

**PRESENTATION OF ASSAMESE SOCIETY IN THE INDIAN-ASSAMESE NOVEL
WITH REFERENCE TO GANGA CHILONIR PAKHI**

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Abstract

Laxminandan Bora is a notable name in the history of Assamese literature, especially in novels. He has fascinated Assamese readers with his excellent writing style from the post-independence period to the present day. They are naturally wonderful and beautifully illuminated. His novels are a successful attempt to analyze the hearts of men and women. The novel Ganga Chilonir Pakhi by Laxminandan Bora is a document of such efforts. He tried to give a new dimension to the ongoing tradition of Assamese novels. The novel deals with love and society from a new perspective. The novel is a reflection of the traditions and social life of the seductive post-independence era. The novel is about friendship, love, traditional Assamese society and the daily activities of Assamese society that are changed by various factors from different perspectives. The novel is about the psychoanalysis of Bhogram, Basanti, Dhananjay and Tarulta. The novel is about love, faith, frustration, conflict of ideals, the fire of disappointment and the reflective of post-independence era of Assamese society.

Keywords: *Novel, Post-Independence Society, Assam.*

Introduction

Laxminandan Bora is a prominent short story writer and novelist of the Rainbow era, the flag bearer of Assamese literature. Bora is a traditional storyteller and has written twenty-eight novels. There is room to discuss other novels written by him. However, only the novel *Ganga Chilonir Pakhi* has been selected for the paper. It is not possible to discuss the entire subject of a novel in a single paper. The paper will only discuss the social depiction in the Novel.

Objectives of the Study

Laxminandan Bora is a well-known name in the context of the novels of the Rainbow era. Bora's novels have been discussed by various people to the date. However, this paper attempts to reveal some new aspects of contemporary society reflected in the novel. The characters represent every aspect of a society in detail.

Scope of the study

There is an opportunity to review the story, language style, character analysis and other aspects of a novel. However, it is not possible to discuss all these in one paper. Therefore, the paper attempts to analyze only the society reflected in the novel *Ganga Chilonir Pakhi*.

Methodology of the study

An analytical method has been adopted to study the subject matter of the proposed paper.

Data collection

The main source of information is the novel '*Ganga Chilonir Pakhi*'. In addition, secondary sources such as books, magazines, etc. have been used. Information has also been obtained from various websites on the Internet.

Analysis

The story of *Ganga Chilonir Pakhi* is linear. A very unconventional presentation of the conventional chronicle. People are so curious about another person because they have two minds at the same time (*Ganga Chilonir Pakhi*, p.7). The central theme of the novel lies in this cautionary sentence presented in the novel. Two or more minds play simultaneously within one mind of a person. Times have changed, with the change of times, the minds of people have changed. '*Ganga Chilonir Pakhi*' is a colorful, beautiful time album of changes in the minds of people. Along with that picture, another picture of the changes in rural society in Assam over the past half century is presented. Therefore, '*Ganga Chilonir Pakhi*' is new and pleasant to read for contemporary Assamese novel literature. The novel is female-centric. The main character is Basantii. She lives in the village of Morapur on the banks of the river. Her mother Sujola, brother Bhogram and daughter-in-law and the children of her brother are the family members. The novel begins mainly with the characters Basantii, Bhogram, Tarulta and Dhananjay.

