

AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL CONTEXT IN A NOVEL NAMED ‘KANHIBUNOR MALITA’ WRITTEN IN THE BACKDROP OF PARTITION AND MIGRATION

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SYNOPSIS:

‘Kanhibunor Malita’ (Ballad of a Grassland), a novel written by Rudrani Sharma, is a documentation of timeless period which is connected with the existence of a race. This existence has been very much active by some catalysts like social, political, economical, cultural and intellectual for long-long period in Assam and it had been depicted in this novel. Bangladeshi refugees are coming in this land since partition and consequently Assamese people are facing existential crisis and on the other hand Bangladeshi Muslims are struggling for their life. And this is the theme of this novel. The central plot of this novel is the life of Bangladeshi Muslims and the author depicted it with utmost consistency; therefore, this novel had been able to take a mature form with the help of its subject, theme and style. Simultaneously this novel had established the relation between man and soil. Land acquisition by immigrated people and the development of close relation with the land had taken the centre stage and this context had enriched the topic and theme of this novel.

Key words: Partition, migration, indigenous people, historical conscience, identity, Assam Movement, existence.

0.0 INTRODUCTION:

This novel had been written in the realistic and prose form and it one of the longest as well as distinguished literary works. In nineteenth century Assamese literature had taken form in the style of western literature. So, Assamese novel was not an exception in this regard. Specially, this kind of literary works had been started through the ‘*Arunodoi*’ news paper, established in 1846 with the initiative of American Baptist Missionaries. In this context we could mention ‘JatrikorJatra’ over here which was translated by Dr. Nathan Brown and published in ‘*Arunodoi*’ in 1848 AD. But it had not any novel like quality; still it had marked the first step in the preparatory period of Assamese novel. In this period some write-ups had been published in Assamese, original and translated both, with the intention to propagate Christianity in this region. Those write-ups had some novel like features still could not be termed as novel. History of successful Assamese novel, which had well-structured story-line and well-developed characters, had began in the last decade of nineteenth century. Four Assamese novels were written and published in this decade. Bexbaruah’s novel named ‘*Padmakumari*’ was published first time in 1891 AD in the January-February issue of *Jonaki*¹, a periodical; and then it had

been published in successive issues. In the same year, 'Bhanumati' by PadmanathGohainBaruah had been published continuously in a periodical named Bijuli. 'Padmakumari' was published with the changed name 'Padumkumari' as a book in 1905 AD. Bhanumati was published as a book in 1908 AD.² PadmanathGohainBaruah's 'Lahori' was published as a book in 1892 AD³. Rajanikanta Bordoloi's 'Miri-Jiyori' is regarded as the pioneer in journey of Assamese novel with genuine novelistic features. It was published in the last decade of nineteenth century, in 1895 AD.⁴

0.1 Place of *Kahinbunor Malita* in the world of Assamese novel

Assamese novels written in twentieth century have brought the fresh air of hope to the world of Assamese novel. When these novels are closely observed then a certain characteristic in terms of subject matter have been found. In this period political novels have been written on the backdrop of past events significantly. Some worth to be mentioned plots are Historical events of Assam, Sino-India war, Movement for deportation of foreigners, Revolutions in Assam etc. Number of young novelists depicted some new themes with details and analysis. Among them Rudrani Sharma has established her unique identity in the world of Assamese novels. Her novels have been widely accepted by readers. Her novels are *Uttarkaal*, *DamitarDastabez*, *LouhityaTeerorAmritgatha*, *PanbazarorPandulipi* and her novellas are *PakhilarAtmakatha* and *UlomaBagan*. Recently she had written a novel about the life of people belong to *Char* (sandbar). And that is *KahinbunorMalita*.

History tries to wipe out some unpleasant truth, but creative literature always take endeavor to bring those truth under the sun. In different languages of India there are lots of novels regarding India's movement for independence and nationalism, but comparatively there are very few numbers of novels regarding partition. Therefore, it must be said that, the issue of 'representative' of certain community has not been established properly in the world of Assamese fiction literature as well. Still there are couple of persons of letters who depicted the crisis period of partition with an artistic sensibility in their literary works. In this context we could mention over here a novel named *Ashirbador Rang* by Arun Sharma. This novel is a vivid documentation of political, social, cultural, religious and human values of Assam in post partition period. In the very beginning of this novel there is a historical depiction about the migration of Muslims of East Bengal and Nepalese of Nepal by the route of Brahmaputra river into Assam. Rudrani Sharma depicted the stories of Bengali Muslims who migrated into Assam since the latter half of nineteenth century and started living in the sandbars of Assam in her novel named *KahinbunorMalita*, published in 2017.

