



## TREND IN OLD BODO POETRY: A CRITICAL DISCOURSE

**Sunil Phukan Basumatary PhD**  
Kokrajhar, BTR, Assam

### ABSTRACT

The main aims and objectives of this study are to delve deep into the insight of the Bodo literature especially old Bodo poetry. As such, to begin with this is crystal clear that the Bodo literature, especially poetry is the earliest manifestation and articulation and classicism, romanticism side by side nationalistic undertone are evident like the common phenomena of world literature today. Secondly, this author has tried to compare the Bodo poets of old period among themselves while the same is done with world leading poets too necessarily to make better understanding of the genres. Thirdly, the author has dwelt the social milieu of the community and the responsibility being taken up by the like minded social worker and reformer as well as poets whenever he feels fit to the text. Finally, the author has tried to focus and uphold the importance of literature as a platform and ways to reform the society as a whole.

**Keywords:** *Bodo poetry; Bibar; Bodo literature*

### 1. Introduction

In Bodo as in other languages, poetry has been the earliest medium of expression and the first specimen of it was *Bibar* of 1920, in hand written form and then in 1924 in the printed form which was edited by Satish Ch. Basumatary. It was the first ever magazine in Bodo literature. At that point of time *Bathou Nam Bwikhaguni Gidu* was found published ventured by Prasanna Kumar Boro Khakhlary singlehandedly from Southern bank of Brahmaputra valley for the first time as a book on lyrical poetry. Then emerged *Khanthai-Methai* in 1923 an anthology of Bodo lyrical poetry jointly ventured by Rupnath Brahma and Padma Shri Modaram Brahma. But all the publications mentioned here were preceded by *Boroni Phisa O Aiyen* in 1915, a composition on Bodo traditional

---

© 2021 : Thunlai Publications, Barama-781346, Baksa, BTR, Assam, India

Cite as: Basumatary, Sunil Phukan. 2021. "Trend in old Bodo poetry: a critical discourse". In Brahma, A. et al. (eds.). *Journal of Bodo language, literature, art and culture* < <https://www.bodojournal.org/publications> > Vol-1 (1): 1-10. Barama, Baksa, Assam: Thunlai Publications.

belief and customary laws at the initiative of enthusiastic Bodo youths from Southern bank of Brahmaputra again.

It is not surprising enough that romanticism and classicism side by side nationalism seemed to have articulated in Bodo verse at one point of time. The fact is that the Bodo literature emerged out much later in comparison to its counterpart Assamese and Bengali and the like. The classicism, for example, finds expression in Rupnath Brahma's poem *Mwnhasoyi Houwa* (The Infinite man) in lucid style:

Oh who art thou?  
Flirting in heart  
Playing on sweet Serja  
Oh who art thou?

(1-4, *Khanthai Methai*)

Thus the romanticism reflects at one point of time on the same poet's poem entitled *Angni Khwina* (My Bride):

Oh charming bride  
Thou art my dearest  
Being too beautiful to imagine  
moved by love  
Oh *khwina* thou art my too dear to be handled with

(1-5, *Khanthai Methai*)

## 2. Discussion

As we know, the Bodos were still totally in dark about the literature while its counterpart underwent changes in their poetry. So, forerunners of the Bodos had to start writing from the beginning. They were widely read and informed; still, they had to have responsibilities to reawake the Bodos from their slumber laden stage. Hence, their themes and techniques happened to be both of nationalistic and rudimentary. According to Boro (2010: 25-33) the themes of Bodo poems of Pre-independence period are: (i) Patriotic, (ii) Devotional or Mystic, and (iii) Love of Nature or Romantic. And mention worthy of its practitioners are Satish Ch. Basumatary, Rupnath Brahma, Padma Shri Modaram Brahma, Jolodhar Brahma, Kshitish Brahma and other. But to Lahary (1998), the themes of Bodo poetry of pre- independence period are: (a) that the quality of the poems is very standard though less in publication, (b) of romanticism and classicism, (c) no influence of

Indian or Sanskrit on Bodo classicism, (d) no influence of British romanticism on Bodo romantic poetry, (e) Patriotic and nationalistic feelings are maximum in number, (f) satiric vein is not less in number, (g) nature poems are considerable in articulation. But in my opinion, one visible theme may be added to them that is humanism or humanity. The humanism finds expression in Rupnath Brahma's poems like *Swrkhau Nongsor Malai Nongdong?* (Who do you assume alien?). (Brahma & Brahma 1923). In recognising the dignity of man as man everywhere he may be influenced by Chandrakanta Agarwala of Assamese litterateur. Chandrakanta Agarwala was, as written by Birinchi Kumar Barua influenced by the French philosopher Auguste Comte. In his own poem Rupnath Brahma says:

Who do you assume an alien?  
None is alien here,  
Yours or mine who do you think ?  
None is yours or mine.

