



PORTRAYAL OF WOMEN IN ASSAMESE SHORT STORIES: A STUDY FROM SELECTED SHORT STORIES OF ASOMIYA HANDPICKED FICTIONS

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Abstract - Asomiya Handpicked Fictions (Katha Book), a collection of 18 Assamese short stories, belongs to North-East Indian Literature. North-East India comprises eight states, such as, Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram, Tripura, and Sikkim. Each state has rich cultural heritage and unique identity. The literary works from North-East India have always been associated with different kinds of themes based on the diversities of its people, culture, land, and society. Along with other literary genres, like novel, poetry, essay, the short story is also a platform for the writers for throwing light on various aspects of North-East Indian society. This article has made an attempt to discuss on the portrayal of women in Assamese short stories, through the study of selected short stories from Asomiya Handpicked Fictions

keywords - North-East India, Assamese Short story, Portrayal of Women

Introduction:

Translated into English from Assamese each story of Asomiya Handpicked Fictions depicts the picture of the Assamese society and its culture and tradition.

Assamese short stories were originated in Jonaki, the second Assamese magazine published in 1889. Lakshminath Bezbaruah is considered as the 'father of Assamese short story'. In Asomiya Handpicked Fictions, the authors are not only concerned with violence but also the issues of displacement, cultural conflict, the lives of people both in rural and urban Assam and its beyond.

However, in order to discuss the portrayal of women, this paper has focused on the short stories, such as, Arupa Patangia Kalita's 'The Invitation'(translated by Arunabha Bhuyan), Indira Goswami's "The Bride"(translated by Liza Das), Harekrishna Deka's "Guilt"(translated by Mitra Phukan), and Sarat Chandra Goswami's "Moina"(Gayatri Bhattacharyya).

Methodology:

The data are collected from secondary source.

Portrayal of Women in Assamese Short Stories:

Each of the stories, selected from Asomiya Handpicked Fictions, has different women characters which are presented as victim of violence and patriarchal society. No doubt, the women are also pictured as projection of cultural signifiers.

Arupa Patangia's "The Invitation" the story of a woman whose values and ideals clashed terribly with the reality around her. She watches helplessly as all the members of her family behave in ways she cannot reconcile herself to. Sarmani is the protagonist of the story, whose life totally transforms after her marriage. However, the real name of the protagonist is not mentioned, but she is called here as 'Sarmani' as her husband's surname is Sarma.

In the story we also get a glimpse of Sarmani's life before marriage. She belonged to a well cultured Chakravarty family. Through her character, the author represents a cultural belief that the eldest daughter is to be married off because it is feared that she would stand in the ways of her siblings. Because Sarmani's plain look, her father feared that she would bring such problems in the family, and hence she was married to Sarma, a businessman. It was Sarmani's father who had set up Sarma's house as well as his business which was destroyed firstly by Sarma, and later by their(Sarma and Sarmani) grown up son and as a result they became poor .

Despite of Sarmani's quiet and decent behaviour, her husband and son are narrated as complete opposite characters. She is tortured mentally and becomes the victim of violence that is taking place at her home.

Sarmani had a 'sarai' (a kind of handicraft item made of brass metal), the last precious thing brought with her from her father's home. The 'sarai' symbolises the Assamese culture. She protects the 'sarai' like a mother sheltering her baby from the enemy. But her elder son wanted

to take away the 'sarai' too from her for gifting it to Sub Deputy Collector's wife in the hope of getting a job without considering his mother's emotion attached to it. Sarmani's daughter also had opposite character from her mother and fond of western culture and outfit.

However, Sarmani does not get any love or respect in her life from her family members and dies at the end of the story. She is the representation of many victimized women of Assamese patriarchal society.

In "The Bride", Indira Goswami depicts the life of woman before marriage in conservative and patriarchal Assamese family as well as society. Rukmini, the protagonist of the story is the reflection of annoying moments traditional Assamese brides face, before they are selected by the bridegroom's family. The author delineates the emotions and reactions of Rukmini, a girl whose joy at being betrothed is about to be snatched away by cruel destiny. Rukmini is young woman who has always been hoping to become a bride. But ironically because of her unattractive looks she is rejected and insulted many times. She is betrayed by her faith as she was about to marry Haren, the only person willing to marry her. In the story, Rukmini can be considered as a powerful cultural metaphor. In Hindu mythology, Rukmini was the wife of Lord Krishna. The protagonist although has a vast difference in looks, has some psychological similarities with the mythological Rukmini. Initially, she was in the wrong notion of thinking herself as beautiful as Rukmini. But later she is made realise about her ugliness by the society. However she is a determined woman and begins to stop thinking about her beauty aspect. She gradually believes that someday she will also become a bride. However, unlike "The Bride", Harekrishna Deka's "Guilt" presents a totally different type of woman character. In Guilt, the writer depicts the female protagonist Durgeswari as a vegetable vendor, who responds unexpectedly to a traumatic event that occurs in front of her eyes to the amazement of the police officer who have taken her as a witness. She is a kind of woman who always gets lost in her thoughts. A reminiscence of the past begins to haunt her when she witnessed the murder in the railway track or be it the lifeless head of the bull in the 'puja mandope'(a place of worship). After the railway incident, she sees the image of the severed heads madly dancing around in front of her eyes which makes her dizzy.

We get a glimpse of Durgeswari's past life through her memory. She was a victim of violence and patriarchy. Her husband used to beat and torture her.

Nevertheless, she usually gazes at the horrific representation of Mahisassur. But her remembrance makes her look at the goddess. In the story she symbolises the 'Hindu goddess Durga', because like goddess Durga who killed Mahisassur, she also chopped off her husband's head and killed him. However that incident constantly haunts Durgeswari which leads her to imprisonment as she confusingly relates herself with murder in railway track and blurts out 'Yes, yes, I killed him! I killed him!'

Interestingly in "Moina", Sarat Chandra Goswami portrays a painful story that movingly recounts the plight of a woman who loses everybody (valuable in her life) to the implacable hands of death. The story is in the first person narrator and in a confessional mode. The protagonist is well pictured as a woman who is solely devoted to her husband. We see her becoming emotionally attached to the 'Myna' (a bird) after her husband and son's death. The narrator/protagonist and the bird become symbolic to each other. Back with her parents, the 'Myna' becomes her only compassion. In fact, the bird (Myna) becomes the object of all her love and affection. However, as mentioned above, her destiny plays cruelly with her heart and hence the bird's company is also short lived as it gets killed. The narrator becomes helpless at the hands of death which snatched away all her loved ones. Thus the misfortune of the unnamed woman narrator is well pictured in this short story of Sarat Chandra Goswami.

Conclusion:

To conclude, we can say that the Assamese short stories are the image or picture of North-East India, especially the Assam and life of Assamese people. Through the study of these short stories we can see that the lives of women are not so easy being victimized in conservative, and patriarchal attitude of society of Assam as well as North-East India. Meanwhile, the women are portrayed as the symbol of love and strength. They are also projected as representation of their culture.

References:

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