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Assamese Regional Novels: A Glimpse

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Abstract

Regionalism in literature is an approach and literary movement that tries to reflect specific geographical areas and highlights their distinctive features such as customs, traditions, dialects, landscapes, folk beliefs, manners, habits, social structure etc. Regional novel is one of the important parts of regional literature. It is a derivative of social novel which concentrates on some specific features which are discerned in regional literature. The year 1800 is one of the remarkable years of world literature. The trend of English regional novel started with the publication of Maria Edgeworth's novel *Castle Rack-Rent* in that year. Since the publication of *Castle Rack-Rent*, a considerable number of regional novels have been published in the field of literature. Like the literature of other parts of the world, Assamese literature has also been enriched by the novels of Assamese regional novelists. The tradition of regional novel in Assamese literature is started with Rajanikanta Bordoloi's *Miri Jiori*.

Key Words: Assamese literature, custom, geographical area, regional novel, tradition.

Introduction

Regionalism is one of the special features of almost all the genre of literature. It is seen that various literary works have been introduced to the field of literature based on local aspects at different times. While the term regionalism makes its entry in the literary discussion it refers to fiction or poetry that concentrates heavily on some specific and unique features like characters, dialects, traditions, customs, history and topography of a specific region or area. Regionalism, as a literary movement is a worldwide phenomenon seen both in Eastern and Western literature. Assamese literature, a

distinctive part of Indian literature strongly reflects regionalism with its features. Like the other fictional works of Assamese literature, the novels frequently focus regionalism with its distinctive aspects like customs, traditions, dialects, landscapes, folk beliefs, manners, habits etc. of its region. In this research paper an attempt has been made to focus regionalism and the Assamese regional novels.

Methodology

The neo-classical method of close text reading and the descriptive and analytical methods have been followed to prepare this paper. To prepare this research paper data is collected from

different regional novels of Assamese literature and different critical books on regionalism and from website.

Discussion

Assamese Regional Novel

Regionalism in literature is a broad concept. At the time of discussing regionalism, another term comes to our mind automatically which is 'local colour'. Even it is seen that sometimes these two terms are used interchangeably. It is, of course, very important to mention here that both the terms are different from each other. Regionalism has generally broader connotative meaning. It is a 19th as well as 20th century movement which encompasses regional consciousness. On the other hand, local colour refers to a particular literary mode that flourished in the 19th century. In 'local colour', "speech especially dialects, dress, customs, mannerism, habits of thought, and topography peculiar to the setting are usually rendered in detail and thus emphasize the verisimilitude of realism. However, its emphasis on eccentric characters, including larger than life legendary characters, on sentimental pathos, on violence and brutality, and on humour both whimsical and grotesque reveal it to be concerned about entertainment, not the truth of the larger aspects of life."¹

On the other hand, regionalism "presents a particular geographical section with fidelity and habits, speech, manners, history, folklore, and beliefs with accuracy. However, it generally differs in that it lays less stress up on quaint oddities of dialect, manners, and costume and more on basic philosophical or sociological distinctions."²

It is observed that regionalism means the sect of geographical boundary. In *A Dictionary of Literary Terms*, it is described as-

The representation in a body of literature, produced either by a single writer or a group of a particular reign or locale, influencing the lives of characters in the work. The locale is taken to be a subject of considerable interest in itself and it is described in detail.³

The writers of regional literature usually set their stories in their regions and while depicting their regions, they describe customs, manners, dialects, history etc. of their respective regions, remembering these aspects from their own age and experiences. Hence, their writing is often blended realism with nostalgic sentiment. In regional literature, the narrator plays an important role. The narrator works as a translator, who provides the readers' room to get the region understood.

Regional novel is one of the important divisions of regional literature. Regional novel, a derivative of social novel, concentrates on some specific features like physical feature, life, custom, tradition, dialects, history, topography etc. of a specific region. When a region becomes a subject matter of a novel, then the novel can be said as a regional one. In its literal meaning, the term region denotes-

A fairly large area of a country, usually without exact limit a part of a country that is away from the capital city' and regional means 'that which is connected to a particular region.'⁴

The Oxford English Dictionary defines region as- "a large area of land, usually without exact limits or borders 'and regional as 'relating to or characteristic of a region."⁵

Therefore, it is discerned that regional novel traces the life of folk in a particular area or region. It highlights the way of living of people of a specific region with their custom, traditions, manners, habits, speech, belief, superstitions etc. in order to show the influence of surrounding environment upon its people.

Assamese literature has been enriched by the novels of the Assamese regional novelists. It is known that the first Assamese regional novel was introduced to the Assamese literature by Rajanikanta Bordoloi. His novel *Miri Jiyari* that sets in the background of the Subansiri river, deals with the beautiful love story of Jonki and Panei. While depicting the story, the novelist tends to highlight the marriage system, rituals, tradition, culture, festivals like Cheng Puja, Narachinga Bihu, folk

beliefs like Deudhai's prediction, worshipping Gods and Goddesses, adamant attitude etc. of the Miri tribe very exclusively. All these aspects make the novel purely a regional one. Regarding this novel, S.N Sarma's opinion is worthy to be mentioned- "One cannot notice any attempt of writing regional novel except Rajanikanta Bordoloi's Miri Jiyori till independence."⁶ (Trans.)

