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A Sense of Bodo Identity and Socio-political Issues in the Works of Select Bodo Writers

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Abstract:

The Bodo people have faced enormous plight, problem and challenges in their journey to progress and development. All these struggles of the Bodos have been represented in the in many literary works of the Bodo writers like Aniram Basumatary and others. The select play is a prominent play by Basumatary. It is a historical drama that reflects the Bodo legend Gambari. In this play, Basumatary depicts the protagonist, Gambari as a brave, bold, energetic, skilful, and a patriot. In the world of patriarchy, she is projected as an archetypal supreme lady. The setting of this play takes place during the pre-independence era when Bhutanese rulers interfered in the socio-political and economical deal in the kingdom of the bodos. Thus, I find the involvement of the Bodowomen in the war field shoulder to shoukder with males.

Keywords: War, History, Power, Culture, Legend, Nationalism.

Introduction:

The Bodo-Kacharis are numerically the largest tribes among the plains Tribal Communities of Assam. Bodos are the race of the Mongoloid stock. They are the ethnic groups and inhabitants of the North-Eastern region of India with their distinctive culture, language,

religion and literature. These people are known Bodos or Boros in the Brahmaputra valley, and Meches in lower Assam and West Bengal. Thus, Bodos are living scattered across the North-Eastern region. They mainly dominate the regions starting from Dhubri and Kokrajhar district, Goalpara district in the west to the Dhemaji sub-division of Lakhimpur to the east. The Bodos are mainly Agrarian based society. For living, they mostly rear pigs, fowls, cattle etc. Being an Agrarian based society, they mostly prefer living away from towns and cities. Therefore, they maintain less or minimum connection with the advanced tribes. Though the folk segment of the Bodos is rich whereas the written form of Bodo Literature is novel form of development. The Bodo short story was become popular as a genre in the early twentieth century. Ishaan Muchahary was the pioneer and his short story titled “Abari” is the first Bodo short story which was published in 1930 in the journal ‘Hathorkihala’ edited by Pramod Chandra Brahma. Over the years, it is seen that many Bodo writers took up pen in this genre. They are- Nil Kamal Brahma, Monoranjan Lahari, Janil Kr. Brahma, Katindra Swargiyari, Rita Boro etc. The Bodo short story mainly centres on social issues, sense of identity, political upheavals, communal riot, insurgency, conflict of modernity and tradition etc. Katindra Swargiary’s short story “Hongla Pandit” can be considered as a mouthpiece which showcases deteriorating of the Bodo tradition with the influence of hybridisation and modernisation. In this text, the protagonist Hongla is projected as an escapist since he tries to discard and never heeds the real and prevalent issues of the Bodos. He holds the position of the village headman but escapes from his duty. Hongla also rather does not like to mingle with the ordinary village people. He always enjoys exaggerating his position. In the end of the story, his arrogant nature brings misfortune into his life. It left dumbstruck seeing that his literate son joins the underground outfit in the name of the Bodo nationalism. In the beginning line, we witness the supreme power of the ‘centre’. Indian forces raided Hongla pandit’s house on the 30th Sept. 1993. Unfortunately, both

Hongla Pandit and his wife Delaishri were punished by Indian Army for they could not tell about their son whereabouts.

A line comes from Pandit and says that-

“...better for me to die than live in this world.”

Katindra’s protagonist, Hongla Pandit whose real name is Haragobinda is a retired teacher. He prefers to be called ‘pandit’ instead of ‘teacher’ or ‘master’.

Another short story entitled “Jido November’s Aronnai” by Janil Kr. Brahma reflects certain plights during Accreditation of the Bodo Literary Forum namely Bodo Sahitya Sabha on 16th Nov. 1963. Here, the protagonist Gangu Master is the prototype leaders who actively participates in the Movement for Separate state in the ground level but never get recognised and considered his contribution. His wife Rangao sometimes teases him for he was never felicitated with an Aronnai. It is a symbol of pride for the Bodos. Therefore, in both the short stories, we come across the reflections of the Bodo nationalism.

Aims and Objectives:

Through this paper, I would like to explore the angst or anxiety of the Bodos with respect to the Bodo Nationalism as reflected in the select Bodo short stories.

Methodology:

This paper is based on secondary sources like books in print forms. I agree that the information provided is tentative and not sufficient. Therefore, anybody interested can continue for further research.

Discussion:

Basumatary in the prescribed texts, highlights that both male and female equally contribute to society as well as to a nation. It is seen that one can also read the influence of transcultural impact in the play. The playwright talks centrally about the Bodo woman's Gambari, a legend.

