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LIFE AND WORKS OF BENUDHAR RAJKHOWA: A STUDY

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ABSTRACT

Benudhar Raajkhowa is one of the most important names of the modern Assamese literary field. His time was the last half of 19th century and first half of 20th century. He was continuously a poet, playwright, novelist, author and a translator. He was not only associated himself solely to literature, rather he actively participated in the meetings, associations and various directions of the society. Therefore, it is important to bring his literary and social works in front of the world. Realizing the needs of justification of his entire lifelong meditation upon literature and works that he did for Assam, this research article is prepared.

Keywords: Benudhar Rajkhowa, Society, Literature, Life, Assamese.

INTRODUCTION

The middle of the end of 19th century and the first half the 20th century was not an easy phase for Assam and for India. After the British entered Assam, there were changes in everywhere including Education, Literature and Society. In this time Assam, with India fought together for Independence and many Assamese people sacrificed their life for the country. Those who worked under the British for the situation and earning a living, they also did not allow themselves to hate Assam. One of them is Benudhar Rajkhowa. Rajkhowa was educated by English education and worked under the British, but he performed his duties for the Assamese society, its language and literature. Though his works have been discussed as a playwright, his other literary works are not yet discussed till now.

METHOD AND SOURCES OF RESEARCH

While preparing the discussion of the life and literary works of Benudhar Rajkhowa, the descriptive and analytical method is taken. For the study, information and helps are taken from both primary and secondary sources.

AIM AND IMPORTANCE OF THE STUDY

There is immense contribution of Benudhar Rajkhowa in the field of Assamese society, its language and literature. The research of the life and meditation of the scholars who contributed to important areas like the country, language and literature helps the upcoming generation. The discussion of the life and works of Benudhar Rajkhowa as a key figure of Assamese society is important. The aim of the study is vested in this.

BIRTH, EDUATION AND MARRIED LIFE OF BENUDHAR RAJKHOWA:

One of the prime figures of Assamese society, its language and literature is Benudhar Rajkhowa. He was born in 1872 and died in 1955. The parents of this Assamese worthy son are –Susandaram Rajkhowa and Heerawati Rajkhowa. Benudhar Rajkhowa was born in Khoang, a place near Dibrugarh on 11 December, Wednesday in 1872. The father of Benudhar Rajkhowa worked as a revenue collecting officer in the division of Khoang nearby Dibrugarh. Later he was transferred to Jaipur. His education started in his father's workplace, Jaipur Division. After passing the ME School, he was admitted in the Dibrugarh Govt English High School. He passed entrance examination from that school and took admission in the Presidency College, Calcutta for higher education. But he passed F. A Examination from the City College. Later, He passed B.A from the Ripon College. He was also about to appear in M.A and Law Test. Benudhar Rajkhowa got a job in 1898 and from 3rd January of 1899, he started his service life as a sub deputy collector. In his service time, he was at work in various positions in multiple places. In 1903, he got the status of A.S.O. After that he got positions like E.S.C, Special Land Acquisition Officer, a few days in Guwahati as a Magistrate, Tahsildar (Revenue officer) in the Hajo areas, for the third time as Acting Deputy Commissioner in Jorhat successively and often worked as Senior E.A.C. He was retired as a commissioner of a district on 30th June in 1931.

Benudhar Rajkhowa's married life also began with his education and work in a parallel manner. He married Ratnakumari Baruah, the youngest daughter of Dutiraam Baruah of Dibrugarh in the month of June in 1899. The wife of talented Benudhar Rajkhowa who was firm in his work, Ratna Kumari Baruah was also a woman of beautiful personality. In Later period, she presided over the position of president of 'Assam Mahila Samiti'(Assam Women Association) .They had 13 children . Benudhar Rajkhowa got the opportunity to witness the both good and bad times of the last half of the 19th century and first half of the 20th century of Assam. He was the direct witness of Assam under the rule of British and the struggle for independence in India, the linguistic, social and political side



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of Assam. The adversity of his nation was not far away from his eyes. Possibly, for this reason, he was always a devout of his responsibility and duties. Being satisfied in his works, the British government honored him with the title of 'Raaisahab.'

