

## Social Realities As Reflected In Non-Fictional Prose of Old Period of Bodo Literature

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**ABSTRACT:** Literature is the mirror of the society through all social elements reflects in a very clear way. Social realities of the society are the essential factors which are reflected through the written literature of any age of all the Countries and communities. It is a common phenomenon for realizing the essence of a society. The Bodo society is not escaped from the occurrences of such social realities. In the last part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of 20<sup>th</sup> century a few educated Bodo peoples who received education in other language started writing in Bodo language where reflections of such social realities were included in a common way. The writings of these pioneers of Bodo Community specially in the form of prayer songs, one act play and essay etc. published in different souvenirs, magazines, books etc. become the footprint for the future generations. Though during this period other literary communities passed several stages of developments, the Bodo Literature proved to the first generation and that is why this period is called as the old period of Bodo literature which pervaded up to 1952 A.D. In this period most of the educated youth who flourished in the field are Rupnath Brahma, Ganga Charan Kachari, Korindra Narayan Brahmna, Anandaran Muchahary, Baliram Kachari, Judhistir Hajowary and others. In their writings the reflections of pedantic pictures of the Bodo society in their non-fictional literature as a means of social awareness and development of Bodo language and literature are seen. Their writings were published in 'Bibar' 1924 meaning flower, 'Olongbar' 1938 meaning constellation, 'Hathorki-Hala' 1939 meaning morning star, magazines led to the development of Bodo language and literature. Here in this paper humble efforts are made to examine how social realities were reflected in the writings of old Bodo literature that has depicted all social elements.

**Keywords:** Old period of Bodo Literature, non-fictional prose, social realities.

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### I. INTRODUCTION TO OLD BODO LITERATURE

The age of old Bodo literature started from the last quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of 20<sup>th</sup> century. This age of Boro old literature is said to be started from 1920 then the Boro magazine 'Bibar' being edited by Satish Chandra Basumatary was brought out in the manuscript form. This age is said to pervade up to 1952, the year of the inception of the Bodo Sahitya Sabha.<sup>1</sup> This job of old Bodo literature was initiated by few enthusiastic Bodo youths mainly the Bodo students of that time. During that time, some educated Bodo peoples came forward to bring social reformation and to develop Bodo language and literature. Some of them were educated in Assamese and Bengali vernaculars. Since then, a few educated Bodo peoples, who received education in other languages, started writing in Bodo language in the forms of prayer songs, one act plays, essays etc. in magazines and in book forms. Their writings based on socio-cultural background of the Bodo society of that time keeping in mind the greater interest of the Bodo society. While considering the written trends of Boro literature, it is necessary to notice the beginning of 1900 A.D. The Boro written literature was flourishing towards the beginning of twentieth century with the publication of several outstanding magazines, souvenirs and books on prayer songs etc.<sup>2</sup> The Boroni Phisa O Ayen (children of Bodos and their law, 1915) is a general introduction of the Bodos and their customary laws. It was the first book written in Bodo language in prose form edited by Ganga Charan Kachari and published by Habraghat Bodo Sanmiloni. This book has opened the gateway of written tradition in Bodo literature. During that period, Bodo society, language and literature were in bad condition in comparison to others. This condition urged educated Bodo peoples to think and work towards bringing renaissance in the society. Renowned social reformer Gurudev Kalicharan Brahma, a religious propagator of Brahma religion took the initiative of social reformation gathering the young educated Bodo peoples of that time-The most noted persons among the Bodos who followed Kalicharan Brahma and work with him during his time and after, were Kalicharan Brahma (Junior), Jamadher Brahma, Mulshing

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<sup>1</sup> Boro, Madhuram: The History of Boro Literature, 1990, p.37