Bhogram is a businessperson. One day Dhananjay comes to Bhogram's home in connection with rice business. Basantii and Dhananjay catch sight of each other. Unnoticed by his family and society, Dhananjay's love for Basantii sprouts. Gradually, Bhogram faces a business recession. The election changed the wheel of Bhogram's fate on the one hand and plunged him into the dungeon of misfortune on the other. Bhogram changed with the touch of the city's famous lawyer election candidate Subodh Shaikia. Bhogram helped in the election campaign on behalf of Subodh Shaikia and Shaikia counted the votes correctly as a result of the greed of the villagers; Subodh Shaikia became an MLA. The differences in ideals affected the relationship between Bhogram and Dhananjay. There were times when the differences between the two friends reached their peak. Amidst this, the love story of Dhananjay and Basantii continues. This love is exposed to mother Sujala and daughter-in-law Tarulta. But when Bhogram's life changed dramatically, he expressed his wish to marry his sister Basanti to Mathura Mandal, son of Bhagirath of Darangial village, in order to preserve his dignity. Thinking of the hopes of Mathura, the honor of Bhogram, the sorrow of Sujla, Basanti returned and got married with Mathura as arranged. But on the day the people of Talpuria tied up Bhogram, who was drunk on adultery, Mathura heard the story of Bhogram's ill-fame and the relationship between his sister Basanti and Dhananjay in front of the village grocery shop. Mathura's relationship with Basanti began to become bitter. Even after learning that Basanti's mother Sujla was seriously ill, Mathura did not allow Basanti to go to see her mother. There was an argument between Basanti and Mathura. Basanti thought that instead of her husband Mathura listening to people and treating her badly, she would tell Mathura everything about her relationship with Dhananjay. Basanti's frank confession did not sway Mathura. On her way back from market Mathura was hit by a truck. People believed that Mathura committed suicide. Three deaths one by one shook Basanti's life. The death of Mathura, the death of her mother Sujala and finally the death of her unborn child. After the death of her unborn child, Basanti gave up the fascination of life. She did not eat or drink anything. Her condition became miserable. When Dhananjay heard about Basanti's condition, Dhananjay, a homeopathic doctor with a reputation in the village, came to her under the pretext of treating her. Dhananjay instilled hope in Basanti. Basanti settled down with the joy of getting her lost lover back. They began to eat and drink. With another encouragement, Basanti sent a letter to Dhananjay

in the hands of his maid Manbari. Through the letter, Basanti expressed her desire to invoke a new life with Dhananjay. Dhananjay took two days to reply to the letter sent to Manbari. Dhananjay sent word to Manbari that he would go to Darangial himself and tell Basanti whatever he needed to tell her. But in time Dhananjay did not tell Basanti anything. He left Pavchila and went somewhere else. No one knew where Dhananjay went. No one heard from him.

Ganga Chilonir Pakhi was written in the post-independence era. The Assamese society of the time was shaken by the horrors of World War II and the freedom movement, but after this horror, technology, modern education and artificiality were imported into the minds of the people. All these changes have brought about changes in society, but the changes in people's relationships are concerning. The novel portrays the socio-economic, political and social changes of the society under the guise of all changes.

In the novel *Ganga Chilonir Pakhi*, the character Bhogram represents the entire society. The novelist has beautifully explored every aspect of society through Bhogram's greed and arrogant attitude.

The novel begins with the external description of Basanti's house, a traditional household with a garden of coconuts, coconuts, and blackberries. The novelist tries to portray a picture of the village through the barn, the weaving mill, the pot and the golden river flowing alongside, the nearby trees, birds and the vast lush fascinating nature.

Bhogram is a trader by profession. He supports his family by selling cheap cloths. The novelist uses less expensive items in his merchandise and Bhogram has not been able to hold his father's annual funeral for these two years; these two things give an indication of Bhogram's financial situation. But his business is in recession. The road from Bebejia to Hati Chung is paved with gravel. So, there is no mess of mud. But Bhogram has to change his tires frequently. Therefore, it is necessary to take into consideration the fact that the country's economy is developing rapidly.

In the post-independence period, people became a clerk after little education. However, the change caused anger among the common people, who were proud of the pride of the old nobility. For example, "Why didn't his ears turn black before hearing the big words of the Molai Mohari, who once sold milk in their house and took the money to work in the garden?" (*Ganga Chilonir Pakhi*, p. 46)

The leaders disrupted the harmony of the villages with packages of temptations to the people whose paths of income were blocked. Fortunately, a man named Subodh Shaikia spread poisonous gas of division in Sonaiparia.

The relationship between Dhananjay and Bhogram also died under the influence of such poisonous gases. These are the things that Bhogram, who has become increasingly selfish and greedy for money, is doing, all these represent a group of people in the post-independence era.

