

Suryya Kumar Bhuyan
As a Short- Story Writer
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Professor Dr. Suryya Kumar Bhuyan is an illustrious figure in the history of history, literature and culture of North- east India. He was a born genius in the field of academic pursuit, a noted educationist, a distinguished literature, an ideal biographer, a dedicated researcher and above all he was a historian par excellence. Although Dr. Bhuyan was a professor of English subject, yet he was better known to the orientalist as a first-ranking historian. It is because of his scholarly works on history and his life-long devotion to it. On the other hand, he is no less a literature contributing poetry, short story, narratives, essays, criticism, biography, etc. to the literary world. If he had engaged himself in purely creative literature, he could have undoubtedly achieved a high position in this direction also.

Considering his historical contributions in English and Assamese several renowned historians and scholars like Dr. B. A. Saletore, Dr. Nalinikanta Bhattasali, Dr. Tara Chand, Dr. Hemchandra Ray Choudhury, Dr. Radha Kumaud Mukherji, Dr. Sir Jadunath Sarkar, Prof. K.A. Nilakanta Sastri, Mr. J.P. Mills, Mahamahopadhyay Padmanath Bhattacharyya, Professor Krishnakanta Handiqui, Dr. Suniti Kumar Chatterji and many others have highly appreciated him. But detailed discussion about his creative literature like short story and upakhyān is not noticed so far. Perhaps his outstanding historical contributions have kept this aspect overshadowed. Here in this paper I offer a humble attempt at analyzing his short stories included in the book 'Panchami'.

Bhuyan's story-book 'Panchami' was published by another educationist Durgadhar Barkataki from Calcutta in January, 1927. The book contains five short stories, so it has been entitled as Panchami. The stories are 'Sila Nahay Phul (Not Stone but Flower), Tetiya aru Etiya (Then and Now), Bijuli (a name of a girl, meaning lightning), Manik Bora (a man by name) and Amina (a girl by that name). All these stories appeared first in the monthly journals 'Usha' and 'Banhi' while he was studying in the Cotton College, Guwahati and the Presidency College, Calcutta in between 1910 and 1913 A.D. The publisher in his prefatory note has stated that Bhuyan's short-stories attracted the reading public at that time because of their simple and realistic episode, clarity of expression and ideals inserted therein. Bhuyan's language was simple, fluent and lucid.

The first story of Panchami is 'Sila Nahay Phul'. It deals with the currents and cross-currents of the life of one Puspa, a young boy who loses his parents at his childhood and grows up with his grand-mother through straitened circumstances. By dint of his own virtues, Puspa obtains the B.A. degree and goes to Calcutta for higher studies. Once, the old grand-mother presses him to perform his marriage-ceremony before her death. Considering his grand-mother's weak health and dwindling condition of his house for want of care and supervision, Puspa marries Baruna, a minor girl of his neighbouring village. As a student of M.A. class in literature Puspa dreamt of a romantic wedded life with Baruna who would not think of such imagination due to her tender age. When Baruna comes for the first time to her father-in-law's house as a bride she did not want to stay there leaving her parents, brother, toys, calf and cats with which she played at home. She, even, cried for her own home. Observing her childlike nature Puspa felt worried and tried to make her understand about the married

life, beauty of mutual attraction etc., but in vain. However, before leaving for Calcutta, Puspa tells Baruna that he will not come back home unless he receives an inviting letter from her. At his departure, Baruna, unknowingly felt a thrill in her mind, she wanted to bring him back home, but she could not do so, because of her shyness. Thus Puspa goes to Calcutta and Baruna comes to her parental house. After a few months, Baruna begins to feel loneliness, remorse and pang of separation. Her parental house appears to her an unhappy one. Hereafter, she sends a letter to Puspa inviting him. Having received her long-awaited letter, Puspa immediately comes to Baruna and they become united with a romantic zeal. He, then, comes to realize that Baruna is not a piece of stone but an enchanted flower.

The writer has tried to present a contrast between a minor girl and a matured youth, between a town girl with free mind and a village girl with confined nature.

Judging it from the technique view-point it will be obvious that it has a dramatic and abrupt beginning as it opens with a dialogue. Its main character Puspa and his old grand-mother – a minor character are introduced to the readers in the beginning. Baruna as a heroine is seen in the next phase. A critical examination of this story reveals that its plot is simple and single. Shortness of length and brevity of the plot are its special traits. The writer has been, to some extent, successful in achieving unity of impression. Generally he takes up a homely problem and tries to treat in a psychological manner. Of course it is true that this story does not present its theme in such an artistic manner as is being done in the present day short story, but we must not forget that it belongs to a period when modern technique of Assamese short story was yet to be evolved. Lakshminath Bezbaroa's application of modern technique in short story was still in experimental stage, although he, later on, could succeed in this field by virtue of his matured intellect.