<sup>2</sup> Basumatary, Phukan: An Introduction to Boro Language, 2005, p.4

Brahma, Birnarayan Brahma, Mukul Chandra Brahma and many others.”<sup>3</sup> This mission was strongly advocated by some educated Bodo youths that led to the formation of ‘Bodo Chatra Sanmilon’ or Bodo Student Association in 1919. The members of the organization were Rupnath Brahma, Modaram Brahma, Satish Chandra Basumatary, Sobha Ram Brahma Choudhury, Jolodhar Brahma, Panchanan Kachary, Karindra Narayan Brahma and others. They took up the idea of reforming Bodo society by way of organizing meetings in various places, writing articles in magazines and books on religion, culture and organizing dramas and one-act-plays for bringing social awareness. Accordingly, in 1924 the first Bodo magazine ‘Bibar’ was published under the editorship of Satish Chandra Basumatary. A good number of poetry and prose were published in this magazine containing the themes of religion, culture, ethics, morality and advice to the Bodo community towards social upliftment as well as social awareness. The social realities reflected in the writings of noted writers who started writing poems, songs, stories and essays are namely Satish Chandra Basumatary, Jaladhar Brahma, Parsuram Brahma, Surendra Nath Brahma, Rati Kanta Brahma, Dwarendra Nath Brahma and others. Bibar contained chiefly the poems, songs and articles contributed by these writers in different issues. The literary period of publishing Bibar magazine is called ‘Bibar Muga’ (the Bibar era). It was a quarterly and trilingual magazine having Bodo-Assamese-Bengali and was published in eight issues during 1924 to 1926. ‘Khonthi-Methai’ (poems and songs), the first poetry book in Bodo language compiled by Rupnath Brahma and Modaram Brahma was published in 1923. Another poetry books ‘Boroni Gudi Sibsa Arw Aroj’ (first devotion and prayer of the Bodos, 1926) written by Padmashree Modaram Brahma, ‘Bathunam Bwikhaguni Gidu’ (songs of bathwu and bwisagu festival, 1925) written by Prassanna Kumar Boro Kakhluary were published at that time. Writers like Satish Chandra Basumatry, Modaram Brahma, Pramod Chandra Brahma, Anandaram Muchahary, Rupnath Brahma, Ishan Chandra Muchahary, Kali Kumar Lahary composed songs, poems, one act plays, prose based on the socio-cultural background of the Bodo society of that time. Another two magazines ‘Olongbar’ (morning star) and ‘Hathorki-Hala’ (constellation) edited by Pramod Chandra Brahma was published in 1938 and 1939 respectively. The non-fictional proses published in ‘Hathorki-Hala’ are considered of high standard. Most of the articles are the source of all inspiration to the Bodo community and published in the magazine ‘Hathorki Hala’ edited by Pramod Chandra Brahma.”<sup>4</sup>The non-fictional proses published in the magazines and contributed by educated young Bodo peoples of that time reflected the social realities of the society.

#### 1.1 Status of the Bodo Language:

After achievement of independence of the country and enforcement of constitution of India, Bodo language was introduced as medium of instruction in the primary level in 1963 according to provisions of Article 350 (A) of Indian Constitution. Now this language is taught as MIL in two states of Assam and Meghalaya; in Gauhati University, Dibrugarh University, Bodoland University, Kokrajhar, Cotton University, Assam University, Silchar and North Eastern Hill University, Shillong. It is also taught as elective subject under Assam University, Silchar and as elective and major under Gauhati, Bodoland and Dibrugarh Universities of Assam. In PG level it is taught in Gauhati University, Bodoland University, Dibrugarh University and Cotton University as well as in few affiliated colleges under Gauhati and Bodoland Universities. It was introduced as the associate official language in Kokrajhar and Udalguri districts on 28<sup>th</sup> December, 1985 and was included in to the 8<sup>th</sup> Schedule of the Constitution of India as 20<sup>th</sup> Indian Regional Language. The Bill got assent of His Excellency the President of India on 7<sup>th</sup> January, 2004. Further, it is now used as a main official language in B.T.C. area, and as optional paper in state and union civil service examinations as well as in SSC examinations.