The play reflects the historical background of the Bodos regarding the fight against the forces of the Bhutanese. Gambari becomes the pillar for the Bodos to stand against the Bhutia and is symbolised as an inspiration. Therefore, as a historical play it is based on the historical narrative. This paper also examines and analyses the ideas of nationalism of the Boro movement and nationalism.

In Brahma's story, it is seen that the existing tradition and spirit of Bodo nationalism are reflected. For them, the community is the supreme and to work for the sake of it is a sacred work and a sacrifice gifted by God. The protagonist speaks to his wife-

"...not everyone gets the opportunity to serve the community"

The story also tells another dark story of the Bodo Literary revolution that is a sort of anxiety for every household of the Bodos which is distinctly shown in "Hongla Pandit". Since, the leaders or the dedicated workers keep busy going to the meetings they cannot give time to their family. This tragedy is projected with a taste of fun in the conversation between Gangu and his wife. Thus, women in the house also play great role in the upliftment of a particular community. We therefore find the equal contribution of both men and women in the movement of the Bodos whether literary movement or a separate statehood. On the other side there's the anxiety in the Bodo nationalism that the men who sacrificed his entire life is recognised less than the man in authority. To substantiate this I would like to quote below-

“The pig prepared the field and the dog had the last laugh...”

This line is spoken by Gangu’s brother-in-law because Gangu was not felicitated by an Aronai, and his share of Aronai was given to the Sericulture minister Mr. Bumgula Wary. Thus, in this story Janil Kr. Brahma talks about identities with respect to literature, culture, language etc. Aronai is a Bodo traditional scarf which is used as a marker of dignity in Bodo society.

In Swargiary’s “Hongla Pandit”, we get to read how a well learned man turns to a rebel. Hongla pandit’s son Iragdao has completed his MA, but after seeing the deteriorating condition of the Bodo villages he grew sentimental and later opted to join the underground outfit. With the passing of years, he gradually realises that his degree will not help to eradicate the sorrows of the entire Bodo people. We also read the pathetic scenes of torture made by the Indian Army to Iragdao’s family. We also find issues of the inter-caste marriage reflected in this story. The daughter of Hongla Pandit, Delaisri marries to a Bihari Man who was from Bihar, later she learnt that he was already a married man and had three children by that time Delaisri was already a pregnant lady. Pandit’s another son also marries a girl who was a Bengali Muslim. After seeing all this tragedy, Iragdao decided to join the underground outfit. Such problems of society can be considered as the main causes of the Bodo youths for joining in the underground outfits. But, the social organisations like ABSU, ABWWF etc. tried to carry out the democratic movement to put an end of the Arms revolution and followed Gandhiji’s mantra of non-violence. Iragdao, son of Hongla Pandit wishes to see freedom of the Bodo society. He represents many Bodo youths who sacrificed their lives for their community. This short story of Swargiary highlights the social realities of the Bodos. Many movements were occurred in the name of building identity of Bodos in the world. The 16th November is one of them which has been celebrated as the Bodo Literary Day. This sense of identity building among Bodos is juxtaposed with various issues such as hybridity, identity and nationalism in the select short stories. The Bodos have their own identity, culture, language and religion. The character,

Gangu tried to showcase the need of preservation of ethnicity and indigenous culture for the future generation. In the name of modernity and inter-caste marriage, the aura of them has been diminishing day-by-day. It is a threat to the Bodo society. In this drama, we can also find the foreigners or 'other' versus the 'Natives', Bodo people. Interestingly, in the high time of the debate of the men and women inequality, Basumatary's Gambari is reflected as a model or '*icon of female resistance*'. He further explores the potential of women and their bonding with social and political issues and also in other communication process. It is seen in the bonding between Gambari her assistant Mwnbari. Their relationship can substantiate with one of the dialogues delivered by Gambari where she speaks to her female patriots-

"Friends! Maibari, In order to protect our own kingdom and tribe there should have equal participation of both men and women. Come let's all stand hand in hand." (p6, Gambari sikhla)

This story deals with the regions of the northern part of the Mighty Brahmaputra especially the district of Goalpara. Large number of the Bodo people hailed in this part since the time immemorial. And the districts like Bijni and other like Jalpaiguri was under the rule of the Bodo emperors. There were also the other legends like sikhna Jwhwlao, Maniram Dewan, Birgwsri and so on. The legend Birgwsri has been beautifully projected in the work of the prominent writer Mamoni Raisom Goswami titled *Thang Fhakhri Tahcildarar Tamar Tarowal*. This novel of Goswami is centrally based on the Bodo woman Birgwsri. Its themes centre on the pre-independence socio-political and economic conditions of the Bodo people in the regions of West-Bengal at Bijni bordering area of Indo-Bhutan. Again, Basumatary's Gambari is the assistant of Birgwsri. They had two horses, one is red and the other is black. They used to sit on the horse back and collect taxes and carry it the Tehsildar. They were so brave and killed many British or the colonisers. Here, we find the intruder of the third party the British. One day, when the two legends were returning back from the Queen a few British soldiers patrolled on their way and secretly attacked them and Gambari jumped in front of the

bullet to save Birgwsri. Basumatary's play *Gambari sikhla* is centrally based on the Bodo women and the participation and contribution of Bodo women to sue away the Britishers.

