

ABSTRACT

Assam, one of the states in the farthest North Eastern region of India, inhabited by a bewildering variety of people belonging to diverse tribes and of different racial stock, is often described as a living ethnological museum. The tribes, endowed with distinct traditions of culture over the centuries have immensely contributed to the growth of Assamese society and culture including growth and development of Assamese literature. A large number of writers originating from various tribal groups have participated in this historical process of literary growth with writings in different genres paving way for interaction in the larger social and cultural set up. A major form in which the tribal life and culture of Assam find wider representation is the art of fiction, particularly the novel. There is a constant flow of interaction and dialogue among tribal and non-tribal people in different parts of Assam having spent most their lives in co-existence. This has led to many creative writers, more particularly novelists who have taken up tribal life and plot of their literary constructs. The trend started with the *Miri-Jiyari* (1894) by Rajani Kanta Bordoloi and is continuing till today with more and more modern writers taking up representation of tribal life in their works.

Simultaneously a host of writers not belonging to tribal life by birth also took to writing novels in Assamese portraying social life of various tribes with meticulous details. The folklore, customary laws, social and religious expressions – written or oral and various other traits and characteristics of folkloric dimension have found representation in these novels with graphic descriptions.

Writers of non-tribal origin like Rajanikanta Bordoloi, Birendra Kumar Bhattacharya and many others have written novels in Assamese portraying social life of various tribes of Assam. Their novels focused on different tribes including- Bodo, Dimasa, Garo, Karbi, Khasi, Missing, Naga and Tagin. It has been found that most of the writers have written their novels through their personal experience of contact. We also found that the writers of tribal origin like Bhabenchandra Pegu, Bishnu Prasad Rabha and many such other authors have also contributed extensively to fiction with portrayals of Assamese novels on their own tribal society.

With reference to the issue of ‘cultural categories with social and group referents’ cultural differences with distinctive features of social groups and communities lead us to

the notion of ethnicity. The novel as a social and cultural narrative many a time draws ethnographic images. While there are novelists coming of their respective communities who write on themselves in which representation of ethnic life or 'cultural boundaries or differences' find vivid portrayal, there are also other novelists who write on ethnic communities as an onlooker. Although both the categories of such novels with representation of ethnicity and ethnic life verge on the same ground of social realism, there are differences of attitudes of 'self' and 'otherness' which need discussion.

The Assamese novel through the passage of more than a century or its history finds a considerable number of such narratives on tribal or ethnic societies authored by writers of both the categories mentioned above. In many of these novels representation of ethnic life and culture, hopes and aspirations, struggle for identity and even frustration found vivid portrayals. These novels which also need to be taken as distinct cultural texts with embodiment of ethnic representation of varying nature provide us a wider space for discussion from the stand points of ethnicity, representation, identity and language.

Keeping these in view the present work aims to study the range of representation of ethnic (tribal) life of Assam in Assamese novels with particular reference to four acclaimed works by four different writers – *Yaruingam* by Birendra Kumar Bhattacharya, *Bharanda Pakhir Jak* by Umakanta Sarma, *Rangmilir Hanhi* by Rang Bang Terang and *Mikchijili* by Jatin Mipun. The terms 'tribal' and 'ethnic' have been taken in the present study as interchangeable although subtle differences (Which are also addressed in the form of a discussion in Chapter 1) are there in meanings of both the terms. There is a constant flow of interaction and dialogue among tribal and non-tribal people in different parts of Assam that has led to the emergence of many creative writers, and novelists who have taken up tribal life as subjects of their literary works.

This study has tried to identify a vertical line of difference between these two categories of novels in terms of the concepts of ethnicity and representation, by non-tribal writers and writers of tribal origin.

The present work is divided into five chapters together with the Introduction and Conclusion. **Chapter I: Introduction** -This discusses an outline of the research plan

including the statement of the problem underlining the importance and relevance of the present study, objectives, methods and methodology, review of literature and limitations.

Chapter II: Culture, Ethnicity, Social Realism and Novel as a Cultural Form - Some Theoretical Approaches:

It lays the theoretical parameters in studying the problem of the thesis with ‘culture, ethnicity and representation’, ‘ethnic consciousness and identity formation’, ‘social realism and novel’ etc. in keeping with the subject of the thesis.

Chapter III: Assamese Novel and Assamese Culture: Some Historical Issues –

It discusses:

1. Growth and development of Assamese novel a short historical note
2. Major trends in 20th Centuries Assamese novel
3. Major novelists from the tribal communities of Assam

Chapter IV: Representation of Ethnicity and Tribal Life in Assamese Novels - It

forms the analytical part of the thesis which incorporates discussions on the issues of ethnicity, representations, identity and language finding revelations in the novels in question and special reference has been drawn to four novelists namely

1. Birendra Kumar Bhattacharya
 2. Umakanta Sarma
 3. Rang Bang Terang
 4. Jatin Mipun
- in respect of their four acclaimed novels namely –
- a. *Yaruingam* (1960)
 - b. *Bharanda Pakhir Jak* (1992)
 - c. *Rangmilir Hanhi* (1981)
 - d. *Mikchijili* (1993)
- respectively.

Chapter V: Conclusion - This chapter draws a conclusion of the above four chapters.