BENUDHAR RAJKHOWA'S LIFE AND WORKS

Benudhar Rajkhoa loved Assam and the Assamese. He did every possible work for Assam. He did not want to obey the restrictions of anybody while working for the development of the language and literature of Assam. He used to give close attention to literary practice from his school time side by side. While getting education in Calcutta, he acted as an active member of 'Oxomiya Bhaxa Unnati Xadhini Xobha'. His literary works cannot be summarized in a few words. He is continuously a poet, playwright, novelist, lyricist, linguist, author of textbooks, critic, secretary, historian. Moreover, he was a successful translator. While studying in Calcutta, he was associated with A.S.L Club with 'Oxomiya Bhaxa Unnati Xadhini Xobha'. From his college days, he kept a desire in his bosom to do something for his language and literature. In that time, he started to write in the Bengali Newspaper, 'Sanjiboni'. The habit of this literary practice also influenced his education. He also practiced literature in the magazines 'Jonaki' and 'Bijuli'. The respect flowed from his heart for the Assamese language which was in danger in that time. In consequence of that, he was inspired to pursue literary practice in his mother tongue. We can divide his works in different categories for making the study easy. His plays are Seuti Kiron (1894), Deka Gabharu(1889) (With Padmanath Gohain Baruah as Joint) , Durjdhonor Urubhanga(1903), Darbar(1902), Kolijug(1904), Dakhyojogya(1908), Kuri Sotikar Sabhyata(1908), Tini Ghoini (1928), Lokhimi Tirota (1909), Osikshita Ghoini (1912), Bipro Damodor(1917), Suror Sristi(1931), Jompuri(1931), Tuponir Porinaam(1932) .

His books on poem are Pancha Kobita(1895), Chandra Sambhob Kabya(1895), Dexogeet(1899), Asomiya Bhai(1901), Jivan Sandhiya(1929), Dehar Pralay(1930), Xipurir Batori(1929) Punarutthan(1931).

Novel---Mahasati Joymoti(1947).

His folk cultural books are-'Assamese Demonology'(1905) , 'Bihi'(1914), 'Assamese Popular Superstitions'(1920). The textbooks compiled by him are 'Neeti Path' (1889), 'Sahitya Prabesh'(1895), 'Lora Puthi'(1895), 'Leelawati' (Algebra) . One of the important books published by him is 'Asomiya Khandabakya Kosh'(1917). This is the monument of his life. His another book is 'A Companion to Writers in Assam' (1947). Rajkhoa also composed historical books. Those type of books and notes are 'Short Account of Assam'(1915), 'Historical Sketches of Old Assam'(1917), 'A Note on the Miri Tribe in Assam', 'A note on the Deuri Chutiya Tribe in Upper Assam', 'A note on Co Education'. 'Brochure on the Assamese Language'(1898)and 'Notes on the Sylhette Dialect'(1913) are books on language. Rajkhoa is known as a successful translator. His translated books are -'The Holy Namghosa' (1920), 'The Ear Eater'(1920), 'Gunamala'(1923), 'Vipra Damodar'(1922). Instead of all these books, he had written his autobiography. The name of his autobiography is 'Mora Jiwana Dapona'(1961). He also wrote a biography of Srimanata Sankardeva, but that book is known as unpublished.

As associated with various socio-cultural areas, Benudhar Rajkhoa gave his speech in various meetings time to time. It is mentioned earlier that when studying in Calcutta, Benudhar Rajkhoa was a member of A.S.L Club and Oxomiya Bhaxa Unnati Xadhini Xobha . In later time, he was the president of Assam Sahitya Sabha in 1926 which was held at Dhuburi District and there he gave a valuable speech about Assamese language and literature. In 1928, he addressed about Mahasati Joymoti celebrating the Joymoti Festival which was held on the bank of Sivsagar Pukhuri. The four songs about Joymoti and a Akashi geet included in this book are also found in his novel, Mahasati Joymoti. In addition of the speeches, he was the president of 3rd conference of Assam Kachari Yuva Sanmilani in 1929 held at Khoang. In this meeting also, he gave a speech. He wrote article on the magazine like 'Jonaki' and 'Bijuli'. With the literary practice, he was also engaged in the act of editing. He edited the 'Bijuli' Magazine in third year. His books on songs are- 'Baahi' (1906), and 'Soru Lorar Gaan' (1910). 'Asomiya Bhai' (1901) included as poetry book is considered as book of songs in many places. Benudhar Raajkhoa worked for the Assamese language all his life. His literary talent has not been properly evaluated today. In order to get familiar with his language, knowledge and talent we have to study his literary works. In the history of Assamese language and literature, his plays have occupied an important place. The playwright Benudhar Rajkhoa played the role of social reformer. Behind his dramatic composition, the moral ideologies are clearly visible. He excelled in dramatic creation by composing the all types of dramas including social, mythical, comedy etc. Jonaki had given an important platform to him and his contemporary individuals like Lakshminath Bezbaruah, Padmanath Gohainbaruah, Durgaprasad Majindar Baruah, Chandradhar Baruah. In 1889, he composed a play called Deka Gabharu with Padmanath Gohainbaruah. Durjdhonor Urubhanga and Dakhyojogya are two of his mythical dramas. All other plays are social. According to Benudhar Rajkhoa, 'Suror Sristi', 'Darbar', 'Tuponir Porinaam', 'Kolijug', 'Tini Ghoini' are comedies. 'Suror Sristi' is written under the influence of Alibaba and Dukuri Dakaits. 'Seuti Kiron' is the fourth modern Assamese social drama. In this drama, for the first time in Assamese dramatic history the love triangle is seen. 'Kolijug' is the outcome of the joint effort of Benudhar Rajkhoa and Durgaprasad Majindar Baruah. This drama can be called best among all the comedy plays. Benudhar Rajkhoa's plays have some unique features. In his plays, some common features can be seen. The plays have act and scene. But in