The sources of writing my paper are based on secondary source of the books and magazines in print and online text. The very aim of my paper is to highlight the projection of the legend Gambari as the emancipation of women in the Bodo society. Anybody interest can take up for further study.

Like other tribes the Bodo also have many legends male and female. The tales of these legends has been spread orally from generation to generation. Thus, the exact place of birth and death of most of these is not known. The play shows us the pathetic conditions of the bodo people of their oppression by the Bhutanese soldiers. Here, we find the *transboundary* disturbance. This problem of boundary and nation and identity is still existence in the world. We can cite the long boundary chaos between China and India in the states of Arunachal and Ladakh. The people those are in this hotspot are never protected either by the own leaders or the host country. Similarly, in most of the time Bodo '*identity*' is always being questioned. Their identity is always hidden and exploited in the name of 'vote bank'. The play also proves the indiscrimination between men and women in the tribal society. The 'sati' system is also never seen in the Bodo society. They are still untouched by many social issues of segregation in account of caste system. The Bodos rely for their livelihood on the agriculture. They have patriarchy mode of society most of the tribes in India. They are the worshipers of '*Bathou*' religion. They are still dwelling in the rural area, but nowadays many of them begin to shift to the urban. Today, the Bodos are demanding back their land which was annexed and conquered by the Bhutanese and later by the British and at present it is under the authority of the government of India.

In scene V, Basumatary render a weakness of the Bodo leaders to be annexed by the Bhutan army. The dialogue of the two forces is-

Khampaa (Assistant general) speaks-

How can we conquer the large Bodo kingdom at a time?

Garpaa(General replies) (p8. Gambari Sikhlaa)

Kampaa, you fool. The Bodo leaders never live in unity and integrity. They never obey to one another. The bodo leaders invariably stay isolated with separate parties.

This historical play can undoubtedly be compared with the present political scenario of the Bodos. The leaders are always separated to one another whether the patriots, socialists, politicians and the intellectuals. But, the brevity of Gambari has no question. Thus, she speaks to her fellow women-

Until I live in Goalpara district I am the Mother of this region.

The image of a mother and her motherly figure can be seen in the drama. She can also be compared with *Mother Courage* of the play *Mother Courage and Her Children* by Bertolt Brecht. Both the plays have the war settings and in the protagonists we find the fine line that '*Mother is Supreme*'. This historical narrative has become a spirit of inspiration to the Modern youths. In the contemporary time the Bodo women participate in politics and other social endeavour. They are fighting against evil issues like-gambling, corruption, liquor consumption, polygamy etc. Many bodo women sacrificed their lives in the evil hands of the Indian forces. In the name of ASFPA (Armed Special Force Power Act) many innocent Bodo women molested and even killed by the armed force. Thus, the indigenous Bodo people are always oppressed and suppressed by the authority. The Bodo culture also reflected in the play so far. The liquor consumption is very much prevalent in the Bodo society. Many of the families run

by selling local liquor called *Jou*. The very character of the play Hadungra is shown as a heavy consumer. Thus, many youths of the Bodo stay idle and pass most of the time simply consumption of *Jou* (Rice beer). Their life expectancy was threatened and it became a vital tension in the very high time of the Bodo nationalism or the Movement of separate statehood. Noticing it, the Bodo women sorted a solution to recover their brothers and resurrect them from downfall and gave them a new hope. Therefore, whenever pangs of anxiety approaches the women always stood against the atrocities. The youth are always shown the path of righteous by them. Thus, the first Prime Minister of India appealed all the Indian women in the eve of the Independence-

To awaken the people, it is the women who must be awakened.(net. Time-7.22pm)

When women moves forward, the family moves, the village moves and the nation moves (net.Time-7.22pm)

We cannot imagine the life without a mother or women. In the end of the play the entire men applaud Gambari. They speak-

She left back the sign of inspiration. It is the inspiration for the protection of the tribe and the nation. This inspiration is none but Gambari, the Lady. In the name of Mother Gambari and becoming the follower of her steps let's protect and spread her name and fame in the world. In the play, the dramatist has been praised the legend Gambari and her sacrifices for her own people throughout the play.

