

Dramatist Jyoti Prasad Agarwala and his 'LOBHIRTA': A Critical Analysis of the Character Lobhita

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ABSTRACT:

The journey of Assamese drama is very dynamic and resourceful. In this endless journey many of Assamese dramatists contributed their vivid and memorable work. Here, 'Rupkonwar' Jyotiprasad Agarwala is one of the greatest contributors. He helped in developing the Assamese drama production into a widely successful phenomenon by giving it a touch of realism with newly expressed themes. Along with his experimentation upon drama, short stories, novels, biographies, children's literature, plays and poems; he was also a gifted sculpturer, a revolutionist, a singer, composer and a dancer, and thus, reigned almost in all such artistic activities. Amongst his contribution 'Lobhita' is one of the finest plays. 'Lobhita' give us a new concept about drama. Also, the character Lobhita is an extraordinary creation of the dramatis. The play is set in the backdrop of World War II, India's struggle for independence, and the time of *Azad Hind Fauz* under the leadership of Subhash Chandra Bose. Lobhita is a woman of the new era. In this paper try to find out some important features and characteristics of the character Lobhita.

KEYWORD: Drama, Lobhita, Features, Characteristics, Relevance.

INTRODUCTION:

'Rupkonwar Jyoti Prasad Agarwala is an embodiment of talent in the field of modern Assamese drama and literature. He has immensely contributed towards the cultural and literary scenario of Assam through his vast range of works. His each and every creation is complete in itself and gives us the idea of his own thoughts and opinions. Along with his experimentation upon short stories, novels, biographies, children's literature, plays and poems, he has under his belt the title of the founder of Assamese cinema. He was also a gifted sculpturer, a revolutionist, a singer, composer and a dancer, and thus, reigned almost in all such artistic activities. In the age of *Arunodoi* and *Jonaki* he helped in developing the Assamese drama production into a widely successful phenomenon by giving it a touch of realism with newly expressed themes. As an imminent playwright, he wrote a total of nine plays- *Sonitkuwori*(1926), *Karengor Ligiri*(1937), *Rupalim*(1960), *Nimati Koinaor* *Rupkonwar*(1964), *Lobhita*(1948) are *Complete Plays* and *Sonpokhili*(1964), *Khanikar*, *Kanaklata* and *Sundar Konwar* are incomplete plays.

Methodology:

To prepare this research paper used both descriptive and analytical methods. Its based on secondary data like books.

DISCUSSION:

The play 'Lobhita' is a medley of an emotional journey of Indian national and social life at its best, and also specifically captures the tyrannical rule of the colonizers over the same. Just like Agarwala's other plays, *Lobhita*, which was written during his last years can be considered as a reflection of his own philosophies and insights into the situations. It is an important play in the Assamese literary scene for its unique style and technique, and one can see how it was running as a predecessor to the later plays with the concept of "anti-hero". Satya Prasad Baruah has explained how this play has highlighted the aspect of an epic-narrative for its elaborate setting from Fulguri village to the Naga Hills, and also pinpointed its quality as a documentary based on true circumstances.

Lobhita is a social and realistic play. It is set in the backdrop of World War II, India's struggle for independence, and the time of *Azad Hind Fauz* under the leadership of Subhash Chandra Bose. Readers are exposed to the revolutionary period of the 1942 India along with the socio-cultural life of Assamese people during the havoc created by World War II. The play puts together the abstract notions of hope, ambitions, joy, sorrow, culture and emotions very beautifully amidst a disastrous time. A summary of the plot would be quite convenient-

Lobhita is the daughter of Baneshwar Baruah, who resides in Fulguri village near the Lohorjaan Airdrome. She was left alone after her father and some other people died during the Japan bombing of World War II. After the disaster, the British government kicked out the people of Fulguri and some other neighbouring villages by

using military force. In her homeless condition Lobhita takes shelter in Mauzadaar's house for Golap's sake, but, however leaves it shortly after being victim of his wife's ill-words and torturous nature.

The third act is significant again as for it shows the selfish nature of the *Gaonbura* or the village head and the Mauzadaar. Lobhita was rescued by an honest Assamese policeman when she was harassed by the military men after leaving the Mauzadaar's house. Again, she was provided shelter by an old Muslim named Elahi Baksh, when the Hindu rescue community refused to take her under their wing. The character of Golap Baruah is passive and voiceless as he failed to accept Lobhita even after knowing what she faced at the hands of the military and the community. It is ironical how even in spite of being an influential person himself, Golap couldn't assemble the courage to resist the typical social conventions and morals.

The fourth act symbolizes Lobhita's further journey where she ends up being a nurse in the army camp.

The fifth act almost provides the reader the climax of the play, as Lobhita falls into the trap of the Japanese soldiers and later joins the *Azad Hind Fauz* as a freedom fighter.

The last scene is named as "*Samapati*", and here lies the pronouncement of the greatness of both Lobhita and the character of L. Baruah. Both of them have sacrificed their life for the sake of the country, and hence, the dramatist in this act makes it a point to narrate their valour and selfless contribution. The play ends with the death of Lobhita and thus pictures a journey of a small step to a colossal undertaking.

Each and every character of *Lobhita* belongs to different sections of class, which makes the play a kind of social commentary. As the dramatist said in the preface- "It speaks for each Assamese people, and thus, one can generalize them as the "hero" of the play", readers are confronted to the extraordinary style of *Lobhita* in terms of technicality and plot construction. However, the character of Lobhita is quite straightforward and transparent.

