

“A discussion of Nabakanta Baruah’s children novel *Xiyali Palegoi Ratanpur*”

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ABSTRACT:

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1.00 Introduction:

Nabakanta Baruah, who is so much the greatest figure in the Assamese Literature of the nineteenth century, started his career as a poet. A man of many talents Nabakanta Baruah contributed to other literary genres such as children literature, novels, prose, translations, and humorous poetry along with literary criticism. However, in the world of Assamese literature Baruah expressed himself as the most exquisite children literature writer. In the nineteenth century, Baruah used the pen name of “Ekhud Kokaideu” to write humorous poems in the magazine *Ronghar* when he decided to switch genres and write child fiction. In the world of children literature, he wrote various poems suitable for children along with songs, plays, stories as well as novels. He also wrote philosophical works like *Ramayan* and *Upanishads* to educate the children. His marvellously effective use of allegory in novels like *Xiyali Palegoi Ratanpur* (1956) and *Akhoror Jokhola* (1958) has contributed significantly towards his popularity as a child story writer. In 1958 Baruah received the national award for his work *Xiyali Palegoi Ratanpur*. In present time the renowned writers of children literature are not able to outshine Nabakanta Baruah as one of the most popular child literature writers.

1.01 Research Objective:

His literary works can impart joy together with scientific knowledge in the minds of children. The fundamental objective of this paper is to explore

Nabakanta Baruah’s children's novel *Xiyali Palegoi Ratanpur* for further research purposes.

1.02 An extensive study of the subject matter:

The novel *Xiyali Palegoi Ratanpur* can be discussed from different aspects. However, the subject of this research paper is limited to the discussion of *Xiyali Palegoi Ratanpur* as a children's novel.

1.03 Research Methodology:

In this paper, descriptive, as well as analytical methods, are used to study Nabakanta Baruah’s novel *Xiyali Palegoi Ratanpur* as a children's novel for further discussion purposes.

1.04 A review of *Xiyali Palegoi Ratanpur* from the perspective of children novel:

Nabakanta Baruah contributed significantly to the Assamese Children Literature by using various pen names. His works as a children fiction writer can be divided into two categories- “Child-focusing” and “Child-centric”. Child-focusing works are those which are created for children whereas works which are not limited to children are known as child-centric works. (Introduction, Birendranath, The entire works of Nabakanta Baruah, Page-1)

His “child-focusing” works include- humorous poetry, child novel, essays, plays for children etc. The novel *Xiyali Palegoi Ratanpur* falls under this same category which can be subjected to further analysis. This novel shares a similar content with Lewis Carroll’s *Alice in the*

Wonderland and Through the Looking Glass in addition to Sukumar Ray's *HaJaBaRaLa*.

In the introduction of *Xiyali Palegoi Ratanpur* Nabakanta Baruah dedicated a letter to the children who can read it after they have grown up. This letter says-

"Dangor hole jetiya Alice'or xadhu porhibi ba Sukumar Ray e tohotole likha kitap, tetiya dekhbi j teulukor dore bohut kotha eyat pai goiso. Tohotor karone okol tohotor karonei kio, amar dore xongxare kothuwa kora manuhor karoneu hai kitapki-khonotkoi aru val kitap moi porha nai." (The entire children literature of Nabakanta Baruah's child, page 118)

(When you grow up and read the stories of Alice or Sukumar Ray, you will find that this book deals with similar subjects like those works. This book is not only for children but for the stressed people like us, I haven't found any better books than those)

This letter shows us that Nabakanta Baruah was highly influenced by writers like Lewis Carroll and Sukumar Ray.

The protagonist of this novel *Xiyali Palegoi Ratanpur* is a small boy named Jun. He heard about a place called Ratanpur from his grandmother. Jun describes various bizarre and supernatural incidents which he faced while setting out for his journey to Ratanpur. This research paper aims to bring forward those descriptions of peculiar incidents through which Baruah tried to educate children about various important facts.

When Jun set out to find Ratanpur he stood amidst the juncture of ten dykes and was perplexed thinking which dyke will lead him to Ratanpur. Baruah compares these ten dykes with the ancient Indian system of ten directions i.e. East, South-East (Agneya), West, North-West (Vayavya), North, North-East (Isanya), South, South-West (Nauritya), Zenith (Urdhva), Nadir (Adho) rather than just

mentioning about the four directions to teach children about the ancient direction system.

In this novel, Nabakanta Baruah teaches children who know alphabets about how the meaning of a word can be changed by adding prefixes or suffixes.

For example when telephone asked Jun-

"Baru, salonir o kar gusai e kar kori dile ki hoi kosun?"

(What happens when you replace the letter "a" with the letter "e" from the word saloni?)

Jun answered- *"Siloni"*

Besides this novel deals with the concepts of morphology where the meaning of words changes when read from left to right side. For example- the idea of word formation is provided to the children when the Vixen asks Jun to read the word *"Napit"* from left to right.

Here in this novel, Nabakanta Baruah used general knowledge to teach the preschool kids about the concept of the solar system. Baruah skillfully portrayed Jun riding a sieve when he saw the Ursa Major playing London Bridge to educate the children about the constellations. Apart from this, differences between the facts that the moon has no light and the sun has its own light were included to give a basic understanding of planets and stars.

Similarly, while coming out of the stars, Jun came across a hole like a small ditch in the sky which indicates the fact that the surface of the sky is rugged.

In this novel children are taught about geography. Jun was flying the sieve for a long time but after some time he came back to the ten dykes. Similarly, in the same way earth orbits around the sun. Such lessons of geography are introduced by an ant. Moreover, kids are introduced to the importance of a magnifying glass which makes small objects appear bigger in size.

Number system and division are more complicated to the kids than the comprehension of language.

However, in this novel, such concepts are made easier by narrating an interesting episode of Jun sharing his biscuit with the greater adjutant.

Along with scientific facts and general knowledge, the author has included mesmerizing songs for children to catch their attention and provide them with joy. Like

“Jun bhaity namaskar”

Tumi eman poriskar

Tumar sulat istri

Omrao Singh misti”

[Greetings Brother Jun!

You are so cleaned

Your cloths are ironed

Like Omrao Singh Mason]

Jun sang to wake the great adjutant as

“Bortokula suka tekela

Julunga nile sure

Bit xogunor hulunga mari

Tumar pithit pore”.

(The greater adjutant is a sharp cope

But his bag has been stolen by thief

Vulture carrying a luggage

Fell on your Back)

In this novel, the writer has expressed various absurd things. For example- telephone can speak, but it loses its voice when it perched, vulture flying with a sieve, the wrestlers who were wrestling on a sieve, while Jun was flying in the sky the biscuit in his pocket became magnifying glass, a fox who was

writing a love letter in the light of that lamp lit by cutting his ears and a ladder which can move upwards. These episodes are portrayed with such perfection that they appear real which ultimately provides joy and happiness to the children.

Conclusion:

In this way, the novel *Xiyali palegoi Ratanpur* uses animal imagery to expand children's knowledge about animals which they see in their day to day life. Various incidents which Jun encounters on his journey are presented to children in the form of educational lessons like the knowledge of vocabulary, number system, the solar system, ancient direction system and geography in a very exceptional way.

References:

- [1] Nath, Birendra. “Introduction”. The entire children's literature of Nabakanta Baruah(first volume). Second edition. Bhabani Offset & Imaging Systems Pvt. Ltd.1-14. Print.
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