The second story entitled 'Tetiya aru Etiya' (Then and now) deals with the life of one school boy, Nilambar by name who faced economic hardship after his father's death. His mother died after his birth. As a faithful domestic servant Ramratan a Bihari man looked after the family. Nilambar now had to depend on Ramratan and Sukhla, the village headman. Nilambar's father Pitambar was a popular advocate and a helpful man. During his life-time, his house was like a joyful meeting place where his friends, relatives and admirers assembled and appreciated Pitambar for his kind heart, benevolence and service to humanity. He lavishly spent money. So, after his demise, Nilambar had to suffer. Pitambar's friends and relatives now avoid Nilambar; they, even, discourage him to prosecute study. But Ramratan and Sukula gaon-burha support him to continue his study. With their help Nilambar Passes the B.A. examination and one day he becomes a magistrate. Observing his progress and prosperity many selfish people like Ratnadhhar Musniff, his wicked son and others try to defame him by various means. But determined Nilambar remains as it is. After being magistrate, Nilambar is approached by many wealthy parents including Ratnadhhar to marry their daughters to him but in vain. On the other hand Nilambar deeply realizes all covering sympathy received from Sukula gaon-buhra, a man of generosity, honesty and piety; so he marries his daughter Sitala, an unblossomed girl of beauty and virtues. Thus he leads a happy wedded life.

The theme of this story is not complex although there was a good scope to do so. His construction of plot, presentation of character and style of expression are pleasingly subtle with honesty, morality and firmness. The writer seems to show that perseverance, honesty and determination may bring a good result of work to the person concerned and the bad result to those of crooked character. Selfish and jealous persons are dangerous to the honest people. Bhuyan was basically an ideal person

whose reflection is noticed in the mind and activities of Nilambar. Ratnadar Munsiff, his naughty son and many others like them are found in our society.

Another short story 'Bijuli' is like a poem in prose; the theme has been metaphorically presented. The writer has described the story in the first person dealing with divine love of a youth. He loved 'Bijuli', a beautiful girl; she also loved him from the core of her heart; but she untimely died of an unknown disease. Thereafter the lover moves hither and thither like a half-mad carrying her remembrance in mind. He leaves 'Bijuli' locality for a distant place where after several years he marries a girl having resemblance with Bijuli. He always feels that Bijuli's soul is roaming around him. Suryya Kumar Bhuyan has applied a new technique in this story. His art of narration is a bit poetic having psychological effect focused through the action of the character.

The fourth story of the anthology is Manik Bora. Its theme is based upon a historical event intermingled with social problem. It begins with a hint of war-preparation of the Ahom King against the last Burmese invasion. Receiving a royal order asking for twenty thousand rupees and ten thousand soldiers from the Kaliabar region, the Solal Gohain discussed the matter with his principal officer Manik Bora of Sutargaon in 1818 A.D. Manik Bora was considerate enough for his subjects' economic condition and hesitated to collect the revenue. But due to royal pressure he did this. For such loyal activities and social services Manik Bora earned a good deal of admiration from both the king and the subjects. There was another junior officer Harigati who envied Manik Bora for his popularity. Ultimately Manik Bora died of Harigati's conspiracy. Later on all the conspirators are hanged to death.

This is a socio-historical episode presented by Bhuyan. He has woven the historical event with social malice. The theme is plainly knitted and lucidly narrated creating suspense in the mind of readers.

In the last story entitled 'Amina' we find a social picture of Assamese Muslim Community. It deals with two Muslim families of lower middle class life; they are simple, honest, pious and large-hearted. Several hurdles make Amina's family disheartened, but the other family comes forward to help them. Later on the two families become united through marriage and pass their life happily. The writer has tried to reveal the underlying ideals of the story by showing that honesty; simplicity and piety are the sources for bringing happiness to life.

Suryya Kumar Bhuyan had a poetic mind in him besides his analytical dexterity. In the field of short story, he possesses the quality of keen observation on the people – their mental state and various social problems. His art of describing natural environment, youthful beauty and human emotion is entertaining and heart-touching. As a short-story writer, Bhuyan's selection of narratives, construction of plot, handling of characters, dealing of social problems and life-philosophy inserted therein draw attention of the critics. His most of the characters are of good nature; the mischievous characters are shown ultimately to suffer. Dialogues are properly used. Suspense is not effective. Bhuyan's style of expression is lucid, suited to short-story.

The significance of Bhuyan's short-story lies in his sobriety of all respects, such as in construction of plot, delineation of character, application of dialogue, handling of romantic love, creation of atmosphere, insertion of ideals and style of language. He is a gentle artist bearing modesty and simplicity. Not a single example of excessive action, emotion and sentence is noticed in his short-stories. If Bhuyan continued story-writing in his matured life he would have been a prominent

artist in this sphere also ; but on the other hand, Assam, perhaps had to miss a historian par excellence, an ideal essayist, an inspiring biographer, an erudite editor, a constructive critic and at best a renowned scholar. However, we cannot ignore Suryya Kumar Bhuyan as a short-story writer who has shown his dexterity in creative literature like 'Panchami' and 'Jaymati Upakhyan.'

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