The novel shows examples of progress in the countryside with wide cobbled streets, white houses of government departments shining in several places and the luxurious tin kitchens of three or four contractors in villages increased. Change is natural but change brings bad consequences to this village. The situation of the people is getting worse than before. The poor are becoming poorer and poorer, dishonest, and hopeless in the struggle between the old and the new. It is natural for the wife to be concerned about the decline of moral values due to the pressure of money. This concern is represented by a sentence—"He became wealthy and no longer valued love and affection. Wealth came, and arrogance took over his mind. After so many years, only now did I become neglected. Only now did I become unpleasant to look at. His mind no longer remained with the wife at home; his eyes turned elsewhere."(*Ganga Silonir Pakhi*, p. 78)

The novelist has beautifully portrayed the causes of this social disorder in the novel. "Due to the lack of spread of education, a new sense of morality has not awakened in people's minds. The people of Sonaipar have not learned to view life with generosity and broad-mindedness. They are still clinging to customs that may once have been considered useful in another age".(*Ganga Silonir Pakhi*, p. 43)

With the passage of time, the people of Sonaipar progressed in many ways, but this development eventually took a negative turn. "The gravel road along the banks of the Sonai reached Ting Bazaar. Two service buses began operating daily. People's minds also became more complicated. People grew selfish. New kinds of scandals involving daughters and daughters-in-law began to emerge. The Panchayati Raj system was introduced. Villages became filled with conflicts and disputes over the election of panchayat members and presidents. Fights and quarrels increased. Villages became divided through rivalry and hostility. Just like the southern bank, unrest entered the northern bank as well. The words of good and honest people lost their value... In common language, one could say that 'politics' entered the banks of the Sonai."(*Ganga Silonir Pakhi*, p. 122)

Gradually, the natural beauty of Sonai's surroundings became insignificant to the villagers. Instead, they started developing a city-oriented mentality. The joy of progress ultimately gifted the

villagers not happiness, but suffering, bitter experiences, and the wildfire of destruction.

In the novel *Ganga Silonir Pakhi*, just as there is a depiction of the disorder and chaos of the post-independence era, there is also an echo of progressive thinking and voices of protest. The moneylenders are portrayed as being responsible for the misery of the peasants. Even while the friendship between Dhananjay and Bhogram remained intact, discussions on exploitations: "The root cause is those deceitful moneylenders who lend on interest. What do the farmers gain by cultivating? It is they who enjoy the profits. Farmers do not get the opportunity to sell their produce at fair prices. That is why I am thinking of establishing a cooperative society in Pavchila this time."(*Ganga Silonir Pakhi*, p. 10)

However, the ordinary working people were not conscious of the exploitative mentality of the oppressors. Therefore, Bhogram says: "But the people are also like that. They consider such a man to be a benefactor. They cannot even realize that he is sucking their blood like a leech."(*Ganga Silonir Pakhi*, p. 10)

From the days of British rule until now, the class of exploiters has continued to adopt different strategies at different times, like the mythical "Raktabej" multiplying endlessly. The novel, however, does not present any concrete solution for liberation from such exploiters. Rather, even an innocent common man like Bhogram gradually comes to represent the exploiting class himself. As a result, the problems remain unresolved and grow deeper. Under the influence of Subodh Saikia, Bhogram deteriorates into an antisocial individual. Yet no organized protest or resistance emerges against the deception and exploitation of Saikia and others. Bhogram's punishment remains merely formal, with no sign of institutional opposition. Over time, the condition of Assamese villages, washed away by the currents of time, only became more terrifying. No organized reformative movement was incorporated. Had the novelist Lakshminandan Bora provided such an indication in *Ganga Silonir Pakhi*, the novel could perhaps have played a more guiding role for society.

The discussed novel also reveals certain aspects of breaking away from tradition. In this regard, the role of the character Basanti is particularly significant. Even today, many traditions continue to exist in our society, and many of them bring suffering into people's lives. Therefore, it feels as though the novelist has presented the character of Basanti in order to raise a voice against such traditions.

Even after becoming a widow, Basanti's attempt to begin a new life with her former lover Dhananjay

reflects the emergence of a new female individuality. There is hardly any room for disagreement on this point. However, the most attractive aspect of this ideology in the novel lies in the stories that create an environment enabling Basanti's thoughts to move beyond the traditional male-dominated norms of the Sonai region.

