



Taboos in the Selected English Novels of NE

Dr Jintu Borah

Assistant Professor in Dispur Law College

Abstract

Taboos are social prohibitions on not doing something. Such taboos are mentioned in some original English novels published from the NE region. In the research article taboos are discussed from four novels of Easterine Kire's 'A Naga Village Remembered' (2003), 'Bitter Wormwood' (2011), 'Life on Hold' (2011), A Terrible Matriachy (2007), L.W. Bapu's Khaduma's Curse (2012) and Mitra Phuka's 'The Collector's Wife' (2005).

In Easterine Kire's 'Life on Hold' we find one taboo; here marriage between bride and bridegroom of two villages is banned which is explicitly termed in the novel as a taboo. In Easterine Kire's 'Bitter Wormwood' also we find a taboo about 'genna day'. It is a day when nobody works in the field. In Easterine Kire's, 'A Terrible Matriarchy' also we find about taboos. It is about throwing food. Food throwing is a taboo.

In L.W. Bapu's Khaduma's Curse also we find one taboo. In the novel also we find a taboo. Woman or girl going to male's meeting is a taboo. In Easterine Kire's 'A Naga Village Remembered' also we find such taboo. Even the husband does not disclose to his wife about the discussion of a male's meeting.

There is another explicit taboo in the novel. People do not mourn a lashu death. In Mitra Phuka's 'The Collector's Wife' we do not find the word taboo. But we find such incidents similar to a taboo. We have seen that near the bride on the day of marriage a barren woman is prohibited to go. This is an implicit taboo

Keywords- Taboo, genna day, lashu death, explicit taboo, implicit taboo.

According to Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary taboo is "a cultural or religious custom" (OALD, p-1560). It does not allow people to do something, for example not to till the ground, not to mourn or talk about a particular thing or to participate somewhere as people find it offensive or inappropriate.

Taboos are social prohibitions on not doing something. Such prohibitions are followed in a particular society. In earlier days there were many taboos. Such taboos are like tradition and folk culture. They are descendants from one generation to another. Societies are binding by such taboos or prohibitions. People feared to break such taboos as there were punishments given by the society and people also feared that something unfortunate will happen if they break such taboos. Taboos are found all over the world. There are cultural, religious and food taboos. Sometimes such taboos are permissible by law but show poor taste in the society. Sometimes it is found that what is taboo in one society is not taboo in another society. Such taboos are mentioned in some original English novels published from the NE region. Such novels are Easterine Kire's 'A Naga Village Remembered' (ANVR) (2003), 'Bitter Wormwood' (BW) (2011), 'Life on Hold' (LOH) (2011), A Terrible Matriarchy (ATM) (2007), L.W. Bapu's Khaduma's Curse (KC) (2012) and Mitra Phuka's 'The Collector's Wife' (TCW) (2005).

In Easterine Kire's 'Life on Hold' we find one taboo. There we find that marriage between bride and bridegroom of two villages is banned which is explicitly termed in the novel as a taboo. It is based on a folk tale of two lovers who could not unite. Their names are Tso-u and Terhuopudiu. When some lovers can not marry each other, they are referred as Tso-u and Terhuopudiu. We find such lovers in a famous Assamese novel, 'Miri Giyori' by Rajanikanta Bordoloi also. There we find two lovers eloped and their eloping was against the will of their parents. So they had to face tragic consequences. Such a thing does not happen in the novel, Life on Hold. Instead, they unite two villages.

In Easterine Kire's 'Bitter Wormwood' also we find about taboos. Here we find about 'genna day'. It is a day when nobody works in the field. There, Mose, the hero of the novel, asks his mother about it. His mother, Vilau replies, "...It is a day when no one works or goes to the fields (BW, P-31) ". When he asks his mother what will happen if someone works on such a day. Then his mother replies, 'Something disastrous' will happen. So people dare not to break a taboo because it always gives worse consequences to those who break it.

Such a taboo is also there in Assamese society. In 'anoshi' or crescent moon farmers in the village stop working in the field for the day. It gives them rest, even the cattle also get rest on such a day. It is good for them as the peasants as well as cattle do not take rest so it is better for them to observe such a 'gena day.'