## **II. SOCIAL REALITIES IN NON-FICTIONAL PROSE (WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO ITS BACKGROUND):**

The Bodo society in late 19th and in early 20th century was highly uneducated and undisciplined both in social and religious spheres. They were underestimated and neglected by the neighboring communities of the area. In such a critical time, the associations Habraghat Bodo Sanmiloni (1912), Bodo Chatra sanmilon (1919), Bodo Maha Sanmiloni (1921) were formed and worked for the development and preservation of language, culture, literature and religion of the Bodos. During this time, writers like Anandaram Muchahary, Rupnath Brahma, Karindra Narayan Brahma, Pramod Chandra Brahma, Satish Chandra Basumatary, Modaram Brahma started to write non-fictional prose for bringing social awareness in the society. They organized meetings among the Bodo peoples living in different parts of Assam and worked to unite them as well as to develop their language, literature and culture.

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<sup>3</sup> Brahma, Manik Chandra: Gurudev Kalicharan Brahma, His life and death, Kokrajhar, 2001, p.38

<sup>4</sup> Basumatary, Phukan: An Introduction to Boro Language, 2005, p.5

2.1 The first half of twentieth century was marked with languishing and backwardness of illiterate Bodo peoples. They were underdeveloped in every fields of society in comparison to other communities. They had no medium of instruction to impart education with their mother tongue. Lack of education made them foolish, unreasonable, immoral and backward. This pathetic condition of the community was tried to be reformed through the good education system among the communities. Therefore, young interested Bodo writer like Karindra Narayan Brahma expresses this sorry state of Bodo peoples in his non-fictional prose 'Boro Jatilo Dui Axharman' (few words to Bodo community). The author says-It is very sad and shameful that Bodo community does not know the path of development. Therefore, due to lack of interest on education most people of our community are immoral, foolish and unreasonable and remain backward in every field."<sup>5</sup>

The pious leaders only show the path of development. The education is like backbone of social development. However, the Bodo peoples of that time did not understand the value of education for social development. They relied on pagan beliefs due to lack of scientific reasoning of modern days. Therefore, the author states- Due to illiteracy our peoples are still unable to avoid the pagan beliefs. Therefore, they do not know the path of social, physical, mental and spiritual development.<sup>6</sup> This shows the author's initiative for social reformation through writing.

2.2 The status of women was very low during nineteenth century India. The women were subjugated, dominated and mal-treated by male dominated society. In 1828, Raja Ram Mohan Roy formed Brahma Samaj to change the pathetic condition of women in Indian society and started social revolution for women empowerment. In Bodo society too women did not get scope to impart education like men. The daughters of family were not treated as same as sons. Due to proper care and lack of education, women suffered a lot in the society be it health and hygiene, empowerment or social status. In Bodo society gsw gwywi haba hwnay (forceful marriage), hinjao khaonay (stealing of bride), hijao bwnay (kidnapping of bride) were rampant until the beginning of twentieth century. Such kinds of social evils were initiated by half-educated youths of the society. The social leaders and educated young people's criticized those works and tried to root it out from society. Kalicharan Brahma initiated to eradicate such social evils from society. 'Noni Maidang' (paddy corn) is metaphorically a female deity of home i.e. Lakshmi. From the time immemorial Bodos are worshipping a family deity of female figure who bestows the well being of family and wealth like Hindus have their Goddess Lakshmi. It is related to the womenfolk of the family attributing the characteristic of the deity who extends smooth running of a family in all rounds. A woman is regarded as Lakshmi whose presence in the family helps the family to live happily in every aspect. Accordingly, the author gives an account of the socio-religious structures and economic set up of the Bodo society of that time. It is to be said that role of women is more important than man in a traditional Bodo family. That is why the Bodos have a saying-Let father die and mother survive. This very saying informs about the importance of women in the society. The Bodo women have a respectable status in society and take responsibility of maintaining their families. Therefore, Anandaram Mochahary says in his non fictional prose as- "The wife is regarded as home. Without women there cannot be a home. Women are regarded as foundation of home. Responsibility of home lies on the hands of women. Therefore, women should be good in characters, weaving, and household works."<sup>7</sup>

