



Key Features And Elements Of Romanticism In Rajanikanta Bordoloi's *Miri Jiyori*

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Abstract

The 'Jonaki era' is referred to as the age of Romanticism in Assamese Literature. The renowned pioneers of Assamese romantic novels are Lakshminath Bezbaruah, Padmanath Gohain Baruah and Rajanikanta Bordoloi. Among all, Bordoloi is regarded as the most significant in Assamese novels. Rajanikanta Bordoloi was a prominent literary figure of Assamese literature. His first novel *Miri Jiyori* (1894) is an early romantic novel of Assamese literature. The novel *Miri Jiyori* illustrates the themes of love, passion, emotion, hate, death and tragedy. The novel also celebrates indigenous culture, human life, imagination, emotion and beauty of nature. The influence of significant English Romanticists like William Wordsworth, Oliver Goldsmith is directly evident in the novel *Miri Jiyori*. This novel is a romance where a young Mishing couple named Jonki and Panei struggle for fulfilling their love. It is a social novel which poignantly represents the culture and ethnicity of Mishing community. This paper will explore the features and elements of Romanticism in terms of themes, literary devices etc. in this select literary work of Assamese literature.

Key Words- Romanticism, Assamese literature, personification, aesthetic, love, nature, woman, romance.

Introduction

Prior to Rajanikanta Bordoloi, the Assamese novelists' romantic literary representation such as Lakshminath Bezbaruah, Padmanath Gohain Baruah's works consist of historical context with identical protagonists which are traditionally convenient to the then contemporary era. Their novels like *Podum Konwari* (1890), *Bhanumoti* (1891) and *Lahori* (1892) are not completely independent of social, literary and cultural temperament of the earlier age. These three novels are more historical than romantic although it embodies the concept of love. In terms of romantic writing of Assamese literature, Tilottama Misra in her essay "Early Asamiya Novels: New Genre, Traditional Mindset and Changing Perspectives" asserts,

The inability of the early novelists of Assam to go beyond the bounds of their class and caste boundaries and to present bold and realistic pictures of the lives of ordinary folk, is thus the greatest weakness of these novels (18).

Misra also underlines that inspite of having elements of 'romantic love and courtship' in Assamese cultural practices such as 'Bihu songs and dances', the early Assamese novelists were incapable of in eloquent expression of romantic love in their writings.

However, the novelist Rajanikanta Bordoloi, often termed as Walter Scott of Assam, pioneered the treatment of romantic elements in novels in an innovative way unlike his predecessors. The romantic traits of literature such as individualism and artistic freedom of Bordoloi have been reflected in his romantic novel *Miri Jiyori*. Also, changes are found to be seen in terms of theme, characterization and expression which are evident in the novel. The novelist has presented a tragic love story within the backdrop of rural tribal life of Miri (Mishing) community. The novel carries several other features of Romanticism which will be discussed below.

Objectives

The aim of this paper is to study the features of Romanticism in the novel *Miri Jiyori* by Rajanikanta Bordoloi. This essay will also explore beginning of Romanticism in Assamese literature especially in the genre of novels.

Methodology

This study will incorporate two methods- descriptive and analytical methods.

Analysis

The Romantic era of Assamese literature began after the publication of Assamese magazine 'Jonaki' in the year 1889. For this, the Assamese Romantic era is also termed as Jonaki era. The first edition, edited by Chandrakumar Agarwala, the magazine 'Jonaki' had paved the way for Romantic sensibility in every genre of Assamese literature. At that time, the Assamese writers got influenced by English romantic writings of Wordsworth, Shelley, Keats etc but did not attempt a blind imitation of those English Romanticists. New thinking was added to Assamese literature with new techniques and themes. The Assamese lyricists, poets, novelists and writers started writing on the themes of nature, aesthetic beauty, feelings and emotion, human behaviours, morality, life of common men by maintaining the originality of Assamese language and culture. Although before the arrival of the 'Jonaki', the narrative of romance and other romantic elements were found partially in the early novels of Assamese literature but were basically in historical or other contexts. Eventually, romantic novels of Assamese literature flourished as a significant genre in the Jonaki era. Even the novels as a genre also developed supremely only in the Jonaki Era and afterwards. The significant novelist of this era are Lakshminath Bezbaruah, Padmanath Gohain Baruah and Rajanikanta Bordoloi.