0.2 Objective of this Study

Life struggle of Bengali Muslim community who started living on the sandbars of Assam and their problems have been depicted in *KahinbunorMalita*; in this way novelist has raised the 'identity' issue of these people. Thus, she had been driven by a deep historical conscience. This novel has depicted the everyday struggle of poverty-stricken labourers against the economical adversity, and simultaneously their socio-political struggle to establish their strong identity. This novel has tried to consider these struggles in the actual historical background. In this study some points will be taken as objective and will be discussed:

1. How the unrestricted migration created a crisis in socio-politico-economical system of Assam.
2. Endeavour of sandbar people to assimilate with the Assamese society.
3. How the insincere politics and power hunger has created a crisis in the way of integration between Assamese society and Muslims of East Bengal.

0.3 Range of this Study

How the context of existence and self-identity has been developed on the backdrop of partition and migration in Rudrani Sharma's novel *KahinbunorMalita*, that has been discussed in this research paper.

0.4 Study process and source of information

In this research paper descriptive and analytical processes have been pursued. But as the main objective of this study is in-depth analysis, so the main process of this paper is analytical. The main source to prepare of this paper are the novel itself and other referential books and periodicals.

1.0 Review of Projected Subject

1.1 Migration of Bengali-origin people in Assam

History of human civilization is mainly about history of migration. Migration is not that kind of problem which has arisen suddenly in this present era. But it started creating complexities in the modern socio-politico-economical system. Therefore, it has been accepted by all that, this continuous migration should be checked at least with artificial means and the socio-economic characteristic should be protected within a certain geographical boundary. Because, the identity of a community is its geographical boundary. People living within a boundary for a long period since past is called 'indigenous'. Demand for independence had been raised and simultaneously the idea of protecting the interests of indigenous people had been developed and series of movement had been taken place since the second decade of twentieth century. After these movements United Nations had given a definition about indigenous people: *Indigenous communities, peoples, and nations are those, that having a historical continuity with preinvasion are pre-colonial societies that developed on their territories, consider themselves distinct from other sectors of the societies now prevailing in those territories, or parts of them. They form at present non-dominant sectors of society and are determined to preserve, develop and transmit to future generations their ancestral territories and their ethnic identity, as the basics of their own Cultural patterns, social institutional and legal system.*⁵ (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/indigenous-peoples>). Indigenous people having these characteristics are the of lands belong to certain geographical boundary. The migration began since the second decade of twentieth century had created extreme debacle in the life of Assamese people. In eighteenth century Zamindar class had been evolved in Bengal. In 1857 Siraj-Ud-Doulla, The Majestic Nawab of Bengal had lost a battle to British then the power of Bengal had gone to them. In 1793 Permanent Settlement Act had been introduced regarding land revenue, in this act payable revenues of zamindars had been fixed permanently. By the rights of permanent settlement act zamindars became oppressive and it was order of the day in those days that whenever zamindars needed to spend money for any of their household matter

then they used to collect all the cost from farmers in the name of taxes. In 1842 British Government had added Assam with Bengal as a part of political conspiracy. Greater area along with Goalpara district was under the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal till 1874 and during this period there was a good communication between Assam and Bengal. In 1880 farmers from Mymensingh district of East Bengal had been brought through the invitation by zamindar of Bilasipara, and the intention was to collect good amount of tax. In 1905 movement against partition of Bengal had been started. Then the migration from Bengal to Assam had taken place overwhelmingly. After that Bengal was struck by famine in 1912-13. Number of people had come to Assam to escape from that famine.⁶ Moreover, colonial rule had devastated Indian economy and life of Indian people like a permanent storm. In the second half of nineteenth century Indian GDP was decreased by fifty percent. The rate of this decline was more in provinces like Bengal than other provinces. This tragic economical situation was one of the reasons behind the migration from East Bengal to Assam. So, naturally the poor and starving farmers afflicted by legal or illegal land tax had migrated to Assam by leaving behind their ancestral land. Therefore, that migration had made an adverse impact on the economics of Assam in the first half of twentieth century.