During Bihar period, some social leaders thought about the necessity of woman education in society. In Boro Jatilo Dui Axharman (a few words to Bodo community) Karindra Narayan Brahma means to state that Due to lack of woman education the good woman (sati) among the women of our community cannot be found. They do not know what the quality of a good woman is and who is a good woman. The women performs their duties to educate their children after marriage therefore; we need to spread woman education from right now.<sup>8</sup>

2.3. The Bathou religion is the aboriginal religion of the Bodos that has been current among them since time immemorial. The religion of the Kachari race is distinctly of the type of commonly known as 'animistic' and its underlying principle is characteristically one of the 'fear and dread.'<sup>9</sup> To overcome from such social and religious chaos the Bodo peoples of nineteenth century embraced different religions like Hindu, Christian and Islam. Some also embraced Vaishnavism of Shankardeva becoming Sarania and alienated themselves from Bodo identity adopting the surnames like Das, Deka, Baruh, Chaudhury and Sarania. They also adopted Assamese language and culture deserting their own. From the relevant source, it comes to know that in between the year 1900 to 1910, about 10 thousand Bodo peoples of Habraghat area decided to convert to other religions from their own Bathou religion.<sup>10</sup> Such a pathetic condition of Bodo community aroused doubtful questions in the

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<sup>5</sup> Basumatary, Satish Chandra (ed.): Bihar, 1<sup>st</sup> Yr. 2<sup>nd</sup> issue, 1992 (reprint), p.43

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, p.44

<sup>7</sup> Kachari, Ganga Charan (ed.): Boro Phisa O Ayen, 2004 (reprint), p.51

<sup>8</sup> Brahma, Pramod Chandra (ed.): Hathorkhi-Hala, 1992 (reprint), p.59

<sup>9</sup> Brahma, Manik chandra (ed.): Gurudev Kalicharan Brahma His Life and deeds, 2001 (1<sup>st</sup> publish), p-37

<sup>10</sup> Brahma, Mihir Kumar: Fwrwnglai, vol-x (ed.), Kokrajhar, 2004, p-83

mind of other community about the religion of the Bodos. At the same time, Gurudev Kalicharan Brahma set out to protect the Bodos from such treat. He visited the important areas of South Goalpara, like Krishnai, Dudhnoi, Rangjuli, Agia and some other villages and was able to bring back many of the Bodo families from the grip of Vaishnavism. The people of that area also felt rejuvenated by the visit of Kalicharan and embraced the religion as to retain their identities there.<sup>11</sup> Most of the Bodos of that areas had accepted Kalicharan Brahma wholeheartedly and accepted and followed the principles of his Brahma Dharma. On the other hand, such situation pained some educated Bodo peoples of that time. Therefore, to solve these social disorders and to unite the peoples of the community, Rupnath Brahma composed 'Kinsit Nibedan' (a few request) in Bengali language which is an account about the condition of Bathou religion. He writes-now a day our Muslim-Hindu brothers ask to know about the beliefs of Bodo community. What religion do you follow? You are not Musalman, but are you Hindu?<sup>12</sup> It highlights the Bodo peoples' religious conversion and writer is urging to the peoples to preserve their religion, language, culture and identity.

