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Charyapads as the oldest written specimen of assamese literature

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Abstract--Assamese literature and language has gained the present status by coming across various levels. The historians of literature have divided the Assamese literary eras by examining the style of composition, language, thoughts, ideals, themes etc of the literature written in the language from the era of origin till now. While dividing this era, Charyapad has been included as one of the most important examples of early age. On the basis of numerous reliable information, Charyapads are considered as the first written specimen of Assamese literature. In order to promote the worship of Buddha religion and theory among the masses, the Siddhacharyas of Sahajayana doctrine, the recent path of Tantrayana branch under Mahayana Buddhism composed the Charyapadas. In 1907, the Mahamahopadhyaya Har Prasad Shastri discovered the Charyapadas from the royal court of Nepal and in 1916 he published it as 'Hajar Bochorer Purono Bangala Bhasay Bouddha Gaan o Doha'. From the ancient era, the textbooks get disappeared in the womb of time due to various reasons. In consequence to that the written specimen of Assamese literature before 14th Century B.C have been found as inadequate. But from the 14th century onwards, the Vaishnava movement and awakening initiated by Srimanta Sankardeva increased the desire for knowledge of the common people and gave importance for preserving the textbooks. Before this, multiple oral literatures contributed to the origin and development of Assamese literature. But due to its oral nature the wide genesis of Assamese literature is not found in this. The Charyapads written by the twenty three Siddhacharyas of Sahajayana Doctrine under Mahayana Buddhism which were rich in simile and metaphor reflect the language, literature, religion, society, music, arts, culture and thoughts of various communities of ancient Assam with the extensive mode of formation of Assamese Literature. Therefore the Charyapads are valuable resources for Assam and the

Assamese. With this we must mention that from various information of research it is found that the ancient specimens of Bangla, Odia, Hindi, Maithili are also preserved in addition to Assamese Language. That is why the Charyapads are like documents of socio-cultural life of entire India. In order to discuss how the Charyapads have been considered as the oldest written specimen of Assamese literature, the paper titled, '*Charyapads as the oldest written specimen of Assamese Literature*' has been prepared. What is Charyapad? What are its themes? Who is the author and what is the timeline of it? The poetic beauty of the Charyapads along with all these questions will be discussed.

Keywords---Charyapads, Buddhism, Specimen, Ancient shape, Siddhyacharyas.

Introduction

In order to worship the religion and pursuit literature, The Siddhacharyas of Sahajayan doctrine of Tantrayana Branch of Mahayana Buddhism composed the Charyapads. The ancient Assamese language and first written specimen of literature are preserved in the Charyapads. The opinion of scholars regarding the writing period are varied. By observing various sides, it is said that the Charyapads were written from 8th century to 12th century. The role of the Charyapads in the history of development of Assamese language and literature is immense. Because they represent the old pattern of Assamese language and bears multiple information like the religion of western area of old Assam, alphabet, song, verse, literature, music, art, society, thoughts of various communities, philosophy, theories of multicolored folk culture.

By studying the Charyapads, it is known that the language of them is indicative and the imagery and symbols used in the theory of religion and philosophy is undecipherable. To understand this we need deep realization. If we say about the language of the Charyapads, we can say that they are not Assamese, Odia or Bangla rather the philological corruption of all these languages. In reality, the language of Charyapads can't be understood wholly. As in the time of evening people can't see their body hair clearly, that means they become confused, similarly Charyapads also keep the readers in uncertainty as they are not completely understandable. Therefore this is called 'Sandhyabhasa'. So this is a symbolic language and behind this there is a main desired meaning and a sub meaning. Therefore we need deep realization and study to understand the Charyapads, the oldest written specimen of Assamese language and literature.

The purpose and method of study

The main purpose of preparing this research paper is that the Charyapads are precious resources for Assam and the Assamese. They can be pointed out to know how Assamese literature has been able to gain the present status. As the Charyapads are scarce resources, it is necessary to have knowledge about this and to know the significance of practical knowledge of the Charyapads in the

Assamese society. The paper has been developed by adapting descriptive and analytical method.