In the later part of the nineteenth century there in Assamese literature appeared Birinchi Kumar Baruah, who wrote two prominent regional novels- *Jiwanar Batat* and *Seuji Patar Kahini*. In the period of post-independence, a considerable number of Assamese regional novelists appeared. Among them Syed Abdul Malik, Birendra Kumar Bhattacharyya, Homen Borgohain, Nabakanta Baruah, Amulya Baruah, Dinanath Sarma, Hitesh Deka, Lakhinandan Bora, Nirupama Borgohain, Rong Bong Terang and Shilabhadra are unforgettable ones.

Syed Abdul Malik's *Surujmukhir Swapna*, which sets on the bank of Dhansiri river depicts a society with its people and their sorrows and happiness, love and hatred, fortunes and misfortunes. In this novel the life and emotions, feelings of the people of a riverside Muslim village who depend on agriculture are portrayed. The hopes and aspirations, happiness and sadness of the people are made lively in this novel using heart-touching emotional language. For this kind of aspect this novel can be considered as a regional one. Syed Abdul Malik's another novel *Jetuka Patar Dare* is also a regional novel.

Another prominent novelist, Birendra Kumar Bhattacharyya, who is popularly known as a Political novelist, has also written regional novel like *Aain*. This novel sets in the backdrop of his own village Dhekiakhuwa. In the words of a critic-

Picture of a village-incantation- death-old age, anxiety-disease, destitute- want, envy-jealousy, theft- bloodshed- murder, etc are the environment of crime and diverse events are perfectly picturised in the novel 'Aain'. A true document. There is no imagination, no exaggeration, no bending anywhere in the novel. It undoubtedly

establishes the efficiency of Birandra Kumar as a writer.⁷ (Trans.)

Matsyagandha, a novel by the distinguished Assamese novelist Homen Borgohain, is also a regional novel where the depiction of a koibarta village with its tradition, superstitions, evil practices, the untouchability, envy, jealousy, enmity, abusive speech and cursing etc. of the life of that village can be observed nicely.

Nabakanta Baruah, a renowned poet and story-teller of the post-independence era, has also written regional novel. *Kapiliparia Sadhu* is one of the most vivid and readable Assamese regional novels. This novel sets on the river Kapili as its backdrop. The love story of Rup Singh or Rupai, a descendant of the Mikir Royal family and Sonpahi starts centering round the Kopili river and it finishes in the setting of the same river Kapili appears as a mother who controls her children as she likes. One critic says, "the river Kapili plays the role of the heroine here."⁸ (Trans.)

The aspects of regional novel can easily be found in *Kapilipariya Sadhu* and hence it can be considered as an unforgettable Assamese regional novel. Regarding the regional consciousness of life in the writings of Nabakanta Baruah, a critic comment-

Regional consciousness of life is a noticeable feature of Nabakanta Barua. His efforts have been engaged for the perfect depiction of the overall picture of life. His creations that engaged in following deeply the diverseness of life of a region is attractive, the events are extended, not confined.⁹ (Trans.)

Another remarkable Assamese regional novel is *Ei Padumoni* by Amulya Baruah. This novel sets in an ordinary Koibarta village which is situated on the bank of the Brahmaputra near Nimatighat. In the preface to this novel the novelist himself says-

It is a humble effort to keep intact all the happiness-sadness, laugh-cry, want accusation of some real common people without any humour. I just try to say about the relationship that formed between a section of people of a village and a river, in

their own style without artificiality.¹⁰
(Trans.)

Another prominent Assamese novelist Hitesh Deka's *Eiyetu Jiban* has also been considered as a regional novel as the aspects of regional novel are found there in it. This novel depicts the life of rustic people with their innumerable problems. Nirupama Borgohain, the prolific Assamese woman novelist has been regarded as a regional novelist also. Her novels like *Sei Nadi Nirabadhi* and *Iparar Ghar Siparar Ghar* are also considered as regional novels. Both these two novels set on the backdrop of the river Pagladiya and depict the pathetic plight of people living on the bank of the Pagladiya. *Rongmilir Hahin* by Rong Bong Terang is undoubtedly a landmark of Assamese Regional novel. The novel describes the Karbi lives and society with the customs, traditions, manners, habits, and different festivals like Sajun Puja, riddles, black magic and many other practices quite realistically.

There is no doubt that Shilabhadra has occupied a significant position in the field of Assamese regional novel. His *Madhupur*, *Agamanir Ghat*, and *Ahatguri* set in the backdrop of the region Madhupur of Goalpara district of Assam.

Apart from these prominent regional novelists of Assamese literature, there are a few other regional novelists without referring them and their novels, the discussion on Assamese regional novel will certainly be incomplete and vague. Here, mention may be made to Mamoni Roisom Goswami's *Mamore Dhara Torowal*, *Dantal Hatir Unye Khowa Hawda*, *Nilkanthi Braza*, Swarna Borah's *Diyung Nadir Geet*, Shiva Sharma's *Maniki Gaonr Kahini*, Pranita Devi's *Dhansirir Usupani*, Jatin Mipun's *Miksijili*, Koilash Sharma's *Anami Nagini*, Yese Dorze Thongsi's *Sawa Kata Manuh*, Lumber Dai's *Prithibir Hahin* etc.

Conclusion

In Assamese literature Regionalism as a literary movement emerges as a part of broader Indian regional literary movement. Novelists like Rajani Kanta Bordoloi, Bina Baruah, Syed Abdul Malik, Birendra Kumar Bhattacharyya, Amulya Baruah, Hitesh Deka, Shilabhadra and many others

have significantly contributed to the Assamese literature in regards to regionalism. By using this literary approach, the regional novelists try to reflect the unique cultural, social, geographical and political identity of their respective regions in their writings.

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