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Mirroring Assamese Life and Culture in Lakshmi Nandan Bora's Stories: An Analytical Study

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Abstract

Lakshmi Nandan Bora, a towering figure in Assamese literature, is celebrated for his profound reflections on rural and urban life in Assam. This paper examines the thematic richness, cultural depth, and narrative techniques of Bora's stories, highlighting their societal relevance. By analysing his portrayal of rural simplicity, urban complexities, and cultural heritage, this study underscores the universal appeal of his works, despite their regional focus. The analysis also explores the evolution of Bora's storytelling, emphasizing its alignment with the socio-political transformations of post-independence Assam.

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1.0 Introduction

The creativity of a writer is often profoundly influenced by the society in which they live. These societal effects are inherently reflected in an author's writings. Lakshmi Nandan Bora's stories do not adhere to a single theme, thought, or depiction of society. His works capture the simplicity and beauty of rural life, the complexities of urban society shaped by politics, the arrogance of government officials, social irregularities, corruption, and the greed for power among ministers. His experiences in rural society greatly influenced his literary pursuits, even during his stay in Calcutta, where he was drawn to the rural society of Assam. His creations reflect the lives of people from various sections of this rural community. Bora was deeply inspired by the lives of people living near the 'Sonai River,' which frequently appears in his stories. For instance, the story Sakha Damodar captures the essence of this inspiration.

Lakshmi Nandan Bora (1932-2021), who debuted during the Ramdhenu era, was a prominent Assamese storyteller of the post-independence period. He began his literary journey through Ramdhenu magazine and continued writing well into recent times. Bora was among the writers who sought to examine individuals and society through a fresh lens. His debut story Bhaona, published in Ramdhenu, explored the

simplicity of rural life, a recurring theme in his work. Some of his notable story collections include Avesh Indrajal (1965), Drishtirupa (1959), Xei Utola (1960), Gaurirupak (1961) and Debotar Byadhi (1966), among others. The Second World War significantly impacted Assamese society, influencing its social, political, moral, mental, and economic spheres. This period saw innovations in the themes and styles of Assamese short stories. The writers of the Ramdhenu era embraced realism and social consciousness, bringing forth new forms and perspectives. In this context, Lakshmi Nandan Bora's contributions stand out for their depth and societal relevance. Bora himself acknowledged the inspiration he drew from real-life events and characters. He stated: "When I write a story, events or stories attract me. I enjoy the planning phase more than the writing itself. Experiences I've gained from society, special events, or real-life characters inspire me. A story becomes compelling when it achieves harmony among the story, characters, environment, and composition style" (Saikia, 1977, pp. 163, 165).

1.1 Aims and Objectives

The primary aim of this study is to explore the themes, societal reflections, and narrative techniques in the stories of Lakshmi Nandan Bora. Specifically, this paper seeks to:

- Analyse the depiction of rural and urban life in Bora's stories.
- Examine the cultural and social elements embedded in his narratives.
- Highlight the universality of his themes despite their regional context.
- Assess the evolution of Bora's storytelling in response to socio-political changes.

1.2 Methodology

This study primarily adopts an analytical and descriptive approach to examine the content and context of Bora's stories. Secondary sources, including critical essays, historical analyses, and literary critiques, have been utilized to supplement the research.

2.0 Content of Lakshmi Nandan Bora's Stories

In Bora's early works, the simplicity of village life is vividly depicted. Through descriptions of natural beauty and the lives of rural people, he captured the essence of rural society of Assam. Over time, he transitioned to city-centric narratives, though the consciousness of rural middle-class life persisted in his stories. Bora explored the innate emotions of individuals while addressing the complexities of urban life. According to Upendra Nath Sharma, Bora's stories reflect the joys, sorrows, and struggles of village life, often highlighting the impact of post-independence societal changes (Borgohain, 2012, p. 455).

In Sakha Damodar, Bora portrays the agrarian society of Assam, emphasizing the symbiotic relationship between humans, animals, and nature. The story delves into the struggles and resilience of rural life, capturing the contrasts between wealth and poverty, rulers and the exploited. Similarly, Sampattir Bapek juxtaposes the heartlessness of village society with the moral strength of its characters.

In Erabarir Laseri, Bora highlights rural customs and superstitions. The story centers on Rajita, a widowed daughter-in-law subjected to societal judgments, whose secret union with Chandan ends tragically. This story vividly portrays the harsh realities of traditional rural society, along with the universal themes of love and desire.

Bora's stories often incorporate elements of Assamese culture, such as Sattriya traditions, Bhaona festivals and folk music. He uses proverbs, Bihu songs, and folk expressions to enrich his narratives. However, critics like Trilokya Nath Goswami have noted that frequent cultural references sometimes hinder the flow of the story (Goswami, 192).

In contrast to his rural-focused narratives, Bora's urban stories, such as Hemantar Hime Dhowa and Sehi Anurag, address the challenges faced by the urban middle class. These stories depict financial struggles, the allure of modernity, and the complexities of urban life.

Bora also explored the degradation of Assam's spiritual heritage in stories like Debotar Byadhi and Guruparba. These narratives subtly critique the decline of traditional values, as seen through the internal conflicts of characters like Mukunda Gosain in Guruparba.

3.0 Characteristics of Lakshmi Nandan Bora's Stories

Lakshmi Nandan Bora's storytelling is characterized by simplicity and linear progression. His narratives often feature a narrator who doubles as a character, lending an autobiographical touch to his stories. Bora's works reflect a deep understanding of life, philosophical insights, and a strong connection to Assamese society.

One of Bora's distinctive features is the unity and coherence of his stories. His narratives avoid unnecessary digressions, focusing instead on life experiences and societal realities. Bora's portrayal of love is spontaneous and simple, often eschewing Freudian complexities. His female characters, though pivotal, are often presented through the lens of a male narrator, highlighting traditional and modern roles of women in Assamese society.

Another notable feature is Bora's ability to balance regional specificity with universal appeal. While his stories are deeply rooted in the culture and traditions of Assam, the themes of love, resilience, and societal change resonate with a broader audience. This duality enhances the relevance and impact of his works.

4.0 Socio-Political Context

Bora's stories are deeply intertwined with the socio-political changes in post-independence Assam. The economic challenges, cultural shifts and political upheavals of the time are reflected in his narratives. For instance, the impact of land reforms, the migration crisis, and the erosion of traditional values find nuanced expression in his works. This contextual grounding enhances the authenticity and depth of Bora's storytelling.

5.0 Comparative Analysis

Bora's works can be compared with those of his contemporaries, such as Bhabendranath Saikia. Both writers emphasized the depiction of rural life but differed in their narrative techniques. While Saikia often delved into psychological complexities, Bora focused on societal realities and cultural heritage. This comparative analysis highlights the diversity and richness of Assamese literature during the Ramdhenu era.

Conclusion

Lakshmi Nandan Bora's works reflect a harmonious blend of contemporary societal observations and the simplicity of a rural upbringing. His strength lies in his ability to depict the psychological depth and social dynamics of rural Assam. Bora's stories, deeply rooted in his personal experiences, resonate universally despite their regional focus. His ability to draw readers into the lives of his characters through vivid storytelling and cultural authenticity ensures his enduring legacy in Assamese literature.

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