

Social picture reflected in the novel Kharlung

Anjali Narzary

Research Scholar, Department of Bodo, Gauhati University. Assam, India

Abstract

The novel Kharlung Novel is written by Monoranjan Lahary is a social novel. This novel is published on 1976. In this novel novelist has beautifully shown the bodo social picture. Novelist focus Bodo people's traditional costumes, folk beliefs. Food habits, marriage system, agricultural life, servant and maid system etc. beautifully in the novel. In this novel novelist reflect the traditional habits of unsettled group of people who usually change their habitat from one place to another. The main character Gohel is a young man of unsettled habit. The nature of Gohel is comparable to the unsettled nature of Bodo society that keeps changing their habits. In this novel we also see some Bodo people who are going to Mimang for settled their life. In this paper I am going to study about the social picture of the Kharlung novel.

Keywords: Social, Bodo, Customs, Agriculture, Reflect

1. Introduction

Monoranjan Lahary, one of the eminent novelists in Bodo literature was born in 1936 in Bamunkhura village. This village is situated under the Gossaigaon municipality. His contribution to the Bodo literature is enormous and remarkable. He contributed to the Bodo literature so many poems, prose writing, short stories, novels, dramas and literary criticisms. The novels written by Manoronjan Lahary are Kharlung, Hainamuli, Rebeka, Daini?, Alaishree, Phami and Jom. In this paper the social picture of Bodos as portrayed in the novel Kharlung published in 1976 are discussed. Through this novel Lahary established himself as a successful novelist. In this novel the novelist reflected a detailed social picture of the Bodo society. The tradition and customs are also reflected clearly through the novel. The traditional habits of a group of Bodo people who usually change their habited from one place to another is focussed in this novel. 'Gohel' is the main protagonist of this novel who plays the role as kharlung. The character of kharlung as delineated by the novelist is in an utmost stage to escape the sophisticated life hence he runs away from the home. This novel also illustrates the traditions, customs, rituals, laws, faith, beliefs, food habits and marriage system of the Bodos.

2. Social picture of the Novel

In general, the novel 'Kharlung' is a reflection of Bodo people's general living hood. Gohel as mentioned in the introduction that plays the pivotal role in the novel seems to be very intolerant. Lahary, through the character of Gohel, metaphorically highlights the unstable and impatient nature of the Bodo people. Similar to Gohel there are many people among the Bodos that bear this unstable and impatient characters. Ransrem and Gaojeng of Bamunkhura village plays the role of Gohel's father and mother respectively in the novel. The Bodo tribes are basically like to stay in a village as they have their customary laws attached to them. Due to the existence of some traditional habit, these Bodo people cannot stay in one place, and they often tend to shift from one place to another. Gohel also unable to settle in one place as he

remains dissatisfied in any situation. He used to feel uncomfortable in any place, situation, therefore he decided to flee away from one place to another. As a result he could not settle his life and almost stayed like an alienated individual, made him to face failure in many ways. The title of the novel aptly implies this nature of the Bodo society. The novel presents a realistic picture of the simple and traditional way of the Bodo society. The day as depicted in this novel when Gohel fled away from Darrang, he met many Bodo people who also assembled there to hadan (newly reclaimed land). These people whom Gohel met belong to the district of Goalpara, Tiyabari, Takimari and Narabari village who went to settle at Mimang. They were preoccupied with a kind of blind faith that in Mimang, there would not be any scarcity of land, money, meat, fish, in fact no scarcity of anything. These Bodo people also believe that any people turn to be a rich man as soon as gets a lot of land. This aspect is vividly depicted through Gohel in this novel. But soon they realised that this belief is just a blind faith. They have to face many problems. This place Mimang is totally flood affected and devastating flood destroy everything. After flood so many diseases arises. There is no proper hospital for treatment and die so many people every year. Gohel's father Ransrem is very poor. Like other fathers he also wanted to get his son educated. So, he was borrowing money from other and kept his own land in mortgage. But Gohel failed to fulfil his father's dream. He came back home awfully as he failed in his B.A final exam. He is neither able to do any job properly nor be a good farmer. Bodo people mainly live in village and agriculture is the main occupation. Through the novel Kharlung the socio-economic situation of farmer as well as Ransrem's pictures are also depicted nicely. Gohel's father is very tense and worries regarding the future of his son. Gohel managed to get a job though he could not pass the B.A exam, but left the job due to his sluggishness. His father out of anger asked him to get married or get a new job. The novel started from paddy field and ended over there. The picture of paddy or many types of grains are being sown very beautifully. Gohel's mother used to carry food for his son but due to his

