



DISCOVERY OF THE SELF : AN INSIGHT INTO ISHAN MUSHAHARI'S "ABARI" AND JANIL KUMAR BRAHMA'S "DUMPHAONI PHITHA"

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ABSTRACT

The hidden potentialities of a woman are very distinct and clear. These can be justified in all her deeds and breaths. Being a woman, the conflict still exists about the loyalty of a woman in the society made by patriarchal power system. Women are facing an existential dilemma. But a woman's journey to selfhood is a sign of her integrity which fulfill her needs to exist as individual in a society. To show the scintillating power of a woman's capability in every sphere of life Ishan Mushahari and Janil Kumar Brahma's characters like Abari and Dumphaoni are the best examples in which Abari and Dumphaoni are the "New Women" exploring their true potential to fulfil their urges and needs. The search of a woman is actually linked with the search for the meaning of life. The characters sensitivity , perception and intensity bring the readers close to the emotional centre of the story. The present paper is an attempt to discover one's own " self" in the short stories of Ishan Mushahari and Janil Kumar Brahma focusing predominantly on *ABARI*(1930) and *DUMPHAONI PHITHA* (2005)

Key Words : Discovery, Self, Boro Short Story

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Ishan Mushahari and Janil Kumar Brahma's contribution to Boro Literature lies in their attempt to create Boro characters in new situations. They produce these characters as they appear in their real life. Better known among the readers as "Keats of Bodo Poetry" Ishan Mushahari (1915-1940) is considered the first recognized short story writer of Boro Literature. His famous short story "Abari" published in "Hathorkhi Hala" in 1930 is regarded as the first printed Boro Short Story in which the writer endorses the struggle of a woman for freedom and her quest for her own identity .

Janil Kumar Brahma (1951-), a distinguished and powerful writer of Boro Literature adds a new

direction in the stories and his award winning work "Dumphaoni Phitha" is based on power of self sacrifice and its power to stimulate love. In the story the writer brings out the dilemma of the simple people, their day to day struggles and how they try to overcome hardships to become successful in the complexities of contemporary existence.

Ishan Mushahari's "Abari"

The major alarming feature is the central character "Abari" who remained powerless throughout the story. Her misfortune is one which is mainly caused by the prevalent social code but which is partly due also to her own weakness of

character. She deeply feels her inability and utters in frustration :

“Oh God , it is you who have given me birth as a hobbling girl, not as sound as others are. Today, you have found it difficult even to find a life companion for me.”

This realization is deep rooted on female passivity and one's inability to establish meaningful relationship with anyone of her own associates. Mushahari here deals with her internal torment, her troubled childhood and at the same time her relationship with men and a serious concern of her family members on Abari's marriage. A young girl of eighteen , Abari is more bashful and dress conscious. Her mind was restless. She could not adjust herself with the prevailing situations as she never expected to be happened in her own life. In her infancy she was made to suffer for an untoward incident which led her to hide herself before others. She was not so crippled but her leg turned crooked. Of course she arouses a sympathy in the predicament in which she finds herself. She is mesmerized by her own thought:

“ May be, one of my legs is crippled , but I am completely motionless. Moreover I am not so ignorant or incapacitated as to do nothing. How shall I be happy marrying a person whom I cannot accept with all my heart? Am I unable to stand on my own feet ? Will it be proper to marry such a person ? It might be well if the bracelet be returned.”

In spite of her knowledge of the true nature of survival , she becomes bold enough and rejects her proposal of marriage by returning the bracelet offered by the bridegroom's party. It is evident and noteworthy in the custom of Bodo Community that if the bride's family accepts a bracelet offered by the bridegroom's party then its acceptance by the bride's family reveals their assent to the marriage.

Abari's tales of woe and suffering symbolize how women in all walks of life are controlled by the authority. Her refusal of marriage is a bold step taken in a time when the village elders could not find any inferiority among the men-folk . This shows the social isolation of women and also women's life filled with bitter experiences . But Mushahari wants

that his protagonist should make decisions and be ready to face the consequences as well.

Being a member of her own family Abari even has no chance of thinking for her sister Maifri's marriage. This arrangement made by her mother and brother accepting bracelet and betelnut chopping for Maifri's marriage create an ill-feeling and a sense of annoyance in the mind of Abari for she believes it was an injustice without the consultation of Abari. Abari's mind is sought to be abused and destroyed when she asked her mother :

“Why have you kept the bracelet ? Why did you not consult me even casually ? What would be the fall out if I refuse the boy ?”

The emotional heart of a mother for her daughters is perceived as when she knowingly plays a despicable act and becomes hard-hearted to Abari while accepting the proposal of Maifri's marriage. But gossiping and ill-feeling for an unmarried girl in the society can not be ignored. The family members also even donot expect that this situation would be happened in their own family. With the passage of time everything has changed. Abari's own brother could not bear such an insult and so he utters :

“It is you for whom I have to bear insults and shame in and outside home. Leave it or kill yourself jumping into a river.”

The words of her own brother forces her to think of life, of survival. She realizes that nobody else can save her , not even her family members; and that she herself will have to be courageous and face the life. A sudden proposal of marriage by a young chap of Simaluguri village bears the testimony of one's ultimate existence in the world where there is no hope. Abari is in search of a convincing, credible and predictable life. Her decision is categorical and final and this decision is a clear proof of the fact that there has always been a hidden strength in her. She must go out into the world to find out by experience what is right and what is wrong. She turns to be :

“ She was determined to stand on her own feet.”