In the same novel, 'Bitter Wormwood' we find that people are not observing such taboos as they do not believe in them. The remark of a character in the novel is that people are facing problems because they are not observing such taboos. When the hero becomes a grown-up man, he has the experience of what is happening around him. How people become ruthless he observes it from nearby. Then one day he suddenly realizes that the cause of such chaos is not to observe the taboos which the society imposes. He talks with his friend that they have "lost human decency and sense of taboo". We find this in the novel that their society is not like the present society. In earlier times they never broke taboos. They were God fearing people. But the present society is not the old one.

..." Modern society has no room for the taboos anymore Mose. It is just us old. In Easterine Kire's, A Terrible Matriarchy also we find about taboos. It is about throwing food. Food throwing is a taboo. It is a taboo in Assamese society also. Yes, this taboo has a very good lesson because there are so many people in our country who cannot afford a sufficient meal even the heroine also has to starve for lack of food. We find this in this novel in the following line-

"Of course, she did not throw it (food) away, as that would have been taboo, but she fed it to the pigs." (ATM, P-2)

In L.W. Bapu's Khaduma's Curse also we find one taboo. In the novel also we find a taboo. Woman or girl going to male's meeting is a taboo. When the heroine of the novel breaks the taboo and attends a male meeting to express her views, she is bitterly bitten by her father. We find this in the novel as follows-

"It was the village council where the attendance of female members was a taboo but that day these two women had taken centre stage thus violating the chauvinistic rule to the utter amazement of their male counterparts!" (KC, P-36)

In Easterine Kire's 'A Naga Village Remembered' also we find such taboo. Even the husband does not disclose to his wife about the discussion of a male's meeting. In the novel, the heroine only guesses about the decision of the meeting by seeing the face of her husband.

When she saw her husband's face then only, she realises that in the meeting it is decided that he has to go far. Here the word taboo is not clearly mentioned but the meaning is the same. We find this in this novel the men never talk about the meeting. Kovi, the hero, also does not talk about the meeting even to his wife. The line shows it-

"...the women could only guess at what went on in the highly secretive all-men meets that infrequently took place." (ANVR, P-2)

There is another explicit taboo in the novel. People do not mourn a lashu death. One of the characters utters, "No, no mourning for lashu death, it is taboo." Lashu death means death of a woman who dies at the time of childbirth unable to deliver a child. So, there is a strict taboo not to mourn in such a death. So, in the novel husband Kovi and the children did not cry or mourn in front of other people although they were grief stricken. (ANVR, P-5)

In Mitra Phuka's 'The Collector's Wife' we do not find the word taboo. But we find such incidents a taboo. We have seen that near the bride on the day of marriage a barren woman is prohibited to go. This is an implicit taboo. This can also be called a superstition. We find this in the novel that this happens in the case of Rukmini who has no child but approaches the bride. One woman who has been standing there, remarks that it is really a bad time. She also tells, "In my days, even the shadow of a barren woman wasn't allowed to fall on a bride" (TCW, P-15)

With the passage of time some taboos are not observed by the society as they lose their binding. Educated people always question such taboos. Still some taboos are there in society. Some people still like to follow the old taboos. Society is changing every day as change is inevitable. So new rules or regulations may form and the old ones may lose their value. So, it is a natural process.

Is the following taboo good or bad? There is always a question among the people. But as they are observed or followed by people through the ages so some people follow them unquestionably and others do not. Society imposes fines on those who do not follow them. Moreover, they think God will curse them if they do not follow the taboo. However, with the advancement of education, science and technology some taboos lose their previous importance. And some are still followed. Some are superstitious in nature but some are not. Such taboos can be seen not only in Naga society or in the society among the people of North-East they are found in different regions of the different places of the world but the causes for which the issue of the taboos are different.

Bibliography

1. Bapu L.W. Khanduma's Curse. Guwahati: Wordweaves, 2012.
2. Kire Easterine. A Naga Village Rememberd. Kohima: Ura Academy, 2003.
3. Kire Easterine. Life on Hold. Kohima: Barweaver and Ura Academy, 2011.
4. Kire Easterine. Mary. Uttar Pradesh, India: Harper Collins Publishers, 2010.
5. Phukan Mitra. The Collector's Wife. New Delhi: Penguin Groups, 2005.
6. Hornby, A S., Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, p-1560.

