

The Ethnic Conflict as Reflected in Umakanta Sarmah's Novel 'Bharanda Pakhir Jaak' (The Bharandas): A Comprehensive Evaluation

Chandan Jyoti Chutia

Junior Research Fellow, Department of Assamese, Dibrugarh University, Dibrugarh, Assam, India

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ABSTRACT

An image of divisive, decaying and unstable condition gradually coming down to the communal lives of the bodos and other ethnic groups who have been coexisting in Assam for long is drawn in the novel 'Bharanda Pakhir Jaak' written by Umakanta Sarma two Bodo-dominated areas Sesakhuli and Sonaphali are used as the background of the novel. Besides the Bodos people of different communities like caste-Hindu, Muslim, Nepali etc. also inhabit in Sesakhuli and there is no dearth of unity among them. The new generation of the Bodo youths becomes angry after being aware of the threats suddenly coming to the existence of different ethnic groups many years after the independence of India. But they split into two factions after difference of opinion erupted among them. Meanwhile the Bodos and the Assamese caste Hindus also get divided after difference of opinion among them on various subjects violence and retaliation creates an unstable condition in the surrounding areas. The situation gradually deteriorates and crosses the limits of control. In this way a section of people get deeply involved in the self-created problem.

A picture of crisis faced by people during the rise of Bodo National consciousness is drawn in the novel. The national consciousness created among the new generation of the Bodo youths has tied all the events of that time with the same thread. In other words the sense of national awareness of the new generation of Bodo youths seems to be the driving force of the events in the novel. This heart-touching novel reflects the gradually broken values of the long neglected Bodo society in an unstable environment. It presents the awakening of the Bodo youth, the value crisis in their public life and the conflict between old and new thoughts in a clean and fresh way. It has achieved the excellence of an epic by maintaining appropriate co-ordination of the background subject matter, conflict, characterization, etc. Umakanta Sarma's 'Bharanda Pakhir Jaak' reflects tribal conflict in an excellent and thoughtful way.

Keywords: Bodo, Ethnic Conflict, Umakanta Sarma, Bharanda Pakhir Jaak, Assamese Novel

I. INTRODUCTION

Umakanta Sarma's novel 'Bharanda Pakhir Jaak' is discussed while proceeding to critically examine ethnic conflicts as reflected in modern Assamese literature. This novel reflects the gradually broken values of the Bodo society, the conflict between old and new thoughts and the opposite techniques adopted by the powers working for change. There is great significance in the naming of the novel too. The novel clearly hints that the separatist movement started by the Bodos may be self-destructive. The novel, which highlights the national awakening of the Bodo youths, contains no usual story like other novels. On the other hand big or small stories of life have received importance in the novel. An attempt is made below to observe the ethnic conflict as reflected in 'Bharanda Pakhir Jaak' through analytical method.

II. Ethnic Conflict and Assamese Novel

Tribal life, society and culture and conflict have occupied a special position in modern Assamese novels. Tribal life has been depicted beautifully in the novels based on tribal life till now. But their conflict has not been reflected clearly in those novels. The ethnic life based novels of the first phase including the first novel based on tribal life 'Miri Jiyari' published in 1895 have shown the best example of tribal conflict. Among those Naga life based novels like 'Yaruingam' written by Birendra Kumar Bhattacharyya, 'Bidruhi Nagar Hatot' and 'Dalimir Sapun' written by Kailas Sarma, khasi life based novel 'U-Khun-Junga' written by Amulya Barua, Karbi life based novel 'Puwate Ejak Dhanesh' written by Jayanta Rangpi, Bodo-Kachari social life based novel 'Bharanda Pakhir Jaak' written by Umakanta Sarma are prominent. Though a few novels have been written based on the great Bodo-Kachari tribe distributed in different places of India

still Umakanta Sarma's 'Bharanda Pakhir Jaak' is the first novel published in book form. The novelist himself is not a tribal person but he has succeeded in portraying the life-style of Bodo-Kachari and their national consciousness in an artistic way.

Umakanta Sarma's 'Bharanda Pakhir Jaak' is specially mentionable among those Assamese novels which have represented ethnic conflict clearly. A picture of crisis-ridden condition of the Bodo society has been drawn in this novel. No detail description of the social life of the Bodos is found in the novel. However, communal violence and value crisis that arise in different situations is clearly represented in this novel.

III. Ethnic conflict reflected in 'Bharanda Pakhir Jaak'

Umakanta Sarma's 'Bharanda Pakhir Jaak' is actually a novel written on the Bodo Problem. The co-existence of the Bodos and other linguistic groups is old enough in the history of Assam. Sesakhuli and Sonaphali are two large Bodo-dominated areas. However, along with the Bodos people of different communities like caste-Hindu, Muslim, Nepali, etc. also inhabit in Sesakhuli. Though they follow different religion, belongs to separate castes and speak different languages still there is no dearth of unity among the people of Sesakhuli because of religious tolerance of the Bodos. In view of *Gaurinath*, the priest of local Hindu temple, there is only one society in Sesakhuli. But many years after the independence the Bodos remain underdeveloped and threats come to their existence because of the mounting pressure from different communities living around them such a situation makes the new generation of Bodo youths angry despite prevailing unity among the people living there. Outsiders begin to occupy lands in Sesakhuli and Sonaphali and thus threat comes to the existence of the Bodos. As a consequence the Bodo youths get united to oppose such a possibility. *Gaurinath* is happy to see such an awakening among the Bodo youths. But the Bodo elders don't pay heed to that matter. Gradually there occurs parallel divisions among the Bodos and the caste-Hindus. The Bodo youths get divided into two groups on ideological ground. Some of them reject the suggestion of progressive Bodos like *Bakul Daimary* and accepts the extremist way of revolution. People like *Alit* realizes that self-created problems have engulfed them.