BODOLAND MOVEMENT

Whenever we talk about Bodoland Movement, we must mention the name of the father of the Bodos, Upendra Nath Brahma. Because he was the pioneer of the stir of the Bodoland Movement. All Bodo Students' Union (ABSU) was founded on the 15th of Feb., 1967. The 29th

and 31st annual conventions were organised in Rowta under the district of Udalguri. During these conventions, Upendra Nath Brahma was appointed as the vice-president of ABSU. Later he became the fourth president of the organisation. Most importantly, the 18th annual convention in Rowta led the Bodo society into a new era. As soon as Brahma became the president, he took some crucial steps to build the Bodo society a Master race. The Bodos lost their own kingdom and during the Post-Independence era they were set to fight back to restore their kingdom under the leadership of Bodofa (father of Bodos). In the entire Northeast of India, many Tribal people were given separate states, but the Bodos were left deprived till-date. The Tribal Belts and Blocks of the Bodo inhabited regions were encroached by the other tribes. The ultimate dream of the Bodos remain unfulfilled till today. Hence, they continuously work for promoting unity and integrity among them to spread a sense of hope and belongingness. According to Bodofa, the 'Bodoland Movement' could be the sole reason in order to restore peace and harmony in the Bodoland. Thus, he said-

"The land is which we live is our Land and this land we've inherited from our ancestors. The name of this land is Bodoland."

By holding the position of the president, Upendra Nath Brahma tried to eradicate the poverty from the Bodo society. He could realise for the survival of the community the growth and development of language and culture is much crucial so he decided to work over them. For the first time, he took a historic decision during the open session of the annual convention held in Kokrajhar on 2nd March, 1987. In the same year the Bodos demanded for Union Territory. Since, then the movement began and never stop. Gradually under the leadership of Bodofa the son of the Bodos (Bodofisaafwr) called for Hunger strike, Mass rally, Road blockade, Ban etc. and raised a stir against the state and the central govt. From 1986 – 1990 there was a continuous movement and it tied up harmoniously the entire Bodo community of Assam. At every heart lit up the spark of the race. There was a tripartite talk with Assam govt., Central and the Bodo

representatives (ABSU). As a result the BAC accord was done on 20 Feb., 1998. On behalf of Assam govt. KS Rao, Additional chief secretary, from ABSU, President Sansuma Khungur and Secretary Rabiram Narzari and from BPAC Subhas Basumatari were present during the agreement. Again, from central govt., Rajesh Pailot, Ministry of state, Ministry of Home Affairs were present. The then CM of Assam Heteshwar Saikia too signed in the agreement. This demand was ended up in BSF Guest House of Guwahati Airport.

Unfortunately, it was sorrowful that Bodofa Upendranath Brahma couldn't sign on the agreement. Since he was ill and bed-ridden and left us on 1st May, 1990. But, it was made possible solely by his leadership of the movement. According to the agreement, the northern part of the mighty Brahmaputra where hails majority of the Bodo people was created as Bodo Autonomous Council (BAC). Sansuma Kh. Baiswmuthiari was appointed as the representative of the council. But, it couldn't fulfil the needs of the society. The movement continued later.

Conclusion:

Through this paper, I tried to bring out the anxiety in the Bodo nationalism besides how hybridity has affected to some extent in losing the sentiments and feelings among the people. In the stories, we also come across the spirit of sacrifice to gain identity. These works bring into focus many issues of the Bodos. They can also be considered as mouthpieces for demonstrating the reinforcing every aspect of the Bodo culture. Though Bodo short stories are still in the stage of developing, but they are slowly attaining popularity among the readers. For instance, the cited short stories reflect the social realities of the contemporary Bodo society. These select short stories reveal the tension and crisis of the middle class and the atrocities and anxieties of the life of the Bodo society. Basumatary implements various songs and music in the play. These give a sort of local taste in the play. It also highlights the rootedness of the Bodos in their land. The names of the characters of these stories also carry a distinctive sense

of locality in sound and taste. As a historical play, it narrates the historical narrative of the Bodos along with humour and fun. Therefore, we never feels boring or tasteless as we read the play or the story. Through this paper, I would like to explore the angst or anxiety of the Bodos with respect to the Bodo nationalism as reflected in the play. While talking about Bodo identity and history of struggle for existence, we must mention the following words of the Bodofa (Father of Bodos), Upendranath Brahma-

“The Land in which we live is our Land and this land we’ve inherited from our ancestors. The name of this Land is Bodoland.”

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