(1-4, *Khanthai Methai*)

Roti Ram Brahma, the contemporary of Rupnath Brahma asserts in his poem *Erin Din Thaya* (These Days Last no more) (Brahma & Brahma 1923) about the playful culture and nature of the Bodos. And in this particular verse poet's morality too side by side gets focused.

These days last no more  
These days last no longer  
Alas no more  
At this demon's region  
Only eating and drinking  
Only gambling and enjoyment!

(1-6, *Khanthai Methai*)

This way, the forerunner poet had to concentrate his expression on his own nation's issues and problems. He was very much concerned about the habit and nature of the Bodos. The same Bodos, who had once royal power, ancestor and kingdom, now, they have found themselves nothing, apart from some heritage and tradition in terms of folklore and folk cultures. Satich Ch. Basumatary another contemporary poet reflects it in his soul-stirring poem *Ja habab* (Be Spirited). He says:

Lakhs and lakhs  
*Jakhaitham balab*  
Not any less in number  
Our Bodo race is.

(7-10, *Khanthai Methai*)

In this context another poet namely Prasanna Kumar Boro Khakhlary (1879-1925) needs to be mentioned. He wrote some brilliant nationalistic lyrics in Bodo. “Single-handedly this poet initiated the literary movement in the southern bank of the Brahmaputra by writing some of the best poems the language can boast of. He wrote immortal poems like *Bathou nam Baikhaguni Gidu*, 1920. ( Lyrics and hymns of the Bathou worship and Baisagu festival) ..... Besides these, he composed *Khemta gan*, a genre of lyrical poetry and tried to arouse patriotic feelings among the people. Composed during the eventful years of the freedom movement, these lyrics aim at arousing nationalistic and patriotic feeling among the Bodos of South Goalpara:

Oh sons of the Bodos, where you are?  
Look, what new ways are waiting.  
Forget those things of past  
Keep your mind steady  
You had king in the past  
Who worship *Kachai Khaiti*  
Now those days are gone  
In Dimapur was the Capital.....”

(Boro 2010: 29)

In *Paharani* (Forgetfulness) Kamala Kanta Bhattacharya in Assamese narrates how Assam’s ancient glories have sunk in oblivion, dwells on how those glories can be revived to exalt over here to her deserved place of honours in comity off nations. These patriotic poems of Kamala Kanta inspired the succeeding generation of educated and enlightened youth to delve deep into the rich mines of Assam’s magnificent past.

Similarly, in case of the Bodos, this situation seemed to have taken place. The first enlightened group like Satish Ch. Basumatary, Rupnath Brahma, Modaram Brahma etc having been inspired by their counterpart’s social milieu, came out to work for the development of their own society. Apart from organizing meeting, seminar and discourses, they used to compose poems to totally uproot the social abuses. Thus these

activities inspired the follow-up generation for further development of the society and enrichment of the literature as the succeeding generation with all the more promising and determined attitudes and activities. Hence, we can never forget the supreme sacrifices of our torch bearers of the Bodos who have been discussed here. For if we forget past the present would be in oblivion and dark in future.

In his *A Glossary of Cultural Theory*, Peter Brooker writes about nationalism, “.....nationalism arises in one nation’s dealings with another rather than in isolation, whether between states, or without them since states or nations are not identical...where this relationship is oppressive as in the history of IMPERIALISM, the conquering Nation will impose its identity as the model of civilization upon another whose identity is thereby suppressed.” (2003: 174).

In Bodo the later nationalist or ethnic poets have been much concerned about their identity, the identity which they had to lose to higher class or higher culture of them in Indian context during humdrum reign of British in India. Here and there the poet sighs with the loss of past glory and history. Ishwar Ch. Brahma in his poem *Anggw Mushri* (Self Identity) says in repentant, emotive, sensitive expression but a concerned ethnic representation such as;

Till-today the history echoes  
Expresses the musical instrument of Kashpur  
And about Rohini, Degadao of Dimapur and  
Dwimalu’s strength and vitality.

(11-16, *Guthal*)

Most of the subsequent poets like Kamal Kumar Brahma, Ranjit Kr Borgayary, Rama Kanta Basumatary etc. are of the same race who are assertive about ethnic issues and problems.

In my opinion what M.R. Lahary said about the reflection of Indian classicism on Bodo classicism, as such discussed earlier in this context at point (c) above §2 i.e. “No influence of Indian and Sanskrit classicism on Bodo classicism on Bodo classicism” can’t totally be right. The fact is that since there was already influence of Hindu-fold through Srimat Kalicharan Brahma in terms of enlightenment and reformation, the Indian ethos and classicism more or less occupied in course of time in the minds of the Bodo people.