2.4 The Bodo peoples take excess alcohol in their social and ritual gatherings such as in worshipping deities, in observing festivals, in marriage ceremonies, in and after cremation rites, in funeral feasts, friendly workings etc. It affected society greatly as they used to consume alcohol during non-festive and non-ritual days as well. The excessive use of alcohol and meats affected Bodo peoples and society a lot. Such pathetic state of the society led to social, political and economic degradation. Therefore, a few educated and social thinkers of that time thought seriously about those matters and tried to solve them through their writings. Baliram Kachary's non-fictional prose on the issue Madak Drabya Sevanor Opokarita (side effect of consuming alcohol) in Assamese language was published in the second year fourth issue of Bihar magazine. It depicts the real picture of Bodo society affected by drinking alcohol. The writer states-today why Bodo community is hated and why Englishmen are not hated by?<sup>13</sup> He urges to his contemporary Bodo peoples that Englishmen also drink alcohol and eat meats like Bodos but they never forgot to behave. However, the Bodos lose their complete sense after consuming alcohol. He reasons the differences between the Bodos and Englishmen of that time. The Englishmen are educated and developed and know how to control themselves in eating and drinking. However, uneducated Bodos consume excessively, lose control and indulge in anti-social works out of their inebriated state bringing the social chaos. Bodo peoples are not aware about the harmful effect of alcohol. It also pushed them towards poverty. Therefore, the author states-people do not hate our community due to backwardness. There is nothing bad and good in the world. People hate only due to our communities' bad habits, customs and backwardness in Education.<sup>14</sup>

2.5 Bodo peoples were not aware about their physical and mental health and hygiene. Due to lack of education they could not think about their future and could not maintain healthy lives. Nibedan (the request) is an one non-fictional prose written in Bengali by Judhistir Hajowary and published in second year first issue of Bihar magazine (April, 1925). This deals with the physical and mental health of peoples for the cause of social development. It gives picture of Bodo society of that time that lacks awareness about their physical and mental development. He writes-truly speaking it is clearly known that for the development of world it needs to be developed mentally and physically. But here a very few people are physical development is seen with a negligible mental development.<sup>15</sup> Excessive use of alcohol harmed the physical and mental state of the Bodo peoples. It also made them physically poor. Therefore, author voiced for the importance of good physical and mental state of Bodo peoples.

Dr. Phukan Basumatary's Bihar muga ni Boro somaj : Somajkhanthiary, Rajkhanthiary arw Rangkhanthiary haal- chaal (Bodo society of Bihar era: its social, political and economic condition) appeared in tenth volume of Laithun, published by Bodo Writers Academy. In his review on some selected writings of the era he views lack of education as the reason of deplorable condition of socio-economic and political scenario of the Bodos of that time. Lack of education brought identity crisis and alienation of language, culture and religion to them. He views that Bodo society of early 20<sup>th</sup> century could not developed in education, social, language, political, religion and literary sphere due to their doubtful nature. Their economy is agrarian economy. The uneducated Bodo peoples could not think about the government jobs. Only a fistful of educated Bodo peoples was able to employ in jobs. Therefore, Gurudev Kalicharan Brahma took initiative to bring agricultural revolution to strengthen economic status of Bodo peoples. Phukan's non-fictional prose gives us details about the social, economic, political and religious condition of the Bodo society of that time.

3.0 Conclusion:

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<sup>11</sup>Brahma, Manik Chandra: Gurudev Kalicharan Brahma His Life and Deeds, 2001, p-29

<sup>12</sup>Basumatary, Satish Chandra: Bihar, 1<sup>st</sup> year second issue,(ed.), p-29

<sup>13</sup>Basumatary, Satish Chandra: Bihar, second year, 4th issue (ed.), 1-4

<sup>14</sup> Basumatary, Satish Chadra: Bihar, second year, 4<sup>th</sup> issue, p-4

<sup>15</sup>Basumatary, Satish Chadra: Bihar, second year, 1<sup>st</sup> issue, p-29

The Bodo peoples were underdeveloped in many aspects until the early part of 20<sup>th</sup> century. It reasons were manifold. Among them mentionable are lacks of self-esteem as well as social and political awareness in them. Lacks of formal education make them blind in every front be it their civil or political right, mental health or hygiene. To overcome them from all these nuances the minds of some educated and social conscious peoples of the society began to cry and with that purpose in view they advocated to free them by bringing social awareness among them through the medium of writing and some through religious preaching, the religion that can free them from being neglected by other society and religious conversion. The thinking of few of these enthusiastic personalities of the society actually worked at that juncture of time of the society. It is due to their courage and noble attempt that today the Bodos are surviving with their distinct language, literature and culture as well as political identity.

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