1.2 Partition and Migration in *KahinbunorMalita*

A group of helpless people who are marginal and neglected, and a journey towards the ascension began among them had been depicted in this novel of Rudrani Sharma. There are stories of three generation in this novel. British colonial politics, partition of India and consequence of that on Assam, which made a critical situation for this state has been depicted along with the main plot. *British rulers had bifurcated Bengal. They annexed a part of Bengal with Assam. They brought lots of people from Bengal to Assam for farming purpose.* (p 22) It could be ascertained from these lines of this novel that the story has been developed during the ultimate process of partition and migration. Indian soil had gone within the jurisdiction of British after they occupied India. British had identified that jute and tea farming should be expanded in Assam. Because, *the good production of tea and jute in Assam would increase the revenue collection of British Government.* (p 23) British had motivated the arrival of farmers because *they thought it would be helpful for development of land in this state and that in turn would strengthen their position; and on the other hand, there was an urgency to produce jute for the British jute industry. Therefore, they thought about the utilization of vast area of land which was uncultivated until then. Farmers of East Bengal were very much efficient in producing jute. British government encouraged those people of East Bengal who were afflicted by flood, drought, famine etc. British even introduced steamer for communication.* (p 28) People like BasirMiya had supported these activities of British whole heartedly. According to him, when the farming would be good then people would get food and at the same time low population area would become populated and the earlier serious situation would be over. Therefore, local people at first had not raised any objection against the settlement of people in the low population area. Most of the people brought by British from East Bengal were mainly Muslims; only few of them were Hindus. This population had made a significant impact on the demography of Assam. *According to census of 1901, Assam had 71.03 percent Hindus; Muslims were 12.4 percent and others were 16.57 percent. And according to 2001 census, Hindus were 64.89 percent; others were 4.19 percent and Muslims increased to 30.92 percent.*⁷

1.3 'Identity' issue in the crisis created by political conspiracy

Before the migration, encouraged by British, some other groups of helpless people had immigrated in Assam. In this novel it could be seen that, before the partition of this country by Radcliffe who 'just drew a line on a piece of paper' to make a boundary line, lots of people from then East Bengal had immigrated to Assam in search of livelihood. *Hunger does not know country, nation and land. They found job and food. People with riches had not immigrated here.* (p 8) After that they lost all the physical and mental connection with their earlier land and in the course of time, they lost all the attraction as well. They assimilated with the soil of Assam. They had made the language and culture of this land of their own and their progenies also did the same. One of the contributors to the protection of Assamese language's dignity is Muslim community of East Bengal origin. Since the nineteenth century identity of a nation has been developed on the basis of linguistic identity. Therefore, ethnicity based earlier identity had been reduced. Assamese became the household language for the people of East Bengal origin. This novel had depicted the linguistic status of the people immigrated from East Bengal thus: *Since the census of 1931 they had been used to say that their language is Assamese. It was their ancestors' decision that, Assamese should be their own language. Osman Ali Saudagar who lived at Ali Tangoni in Nagaon had established an Assamese medium school in 1902. ...Muslims of East Bengal origin had taken initiative to establish Assamese medium school in sandbar areas. During the language movement in 1960 and medium of instruction in movement in 1972 they showed their blood and cordial relationship with Assamese language.* (p188) But some political situation raised new questions regarding their relationship. Once they came from East Bengal but in the course of time that East Bengal became a country by the name of Bangladesh. People immigrated from then East Bengal to Assam have not given a place in their heart to any other country, still they were suspected regarding their identity. Questions being raised against the Assamese identity of these people by the strong nationalistic sentiment instigated by the political conspiracy. Therefore, we could see in *KahinbunorMalita* that, the central character of this novel named Ramiz and some other characters had taken active part in the Assam Movement to deport the illegal immigrants, but they became the subject of suspicion. Objective of the Assam Movement was to protect the linguistic, cultural, political and economical rights of Assamese 'indigenous' people. But the leaders of that movement had not any ideology, they were power-hungry and had not any political strength, therefore that movement had fallen into the political whirlpool. Central character of this novel Ramiz had witnessed this, therefore he moved away from this movement, *but he never opposed against it. His comrades are suspicious about his identity, so why should he walk along with them?* (p 123) 'Homeland' is a very sensitive issue for this kind of people. The movement against outsiders turned into movement against foreigners. The term foreigners had been explained in many ways. According to hardcore nationalist, those people are foreigners who wears lungi, have beard, speaks Assamese in foreign accent, lives in sandbars or on the bank of river and involved in jute farming. Those made riches were uplifted but poor laborers got the Bangladeshi tag. (p 159)