absence in the filed his mother became worried and started looking for him everywhere. In the same time other farmers were busy ploughing and growing their paddy. Bodo peoples were make their foods of agriculture and invent the technique of farming. The Bodo society is acknowledged for their distinct folks and customs. They maintain their distinct customs and traditions to develop their society. They also have a very strong feeling of community, when any misconduct or offence, takes place in the community, they decide it mutually where the selected elderly members of the society known as 'Gaonbura' decides through a system of panchayat. Since the initial beginning of this novel he has shown us the notion of settling dispute or solving any mystery in the society through the selected judge of society members known as 'Gaonbura'. The members of the society try to impart their sense of justice by solving the issues and thinks that it is better for the Bodo society. For, example when Gohel left the field to his home the cows that he used to plough was seen eating the paddy of Lesharam. But Ransrem soon came nearby and prevented the cows to eat the grains of Lesharam and takes away the cows from the paddy. Lesharam out of covetousness tries to complain it to the community leader known as 'Gaonbura' against Ransrem. Therefore a panchayat is held at evening. The judgment takes place in Village headman's house. The name of the village headman is Gagrang. His age is no more than 76. He gives equal judgment for everyone in the village and everyone likes his judgment. He always speaks the truth and never the lie, a man with sweet heart. Everyone gathers in village headman's house in the evening. Lesaram came in front of everybody because he was the one to complain the issue against Ransrem. Messenger Mwlla went to inform everyone and whoever he did not met, he went back again to them. Sadaru, Badaru, Golo, Gwbla, Korde and everyone else came for the judgment. Villagers managed to make seat for themselves in barenda, front yard, chairs and also stools. Village headman asks the messenger,

"So, has everyone from the village arrive?"

"Yes, grandfather." the messenger replies.

Then the old man starts the session. He first asks Lesaram the reason he was complaint for, "What happened Lesa?" (Kharlung p-48)

Lesaram have been wanting to shame Ransrem and for this he said much more than what actually happened. He said, "Ransrem's two cows entered my rice seedling field and now there is nothing left in it. They ate so much that there is none left to plant." After that he started using foul language against him. When asked about it by the Village headman Ransrem said that the cows were just starting to eat the seedlings when he saw and brought the cows back Because Ransrem did not accept his fault, Lesaram started beating him and moments later, his son Rode joined him and continued beating. Later Village headman said to stop and they did. Some people from the village ask justice on behalf of Ransrem. Then the village headman said, "Lwisa, just because it's someone's fault, don't hit them. Rode, Ransrem is of your father's age. Beating him is like beating your father, which is a big sin. So Lwisa, Ransrem's two cows ate your rice seedlings. Do you have any witness?"

"There is witness brother. My cowherd Bergo was with me."

Lesam said. "I saw it myself." Bergo said.

"What did you see?" Village headman asked.

"I saw that Ransrem's two cows ate all the rice seedlings that belonged to my master." Bergo said

"Is there anyone from the public who saw it?"

Village headman asked

"I saw uncle. Not much from the seedlings were ate." Budang said

"Earlier, this morning when I passed by uncle Lesa's rice seedling field, I saw the tip of it being cut off. When I asked why they were doing that, they said our master said so."

"Cutting it like that means they were trying to falsely prove uncle Ransrem's cows ate all of it." Kwmtha Halo said

"Did anyone else see Bergo cutting off the seedlings' tip?" Village headman asked.

"I saw that as well." Gwbla's cowherd, Gala said (Kharlung p-51)

After enquiring like that Village headmen came to know that Lesaram was trying to trap Ransrem. Later Ransrem was told to look after his cows so that they don't eat other people's paddy. Then he said to Lesa,

"Lesam, a big wrongdoing has been done. You tried to trap Ransrem by cutting the tip off your seedlings just because some seedlings were eaten by his cow. So, for this, you will have to pay a fine of Rs. 61. And, for beating Ransrem, Lesa and Rode will have to ask forgiveness from him." Lesa felt really ashamed and he also was sad because his plan backfired on him. Later, Ransrem said to the public that he forgave them before being asked for forgiveness. This kind of judgment and customs can be seen in Bodo society.

Pre-marital sex is regarded to be a sin in Bodo Society. There is a punishment for those who try to cross this morality according to the village people. The novel depicts it through Gala and Phenthebe who elopes and Phenthebe gets pregnant before marriage. Gala promise her to marry but latter refused to marry her and Phenthebe had to come back home. When the village people comes to know about it they ask her for purification through ask sorry with a famous ritual praying known as 'jogyo' and along with a sum of Rs.50 fine to the village people.

Festival is a sign of culture of any society. In Bodo society there are so many folk festivals. According to Indramalati Narzaree there are two kinds of folk festival; Religious festival and Agricultural Festival. According to Dr. Kameswar Brahma there are three types of festivals which are (a) Seasonal festival, (b) Religious festival and (c) Agricultural festival. But all the festivals are directly or indirectly related to agriculture. The ceremony of eating new rice after the harvesting season is depicted here. Gohel and his friend would never miss any new rice eating ceremony in the village. The Bodo people believes if you can feed as many as people then God bless more and more. Gohel and his friend even would not leave any Saradu when they were child.

