

BURHI AAIR SADHU AND LAKSHMINATH BEZBARUA'S LOGIC OF NATIONALISM

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Abstract

Lakshminath Bezbarua was one of the three most significant scholars of the *Jonaki era* who may truly be regarded as a harbinger of modernity to Assamese literature in the 19th century. A poet, a story writer, a novelist, a dramatist, a critic, a journalist, a children litterateur, a biographer, a writer of autobiography, an editor, an essayist, a compiler of innumerable Assamese folk tales, Bezbarua possessed a rare combination of different skills. Behind the making of this multi-faceted personality of Bezbarua there was a keen sense of nationalism.

Key Word: Burhi Aair Sadhu, Lakshminath Bezbarua, Logic, Nationalism, Jonaki era.

INTRODUCTION

In conjunction with the vital genres that Lakshminath Bezbarua tried his hands on and emerged out successfully, his tales are of equal significance in terms of his overall assessment as a pioneering author of the North-East region. Despite the fact that folk tales are commonly considered to be a part of child literature, it cannot be categorized merely as a literature of the comic kind; because it serves as a valuable document that highlights the socio-cultural history of the human civilization. As a powerful branch of folk literature, these folk tales emerge out of the Assamese folk life and thus, to know the social life and folk culture of that ancient era, one must take reside in the folk tales. Therefore it would be unjustified to generalize the folk tales of Bezbarua as merely a medium of amusement for children. These folk tales, too, serve as valuable documents in the study of the history of Assamese literature.

Statement of the Problem:

To find out a sense of nationalism in literature is of great value. Hence, the Burhi Aair Sadhu and Lakshminath Bezbarua's Logic of Nationalism plays a very significant part in Assamese Literature.

Objective of the Paper:

The objectives of the study are mainly-

1. To find out the facets of nationalistic idealism.
2. To study the sense of nationalism in Lakshminath Bezbarua's Burhi Aair Sadhu.

Research Methodology:

The study is descriptive based on secondary sources. The sources of secondary data are collected from reference books, periodicals, research papers, edited books and journals.

Rationale:

The study of nationalistic feeling is of great value for societal formation.

Discussion and Results:

Folk culture bears the root of nationalism. The two German scholars popularly known as the Greme Brothers have shown how the elements of the folk culture are directly connected to the emergence of nationalism of a particular region. Through in-depth discussions on folk culture these two brothers have highlighted the supremacy of the German language. In this context mention may be made of their Indo-European Theory and the Nationalistic Method. Scholars like Rabindranath Tagore and Dakshinaranjan Mitra Majumdar collected the resources of folk culture with nationalist views. In fact a same sense of nationalism turns out to be the guiding force behind Bezbarua's practice of folk tales too. Even a very casual view on the preface of his "Burhi Aair Sadhu" confirms this fact.

For Bezbarua folk tales were not merely a source of merrymaking for the children. The preface of Burhi Aair Sadhu bears the proof of his deep insight into the theory of language as well as a systematic discussion on the folk tales as a serious genre of literature. Even long back in 1911 he came up with such a suggestion that the Assamese folk tales should be analyzed and evaluated with the help of certain modern critical concepts like 'motief', 'index', 'circle study' etc. And this anticipation unveiled the fact that a vast field of literary study was fallen waste in the guise of Assamese folk literature. Thus he took responsibility to pave the way through which the future generations may bring the Assamese folk tales to the vast stage of world literature.

The Assamese phrases 'Sadhu Katha', 'Sadhu', 'Upo-Katha' etc may be taken as synonyms to the English word 'Tale'. Bezbarua has regarded folktales as moral stories or the advices of saints. In addition to the elements borne by an English 'tale', the Assamese folktales include in itself the legends, myths, and fables too. The Burhi Aair Sadhu includes thirty tales of varied length and subjects. Till then these tales had been handed down from one generation to the other orally. Bezbarua painstakingly collected these tales from various persons among whom he has mentioned the names many. After assessing the significance of these tales, he devoted time and labor to edit, rewrite, or to even invent similar tales of his own to be added to the collection. These invented tales may undoubtedly be regarded as his original contribution to Assamese literature. And this highlights his sense of responsibility to the emerging Assamese literary cult.

In the Preface of Burhi Aair Sadhu, Bezbarua makes mention of two kinds of tales. The first kind of tales are those replete with moral message and teachings, for example- the tales of Panchatantra, Hitopodesh, or the tales of La- Fontaine etc. The other kind tales

are those that excite the human imagination by provoking it to fantasize. From the children to the people of various age groups these tales provide intellectual nourishment. Though the children literature in Assamese made its first appearance in the magazine titled Arunodoy, published by the Christian Missionaries, Bezbarua should be credited for the true nourishment and development of the same. His serious effort in this regard may be seen in his collections of tales such as: Burhi Air Sadhu; Junuka, 'Kokadeuta Aru Nati Lora', 'Bhagavat Kotha', 'Bakhor', 'Kamot Krititta Lobhibor Sonket' to name a few.

Burhi Air Sadhu is not only the most popular collection of tales for children, but it also has a very significant role to play in shaping their personality and moral character. The subject matters dealt in the stories are considered to be of utmost benefit in terms of creating literary interest for the growing children. But it is to be noted that Bezbarua did not adhere to any specific principle to categorize these tales in respect of age groups of children. One of the reasons behind the immense popularity of Burhi Air Sadhu is perhaps the fact that Bezbarua was well acquainted with the literary happenings of the contemporary world. And he was also very well acquainted with the child psychology that emerged to be attached to literature. These tales create such a fantastic world for the children in which they very safely raid and roam to their heart's content.