Basanti, who had initially wished to spend her widowhood in spiritual contemplation according to Hindu customs and scriptures, found these stories challenging her beliefs. From the stories she heard from Monbori and her mother, it becomes clear that the patriarchal traditions presented before Basanti by Sujala were never accepted by the people of Sonaipar as absolute and invincible truths.

At another place in the novel, it is even mentioned that Sujala herself, in her youth, had run away to the banks of the Sonai River under the intoxication of love and started a family there. In reality, just as seasons change on the banks of the Sonai, incidents of love and romance are shown in the novel as natural and inevitable events. This idea appears repeatedly throughout the narrative. Yet Basanti, measuring the natural truth of love against the scale of the prevailing patriarchal traditions of Sonaipar, ultimately had to retreat. Just as Mathura failed because he could not break through the hidden truths of history, Basanti too faced complications in her life because others failed to understand the essence of her words. Basanti remains protest-oriented even before Mathura. Evidence of her opposition to patriarchy is found in the following lines: "Why should he oppress her so much just because he is a man? You have treated me as if I were a purchased slave."

(*Ganga Silonir Pakhi*, p. 98)

However, the fact that Basanti is not disturbed by rejecting the love story of Bajju and Kanchanmati proves that she no longer remains loyal to that tradition. The main reason for opposing the marriage of Bajju and Kanchanmati is that Bajju belongs to a lower social class. There is instead a desire to marry her to a boy named Bayen because: "Bayen is a pure Kalita man. Moreover, Magu Bayen is the son of the well-known Gandhar Bayen, whereas Bajju is merely a Hira." (*Ganga Silonir Pakhi*, p. 128)

An incident that takes place after the death of Basanti's husband reflects a liberal attitude toward breaking traditions. Basanti becomes a widow and is made to wear white clothes. However, the broad-minded outlook of her parents-in-law is noteworthy: "We would feel satisfied only if you dressed like Parul and the others. How can we bear to see such a young woman wearing these clothes?" (*Ganga Silonir Pakhi*, p. 120)

In the end, the possibility of leaving with Dhananjay is also suggested. Why Dhananjay did not accept Basanti's proposal is perhaps not a very important question. Although he does not display unnecessary loyalty toward tradition, the novel also does not portray him as someone who takes an intensely rebellious stand. Unable to bear the suffering in Basanti's life, Dhananjay chooses to remain in hiding at Pavchila, and later leaves Pavchila altogether because he cannot heal the pain of Basanti's life. Through these incidents, one can identify a psychological basis for Dhananjay's drifting and unsettled nature.

In the novel, the characters are naturally used to reflect different aspects of society. The society portrayed through Bhogoram is different from the one portrayed through Dhananjay and Basanti. Although all three represent the same society, each of them possesses a distinct perspective toward it.

Assam is primarily an agricultural state. Every family builds its dreams around farming. The lives of farmers before independence, and their continued dependence on cultivation after independence, their struggle against poverty, and their joy over even small agricultural yields reveal the simple, innocent, and pure-hearted nature of the peasantry. However, *Ganga Silonir Pakhi* portrays the injustice, exploitation, oppression, and greed of a class of exploiters who deprive farmers of their rights.

After independence, society no longer provided a stable environment for sustaining life solely through agriculture. People were compelled to seek alternative occupations alongside farming. Due to population growth and the increasing need to purchase household necessities, money became essential, and the post-independence society, having lost its sense of humanity, became materialistic. In such a society, there was little spirit of mutual help or sincerity. As a result, Bhogoram grows weary carrying the burden of his family. For cultivation, he possesses only three *halichas* of land — insignificant, like a single chili in a bowl of curry.

The Sonai River itself serves as the lifeline of the agrarian community depicted in the novel. The generosity of the Sonai enriches the farmers' households with prosperity, yet at the same time the destructive force of the river brings suffering to the people of Sonaipar. The blessings and wrath of nature determine the course of their lives. The blessings of the Sonai spread abundance across the fertile land, producing rice, grains, and vegetables in plenty. But floods can destroy paddy and jute cultivation in an instant. Epidemics and famine paralyze human life, leaving no room for peace or creativity.

