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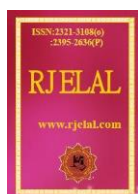
INDIA

## Portrayal of Female Characters in Birendra Kumar Bhattacharyya's Novels

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### Abstract

The story or plot of a novel is the reflection of some events or emotions. These events or emotions are of some individuals. This type of individuals are the characters of that narrative work. The portrayal of characters in novel is one of the basic fundamental aspects of fiction writing. While creating characters for novels, skilled novelists give equal importance both to the male and female characters. Woman characters have been regarded as one of the important aspects in the 20<sup>th</sup> century literature. Literature is the expression of all-pervading feelings of human beings irrespective of time, place or language. In regards to thoughts, feelings, emotions etc. no geographical, linguistic or national boundary is relevant. Though there is irrelevance of place, society, culture and language, a universal similarity is noticed in regards to emotion, feelings, basic thinking, sorrows and happiness, joy etc. It is observed in Birendra Kumar Bhattacharyya's portrayal of women characters in the Assamese novels. Love, sympathy, pity, softness, timidity etc. are the general characteristics of women. All these common features are beautifully employed in the female characters by Birendra Kumar Bhattacharyya. His female characters like Dimi, Koli Baideu, Pannu, Sarengla, Nayanmoni and others exhibit the female characteristics. Bhattacharyya is a novelist of progressive outlook who depicts the picture of active, bold, courageous and rebellious woman in his novels. This Assamese novelist has always been sympathetic towards the miserable plight of women.

**Key Words:** Birendra Kumar Bhattacharyya, bold, courageous and rebellious woman, Female characters, Pannu, Sarengla.

### Introduction

Birendra Kumar Bhattacharyya is one of the life time devotees of Assamese literature who plays a significant role in the development of modern Assamese literature by his multifaceted literary personality. He enriches the store house of Assamese literature by contributing many

remarkable works like novels, short stories, poems, essays, travelogues, biographies, articles etc. Birendra Kumar Bhattacharyya has been acclaimed as one of the prominent litterateurs in the realm of Assamese literature for his literary talent, high devotion and close attention. Hemanta Kumar Sarma in the Preface to the book *Birendra Bhattacharyar Sahitya Kriti* says-

Among those few authors who have been able to introduce themselves as the top most Indian litterateurs, Birendra Kumar Bhattacharyya, the winner of highest literary award Jnanpith is exceptional.<sup>1</sup>

Though Bhattacharyya has worked a lot in different literary genre, but his major contribution on the growth of the Assamese literature can be discerned mostly in the field of novel writing. It is the genre of novel for which he has procured a prominent place in Assamese literature. The novels of Bhattacharyya can be considered as the mirror of contemporary society. He has enriched the store house of Assamese literature by contributing 23 novels with contemporary social and political themes. Bhattacharyya is too much conscious in the portrayal of his characters. In his writings, reflection of sufferings, hardship, different kinds of forms and psychic states or the real picture of the traditional Indian women can be noticed.

The primary objective of this research paper is to focus the women characters of Birendra Kumar Bhattacharyya with special reference to his three novels- *Mrityunjay*, *Yiaruingam* and *Pratipad*.

### **Methodology**

The descriptive and analytical methods have been adopted for this research paper. To prepare this paper primary data are collected from the novels *Mrityunjay*, *Yiaruingam* and *Pratipad* and secondary data are collected from different critical books on Birendra Kumar Bhattacharyya's novels. The scope of the study of Birendra Kumar Bhattacharyya's novels is very comprehensive. To discuss this novel in the limited range of a research paper is not an easy task. Therefore, for the convenience of the study, only Bhattacharyya's portrayal of female characters is attempted here to focus on.