As the later Bodo modern poets have been found influenced by the Indian classicism at large. And, as the poets of the old period got changed their religious beliefs under the influence of *Brahma Dharma*, their search for the infinity must, without doubt, be under the pretence of Hindu philosophy which can’t be denied as a fact.

The Bodo literature particularly poetry has got its solid and firm foundation in the hands of Ishan Moshahary, Promod Ch. Brahma, Kali Kumar Lahary and others of their contemporary. They are all out and out Nature and romantic poets.

Ishan Moshahary is gifted and thus acknowledged as the greatest romantic poet in Bodo so far. In his hands Bodo romantic poetry has achieved the peak of its development. In fact, Ishan is a love poet, a devotee of beauty. He sees everything around the world with love, dreams love and writes on the same theme. He prefers secret love to open one. Because he thinks, maybe, the laymen misunderstand their divine love. The poet knows the love always gets moulded with pain, suffering, separation, grief and despair. Romantic poems like *Badari* (The Woodcutter), *Mwnabili* (The Evening), *Dumthenai Bibar Bari* (The Fenced Flower Garden) *Mwdwi* (The Tears) *Gwthwibari* (The Graveyard) have the intensity of these elements. In *Mwnabili* the poet expresses his intensity to fall in deep love with superb beauty of Nature. As such the speaker says.

Oh maiden evening  
None knows but You and I  
Coming from western sky in motion glee  
Causes the gentle breezes blow  
Unfurling the cloud of silken *Dokhona-phali*

(1-6, *Sonani Mala*)

The Poet has painted the enchanting beauty of the evening with the help of superb collection of colourful attire with musical word and moment and fragrance. That makes the poem is unique and great looking and reading and listening as well. This portrait of Moshahary on life and nature must invite the reader to recall Rabindranath Tagore's portraits. There is almost a resemblance of picture presented by both the poets. Sukumar Sen says about the portraits of Tagore:

The day is at an end but the afternoon lingers.  
Toward the end of the day the sun looks tired  
but does not like to take leave yet: he stays looking  
on at the earth and would not bid good bye. The day  
entangles itself in the stray clouds over head; it lies  
scattered over the fields, it quivers on the waters of the river  
It stands still, casting long shadows on the bank of the tank  
and in pathway.

(Sen 1960: 196)

Tagore portrays the real picture of evening to suggest old age of life while Ishan portrays the real beauty of the evening. Being captivated by the evening, he falls in love and got married too with Nature in imaginary world.

Though Ishan has fallen in imaginary love with Nature and abiding Beauty, through his life, he suggests the earthly love where there are life and death, unification and separation, doubts and fears, pangs and sorrows, but then, for the poet, all that melancholy becomes a sweetheart at the end of the day. His world is an ideal world of fancy and imagination where tears can mingle with happiness and laughter. His world is an ideal world of fancy and imagination where tears can mingle with happiness and laughter. So as Shelley sings, “Our sweetest songs are those that tell of the saddest thought.” Hence Ishan Moshahary is highly praised by Dr Anil Boro and compared with John Keats by scholar M.R. Lahary as Moshahary too died young and composed a number of romantic poetry par excellent as the latter.

Promod Ch. Brahma another luminary of romantic poets left behind him a number of impressive poems. These include *Hayenni Suphin* (Flute of the Plains) (1992), *Dwi-bajrum* (The Waterfall) (1992), *Daha* (The Melancholy) (1992), etc.

*Hayenni Sufin* (The flute of the plains) portrays the luxuriant beauty of the Nature, delicate rhythmic and lyrical language employed by the poet invite the common reader to remind Coleridge’s dictum on poetry “The best words in the best order.” Promod Ch. Brahma says in his poem:

Far and wide meadow shines brightly  
Surrounded by the three hills of mighty  
Standstill the dripped up straws of grain  
The alive snails are on the edge of wetland.  
(1-4, *Hatharkhi Hala*)

The poet delineates the beauty of countryside where he resides. In fact, the Bodo people prefer to live at the side of meadows surrounded by scenic natural beauty. They like rivers, hills, lakes, birds, animals, flowers etc which are part of their life and enjoyment. Boro rightly says, “The poem *Dwi-bajrum* (Waterfall) is not a simple phenomenon of nature. Like Shelley’s West Wind, it is the symbol of revolt. Like West Wind, it has power to destroy and drive away the evils of the society. Thus in the poem the waterfall becomes the symbol of destruction and new creation.” (2010: 30). Thus the poet could make use of the nature as a symbol and the symbol of contrast pictures as two strains with single stroke.