Bezbarua understood it very well that children cannot distinguish amongst human, animals, living and non-living matters, for them all are same, and thus he makes profuse use of personification in the tales. Thus he brings to his tales various issues as well as quarries that really suit the fantastic world of children. Besides, he was much aware of his intention behind, that is, to come up with a moral lesson that proves helpful in moulding and shapping of a good character in children. This secret intention of the author again proves his national responsibility.

So far as the language used in the tales are concerned, Bezbarua makes it very much fluidic, flexible and suitable to his task. Here it becomes lyrical, conversational, colloquial, alliterative according to the requirement of the narration. It is to be noted that Bezbarua made his sincere efforts to store the treasures of the Assamese oral literature by borrowing it to the tales. Even a casual reading of the preface to Burhi Air Sadhu reveals Bezbarua's nationalistic ideals. He says: "As every nation and every country has its own language, in the same way it possesses its own folklore too. As a language sprouts from the very root of the national life of a particular nation, and it justly be regarded as an autobiography of that nation in disguise, in the same way the folklore of a nation may also be regarded as the autobiography in a different disguise. As the footprints of various people, irrespective of educated or uneducated, civilized or uncivilized, wise or fool, get imprinted in the language of a particular nation, in the same way the various traditions, behavioral codes, thought process, speculations of a people, irrespective of caste and creed, get stored in the folklore of a nation. As the study of philology and mythology is important to know the ancient unwritten history of a particular nation, in the same way study of folklore is equally important too." (Nagen Saikia (Ed.)) Bezbaruar Rachanawali, Part- VI, and Page- 127) the quoted lines highlight Bezbarua's sense of national responsibility. These lines ensures the fact that Assam bears her own

language, culture, tradition, and folklore from time immemorial, from which the concept of national identity emerges.

The fact that Bezbarua had to pursue his education in Bengali medium in lieu of Assamese; gave him pain and prick. In this context he wrote in his autobiography thus: "During those days Bengali was considered to be the mother tongue of the Assamese. This language was not an independent one, but was largely subordinate to that of the Bengali language...." (Laxminath Bezbarua: *Mur Jibon Suoron*, Page- 37). It is a fact that the Assamese language was considered to be subordinate to that of the Bengali language those days. In the preface of the *Burhi Aair Sadhu*, Bezbarua comes up with scathing criticism against this false notion: "...no nation of any country has kept such an elevated name as 'Sadhukatha' to its folk tales. The Europeans call it 'folk tales', the Bengalis call it 'rupkatha', or 'asaare golpo'; and no other nation calls it 'sadhukatha' as the Assamese do. The language and the folktales of a nation may be regarded as its bone marrow. Assamese people call language as 'maat', or voice and they call the folktales as 'sadhu katha', still some critics are of the opinion that the Assamese and the Bengali language are one and the same thing." (Nagen Saikia (Ed.) *Bezbaruar Rachanawali*, Part- VI, and Page- 129) Even in the Editorial notes of the celebrated magazine 'Banhi', Bezbarua tried his best to defend the Assamese language against such baseless criticism regarding the origin of the Assamese language.

In the preface to *Burhi Aair Sadhu* Bezbarua examined folk tales from a scientific point of view along with various references to the folklore of foreign countries. In many of the tales included in the collection Bezbarua attempts socio-criticism in the pretext of depiction of the Assamese society. These tales also serve as a mouthpiece against various social ills of the contemporary society. Such a critical voice does not influence in the moral of the tales, but in the very atmosphere it seems inherent.

In course of the tales he satirizes the religious ills, harmful traditions of that remote Assamese society. In the tale 'Sarabjan,' through a character named Foring, Bezbarua exposes the prevailing social prejudices like fortune telling in a satirical manner. In the same manner we may also bring into account a character 'Makhi' in the tale 'Lotkon' who is seen taking advantage of his high caste and tries to live a comfortable life. In addition to that 'Burhi Aair Sadhu' also portrays the rural agricultural life and society of the rustic folk. For example we may get a life-like picture of an old couple who cultivate edible arum in their agricultural field; a character named Champawati guards her paddy field; a frog busy in ploughing; a tiger and a crab are seen tilling land etc. At the same time the collection of tales also displays a picture of the economic scenario of ancient Assam by describing certain class representative characters like the king, merchants, businessmen, farmers, cow rearer, beggars to name a few. These tales also give us a view of the contemporary Assamese society at large along with its follies and foibles; the practice of polygamy, negligence towards the girl child, conflicts between the concubines, ruthless behavior of the step mothers, marriages, religious gatherings, festival celebrations, way of dressing of the ladies, their ornaments, their way of doing household chores etc.

CONCLUSION:

The different facets which are revealed in the preface to 'Burhi Aair Sadhu' testify to the fact that Bezbaruua was such an author who was greatly inspired by nationalism. The tales also reveal his sincere efforts to preserve the heritage of Assamese culture at large. Each of the tales bears token of Assamese cultural identity that, in a different way, highlights Bezbaruua's sense of responsibility towards the Assamese society at large.

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