Among all, Bordoloi is regarded as the most significant pioneer of Romanticism in Assamese novels. Due to his immense contribution to Assamese literature through novels, Bordoloi is popularly known as 'Upanyash Samrat'. His novels are *Miri Jiyori* (1894), *Monumoti* (1900), *Rongili* (1925), *Nirmal Bhakat* (1927), *Rahdoi Ligiri* (1930), *Thamba-Thoibir Sadhu* (1932). Except *Miri Jiyori*, all other novels are historical on the whole, having limited romantic expressions in the narrative. Bordoloi's *Miri Jiyori*, a romantic novel, is considered as "the most enduring romances of Assamese literature" (Natarajan, 28). This novel unfolds several literary elements of Romanticism if we thoroughly look at the themes and elements of the novel.

The central theme of *Miri Jiyori* is the theme of romantic love. *Miri Jiyori* presents a tragic love story of two passionate lovers Jonki and Panei who belong to the Mishing tribe of Assam. They had to struggle many obstacles and social prejudice for their love and eventually met their tragic end of death. As Jonki was an orphan, he was deprived of parental love. In his whole life only Panei loved him and later Dalimi offered affection and respect to him. Another male character of the novel Kumud, the son of a Gum also showed romantic interest towards Panei and got married to her without her consent. Kumud's marital companionship with Panei was a miserable failure as it was based on materialistic considerations without presence of true affection and interest. The theme of romantic love is depicted through another character of the novel also which is Dalimi. She selflessly loved Jonki but could not be able to get his interest back towards her. The theme of familial love is also reflected in the text. Panei, a lovely daughter of Tamed and Niroma. As she was the only daughter of her parents, she was brought up by them with utmost love and care till her youth. However, her parents did not support her in her romantic affair with Jonki. Although, love is the central theme of the novel, it could not conquer materialistic interest, social hierarchies and evils of human society. Jonki and Panei fought for fulfilling their love but these two young and innocent beings became the victim of tragic death.

The other element of romantic literature is representation of nature. Significantly, nature or elements of nature is exquisitely presented in the novel. The beauty of nature is glorified by Bordoloi by using poetic lines of the great English Romantic writers like William Wordsworth and Oliver Goldsmith. While describing the alluring beauty of Subansiri river, Bordoloi quoted a stanza of Wordsworth's poem named "Lines Written While Sailing In A Boat At Evening"-

How richly glows the waters breast-
Before us, tinged with evening hues
While facing thus crimson west-
The boast her silent coursepursues
And see how dang baskward stream
A little moment past so smiling

The narrative of the novel is set in a small Miri village on the bank of Subansiri river which full of natural beauty. Bordoloi has described wild and beautiful aspects of nature in the text. This implies how Assamese rural life is deeply associated with nature. Glorification of nature which is a major elements of English Romanticism is clearly evident in *Miri Jiyori* also. Bordoloi has given expression to the inner conflict or inner self of the characters through nature. In the opening chapter titled 'Noyir Parot', Bordoloi has described about the mighty Brahmaputra, Subansiri river, Kherkotiya river, Miri and Dophola hills, cool breeze coming from Subansiri, paddy fields, wild birds and animals, exotic forests, mesmerizing scenario of sunlight dazzling bright in the water of Subansiri. He has used several poetic lines and Bihu songs expressing the natural beauty of Assam which implies the significance of nature in Assamese culture. The author has given a pictorial description of how the protagonists Jonki and Panei have grown up together during childhood in the surroundings of nature. The love interest between the two also developed on the lap of beautiful nature nearby the Subansiri river. Through the narrative of the novel one can explore and feel aesthetic beauty nature.

Representation of aesthetic beauty is a key theme that often emphasized in Romantic literature. Apart from nature, female's beauty is associated to the theme of aesthetic beauty by Romantic writers. In the novel *Miri Jiyori*, Bordoloi has depicted beauty of bihu dancing by Miri girls. He has typically described their sweet face, fair complexion of skin and charming physical appearance in traditional attire. The novelist has compared grace and charm of five Miri girls with nymph of heaven. Bordoloi has also compared them with mermaid as if coming out of water.

