

The Role of Journals in the Development of Assamese Literature in the British period (1826-1947)

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Abstract: *This Paper presents a study on the role of journals in the development of Assamese literature in the British period (1826-1947). This period will include the Orunodoi era and the Jonaki era of Assamese literature named after two important journals Orunodoi and Jonaki of that period.*

I. Introduction

In 1826 by the landabu treaty Assam was conquered by British. This brought a remarkable change in Assamese social life as well as in the Assamese literature. In the British period many journals were published which played a very important role in the development of Assamese language and literature. Different forms of modern literature like short story, novel, biography etc. entered into the Assamese literature through the journals. Two major journals of that time were the Orunodoi(1846) and The Jonaki(1889). These two journals started two eras in Assamese literature named after the the journal as Orunodoi era and Jonaki era. These two journals formed base of modern Assamese literature.

II. Orunodoi Era

Orunodoi was the first Assamese journal. It was published for the first time from the missionary press in Sibasagar in 1846 under the editorship of Nathan Brown. Though the prime reason for publication of Orunodoi was the propagation of Christianity but it also helped in entrenching the Assamese intelligentsia and broadening the mind of Assamese people. It also helped in reestablishing the Assamese language in Assam. In the early age of British rule in Assam the official language of Assam was Bengali. Assamese language was neglected in its own land. Some of the Assamese youths of that time along with the missionaries made a revolution to reestablish the Assamese language. As a result of their strong revolution Assamese language got the official status in 1873. The journal Orunodoi played a vital role in the revolution.

The writers of the Orunodoi era can be divided into two groups namely, the Christian writers and non-Christian writers or Assamese writers. The Christian writers were mainly involved in writing religious books for the propagation of Christianity. But they also wrote some dictionaries, grammar books and school books. The Non-Christian writers were mainly involved in the development of the Assamese literature. Among the Christian writers Nathan Brown, Eliza brown, Miles Bronson, Oliver Cutter, Nidhiram Pharowall were important. Among the Non-Christian writers Anandaram Dhekial Phukan, Gunaviram Baruah, Hemchandra Baruah were important.

Orunodoi established the modern Assamese prose. The missionaries used simple and only the external form of Assamese language in their writings. Their style was close to English. Even in the writings of Anandaram Dhekial Phukan in some places the influence of English language was reflected. Hemchandra Baruah gave Assamese prose a stable form on the pages of Orunodoi. Thus Orunodoi helped Assamese prose to get a stable form. In Orunodoi though most of the writings were in prose style, some poetry form of writings also published in Orunodoi. These followed both the Vaisnaviate style and western style. The subject matter of the vaisnaviate poems were mainly the different holly places. Some of the poems of that time specially the Nidhiram Pharowall's poems reflected Cristianity. Different history such as "Chutia Buranji", "Purani Asom Buranji", "Kamrupar Buranji" , different political stories, different aspects of science, biography, short stories, modern drama and novels started on the pages of Orunodoi.Orunodoi continued to be published up to 1880.

Orunodoi formed the base of modern Assamese literature. It inspired the development of modern Assamese literature and brought Assamese literature to a dynamic state and to a larger world of literature. Following the example of Orunodoi several newspapers and magazines were published in Assam in the second half of 19th century. The most important among them were Assam Bilasini (1871, Majuli), Assam darpan (1874, Tezpur), Assam Mihir(1872, Guwahati), Goalpara Hitashadhini(1876, Goalpara), Chndrodaya (1876, Nagaon), Assam Dipak(1876, Guwahati), Assam news(1885, Guwahati), Assam Bandhu(1885, Nagaon), Mau(1886, Calcutta) and Jonaki(1889, Calcutta).

III. Jonaki Era

The Jonaki a monthly journals published by Assamese students in Calcutta started a new era in Assamese literature which is also known as the age of romanticism in Assamese literature. According to an article of Vol5, issue No.7 of the journal written by Lakshminath Bezbaruah the inception of the journal was an outcome of a tea party at 67 Mirjapur Street on August 25, 1888. In that tea party a committee was set up – “Axomia Bhaxar Unnati Xadhini Xabha”. The development and Assamese language and literature was the primary aim of the organization. For these purpose the organization decided to publish a monthly journal to preserve the old Assamese literature, to translate different important books from Sanskrit and other languages to Assamese, to develop reading habit in all classes of people, to introduce pure grammar and orthography and to create one standard written language all through the areas of Assam. As a result in 1889 in the month of January under the editorship of Chandra Kumar Agarwalla the first issue of Jonaki was published. It published from Calcutta for 10 years up to 1899 and in 1901 and 1903 it was published from Guwahati. After 1903 its publication ended but in the history of Assamese literature the Jonaki era extended up to about 50 years. There were so many news papers and magazines tried to continue the flow of Assamese literature created by Jonaki. Among them Banti (1900-1944), Usha(1907-12), Banhi(1909-1946), Assamiya(1919-58), Chetana(1919-27), Milan(1923) were important.

Jonaki era brought different new forms of literatures along with new thinkings to Assamese literature. Poetry, drama, Novel short story comic literatures in all directions a new movement started. Different trends of literature which entered to Assamese literature in Orunodoi era became more distinct in Jonaki era. Mainly the Assamese short story started on the pages of Jonaki. In the Vol4, issue4 of the first Assamese short story “seuti” by LakshminathBezbaruah was published. Jonaki also brought the trend of novel to Assamese literature. Another journal “Bijuli” edited by Padmanath Gohain Baruah published parallely to Jonaki was also important in the field of Assamese novels. In 1891in Jonaki the novel “Padmakuari” by Lakshminath Bezbaruah was published in a serial manner. In the same year the novel “Bhanumati” by Padmanath Gohain Baruah published in Bijuli in a serial manner. Jonaki and Bijuli formed the base of Assamese novels. Jonaki also brought a massive change in the Assamese poetry. The trend of romantic poem was started by Jonaki. Though modern Assamese drama was started in the Orunodoi era but real development in modern Assam drama was in the Jonaki era.

Jonaki brought three literary genius of Assamese literature to light who were also known as the trimurthy of Assamese literature. They are the editor of Jonaki Chandra Kumar Agarwalla, first Assamese sonnet writer Hemchandra Goswami and Rasaraj Laksminath Bezbaruah.

IV. Conclusion

Orunodoi and Jonaki played very important role in the development of Assamese language and literature. Orunodoi brought Assamese literature from a ceased state to a dynamic state and also helped the Assamese language to regain its status whereas Jonaki established a proper and stable form modern Assamese literature. Importance of other journals of this period also can not be ignored. They supported Orunodoi and Jonaki in the development of Assamese literature.

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