A key concept throughout Mushahari's work has been that of suffering and torture between the boundary of own realization and the social structure. He portrays the character of Abari as a woman of strong feeling and understanding but

thinks herself unprotected and becomes the subject of unconscious desire. She is made to appear a victim of her circumstances, a victim of her own fate and as such she accepts her destiny quietly but tries to live life like others.

Janil Kumar Brahma's "Dumphaoni Phitha" :

The story revolves round a central character Dumphao who is not only dashing but also a matriculate as her education is concerned. A simple girl cherishing the desire to lead a better and secured life she is endowed with an assortment of virtues and became a part of jealousy for her friends. Sarala one of her close friends felt her inferiority and uttered :

"Dumphao Phagli ! Why have you changed so much ? You were more beautiful than us before."

The conflict that arose in the mind of Dumphao is totally domestic and mundane. At the same time Dumphao also strikes a balance between her inner self and the outer world. She asserts here her being deprived of happiness after assuming the life of a woman :

"What do I do ? Dumphao married the person who was destined for her . I married a private school teacher from our village three years ago. My husband does not have any land or property. He is very poor. I wish you happiness. There is no need for you to think about us."

These lines are bristling over with pathos which evoke the image of sensitive feminine soul for pleasure and happiness in life. Dumphao has the sense of reality. As a protagonist of the story , she is in a mood of submission, there is no desire to escape , no negation of life. She is unable to proceed with her thoughts for sometime all because of the mental torture . The unfavourable luck of Dumphao made a big question in the minds of her friends which justify the narrow mindedness of people prevalent in our own society. The profession of a teacher is highly valued in the society but the perceptions of Sarala and Gaodang were beyond imagination. They perceived the life of a teacher with a remorseless manner :

"That is what happens when one's husband is a teacher. It is better to die than to live like her."

Dumphao couldnot tolerate the hard boiled speeches of her old friends and prepared herself to face a better life than before. She keeps herself busy in search of alternate moods of hopes and despair. She is the symbolic equivalent of the modern house wife whose sensibility is perpetually under stress.

A private school teacher and also the husband of Dumphao, Somen master likes to serve his own people with an open heart. Dumphao and her family live a very happy life without bread and butter though Somen master is totally unaware about things and the happenings around him. The words of Dumphao's friends so harshly touched her heart that she could not hesitate to reply angrily the words of Somen master:

"Where is the rice that you brought? Where is the rice to cook? With an empty stomach and no job , how will you run your family going to such meetings? Look, how much money Gaodang's and Sarala's husbands have. I am ashamed of making family with you."

The lines distinctly reveal how beautifully she expresses her feelings. She is happily ready to participate in the mirth and merriment of life. But her mental agony is the outcome of her inability to cope with the modern society. Her longing for all the pleasures remains unfulfilled because of her husband's job and permanent existence for life.

It is the job of her husband to provide her all the pleasures. On the other hand Somen master's simplicity and honesty is so distinct and touching that his words provide a room for everyone to think for a while:

"Dumphao, everyone's luck is not the same. If you had luck like Gaodang and Sarala you wouldnot have married me and then you need not have to wade in sorrow with me. I am poor not because I want to be."

The responsibility of a husband to run his family is deep and pure but his realization to uplift his own community is also intense. He lives with a sense of defeat and failure:

“But what have I given to the community? You have seen Dumphao, how now a days everyone wants their community to prosper. All communities are progressing. Only we Bodos are lagging behind. Will our community survive if we sit back and say we are poor?”

Somen master’s idealized image of himself is that of an upright teacher in the village, a humble man in society and a victimized self at home. The impossibility of translating the dreams of Dumphao into reality frustrated her. She now realizes that she has an identity of her own that she must find out her own potentialities and strive to develop them. But she engaged herself in the struggle for daily survival. Her primary concern is not with how one gets along with others but with oneself :

“She made up her mind to help her husband in every step of life. If women from other communities could thrive trading in items like betel nut and tea why can’t the Bodo women ? I am also human, thought Dumphao.”

With this objective she starts her journey to be a successful one by selling phithas (rice cake) in the Samthaibari market. Dumphao who has always led a conventional kind of life in the household takes a revolutionary step. This bold and inspiring step of Dumphao illuminates the light of hope for a new shining day .

Conclusion

Ishan Mushahari’s “Abari” is an attempt to show prejudices nurtured against a girl in a Hindu household. It is also about a mother’s serious concern of her daughters to be married. The prime characteristics of Abari that attract our attention are her helplessness, humility, suffering and nobility. Dumphao and Abari indicate a steady progress in their march from self alienation to self discovery. This growing urge for self discovery in the stories of both these writers exhibits the growth potential of their protagonists. Abari attains a harmonious, clear vision of life, a sense of delighted, joyous, serene fulfillment. Dumphao experiences an awakening. She experiences the irresistible urge to liberate herself from the shackles of a conventional life. Dumphao who has been living an ordinary mundane

life is suddenly pushed out of this ordinariness and given a chance to exist her challenging experience. The characters of both these writers are deeply sensitive to the grandeur as well as sordidness of life.

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