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terms of division there are discrepancies in many times. Though he wrote tragedy and comedy plays, he was unable to show his talent equally in both types. According to Satyendra Nath Sarma “In comparison to the tragedies, he has gained some amount of success in composing the comedies.”¹ The dramas show his social reformative perspective. For example, in the play ‘Tini Ghoini’, the playwright has shown the chaotic life due to polygamy. In reference of this play, Sri Harichandra Bhattacharya has said – “The humour of this drama is situational. The main of the dramatist is to show the unhealthy consequences of polygamy”.¹ In his plays, abundance of songs is noticeable. Benudhar Rajkhowa felt the lack of Assamese songs and hoped that through his usage of songs in the plays the lack would be fulfilled.

Benudhar Rajkhowa not only created a movement in the field of drama, his name is important in the field of poetry of 19th and 20th century also. In his book, ‘Asomiya Sahityor Samikhyatmak Itibritta’, Satyendra Nath Sarma has included Benudhar Rajkhowa in poetry as well as in plays. Rajkhowa’s book ‘Panchkabita’ is the collection of five poems. The two poems of the book ‘Jivan Sangeet’ and ‘Dudol Sanya’ are the translations of ‘A Psalm of Life’ by Henry Wordworth Long Fellow and ‘The Two Armies’ of Oliver Wendell Holmes. ‘Chandra Sambhob Kabya’ is recognized as a best book of poem in the history of literature. The book Doshogeeet is the collection of ten poems. From that side, this can be called a book of songs. Another poetry book by Rajkhowa is Asomiya Bhai in which he introduced the pathetic conditions of socioeconomic life of Assamese nation and inspired the Assamese brothers. He shows his real love for the nation by saying that if we don’t give up procrastination, boredom and opium the Assamese nation will be very poor. His quote is relevant present time also. Today, the Assamese people are getting that proof.

The only one novel of Rajkhowa is ‘Mahasati Joymoti’. The novel is historical novel divided in fifteen chapters. The tragic story of Swaradeu of Ahom Empire, Godapani(Godadhar Singha) and Joymoti is described in the novel. In the novel, Rajkhowa has only described the historical events, the introduction of art strategies are not present in the book. But the songs included in the novel increases the beauty of the work.

Benudhar Rajkhowa studied various subjects related to Assamese society and its culture and gathered knowledge widely. In a folk society, people believe in good energy as well as bad energy. In Assamese Demonology, he describes the ghostly spirits which have been occupied a place in Assamese folklore. Similarly in his book ‘Bihu’, Rajkhowa has described about Bihu and Husori in a detailed manner. This book shows his thought-provoking description of how the modern civilization has changed the terminology of Bihu. Another folklore related book of him, ‘Assamese Popular Superstitions’, shows the prejudices or folklores prevailed in Assamese society.

The consciousness and thoughts of Benudhar Rajkhowa who had to educate himself in Bengali Language is praise worthy for the upcoming generation in terms of education. He prepared several textbooks for the Assamese students so that they could learn in their own mother tongue. He wrote ‘Neeti Path’ while he was studying in Calcutta. The short stories included in this book were advisory in nature and it helped the students immensely. Among his two other books, it is known that the ‘Lora Puthi’ was included as a textbook in the primary schools in the early period of 20th Century. ‘Leelawati’ another book by him is still in unpublished condition.

Benudhar Rajkhowa’s one of the most important books ‘Asomiya Khandyabakyo Kosha’ is considered as a milestone of his whole life. Rajkhowa collected phrase and idiom which is one of the resources of Assamese literature and they are preserved in this book. There are 2387 phrases in this well accepted book. The meaning of these phrases is not similar to that of earlier and that is why it can be said perhaps Rajkhowa got that kind of prevalent explanation at that particular time. Benudhar Rajkhowa’s ‘A Companion to writers in Assam’ is a noteworthy book which was published by Dibrugarh Satra Bhandar. The book has been helping each and every individual who wants to use Assamese language correctly. The book is like a dictionary. Moreover, another treasury ‘Sangshipto Asomiya Obhidhan’ is unpublished.