Her character is plain and simple, patriotic, full of forgiveness and love. She protested against the injustice of the government when they forcefully decided to get rid of the villagers of Lohorjaan, and also called them out of her concern for the villagers' food and shelter. She didn't even step back in reminding the *Gaonbura* of his ill-intentions in profiting from the innocent villagers:

"You only think of snatching away the revenue money by hook or by crook without even judging what is right and what is wrong!" (Act II, Scene II)

Lobhita is a new woman who is modern in thought and ideology, independent, and is not restricted to the image of a conventional ideal woman. She never felt uncomfortable when she had to reside in Elahi Baksh's house. However, this is not the case with the patriarchal and judgemental society around her, as they deemed her immoral. The conservatism and double-standards of the Hindu community won't let her join them as she is apparently touched by the military and she took shelter in a Muslim's abode. Even Golap who considered himself as a highly intelligent and influential man of the society was scared to raise his voice against the disorderly community and their biased views. Lobhita criticized Golap for this and said:

"Don't ever say, don't ever introduce yourself as a modern man! A man who doesn't have a revolutionary fire burning inside the heart can't be a modern man. A man who is willing to tolerate injustice of the authority and law, a man who lacks willpower and courage to stand against the ideals of the foolish society; a man who turns blind eye to the immoral and illegal practices of the nation can't be a modern man! Old man! I no longer belong here. I am going. (Starts crying). No need to be upset for me, Golap. No need to stress yourself for me. You don't need to be an enemy of the people. You don't need to bear the curses from those high men of religion. No matter what you are, you aren't a modern man! Stay with your people, your village, your cast, your customs and community. But don't ever say to anyone that you are a modern man, don't ever say, don't!" (Act III, Scene II)

These words of Lobhita are strong and sensitive, and echo her protest against the superficiality and stereotypes of the society. Her clear-mindedness and strong principles allow her to speak her mind against any form of repression. She even put an end to her love relationship with Golap for his passive and inactive nature, which further helped her in achieving peace and freedom of mind.

Lobhita worked as a nurse in the army camp. In this way she challenges the social role of Assamese women thrown by the patriarchy, because in those time women who work or serve outside the house is considered as an *Asati* women. And this act emerges Lobhita as a determined and independent soul.

The character of Lobhita is not altogether unconventional, but, she is the new woman who balances both her past and the present accordingly. She doesn't forget her roots, but, holds onto them with longing and love. She rejects the negative side of the traditional aspects, and embraces the positive newness of her time. In the very initial scene of Act I of the play, we are presented to her affection for Assamese traditional songs *Bongeet* (*Luitorakahottorartorawoli*) which she sings beautifully. She continued her love for the folk songs until her last hours, where she requested to listen to the same as her dying wish.

Moreover, the autobiographical elements in the play can be widely discussed as a part and parcel of the dramatist's intention. Just like the character of Chitrlekha through which Jyoti Prasad Agarwala's artistry is insinuated, readers can get a glance of his reflection in Lobhita. The historical and modern scientific approach of the play pictures Agarwala's own lifelong principles and his revolutionary spirit.

The survival of literature lies in its seriousness and significance in expressing a diverse range of subject matter that resonates with reality. Although literature has been incessantly produced in all corners of the world, only a few among them gets recognition and fame. It remains immortal only when it stays rooted to reality and the present conditions of society and culture. Depending on different time, place and history, literature continues being dynamic and ever-changing in nature. This is relevant in case of *Lobhitaas* it is also a play that emerged out of social and political situations of its time. Every character of the play also reflects back the community and its different sections of class, creed and religion. It is nearly like a historical documentary fragmenting the national and communal life of Indians. However, the play is not only restricted or limited to the times of Indian struggle for freedom during the 1940s, but, it also makes it way to the current time. Even after many decades of Independence, there still harbours among our society people who are selfish, hypocritical, opportunistic and narrow-minded. One can even argue that times are getting worse day by day with the increasing of such kind of people around us. It seems like the voicing against such negativity in the play *Lobhitaas* quite significant and essential as a role played by literature. The past reflecting the present time of war, battles and other political dilemmas is a strong indictment in the play. Isn't the bold spirit of the Assamese society and other people during the war-torn era still alive and awake within their hearts even today? The dramatist likely makes it a point to remind us that through the sacrifice and death of Lobhita in the end, she has paved a way for endless possibilities for the advent of a peaceful and just society. Through the play, one can realize the importance of respectful and good-natured men and women in changing the face of Assamese society and even the world as a whole.

CONCLUSION:

'Rupkonwar' Jyoti Prasad Agarwala is in himself an invaluable asset to his motherland, Assam. An article like this is only a minute observation of his vast oeuvre that he possesses. He is an artist who always felt the need to be responsible enough in representing and catering to his community in the larger scenario. Through his plays he brought up a picturesque image of the Assamese social lifestyle and dilemmas, while simultaneously making an effort to form a peaceful national identity. This is one part of his contribution to the general public and the literary arena which actually everyone must try to address. Jyoti Prasad Agarwala has uplifted an identity of the artistic life where:

"Every principle of the world must attain a form of cultural compromise. Cultural politics, cultural economics, cultural sociology, cultural communism, cultural art, and if you closely inspect commerce it can be embraced within the purview of culture too. Hence, cultural commerce should be an option along with the others above." ('*SilpirPrithivi*', The World of Artists)

The beautiful mastery of Jyoti Prasad Agarwala over language and literature, and his modern outlook on life has opened up a horizon for both Assamese culture and its people. This horizon shall let us walk through time and ages and would definitely enlighten us with knowledge and wisdom about the greater meaning, passion, and commitment of life.

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