### **Discussion**

Birendra Kumar Bhattacharyya has got worldwide reputation as a novelist mainly for his immense power of portraying and analyzing characters. Each and every character that Bhattacharyya created has own features. In this regard, Prafulla Kotoky's words can be quoted-

Deepest sympathy and an intense desire to understand the life wholly- are the two qualities that Birendra Kumar has and as a result of that each and every character glitter lively.<sup>2</sup>

This Assamese novelist has created a marvelous portrait gallery in his novels. All the characters of Birendra Kumar Bhattacharyya's novels have their own individual features. Bhattacharyya's power of analyzing characters is superb. He tries to read their minds, to understand about their thought and feelings, ideals etc. and was quite sympathetic to them.

Birendra Kumar Bhattacharyya has the power of analyzing the life-consciousness of the woman characters by going to the depths of them. So, the woman characters created by him are deeply attractive.<sup>3</sup>

Following full detachment, he analyses the characters with an analyzing attitude. For these kinds of qualities all his minor or major, round or flat characters appear bright and lively.

Bhattacharyya is a novelist of progressive outlook who depicts the picture of active, bold, courageous and rebellious woman in his novels. This Assamese novelist has always sympathetic attitude towards the miserable plight of women. Therefore, he dreams of a society where the women would be emancipated from all social, political and economic oppression. In his novels characters of many active and rebellious women are portrayed who raise their voices against the oppression and take active part in serious jobs like those of his male figures. His Dimi, Koli Baideu, Pannu, Nayanmoni etc. are very active and brave women. These women characters show their activeness in every field. In *Mrityunjay*, woman characters like Dimi, Koli Baideu take active part in the activities of freedom struggle of India. Apart from doing various activities related to the freedom struggle, Koli Baideu, by her witty words inspires the volunteers to engage in the struggle without thinking about their lives. Dimi involves herself in bearing and keeping the necessary records related to freedom movement. In *Pratipad* also, characters like Pannu, Lashmi, Nayanmoni, have shown their activeness by their courageous steps. Along with the

revolt against the British, these characters have tried to make themselves free from the clutches of patriarchal Indian society.

Though Pannu comes from a very poor labour's family, she has the strength to stand independently only because of her education. Even she opposes her father very boldly in his decision to fix her marriage with an aged person. Lashmi and Nayanmoni also try to be independent. All these characters of Bhattacharyya have proved themselves as very strong and bold characters. Of course, despite being active and brave they cannot be called as round characters as there are no changes observed in their characters.

Bhattacharyya has not only portrayed the strong female characters but many weak female characters have also been portrayed. Subhadra and Gossani in *Mrityunjay*; Madhuri, Jebunnisa in *Pratipad* are some such weak characters. Bhattacharyya's Subhadra is portrayed as a discomfited woman in the novel *Mrityunjay*. Observing this character, it is found that despite trying to make her a dynamic character, the novelist rather intends to highlight her as a symbol of suffering woman. Almost ten soldiers altogether raped Subhadra in an environment of World War II. This incident compelled her to commit suicide as she could not bear her mental agony and the negligence gets from the society. This woman character of Bhattacharyya has no dynamic nature. He also depicts Jebunnisa and Sharengla as discomfited women in *Pratipad* and *Yiaruingam* respectively. They are considered as fallen women in society. Sharengla is kidnapped by Ishawera, a Japanese soldier and keeps her with him almost for a year. This Japanese soldier makes her pregnant. She becomes free from the clutch of Ishawera as the Japanese soldiers retreat from this land. But the villagers start neglecting her as a fallen woman. Even she has to sacrifice her first love i.e. Rishang. Nyatingkhuin has tried to molest her. Khutingla rebukes her. Bhattacharyya depicts her as a woman who has lost everything in a worst political situation. Of course, these weak women in course of time have got changed. She tries her best to get rid of the sufferings of her life by rendering service to mankind

as her religion. Such type of changing attitude makes her a round character.

In *Pratipad*, Jebunnisa, a downtrodden discomfited neglected woman, is introduced to the readers, at the very initial stage of the novel, as a whore of the high ranked white officers in the Digboi city. This woman, who *has the blood of Christians, the Hindu's flesh and is taken care of by the Muslims*<sup>4</sup> (Trans.) bears the blame since her birth. Even her relative like Sandi Ahir considers her as untouchable. She has lost everything- relationships, love, care etc.