In romantic literature, human emotion is a powerful element that given emphasis by romanticists. In the novel *Miri Jiyori*, Bordoloi has incorporated strong human emotions that lead the major actions of story. He showcases the male and female protagonists' profound love and passion towards each other. The emotion of love is also reflected through Dalimi, Niroma and Tamed also in respective ways. One can explore anger and hatred of village people and Panei's parents for Jonki and Panei's union. However, some people were sympathetic towards Jonki and Panei's grief. The cruelty of humans is also juxtaposed in the novel through the people of Porbotia Miri. Kumud felt embarrassed by Panei's rejection as she left him for Jonki. He questioned himself that why he is not as worthy as Jonki. At times human's internal emotion is expressed through nature. It is evident when Jonki was sad and completely despair about his separation with Panei and was sitting inside the boat on the Subansiri river by thinking of Panei with tears in his eyes. The characters – Jonki, Panei, Dalimi and Panei's parents, all had to undergone through grief and sorrow due to various sensational external factors. A sense of loneliness is also presented by Bordoloi through the protagonists Jonki and Panei as both of them got emotionally deserted by people of their surroundings.

English Romantic Literature advocates for a childhood filled with happiness, innocence, fun and goodness. In *Miri Jiyori*, although the male protagonist of the novel, Jonkie was an orphan deprived of parental care and affection, but his childhood was spent well. He used to play and dance with his companions specially with his beloved friend Panei. Jonkie used to play with Panie in the sand of the bank of Subansiri river, playfully travelled over water of Subnansiri, dance together in Magh bihu and Bohag

bihu. Both went to Lakhimpur town for celebrating Bihu during childhood days. They always tended cows together. They spent their childhood in childlike fun, laughter and amusements. Jonki and Panei used to travelled many places in the moors of Miri village. As a kid Panei was always adored by her parents. Both Jonki and Panei represent innocence of children who are completely unaware of the cruelty, social stigma and complexities of human society. As a child they are perplexed by their mutual liking for each other because of their tender age and innocence.

Romantic literature always portrays woman as ideal being. This feature of romanticism is found in the characters Dalimi, Niroma, Panei of *Miri Jiyori*. Panei, the female protagonist is presented as pure and beautiful young girl who was so passionate about her love that sacrificed her life. However, she became an object of male's gaze and attraction that she was attempted to seduce by the males of the society. Except being an ideal woman, she is critically found to be rebellious who went against her parents' decision and societal domination for her love. Panei's mother Niroma is an ideal wife. Although Niroma voiced that Jonki would be a good choice for her daughter Panei, but she could not do anything but act according to her husband. She supported her husband, Tamed for choosing a rich guy Kumud as their domesticated son-in-law and ultimately tried to convince Panei for marriage as per her husband's advice or order.

Personification is another element of Romanticism found in *Miri Jiyori*. Bordoloi has used literary device of personification in Subansiri river. The novelist has personified Subansiri river as mother. The people in the novel have been benefitted by generous hands of this mother called Subansiri. Bordoloi narrated how Subansiri look after the humans with her motherly virtues. As mentioned by the novelist, this mother loves the Miri people more than others with all heart and provides them breeze, clean water and other multiple things. Thus, Bordoloi has attributed human values of a mother in Subansiri river with his literary imagination and juxtaposed the pure connection of mother nature with human world.

It is already mentioned above that the author Rajanikanta Bordoloi stands apart from the conventional writers of the age which implies his freedom of artistic expression. It is a characteristic of true Romanticist. The artistic freedom of expression is reflected in this novel. Bordoloi's own imagination and artistic style have got significance in the text unlike his predecessors.

Conclusion

To conclude, *Miri Jiyori* is a romantic work of Assamese literature. It is constructed around life of common tribal people of Assam as represented by Jonki, Panei, Dalimi, Niroma, Tamed and so on. Jonki and Panei's passion for each other is the most powerful emotion of the novel which eventually calls forth their tragic death that their love never gets fulfilled. The theme of love is presented by Bordoloi in different levels in the text through the protagonists Jonki- Panei and other characters Dalimi, Kumud and Panei's parents. Moreover, the Bordoloi's inner self and his love for nature is also reflected in celebrated description of the novel. Bordoloi has depicted pleasing and vivid images of nature in the novel. The typical link between nature and romanticism through culture and customs of human society is emerged in the novel. *Miri Jiyori* is driven by powerful emotion of love, passion, grief and anger which replicate emotional

images of the characters. He has appreciated the bewitching beauty of the females and significantly engaged the readers with his description of aesthetic beauty of nature. Thus, the novel *Miri Jiyori* incorporates several elements of Romanticism that makes it an exceptional work of its time in Assamese literature. This novel brought new dimension to Assamese literary sphere which placed the novelist Rajanikanta Bordoloi as a distinguished and phenomenal litterateur of Assamese literature.

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