The scope of research

Within the scope of selected subject, the author of the Charyapads and writing period, the main themes of it, the main reason of composition and its poetic beauty etc will be included.

Main discussion

Charyapads as the oldest written specimen of assamese literature:

The example of Assamese written literature before 14th century is found very less as many ancient texts were lost due to various natural disasters, climate of the country, political disturbances, prejudice, outrage of insects, people's lack of knowledge regarding preserving books and neglect. If we see literature from 10th - 11th century to 14th century, we have only Charyapads written by Buddhist Siddhacharyas of Sahajayan doctrine. But from 14th century Srimanta Sankardev's Vaishnava movement and awakening increased the love for knowledge among the masses which also gave importance for preserving the religious texts. Before Srimanta Sankardeva, Gautam Buddha occupied a place as a form of God in the Hindu scriptures and till 13th century Buddhism gained so much popularity. Though multiple oral literatures lightened to the origin and growth of Assamese literature, the wide form of ancient Assamese language is not found in them. As the religious heads composed many songs, verses, plays, theories to manifest the doctrine of Indian Vaishnavism and Philosophy among the common people, similarly the Siddhacharyas of Tantric Buddhism also wrote a lot of theories, songs and verses, plays etc. So we get the Charyapads from 10th - 11th century to 14th century written by the Siddhacharyas of Sahajayana doctrine as the literary example of this time. These Charyapads are the ancient written example of Assamese language and literature deciphered till now. Kaalchakrayana, Bajrayana and Sahajayana, these three branches are created from Tantric Buddhism and three of them have own features. Sahajayana is one of the main branches of Buddhism and the themes of Charyapads are dependent upon this religion. Most of the ancient scriptures written by Siddhacharyas of Sahajayana doctrine have been translated to Tibetan and some of the rare main books are published after being rescued from Nepal.

Mahamahopadhyaya Har Prasad Shastri visited Nepal thrice from 1897 to 1907 to collect the texts of Calcutta Asiatic Society. In Nepal, he discovered some books preserved in the library of royal court of Nepal. They are—'Charyacharya Binisshoy', 'Sarohbrajar Dohakosh' 'Krishnacharyar Dohakosh' and 'Dakarnav'. These books were edited together and named it 'Hajar Bochhorer Purno Bangala Bhasay Bouddha Gaan o Doha'. The Bangla Sahitya Parishad of Calcutta first published it in 1916. The real name of the main 'Charyageetisangrah' was 'Charyageetikosh'. Shashtri named it as 'Charyachraya Binisshoy'. The book he got was not the main book, but a copy of Munidutta's commentary. Shashtri also gave the name, Charyapada. The word 'Charya' is mentioned in many scriptures of Tantric Buddhism. Many people have given its many meanings. But, however

the historians of Assamese literature have also placed these Charyapads as the oldest specimen in the history of Assamese literature.

The themes of charyapads

The theme of Charyapads is surrounded with mystery like a riddle. To know the symbolic and indicative themes of the Charyapads, it is necessary to have a comprehensive knowledge of the origin and its development of the Sahajayana Community of Buddhism. The religion preached by Buddha is divided in two sections –Mahayana and Hinayana. Again the Mahayana community has three sections—a) Sunnyabad b) Yogacharbad or Bigyanbad c) Tantrayan. Tantrayan has again three types--Kalchakrayana, Bajrayana and Sahajayana. The songs of spirituality of Sahajayana doctrine are mainly Chryapadas. In later period, several Siddhacharyas began to promote it together as songs. As in India, the religious heads composed theoretical writings through songs, verses and plays to spread Vaishnavism similarly the Siddhacharyas promoted Buddhism through the Charyapads.

Hinduism was developed before the origin of Buddhism. Absolute truth like the world is transitory found place in the Upanishad before the incarnation of Maharshi Gautam Buddha. Buddhism and its philosophy was inspired by scriptural ideas of Hinduism. Though in ancient Kamrup, Buddhism was vanished due to the influence of Hinduism, one time it was also expanded. The existence Tantric Buddhism is proved by these Charyapads. In this context, Taranath, the Tibetan wise man opines that Buddhism came to Kamrup in Therevada form in the reign of Ashok.