The population of the farming community in Sonaipar continues to increase. As land is divided among brothers, eventually each receives only a tiny portion. Since the days of British rule, different groups of people have continuously arrived to exploit the farmers, each employing its own strategies. Bhogoram's father, during his time, never felt the need to accumulate property for his son because there was no scarcity then. In those days, the life of farmers was stable and prosperous. Despite facing many hardships, the agrarian people of Sonaipar continue to celebrate life with joy. Farmers welcome the rainy season with warmth. In the furrows made by the plough, they discover the signs of prosperity. Crops grow abundantly on the fertile soil. Moreover, the greenery of jute fields and paddy fields allows the people of Sonai to weave countless dreams for the future. As the clouds clear away, the brightness of autumn skies arrives. The people of Sonai then take rest. After harvesting the golden crops, they enjoy the charm of the months of *Aghon* and *Puh* (November and December). Fishing in ponds and streams, welcoming the *Bhogali* festival with the sounds of flute, *pepa*, and *gagana*—all these contain a sense of pure and unspoiled happiness. In the graceful steps of the dancing girls with slender waists, the rhythm of youth blossoms forth.

However, after independence, the environment changed. A section of the people of Sonai became self-centered and economically prosperous, while another section remained trapped in poverty. Therefore, the novel comments on the exploiters and the moral degradation brought into peasant society by changing times in the following manner: "In the crippled condition of agrarian life, amidst the diseased progress of the nation and the decaying condition of rural life, new values and circumstances have created new kinds of people like him." (*Ganga Silonir Pakhi*, p. 114)

Ganga Silonir Pakhi is fundamentally centered around a patriarchal society. At times, the character of Basanti is suppressed by Bhogoram, and at other times by Mathura. Similarly, Tarulata too is compelled to bow before her husband Bhogoram. The patriarchal society is shown attempting to suppress women through the use of folk beliefs and traditional narratives.

Sujala gives her daughter Basanti many instructions regarding life and marriage, but these teachings merely prepare her to submit before a male-dominated society. Baseless stories from the past are used as weapons for this purpose. Through such stories, Basanti is made to believe that every misfortune of men occurs because of the sins of women. Folk tales are used to establish the supposed purity and superiority of men:

"Gandhakala drowned in the Sonai while going to soak jute because his wife had committed sinful acts at home. That day there was no storm in the Sonai. Even the boat was sturdy."

(*Ganga Silonir Pakhi*, p. 40)

Every woman, throughout her life, is expected to remain under the authority of men. In the society reflected in the novel, every woman spends her life enduring male domination and suffering. Sujala therefore said that a woman is never independent in all three stages of life. With anger and sorrow, she explains that in childhood a woman must remain under the authority of her parents, later under her husband, and in old age under the control and domination of her son Bhogoram. Thus, worried about her daughter's future, Sujala is compelled to think deeply and express her frustration and anguish.

Tarulata is a tragic woman who spends her life suffering under a patriarchal society. She performs every responsibility of the household—bearing children, caring for her mother-in-law, and managing all domestic duties efficiently. During times of financial hardship, she sacrifices her own hopes and desires while constantly worrying about the happiness and sorrows of her husband, Bhogoram. However, the arrogance brought about by Bhogoram's financial prosperity gradually turns him into an immoral man. Involved in illicit relationships and unlawful business activities, Bhogoram does not show even the slightest emotional affection toward Tarulata. The very Tarulata who had stood beside him through happiness and sorrow receives no love or care in return; instead, Bhogoram considers the figures in his check book sufficient fulfilment of his responsibility toward her. Thus, rather than valuing a woman's love, emotions, and aspirations, Bhogoram gives priority only to his own lustful pleasures.

