

Short Stories Of Ronbong Terang: A Mirror Of Ethnicity And Tribal Life

Dr Bhubaneswar Deka

Associate Professor & Head

Department of English, Pandu College

Guwahati, Assam

(Affiliated to Gauhati University)

Abstract:

Rongbong Terang (1937-), born in Karbi Anglong, Assam, India in 1937, is an academician, novelist and poet of repute in Assamese literature. A Padmashree Awardee for his fictional work *Rongmilir Hanhi* (1981) Terang was elected the president of Asam Sahitya Sabha for two terms. *Srimad Bhagawad Gita* (1986), *Samanway Prabah* (1989), *Faringor Geet* (1990), *Smritir Papori* (1998), *Neela Orchid* (2001), *Krantikalar Ashru* (2005), *Jak Herowa Pakhi* (2005), *Langsoliator Kukrung* (2007) etc are some of his notable works. This paper critically examines Terang's stories as a mirror of ethnicity and tribal life especially the Karbi people living in the hills of Karbi Anglong, Assam, India. It also probes how Terang with his stories truthfully go all-out to construe the social transformation of the Karbi people in the pre-independence era.

Keywords: Karbi community, cultural crisis, academic disparities, eco-culture, post-colonial discourse.

Rongbong Terang (1937-), born in Karbi Anglong, Assam, India in 1937, is an academician, novelist and poet of repute in Assamese literature. A Padmashree Awardee for his fictional work *Rongmilir Hanhi* (1981) Terang was elected the president of Asam Sahitya Sabha for two terms. *Srimad Bhagawad Gita* (1986), *Samanway Prabah* (1989), *Faringor Geet* (1990), *Smritir Papor* (1998), *Neela Orchid* (2001), *Krantikalar Ashru* (2005), *Jak Herowa Pakhi* (2005), *Langsoliator Kukrung* (2007) etc are some of his notable works. This paper critically examines Terang's stories as a mirror of tribal communities especially the Karbi people living in the hills of Karbi Anglong, Assam, India.

A serious reading of Rongbong Terang's stories in Assamese sums up the fact that the author successfully demonstrates a mirror of tribal lives in the Karbi hills with eco-cultural background, degradation of morality and ethics of present educational system, legends and myths, terrorism and its upshots, obsession for art and culture, community tussles, changes in the lifestyles out of western or external influences. On the other hand, Terang claims credit for the growth of the Assamese language through his creative works. Rajkumar has exactly opined: "His main thrust lies in his efforts to unite all the tribal languages of Assam for the growth of the primary language of Assam" (Rajkumar, 2019).

With the same tune of the regional authors, he depicts local color, dialects and environments in each of its sequences of the stories. Besides these, he also exposes inner conflicts of men through various symbolical implications. Alongside, we also discover an account of his biographical details he meticulously leaves it for his readers. His stories, in comparison to his highly acclaimed fictional work *Rongmilir Hanhi* (1981), are drawn in vast aesthetic arena encompassing changes of lifestyles.

The town Diphu (central place in Karbi Anglong) emerges as a metaphorical space as well as setting to talk of its life-based connotations. The settings, as when the author gives its pen pictures, spontaneously speak of local people, histories of the hills, links with people living in the external world, physical environment, architecture, monuments, centers of learning etc.

The story *Tisolongjonor Gabhoru* (girl of Tisolongjon) maps out paradoxical lifestyles between rural and urban conditions. It is also a story of human jealousy and doubts. *Unmukta*

Khiriki (Open window) beautifully depicts cultural changes and degradations of the Diphu town. The heinous conflict between Karbi and Dimasa is crystal clear in literary work. The author, while assuming the town to be a desert, indirectly contends that it is nothing but a crisis in cultural consciousness of the Karbi people. The sorry state of affair is that the student activists under Karbi Autonomous Council show disdain towards Dr Phukananchandra Phuncho, who painstakingly made frantic efforts to establish a centre of higher education in the Rangsin hills. This attitude makes the author saddened and he exposes it in his narrative. *Silalipi* (Writings on the stones) is also a story where Terang depicts the town in a beautiful way. This story is critical of bandh culture in the town and tries to send message that it keeps on hampering badly in the economic sectors since a long back. *Biplabar Sur* (Tunes of revolution) is a story that entwines terroristic psychosis whereas *Puyar Ragini* (Morning songs) gives hints of ecological resources of the land.

Curiosity is one of the recurring skills of Terang's stories. The narratives leave its readers to a kind of amazement; and behind this extraordinary discourses, he makes use of several symbols to give effect to the underlying facts. This technique makes the development of thoughts more inquisitive. Stone cuttings in the story *Silalipi* are symbols of academic disparities.

Jhum cultivation has been a lifeline of tribal people in the Karbi Anglong hills. Its sight is not only an item of mesmerizing beauty but also a treasure house of racial uplift and progress. *Samadhir Phul* (Flowers of the grave) gives insights to this way of living with eco-cultural importance. The scenic beauty that Jhum cultivation keeps open for all watchers forever sings songs of the communities.

What is more important about Terang's stories is that he tactfully feels serious concerns about three prime aspects--lifeline of tribal communities in the Karbi hills and its gradual decline, history of tribal art and culture and the myths. Through reconstruction he discovers that the communities facing a serious doom at present day times.

The credibility in Terang is that as a tribal-Assamese writer he has been capable of leaving his impressions on the new practitioners in this field in the next phase. In a write-up it is clear that "after Lumber Dai and Medini Choudhury, another powerful tribal-Assamese writer called Rong Bong Terang emerged in the picture with his novel *Rongmilir Hanhi* (Rongmili's

Smiles). His consistent and prolific contribution to Assamese literature continues to keep the tradition fresh and ever-growing. His footsteps were followed by writers such as Jayanta Rongpi, Samsing Hanse, Longkam Teron, Arun Teron, Dhaneshwor Engti and several other Karbi writers who have contributed remarkably to Assamese literature” (Muse India, 2010).

Our study contends that the new generation in the hills must face a dreaded consequence if they ignore all these degradations. As a writer with social responsibility Terang has done a lot through his fictional work with much of social realism. His stories, in some way or other, may be documentary evidences of tribal tradition and heritage and its gradual decline. Arindom rightly say: “in the stories of Terang, the realization of tribal people at the backdrop of changes remains in perplexity” (Terang: Preface, 2012).

His stories truthfully go all-out to construe the social transformation of the Karbi people in the pre-independence era. The great thing about Terang’s stories is that it is a historical and eco-cultural mission on the part of the author to a land where hills communities gradually put their tradition and heritage into oblivion in course of time. Hence, the stories are a call of the hour to reboot consciousness for a better hill zone.

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