Charyapads were composed specially to get Moksha and Nirvana. People expect happiness, we all consider pleasures, painless life as the main purpose of our life. To free from all materialism of the world is to get Moksha. The main ideas of getting this Moksha in the Charyapads are written in very difficult language for which Shashtri had named the language of it as ‘Sandhya Bhasa’ or ‘Alo Adhari Bhasa’. Though the hidden meaning is tough to understand, the outer meaning is easily decipherable to common people. In order to understand its main theme, the help of scholar is necessary, otherwise the mysterious advices of the Charyapads are difficult to understand. The predominance of religious preceptor in our life is best understood as without help of them the hidden meaning of Charyapads can’t be understood. By following the way shown by the instructor, the disciples can attain salvation. Only painful life is gained if one immerses himself in the illusion of Sangsaar (The World) and the reasons of this pain are –ignorance. The ultimate goal of life is to advance in the way of annihilation which can be attained from the redemption of ignorance. The Siddhacharyas of Sahajayana believed that it was possible with the help of Yoga and Tantra and in consequence to that the subjects Yoga and Tantra also got place in the Charyapads.

The deep theories are represented in the Charyapads from 8th century to 12th century through several images of socio cultural life of North East India. The description of the lives of men-women and agro based rural life of that time has multicolored the Charyapads. The villages were formed on the bank of river due to easy access to the waterway. The Charyapads also show the rural lives centered

around the river. Many images of contemporary lives like the techniques of fishing, marriage ceremony, working business images and daily activities are used symbolically in the Charyapads.

Moreover the directions regarding bringing the emptiness back to mind through the salvation from the world and Pranayama are also given. No work is considered as unholy in the Charyapads. They give importance to Karmayoga, as one considers his/her works, he/she gets same consequence.

The lower class of people are particularly portrayed in the Charyapads. The subjects of dowries in the marriage like ceremony, the beauty of women, hunting, specially deer hunting, elephant catching, method of treatment etc can be found in the Charyapads. The sage of that time, Palakapya wrote Hastayurveda regarding the treatment of Elephant.ⁱ Similarly, 'Hastividyanava Sarsangrah' written by Sukumar Barkaith under the orders of Ahom King Swargadeu Siva Singh and Barkunwari Ambikadevi in the 8th century proves that Assamese social lives were represented in the Charyapads which written in 10th -11th century.

Though the purpose of Charyapads was preaching religion, the lives of common people are shown in several ways. The occupation of common people, Birth-death, marriage etc are represented indicatively with various imageries and metaphors.

The author and writing period of the charyapads

The real name of the book, 'Charyacharya Binisshoy' which was discovered by Har Prasad Shashtri from Nepal was 'Charyageetikosh'. Shashtri gave its name 'Charyacharya Binisshoy'. That book was not a real one but a copy of Acharya Munidutta's manuscript. With that manuscript, main charyas were also there. The document of Munidutta is found as 'Charyageetikoshbritti'. This book is the collection of 50 Charyageet, theories of Sahajayana religion, written by 23 Siddhacharyas belonging to 84 Mahasiddha of Mahayani Buddhist Community. These Siddhacharyas of Charyas are—Luipada, Kahnupada, Bhusukpada, Sarahpada, Kukkuripada, Sawarpada, Shantipada, Biruapada, Gunduripada, Chatillapada, Kambalambarapada, Dombipada, Mahidharapada, Beenapada, Aryadevapada, Darikpada, Bhadepada, Tadakpada, Kankanpada, Jaynandipada, Dhampada, Dhendhanpada and Tantripada.