Jebunnisa is portrayed as a weak woman in the first half of the novel. But, as time progresses she gets changed rapidly. She is frustrated with the life full of blame and so she tries to get rid of this life by any means. There are, of course, some people who support her fully for a life of freedom. Nasiruddin, an old cook, takes care of her as his own granddaughter. Giasuddin Sahib also supports her very much. With the help of her indomitable mental strength, she could get rid of blames of her life and proceed forward for the service of human beings. Being a nurse, she takes care of the sick or ailing people and thus she works for the welfare of the human beings. But being rejected by her lover Ismail she becomes mentally and physically weak and dies very soon. Such type of changing attitude of life and the developing aspects make the character of Jebunnisa a round character.

Gossani, the wife of Mohadananda Gossain of Doipara Satra, is another important round female character characterized by Birendra Kumar Bhattacharyya in *Mrityunjay*. This character is portrayed as very mild, weak and simple in nature like a traditional Indian woman. In the beginning of the novel it is seen that she confines herself within the four walls of her home. Gossani has all the natural qualities of woman such as kind heartedness, emotion, sympathy towards weak and poor, dutiful etc. She is fainthearted in nature and her timidity reminds the readers about the universal form of woman. Hearing the discussion between Mohada Gossain and his fellow fighters about indulging in riot for freedom, Gossani shivers in fear and apprehension. She is terribly frightened and afraid when Mohada Gossain is getting ready to

go to the guerrilla war. In an instable psychological state of mind, she says-

What can a handful of man do in the face of so many armed troops? They will kill you like Tilak or the way they killed Kanaklata at Gohpur or Tileswar at Dhekiajuli.<sup>5</sup>

But at the same time, she has proved herself as a devoted wife by providing him some necessary things like 'maran ada' (a type of ginger), tea leaves, gaggery, betel nuts, his bowls etc. for his journey.

This character has struggled a lot throughout the novel. She feels as if she is a refugee at her own 'ashram' in Kamarkuchi. Even she has to suffer from delivery pains for the whole night in reserve ground. Finally, she has lost her husband forever. The painful experiences that gathered from the events of life brought changes to this character in the later part of this novel. Seeing the instances of self-sacrifice of the *Mrityunjay* heroes for their native land, Gossani's heart also fills with patriotic feelings. She dreams about an independent India coming out of the narrow range of the family life. She even utters-

Swaraj will come. Good or bad, it is this people who are ushering in swaraj. These British won't be around for long.<sup>6</sup>

Gossani's transformation from a very weak woman to a strong one makes her character very realistic and a dynamic one.

All these characters of Bhattacharyya-namely Subhadra, Jebunnisa, Sharengla are depicted as the victims of political instability and the neglected woman. All of them are getting sexually exploited. Bhattacharyya is quite successful in portraying the sufferings of down-trodden women in his novels.

### Conclusion

Birendra Kumar Bhattacharyya has showed an extra ordinary quality in portraying the female characters. In his novels women characters have got an important status. Bhattacharyya himself opines in regards to the importance of female characters in his novel as-

The woman too is important for a male writer for she is the other self. In my writings the other self often appears as the whole society and the woman acts as the symbol of the starting point.<sup>7</sup>

Bhattacharyya tries to depict the picture of women with their universal attributes like liveliness, intelligence, charm, and significance as an active member of the community on the one hand and also reveals the predicament of women in the patriarchal society on the other. Like a feminist writer he tries to portray women as capable of acting independently against the male dominated society. He has the ability or power to analyze the overall experiences of life of the woman characters by going into the depth. He can understand the undefeated psychological power of woman. He has acquired the ability of uplifting the rare psychological power of a woman who lost everything. For this kind of uniqueness or power, his woman characters are flashing more and more in an attractive form.

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