When Ramiz's, the central character of this novel, predecessors came to Assam at that time this country was not bifurcated. Ramiz's grandfather Bashir Miyan became destitute after the third famine in Bengal. Then Bashir Miyan came to Assam with BillalBepari, and he started a small trade over here, at that time he noticed the fertile land and enchanted with the natural

beauty of Assam. As there was no zamindari system over here so the uncultivated land was abundant. Over the time Bashir Miyan slowly lost all the longingness for his native village Paisana of Naagarapur in Mymensingh while staying in the beauty of Assam. Bashir Miyan then enchanted with this place and came over here for good. *He strengthened his dream— when he came to know that there was no zamindari system over here, here was raiyat system. ... Here plantation was very easy just one need to push the seed into the soil, one needed not to drop his sweat to made this soil fertile.* (p 13) MadhuMahajan had given a piece of land near his farm to Bashir Miyan. And the contract was that, Bashir had to look after the farm. After coming to Assam Bashir became father of three sons. His eldest son was hardworking, but not his other two sons. And that hardworking MadhuMiyan was father of Ramiz, the central character of this novel. MadhuMiyan tried with heart and soul to embrace Assamese language and culture. Ramiz actively participated in 'Assam Movement' against the illegal immigrants, while pursuing his study. He tried to spread awareness among the people by writing articles in dailies and periodicals. Ramiz's grandfather and father tried to awaken the people of their society against the superstitions, and they also used the education as a mean to do that. Ramiz also had taken the same way and he pursued education and at the same time he tried to enlightened his own society with education. Ramiz took an initiative to eradicate the backwardness of his society by the means of education. He tried to depict the problems of his backward society in front of the outer world with his education and write-ups. And for doing that he raised his voice to the ears of intellectuals who belonged to Delhi. While doing all these things he never thought himself be separated from the mainstream Assamese society. According to Ramiz, *undoubtedly, he had utmost love and loyalty towards his own country.* (p 11) Ramiz was involved with left minded thoughts and at that time he felt that his activities should be carried out in broader perspective with an organized way. Therefore, he established 'SamanvayAruManavata Mancha' (Platform for Integration and Humanity). His intention was to deal with the problems of Muslims of Bengali origin who lived in sandbar of Assam and as a whole the problems faced by Assamese society. Ramiz had firm belief that, the poor people had been living here generation after generation had found their place in the language and culture of Assam, and they existence could be protected by strengthening their linguistic and cultural identity, not by religious identity— *I love Assam, I love to introduce myself as Assamese. If someone treat me as a Muslim or Garia, let them do that, I don't care.* (p 229)

1.4 Communal Dissention created by Political conspiracy

Some section from both Hindu and Muslim community tries to create communal dissention for political interest. A section of people, who are politically strong, among the Assamese Hindu has such political conspiracy that they are creating obstacles in front of people like Ramiz who tries to assimilate with the Assamese society. Although some people trying to create political dissention yet people like Ramiz tries to establish themselves as Assamese all the time. Ramiz had firm belief that, their future would be protected if they linguistically and culturally identify themselves with the Greater Assamese identity. But on the other hand, comparatively strong section of people among the Muslims always tried to maintain their power; therefore, they didn't want that, the other people of their society should overcome the socio-politico-economical backwardness. They always tried to captivate the common people within the religious backwardness. But highly educated Ramiz felt that, this religious backwardness is too

much harmful to their struggle for existence and identity. Therefore, Ramiz raised his voice against so-called religious system. But then he faced the wrath of religious fundamentalists— *Assam is a very sensitive state in terms of religion and ethnicity. A single spark could create a wildfire. Only politicians would be benefited by that. Let Assam burning like Kashmir and let them prosper. That's why people like Ramiz master are their target.* (p 240)