The feature of the published historical books of Rajkhowa is that these are written in English. Perhaps he chose English as a language to write to let the other people to know about Assam. ‘Short Account of Assam’ was published by Assam Commercial Company. There are descriptions in the book from the old age to the advent of British and its aftermath. ‘Historical Sketches of Old Assam’ is also published by Assam Commercial Company. The writer has described the history on the basis of proverbs. The book is not like other history. His ‘A note on the Miri Tribe in Assam’, ‘A Note on the Deuri Chutia Tribe in Upper Assam’ and ‘A note on Co Education’ are three unpublished notes.



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Benudhar Rajkhowa introduced various directions of Assamese language in his books ‘Brochure on the Assamese Language’ and ‘Notes on the Sylhette Dialect’. In the first book, he has introduced the antiquity and heritage of Assamese language. Like ‘A few remarks on the Assamese Language and on Vernacular Education in Assam’ of Anandaram Dhekial Phukon, this book of Rajkhowa is also important which is related to language. The lover of Assamese language, Benudhar Rajkhowa has tried to say that the Assamese language is not a philological corruption of Bengali and it is an autonomous language. In ‘Notes on the Sylhette Dialect’, he said that Sylhette language is a part of the Assamese language. He gave a comparative discussion of the intimate relation of Assamese, Bengali and Sylhette language with examples.

The field of Assamese literature is rich from earlier period, but without translation people of other language cannot study the literature of Assam. That is why, Benudhar Rajkhowa took the shape of a translator. Being expert in English, Benudhar Rajkhowa translated the ‘Namghosa’ of Madhavdeb as ‘The Holy Nam-Ghosa’, The ‘Kaankhoa’ of Sridhar Kandali as ‘The Ear Eater’, ‘The Damodar Vipra’ narrative and ‘Gunamala’ of Sankardev as ‘Vipra Damodar’ and ‘Gunamala’. The simple translation of theoretical books of Neo Vaishnavism is not an easy job. It was done so that the people outside of Assam can read those texts. Rajkhowa translated the books by not changing the content, he kept the beauty of the original text as unharmed. In this context, his expertise and occupation in English language can be understood.

Benudhar Rajkhowas was not tired of working all his life for his motherland, Assam and Assamese people. He wrote an autobiography collecting his life events. His autobiography ‘Mora Jiwana Dapona’ was published in 1960 posthumously. The autobiography includes various events of his life, works done for the country and his sacrifice. The book shows the sacrifices of Rajkhowa who managed to struggle for the nation and language though he was working under the British. The autobiography, despite of being a collection of his life events is recognized as a readable book.

While he was associated with various meetings and associations of Assam, he used to give valuable speech for Assam and Assamese people. He always fought for preserving the authenticity and autonomy of the Assamese language. In 1926, he gave a presidential speech about language in the Annual Conference of Assam Sahitya Sabha held at Dhuburi District. Many Bengali gentlemen left the meeting when he said that Assamese is not a philological corruption of Bengali, it is an autonomous language. Before the birth of Assam Sahitya Sabha, many intellectuals like Benudhar Rajkhowa, Satyanath Bora, Durganath Sangkakaty, Taffajjul Hussain, Nabinchandra Bordoloi were planning to establish an institution for the sake of survival of Assamese language and culture. Benudhar Rajkhowa accepted the headship of editing of the Bijuli Magazine from 1890 to 1892 who earlier used to write article and drama in Jonaki Magazine.

CONCLUSION

Benudhar Rajkhowa was a real Assamese person. He did not adopt the foreign lifestyles though he worked under the British for a long time. The way he satisfied the British with his English education, devotion and close attention to work, similarly he worked for his motherland with all his energies. It is already mentioned that being satisfied in his work; the British government awarded him the title of ‘Raaisahab’. He thought of all including education, literature and culture. He gave emphasis on establishing schools and organized various meetings and exhibitions. He tried to erase prejudices, ill customs from the society directly or indirectly through literature. His effort of establishing Dibrugarh Girls’ High School shows that he realized the need of women’s education. His patriotism is found in his literary works. His love for nation is in abundance in his songs and poems. He wanted to introduce the cultural and literary richness of Assam in front of the world. He did not think of himself only as an Assamese but also Indian. The battle of surviving the existence of the nation that Rajkhowa fought in that time, is still the fight of each and every real patriotic. The proper evaluation of the literary works of the tireless devotee of language and literature, Benudhar Rajkhowa has not been yet done. The detailed study and discussion about him are the most important subject of present times. The right evaluation and publicity of his talent will be possible through this.

¹Sarma, Satyendranath. Asomiya Sahityor samikhyatmak Itibritta. 2009. P. 342

²Bhattacharya, Sri Harichandra. Asomiya Natya Sahityar Jilingoni. 2013. P. 254



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