Marriage is one of the most important socially recognized rituals of Bodo society. In this novel Dwnkharlangnai, Kharsonnai, Habagwla and Bihary lanai (second marriage) picture are shown. In this novel the Khokhilongbari village, where the ceremony of marriage was taking place has been beautifully portrayed. The marriage of Gasiram's son along with JatraGaan is being shown. Jatragaan was very much needed in the marriage of Bodo society since early times; otherwise ceremony of marriage would have been dull.

Phentheb is the youngest daughter of Ransrem. Ransrem in order to educate Gohel borrowed some money from one of the landlords of that village known as Arga Mahajan with a promise to return it in time. Being unable to pay the money, they had to keep Phentheb as a servant in their home, against their wish. One day Arga Mahajan tried to sexually assault her, therefore she fled from their home to her own house. Since then she started to stay at home and helped her mother in the household works. One day while she was out for fishing with her friends a snake bit her. A person named Gala, seeing her in that condition calls in the local people who had the knowledge of ayurvedic medicine and heals her. Gala looked after her very carefully till she was completely cured. Hence out of whole this scenario a new relation starts among them and both of them falls in love with each other. On the day of a marriage, held in a village named Kokilingbari they both eloped. This is called Dwnkharlangnnai in Bodo society. Later Phentheb come to know that Gala was very poor and have no house of his own even. At first for both of them tried to stay somewhere in Guwahati but goes back to their village Bollamguri and after that, back to their own house. In fact, in the village named as Allengmari, which is the native place of Gala he did not have his own house. They had to stay in one of their relative's house. Phentheb repents on her decision and considered it to be wrong step on her part. Gala was also a kind of philanderer kind of guy who keeps physical relation with many women and then leave them. Phentheb was his third girlfriend. Gala also started to be getting irritated by her. After Phentheb being pregnant gala got more irritated by this fact. One day when the villagers of Allengmanigaon accusing both gala and Phentheb of spreading immoral things in the society, they came out in search of them. Gala ran away keeping Phentheb beside. Phentheb, out of the pain in her life, tried to commit suicide jumping into the river but, by the time she reaches the bottom of the river, she refrained from her decision thinking about the baby inside her. She went back home but was brought to the village headman by villagers for judgement. Phentheb's father Ramsrem, out of tension, tried to give her daughter married away to someone before the baby get borns. With the help of a marriage maker he found a man from the village Tulsibil. The new found man for marriage was already in love with another girl but his father did not wished them to get married so his father too was ready for the marriage. Soon life was harsh again for Phentheb, she was not happy. This time it was more brutal than before. She was physically harmed by her husband and beaten up too. Her son that she delivered after 7 months of marriage was not accepted by her husband and he used to criticize her about the days she was with Gala. The reason for this was, he and his girlfriend tried to come back in relation and get married soon. She agreed to enter his home before the settlement of marriage which is called kharsonnai, so he readily leaves Phentheb. This is depicted in the novel. In the last part of novel the author talks about how Rangrashi enters into the house of Gohel before marriage. This type of marriage is called 'kharsonnai haba'. We have seen the practice of keeping two wives in the Bodo society so in a sense of polygamy is practised. Malshing Babu in the novel is seen as having two wives. Arga of Bamunkhura village also wanted to woe Phentheb as second wife but he could not.

Food habits are also focussed in the novel. Novelist tries to show how Bodo people collect the vegetables' from forest

and also fishing habits of the Bodos are shown. Phentheb and her friend used to go for fishing. Having rice beer and betel nut also takes very important role in Bodo society. There are many festivals that are not completed without the rice beer. A good hospitality is also very important among the Bodos. They always try to respect the guest. Bodo people believe the guest as lwkhi or mainao. They think that if guest come then lwkhi or money will come in the home. So they served every need of the guest. In the novel they tried to portray Gohel as guest of Bisthiram. Bishtiram's sister served him with all the delicacies herself.

The maid servants also have importance in the Bodo society. In the novel Phentheb and Angshi stayed as maid in Lesharam's home. Bergo, Gala, Gatham, Rakeb, Daorao and Malshing Babu's six servants and five maid all the character have got importance in the novel.

3. Conclusion

The Bodo society looks like to a great extent which has been depicted by the author in this novel. This novel is a total picturisation of a Bodo society. The novel kharlung very skilfully highlights how an agriculture based Bodo society has its own pros and cons. It depicts many relations, hopes and aspirations of the poor farmers. The Gaonbura is main person to solve any kind of problems in the village. It is also nicely depicted in the novel which still takes place in the village of the Bodo society. The importance of social customs, festivals, uses of social materials, food habits etc. are wonderfully publicized in the novel. Apart from the discussion in the novel, many things do exist in Bodo society that we come across. House materials are made by themselves as we have seen Ransrem busy all the times with the work of bamboo. This novel will serve its needs to the readers to know a Bodo society.

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