For every child, parents are the dearest people in life. Yet, in the social background depicted in *Ganga Silonir Pakhi*, the responsibility of caring for parents is considered solely the duty of sons. For a married daughter, serving her parents is almost unimaginable. Even during the critical moments between her mother's life and death, Basanti must seek her husband's permission to visit her parental home. But Mathura refuses to allow her to go. Basanti becomes angry and burns with frustration, yet she is unable to protest strongly. The reason for this may be said to be that she is an ordinary woman in a male-dominated society. She does not even know the meaning of rights and independence.

Although Tarulata is aware of Bhogoram's illicit affairs, she silently continues to serve her immoral

husband. On the other hand, when Mathura learns about Basanti's past love affair, he labels her as impure and sinful. Is this not another form of injustice inflicted upon women by patriarchal society? When men commit mistakes, they are forgiven, but women are never granted forgiveness for theirs. This is not merely the language of the novel; it is also a reflection of real society.

Mahatma Gandhi's contribution to the Indian freedom movement is unparalleled. The ideals of the Father of the Nation, Mahatma Gandhi, had deeply influenced the hearts of every Indian. Therefore, it would have been surprising if the novel had not reflected those ideals. Before independence, the ideals of Gandhi's non-violent movement were well understood by people in every household across the country. However, with the passage of time, by the 1960s these very ideals had become alien to the same people.

Even individuals like Bhogoram, who had actively participated in the Quit India Movement of 1942, became corrupted under the foul atmosphere of politics. "Boycott foreign goods and adopt Swadeshi" remained merely a slogan. People stopped wearing khadi clothes. The business of khadi cloth merchants also declined. The markets became filled with flashy imported fabrics. Overall, moral values underwent a transformation. Using Gandhi's name as capital, politicians tried through deceptive arguments and clever tactics to trap ordinary people in the web of politics. Therefore, the novelist writes: "They confused innocent people with endless words. The people of Sonai do not understand politics; they only understood it during the time of 'Gandhi Raja.'" (*Ganga Silonir Pakhi*, p. 62)

Moreover, many of the people of Sonai abandoned Gandhi's ideals in the post-independence era in pursuit of comfort, material wealth, and luxury. Ironically, these very people had once regarded Gandhi's ideals as the guiding principles of their lives. Bhogoram is one such character. Driven by poverty and helplessness, he sells his ideals and becomes favored by Subodh Saikia. Through Saikia's influence after elections, Bhogoram receives contracts and various forms of assistance. His financial condition improves. Poverty alone does not corrupt human nature; excessive comfort can also destroy character. All these incidents represent the realities of post-independence Assam. Bhogoram becomes wealthy. The very Bhogoram who once questioned whether Gandhi's ideals had disappeared now undergoes a transformation in both ideals and mentality. This is reflected in the

following lines from the novel: "After becoming rich, their attitudes and ways changed. Bhogoram too began speaking boastfully, and when shown muga or silk clothes, they would instead talk about 'jerjet voile' fabrics."

(*Ganga Silonir Pakhi*, p. 77)

Ultimately, Assamese society sacrificed Gandhi's ideals in the pursuit of wealth. The following line from the novel proves that by the 1960s, Gandhi's ideals had been pushed aside by Assamese society: "Has the spinning wheel fallen silent because Gandhi is no more?"

(*Ganga Silonir Pakhi*, p. 46)

Conclusion

The novels of Lakshminandan Bora enriched post-independence Assamese literature. From the simplicity of rural life to the noise of outsiders, from moral anarchy to deep conviction, and from external prosperity to the inner emptiness of human minds, the thematic diversity of Bora's *Ganga Silonir Pakhi* is remarkable. The foundation of the novel lies in contemporary social life. However, the novel does not merely glorify society. It also contains national consciousness, multiple perspectives on love, the urge to break social conventions, the cries of people who have lost their dreams, and the growth of immorality and disorder brought about by changing times.

The monotonous themes that dominated pre-independence novels were rejected by post-independence novelists, and this transformation is clearly reflected in Bora's novel. Like his other stories and novels, this work also portrays the conflict between modern life and traditional life. The novel beautifully presents aspects such as folk culture, psychological analysis of women, and literary style. However, considering the limitations of the present research discussion, these topics may be explored further in future studies and analyses.

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