of the background of the novel. The abundant use of folk cultural elements has increased the artistic value of the novel. A major part of the novel is occupied by the rules and rituals of Vaishnavism, Celebration, social customs, food habits, medicinal practice, folk art etc.

Another remarkable aspect of the novel is its language. Accordingly with the situation, background and emotional state of the characters the language has become varied. The normal description or day to day speeches language is very colloquial. But in the description of nature and psychological analysis of the characters language has become poetic and metaohorical.

Metaphorical narration has increased the beauty of the novel. In psychological analysis of the characters the language used is very emotionally charged. Proper use of simile, phrases and idiorns has made the language colloquial and very attractive. The use of vocabularies used around Borpata and use of the kind of phrases used by the *bhakats* have lead to the creation of facsimile and a faithful narrative. Prescriptive, dramatic and colloquial, prose has made the language diverse and enticing. In some places quotes from the scriptures, verses and songs have been used. These have lead to the increased gravity or solemnity of the novel.

*Mara Noir Jiya Xur* (2008) by Dhiraj Das has also been written based on the life of Padmapriya. The style of presentation of the novel is poetic. The story is advanced with a combination of narratives in first and third parson. Every chapter is given a poetic heading. Using playful language a poetic environment is created throughout the whole novel. Excellent narration, control in expression and uniqueness in presentation style have added a special dimension to the novel.

The novel begins with the monologue of the Kalpani River. Kalpani and Porola, these two rivers are integrated with the happenings of the novel in such a way that they cannot be looked separately. This beautiful combination of story and background has made the novel enticing. The facts found in the charitas about Padmapriya have been presented have with slight changes have and there accordingly with the demand of fiction and befittingly against the backdrop of political and social settings of the middle ages. A few characters are creation of imagination of the novelist. These imaginative characters have helped in enlivening the historical reality. The novelist has given more importance on characters rather than the story. The writer has shown his individuality in description of the mental aspects of female characters like Padmapriya, Brindawati etc. the imaginative mind of the author has roamed among the days of Padmapriya childhood, adolescence and youth. This unique imagination has made the novel a lucid one.

Although the novel abounds in emotional and poetic language, to provide movement is the tory or to create reality simple, lucid and denuded prose too has come in plenty. Phrases and idiom, legends, myths etc. have been used in a proper way that has made the subject matter an enticing one.

The name of the novel is also significant. On the banks of two rivers – Kalpani and Porla a huge power centre of women was born in the sixteenth century. The time, but the tunes emanated from that echoes till date.

Another novel of this genre is Dr. Amiya Mahantas *Radhika* (2018). Sati Radhika is one of the eminent women of the Vaishnava era. In the *Guru Charita* a miraculous story is included about Sati Radhika. Sankardeva wanted virtuous women to be able to build an embankment on Tembuani rivulet. Those women had to bring water from Bragmaputra with a 'Pol' a kind of bamboo basket for catching fish. It was an impossible task. But Sati Radhika, a woman belonging to a lower caste, made possible this seemingly impossible task. In the novel *Radhika* Dr. Amiya Mahanta has enacted this event from realistic viewpoint. The super natural or fantastic element that imbues the charita literature has been put away and the plot is established on the background of reality Xumathira or Radhika's father Parnanada who spent his whole life in water, know the techniques of building embankment to arrest the flow of water. Xumothira was very intelligent she learned the technique for herself while accompanying her father in boat journeys. A laywoman like Xumothira accomplished the task which the patriarchal society could not. So the society ignores the technical knowledge of the woman and rather imbuing her with virtuosity make the event look like miraculous one. The novel is written with such logical viewpoint. Although the novelist views the event of Radhika building on embankment realistically some other miraculous events about Radhika in the charita literature have also been included in the novel. The dead fisher in the basket of Radhika coming to life after watching the 'Sihna yatra' Bhauna, Radhika giving life to the dead son left lay a brahmana etc. have been included in the novel. Surely the novelist has tried to give them a touch of reality too. In the novel *Dhanya Nara Tanu Bhal* by Syed Abdul Malik too the character of Radhika has been created in a realistic way.

The story of the novel has been placed on the background of a fisherman's (kaibarta) village Nalsa on a river bank. The rivulet that flows nearby in the Tembuoni rivulet while enacting the day to day life of the people diving on the banks of Tembuoni we come across the deft hands of the novelist. This beautiful description of the nature and environment has increased the artistic quality of the novel. Without hampering the flow of the storyline, the history of the Kaibarta people, their customs, traditions and rituals are narrated beautifully. Various legends and folk tale too have been incorporated contextually with the storyline and blended in to new forms. The writer has analysed the reasons behind naming of Xumothira as Radhika by Sankardeva thought the confusions in Radhika's mind. Historical data or religious theories have not done any harm to the beauty of the main topic. Rather it has become complementary.

*Aparajita* by Nirupoma Mahanta is a thought provoking novel based on the life of Mahaourush Sankardeva's granddaughta Aai Kanaklata. Kanaklata was the daughter in low of Mahapurush Sankardeva's third son Haricharan Thakur and the first wife of Charuruj Thakur. She could spread religion in upper Assam with the support of the Ahom king despite being a woman. Not only that but she could recover the Bordowa Satra, left by Sankardeva for good also and showed immense strength and courage. By using the limited resource available in charita literature and adding her own imaginative prowess the writer has made the novel a very palatable one.

### **Consolation:**

The fact that the mother of the Vaishab era could be a beautiful topic of Assamese biographical novel is proved by the already discussed novels. The purpose of the intellectual and social life of Assam hitherto ignored. Having such emotional attachment, the construction of plot, creation of characters and language and background, everything has been done with an untiring zeal. Such efforts surely have provided Assamese literature with another genre diversifying it to achieve newer dissension.

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