The broken values and the crisis ridden condition of the Bodo society as reflected in the novel can be discussed from different angles.

Conflict between Old and New

Outsiders or refugees start occupying land at the border of Sesakhuli and Sonaphali. Immigrants of Mymensing origin burn down the unused jungles of the area and begins to live permanently there. The Bodo youths became angry after realizing The threat to their existence and plan to use extremist ways. Some people are happy to see the new awakening of the Bodo youths among the tradition and Bodos who lost everything. The new generation is worried over the aggression of the outsiders while the old generation of Bodos are not worried at all over this matter. People like *Basiram*, *Rupnath*, *Dhaniram*, *Karendra* think that the immigrants have done good works by cultivating in cleared jungles. The old ones like them are happy at the increase of shops at Sesakhuli bazaar. But according to the educated

youths like *Urmila*, *Alit*, etc. it is not proper. According to them the aggression of the outsiders should be opposed tooth and nail. If it is not done in the beginning it will not be possible later. So, they are engaged in a movement without much thought. Because of such reasons a conflict arises between the old and new generation of Bodo people. Gradually such conflict takes a dangerous turn and boils up the situation in Sesakhuli and Sonaphali.

Acceptance of Opposite Techniques by the forces working for Change

The new generation Bodos who try to stop aggression of outsiders at Sesakhuli and Sonaphali hope for change of conflict ridden situation there. These Bodo youths get separated in to two sides because of differences in their ideology in the middle of their movement. One group representing youth like *Ronen*, *Ranjila* etc. think of development of the Bodo through their organization and long time preparation. But the youths of the other group like *Alit*, *Urmila* etc. choose the extremist way as the real path to revolt. They ignore the suggestions of Bodo intellectuals like *Bakul Daimary*.

Alit is the leader of the extremist faction of the Bodo movement. As an Educated young man *Alit* has realized the underdevelopment of the Bodos till many years after the independence. So he has engaged himself for the protection and development of his own people. *Basiram's* son *Ronen* also think like *Alit*. The aim of both of them is the same but their techniques and ways of working are separate. In order to end the under developed condition of the Bodo *Alit* supports the path of movement instead of taking long-term technique. *Alit's* path leads to terror, conflict and destruction. The members of *Alit's* Organization participate in fund raising activities for their organization and forces and even physically assault the inhabitants of the area. *Alit* indirectly supports such activities so as it increase the strength of his organization. Similarly *Urmila* as a school girl also realizes the long-neglected condition of the Bodos. Having seen the exploitation and oppression of the Bodos she becomes impatient to join the extremist organization led by *Alit*. She does not tolerate people like *Bakul Daimary* and *Ronen* of the other faction she thinks that both of them are answerable to the Bodo nation.

The Problems of Caste- Hindus

Along with the Bodo the caste -Hindus also inhabited at Sesakhuli. In the beginning there was harmony and coordination between the two communities. But later there was a division between the bodos and the Assamese caste-Hindus because of several reasons. The Bodos also wanted Assamese as the state language of Assam. But the caste-Hindus never tried to understand the problems faced by the Bodos. Even the plans made for the development of the Bodos ultimately made the non-Bodo areas. Teachers like *Ramakanta* and *Devakanta* sought all round development of the Bodos. But the extremist looked them with suspicious eyes. The extremist faction of the Bodos started to use the immigrants against the Assamese caste-Hindus. On the other hand *Basiram*, *Dhaniram*, *Rupnath*, *Karendra*, etc. were examples of simple-minded Bodo villagers who wanted progress of all the people of Sesakhuli belonging to different caste and creed. They did not object to the occupying of forest and by the immigrants and use of land of Bodo areas by the non-Bodos for business purpose. Instead they support such use of unused land of their area. So they could not

understand the reason of objection raised by their new generation against such work. Now they think that their days are over.

Conflict of Values:

The identity crisis created in our minds has also affected our traditional values. It has been depicted in an appropriate manner in this novel.

No real reason of the protest shown by the Bodos for preserving their nationality or the technique adopted by them for achieving that is explained in 'Bharanda Pakhir Jaak'. Therefore, the elders and many educated youth have not found any rationality of such a movement. As a consequence of it the long lasting co-ordination of the Bodos, Nepali, Bengali, etc. living in that area has begun to end. The gradually broken values of the long neglected Bodo society and its unstable condition has been depicted very beautifully in the novel.

IV. Conclusion

'Bharanda Pakhir Jaak' is a live account of the tribal conflict. Opposition and conflict start even among the people of the same community as a result of misunderstanding of different kinds. The string of unity binding different people of that area begins to weaken and get destroyed. The novel is actually a good example of humanism. The writer has expressed sympathy towards the deprived, neglected and

economically exploited people in this novel. The novel highlights the fact that the solution of problems of the neglected and exploited communities of India like the Bodos is possible only through a comprehensive approach. The principal message of the novel is that instead of division co-ordination is more important for the people of Assam. Umakanta Sarma's 'Bharanda Pakhir jaak' which has achieved the excellence of an epic is important not only from the literary but also historical point of view. This is an excellent novel based on tribal life and written on a contemporary burning topic like the Bodo problem. It depicts the tragedy of a society of co-ordination which we later choose the path of degeneration.

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