Many scholars opine differently regarding the writing period of the Charyapads. In this context, Har Prasad Shashtri has said that the Charyapads were composed approximately in the 10th century. According to Dr. Suniti Kumar Chatterjee and Dr. Sukumar Sen, the Charyapads were written within 10th century and 12th century. Dr. Pramod Chandra Bagsee says that they were written in some time between 8th century and 10th century. According to Dr. Harinath Sarma Daloi, Dr. Leelawati Saikia Borah and Dr. Pareekshit Hazarika the writing period of the charyapads is within 8th century and 12th century. By examining the various writing periods of the Charyapads given by several scholars, we can say that the charyapads were not written before 8th century and after 12th century.

The Charyapads are the composition of ending stage of oriental philological corruption. The period from 6th-10th century is known as the time of Abahatath

corruption. Though the literature of philological corruption started from 6th century, it gained literary rank in 8th century and within 10th-12th century, modern Indo Aryan language like Assamese, Bengali, Oriya, Maithili, etc upraised after coming through several evolutions. From that, it can be said that the Charyapads were composed in the early period of the uprising of new Indo Aryan languages.

The poetic beauty of charyapads

The Charyapads are one type of religious songs that the Siddharcharyas composed to preach the religion and to create spiritual pursuit. The Charyapads are equally valuable in terms of language, literature and religious context as well as in ancient tradition of Assamese songs. We can say that poetic beauty is imagery language used in literature, simile, metaphor, a collection of rhythmical ornaments, which gives a beauty to literature. The theoretical Charyapads show rare artistic quality, but the usage of many metaphors, similes and symbols in the elements of practical yet social life of people brings it closer to common people for which it can be easily understood. Though the Sahajayan doctrine was preached by the Charyapads, it was never dull but lively. The author of the Charyapads used Santa Rasa, Karun Rasa, Hasya Rasa by applying various ornaments like alliteration, pun, simile, metaphor, sarcasm, hypothetical metaphor etc.

The spirituality in the Charyapads is shown by using many elements of our daily lives as symbols. The successful usage of allegory is shown in the Charyapad 1 of Luipada by the trial of explanation of theory. The relationship of people with trees is very old. The people are compared with the body of trees in the Charyapad 1. In his Charyapad 2, Kukkuripada describes the way of getting easy peace. The usage of allegory and metaphor has increased the poetic beauty of Bhusukpada's charya to a great amount. The deer hunting in his Charya 6 is a beautiful allegory. Here the poet has compared the restless mind of human being to the fast deer. Similarly, Chatilpada has portrayed the river and bamboo bridge as allegories in his Charya 5. He has described the life of men to a river and also describes the way of redemption. It is said in the charya that salvation is possible only through the relation of knowledge and meditation. It is not possible to attain salvation from the love of the world without the advice of the religious instructors and Kambalambarpada's Charya 8 shows this in an allegorical way. In the Charya 50 by Sawarpada, the pleasing mind of a poet is distinctly visible through his imaginary thought and artistic quality. By taking the portrayal of natural scenery and individual love as one shelter, a profound theory has been explained.

In addition to allegory, simile, metaphor, symbols the usage of other figure of speech like doubt, dispute, parallelism, faithful transcript, alliteration, pun, sarcasm, rhythm etc have doubled the poetic beauty of the Charyapads. The authors of Charyapads used many imageries and allegories in a huge amount purposefully so that other people could not understand the hidden meaning of their religion. That is why it can be said that the Charyapads are deeply mysterious. But though mysterious, the poetic beauty of them is clearly visible.

Decision and Conclusion

From the above discussion, the following decisions can be attained:

- 1) The Charyapads have an important role in the history of continuous development of Assamese language.
- 2) From the religious side, the value of Charyapad is abundant especially in Assamese language-literature and culture.
- 3) Though the Charyapads were written in order to preach religion, the importance of this --advisory learning, way of redemption, image of support is introduced through various allegory and metaphors.
- 4) The ethical or instructional subjects belonging to the Charyapads in Assamese Literature gained wide forms.

So in the conclusion, it can be said that from the language- literature, religion-culture yet social sides the Charyapads share a close relationship with the Assamese language and literature. The status which Assamese literature has been able to gain today, only the Charya

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