Though Pramod Ch. Brahma wrote some of the romantic poem par excellent, his mystic poem is all the more impressive and philosophic. His recurrent themes are the fusions of mysticism or classicism in search of the infinity.

Kali Kumar Lahary is another luminary of the time or before the Independent period. He wrote some of excellent verses mixed of romantic, classic, nationalistic, and all the more ethnic identity on satiric vein. *Dodre Phangdang* is on romantic, *Araj Gabnai Bar Bar Sadinai* (Reading prayer repeatedly) *Baidi Mwjang Khauraing* (Different Good news) is on classical undertone. *And Jakhad Boibo Boro Bima* (Awake all the Bodo mothers) is on nationalistic and *Sarkar Hinjao* (Strayed Woman), *Sarkar Jalai* (Strayed youth) etc is on satiric vein.

In *Dodere Phangdang* (Sweetheart), Kali Kumar Lahary says in superb expression in pictorial and intensely lyrical language about fascinating beauty of the sweetheart. He delineates as:

Oh my sweetheart  
Don't madden thee my heart  
If I see thy smiling face  
I'm always happy  
Oh my sweetheart  
If I see thy smiling face  
Become tireless and fresh.

(1-7, *Khanthai Bijab*)

Again he says in the same poem:

Don't go away thou leaving me alone  
If thou go away, I'll go mad (34-35)

His poem must recall us the poem of Sir T. Wyatt's *The Lover's Appeal*:

And with thou leave me thus?  
Say nay! Say nay! For the shame  
To save thou from the blame  
Of all my grief and grave  
Wilt thou leave me thus?

(1-5, *Golden Treasury*)



About woman-folk Kali Kumar Lahary's treatment is not always the same. For sometimes she is every source of development and encouragement for the Bodos while she is treated good in contrast with every source of evil of the world while she is treated bad. Given the poet awakes all the Bodo women treating them motherly image to dig out the loss of identity, power of legendary heroes and history is really a matter of a great deal of achievement of our literature and culture.

To Classic poets or Pope mostly "The study of mankind is man", is the evident as such Kali Kumar Lahary is the classic poet, he portrays human characteristics with the satiric element in the superb collection of colloquial language as most of the classic poets of the world do. In the Bodo literature he showed the seeds of satire. Thus Kali Kumar's poems explore a great variety of themes.

### 3. Conclusion

Before the Independent period, there are some more mention worthy poets. They include Dhwarendra Nath Basumatary, Joy Bhadra Hagzer, Promotes, Moniram Supramary, Jagat Ch. Basumatary etc. Their themes also echo ethnic issue, cultural background, socio-economic, socio- religious scenario and focus on *Bathou* religion side-by-side romantic and mystic undertone with fascinating language and musical words which are responsible for leading to modern articulations and manifestations at large.

### References

- Abrams, M.H. & Harpham, Geoffrey Galt. 2009. *A Handbook of Literary Terms*. New Delhi: Saurabh Printers.
- Barua, Birinchi Kumar. 1957. *The History of Assamese Literature*. New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi.
- Basumatary, Sunil Phukan. 2008. *A Study of Themes and Techniques in the Poems of Brajendra Kumar Brahma, Surath Narzary and Bishnujyoti Kachary*. An Unpublished Thesis Submitted to Gauhati University.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2019. *SPECTRUM of Bodo Culture and Literature*. Kokrajhar: Gaurang Publications and Ansumoi Library and Publishers.
- Boro, Anil Kumar. 2004. *The Flute and the Harp*. Guwahati: G.B.D.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2010. *A History of Bodo Literature*. Kolkata: Sahitya Akademi.
- Boro, Madhu Ram. 2003. *The History of Boro Literature*. Hajo: Priyodini Printing Press.

- \_\_\_\_\_. 1990. *The Historical Developemnt of the Boro Language*. Dhamdhama, Nalbari: Bijoya Printing Press.
- Brahma, Pramod Chandra. 1992. *Hatharkhi Hala*. Dhubri.
- Brahma, Rupnath & Brahma Madaram. 1923. *Khanthai Methai*. Guwahati.
- Brooker, Peter. 2003, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edn. *A Glossary of Cultural Theory*. Euston Road, London: Arnold.
- Fowler, R. (ed.). 2005. *Modern Critical Terms*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Lahary, M.R. 1998. *In the Realm of Thought*. Kokrajhar: Ansumoi Library.
- Long, William J. 2012. *English Literature*. New Delhi: Atlantic.
- Sen, Sukumar. 1960. *The History of Bengali Literature*. New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi.
- Wyatt, Sir T. 1875. "The Lover's Appeal". In Francis T. Palgrave. (ed.). *The Golden Treasury*. Retrieved from <https://www.bartleby.com/106/33.html> on 1 March 2021.