Love for nation is limited within the certain geographical boundary. This is a widely accepted notion. Therefore, when unrestricted immigration takes place into a geographical boundary, then it creates a challenge to the socio-economic structure of that place. In this case government didn't solve the border issue with a neutral position, rather they created communal disharmony. *They maintained a good relation with Bangladesh by not solving the border issue, but created a hateful relation with Assam. Colonial government sowed the seed of animosity against Bengali people by introducing Bengali language as official language in Assam. And the Central or State Government had spread the hatred against the Bangladeshis.* (p 138) There was a conspiracy to include Assam in Pakistan by making the Muslims of East Bengal origin to immigrate with large number in Assam. In this novel there is a mention about Jinnah, who raised his voice in favor of separate Muslim State. Muslim League was founded in 1906. Muslim league sent people to Assam not only with economic intention, but with a political conspiracy as well. Muslims had internal understanding with British; therefore, Muslim communalism was able to take strong form. Shadulla led alliance government (1 April, 1937-4 February, 1938) had a suspicious role regarding immigration of Muslims from Mymensingh district. A decision had been taken under the leadership of Bordoloi that, those who came after 1938 (in this year first migration had taken place into Assam and that was before independence) shouldn't be given land. But a section demanded that, the cut-off year should be extended and the farmers should be given land settlement. By taking the opportunity from this conspiracy Shadulla government hadn't implemented that decision taken under the leadership of Bordoloi. But for year after year since 1938 (the cut-off year of land settlement) and during independence and partition tremendous immigration had been taken place from East Pakistan.⁸ Excerpts from novel: people are coming from outside again and again. They are coming from Nepal, from other states of India, people are coming from earlier East Pakistan and from today's Bangladesh. Government of India had helped in the making of Bangladesh. But does that mean that, Indo-Bangladesh border should be left open? (p 111) It has become clear that, if the people, struggling for life everyday are trying to establish themselves as Assamese, then they have to give priority to the cultural assimilation rather to religious bond— *it would be an act of deception if one cannot become Assamese after living in Assam. Their religious faith also doesn't allow to do so. One should be assimilated with the soil they live in and the people they live with.* (p 80) On the other hand Muslims of other place find it hard to accept the Muslims living in sandbar of Assam who situated outside the realization of outer world. Jasmina, a student from Delhi, once went to sandbars but she was shocked after witnessing the unimaginable poverty over there. Therefore, Jasmina involved in argument with her elder brother Parvez about the real situation of these people. Parvez also believed like other people that, these people had come after formation of Bangladesh. May be, they acquired those land by force or had been settled by middlemen. That means, those people are not accepted by Parvez. He even said to Jasmina that, they themselves are responsible for their own situation.

Jasmina couldn't agree with Parvez, because she had seen with her own eyes the plight of those people.

1.5 Other related points of this novel

This novel had depicted simultaneously real issues of people belong to sandbar, like child marriage, polygamy, illiteracy, superstition, malnutrition, plight of women etc. Illiterate women got married at the very early age and at that age they had to give birth to number of children, these things bring only tremendous situation for them. As the polygamy was allowed for men, so they were always in the position to marry in the old age with the girls of their daughter and granddaughter's age. Illiterate women also didn't against that malpractice just in the hope to get little shelter in their husband's house. If a woman goes against her husband's any malpractice then she has to leave her only shelter and that is her husband's home. Thus, these women accepted all these things silently. But on the other hand, Amina, paternal aunt of Ramiz, had some morale and progressive mind, thus she was able to acquire some extraordinary power. She didn't support her husband's second marriage. She even left her son's home because her son ill-treated his first wife after his second marriage; she went to her brother MadhuMiyān's house after leaving her son. Amina had so much interest in education, and she wanted to bring that light to the life of her nephew Ramiz. The section among the Muslim community, who were comparatively powerful, had taken more vehement role to push the illiterate society into the abysmal darkness. According to them, people like Ramiz Master are misguiding the society. Because he spoke in favour of right to education for women, abolition of purdah, birth control etc. Those are the sections who defined the position of women in society who believed, *women should be veiled under burqa and purdah. Men are not allowed to hear women's voice.* (p 182) Ramiz Master therefore realized, *not a single religion is liberal for women. Men creates all the rules for their vested interest and they introduced those in the name of religion and let those practiced in their community.* (p 167) This novel has depicted the terrorist activities as well. Jagadish Sharma's sister Beena's husband was not able to pay five lakhs rupees, therefore he had to die— *new extremist groups had been formed. Terrorist activities are growing up day by day. Those groups need money to run their activities. The most pressing issue is that that, when some violent people get gun in their hand then they locked up their reason and conscience by the intoxication of power. But then the sufferers only the common people.* (p 164)

2.0 Conclusion

In post-partition period, how the communalism had spread its claws that has been depicted with historical analysis in this novel named *kahinbunorMalita*. Here one could find the subtle expression of hope and despair, emotion and feeling, love and hatred in the hard and relentless struggle of working-class people. And all these things are caused mainly by politics in this novel. We have arrived on some conclusions after this discussion. These include:

(1) From the time immemorial people have been migrating from one place to other in search of livelihood. But illegal migration should be prevented and it should be done. Because, it could not be accepted that, unrestricted immigration into a certain geographical boundary would create a challenge to the socio-economic structure of that place.

- (2) Educated and modern people of India are also affected by communalism. Common working-class people of democratic India are suffering because of inhuman treatment and communal minded people and these are happening with the political vested interest of some section of people.
- (3) Linguistic and cultural unity of India is in the brink of extinction in Assam because of communal disharmony created by religious animosity.

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