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Education, Scientific Consciousness And Social Superstitions: An Analysis Of Shyamlal Debbarma's 'Khong'

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines Shyamlal Debbarma's 'Khong' (1996) as a literary representation of education, scientific consciousness, superstition, and social transformation in Tiprasa society. 'Hachuk Kwpara' is portrayed as an old and large village where people have lived for generations, preserving their social and ethnic traditions. However, the village is also marked by illiteracy, superstition, irrational beliefs, and social conflicts. At one point, the villagers, influenced by an Ojha (Ritual Practitioner), believe that an evil deity is responsible for the suffering and deaths in the village. As a result, they are compelled to leave 'Hachuk Kwpara' and move to 'Gairing Kwpara'. Against this social background, Bichang emerges as a symbol of education, scientific consciousness, rationality, and social change. Although he grows up in the same social environment, education enables him to acquire knowledge and examine traditional beliefs through reason and practical understanding. As a B.A. graduate in Economics, Bichang is presented as one of the most educated persons in the two villages and among the educated sections of the Tiprasa community. He seeks to challenge superstition, irrational conflicts associated with religious beliefs, and harmful social practices. The character of Naithokti, Bichang's beloved, further reveals the cruelty of superstition. Because of her poverty, she is labelled a Daini (witch), exposing the social exclusion and inhuman treatment caused by such beliefs. Thus, 'Khong' presents education, scientific thought, rationality, and human values as essential forces for social reform. Through Bichang's character, Debbarma suggests that the development of education and rational consciousness can help eradicate harmful superstitions and contribute to the intellectual and social development of the Tiprasa community.

Keywords: Education; Scientific Consciousness; Social Superstitions; Rationality; Social Transformation.

INTRODUCTION

Literature reflects the life, culture, beliefs, customs, and ways of thinking of a society. Particularly, a novel can present the life of a particular community in a broader way by portraying its social conditions, problems, traditional beliefs, and possibilities of change. In this context, Shyamlal Debbarma has made a significant contribution to representing the life and social realities of the Tiprasa community through his literary works. His first novel, 'Khong' (1996), is an important literary work that focuses on various aspects of Tiprasa society. Before being published in book form, the story of 'Khong' was published serially under the title Sampili in the magazine Tripura Koktun from 20 May 1981 to 29 September 1982. Later, when it was published as a book, the title was changed to 'Khong'. The novel was published in book form at the 'Agartala Book Fair' in 1996. In recognition of his contribution through 'Khong', Shyamlal Debbarma received the 'Salil Krishna Debbarman Mukumu' Award in 1997. This recognition also indicates the literary significance of the novel.

The word 'Khong' is closely associated with the traditional customs and cultural practices of the Tiprasa community. During the traditional Ker Puja, a specific boundary or enclosure is made around the village, which is known as 'Khong'. Once the 'Khong' is established, people from other villages are not allowed to enter the village while the puja is in progress. Outsiders can enter the village only after the puja is completed. If someone enters the village during the puja, either unknowingly or by mistake, he or she has to pay a prescribed fine. Thus, 'Khong' is not merely a physical boundary; it is also a traditional socio religious practice associated with maintaining the rules and sanctity of the Ker Puja. In Bengali, the word 'Khong' may be understood in terms of a 'গণ্ডী' or 'সীমারেখা', while in English it may be expressed as 'Boundary,' 'Enclosure,' or, depending on the context, 'sacred boundary.' The title of the novel therefore carries a significant connection with the traditional culture, beliefs, and social practices of the Tipruri community that means the word 'Khong' means sacred boundary during Kerpuja.

In the novel, Hachuk Kwpara is presented as an old and large village. People have lived there for generations, and their own social and ethnic traditions have developed over time. However, along with this traditional social environment, illiteracy, superstition, blind faith, and conflicts among the villagers also had a strong influence on their lives. The villagers were often dependent on traditional beliefs and social perceptions. One significant example is the incident related to the statement of an Ojha. Influenced by the Ojha's words, the villagers believe that an evil deity is responsible for the suffering and deaths occurring in the village. As a result of this belief, the people of Hachuk Kwpara leave their village and move to Gairing Kwpara. This incident clearly reveals how superstition and blind faith can influence people's lives and decisions.

Within this social environment, the character of Bichang represents a different way of thinking. Bichang grows up in the same society where various forms of superstition and blind faith are prevalent. However, education brings a change in his outlook. Through education, he gains knowledge and learns to examine different social issues through reason and practical understanding. As a B.A. graduate in Economics, Bichang is presented as one of the most educated persons in the two villages and as a representative of the educated section of the Tiprasa community. He takes a conscious position against harmful beliefs, irrational conflicts associated with deities, and various harmful social practices.

Through the character of Bichang, the author highlights the importance of education and the need for scientific and rational thinking. Bichang's outlook suggests that education is not merely a means of acquiring individual knowledge; it can also transform people's ways of thinking and encourage them to question harmful or irrational beliefs prevalent in society. In this sense, Bichang becomes an important symbol of social awareness and transformation in the novel.

On the other hand, the character of Naithokti reveals another inhuman aspect of superstition in the novel. Naithokti, Bichang's beloved, is labelled a Daini (witch) because of her poverty. Her treatment by society demonstrates that superstition can affect not only people's ways of thinking but can also lead to the humiliation, exclusion, and inhuman treatment of an individual. The experience of Naithokti therefore becomes an important example of the cruelty associated with social superstition in the novel.

Thus, 'Khong' presents, on the one hand, the traditional culture, social life, and beliefs of the Tiprasa community and, on the other hand, the negative consequences of illiteracy and superstition. Through the character of Bichang, Shyamlal Debbarma emphasizes the importance of education, rationality, scientific consciousness, and social awareness. The novel particularly suggests the possibility of transforming people's ways of thinking through education and of creating a more conscious society by overcoming harmful superstitions.

The main objective of this study is to examine the relationship among education, scientific consciousness, rationality, and social superstitions in Shyamlal Debbarma's 'Khong'. The study also seeks to analyse the impact of superstition within the social context of the Tiprasa community and to explore the possibility of social transformation through education and the development of rational consciousness.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The present study aims to achieve the following objectives:

1. To examine the role of education in shaping the intellectual and social awareness of the people represented in Shyamlal Debbarma's 'Khong' (1996).
2. To analyse the representation of scientific consciousness and rational thinking in the novel, particularly through the character of Bichang.

3. To identify and examine the different forms of social superstition and blind belief portrayed in 'Khong' and their influence on the lives of the people.
4. To explore the social consequences of superstition and irrational beliefs, including social conflict, exclusion, and inhuman treatment, as represented through different characters and incidents in the novel.
5. To examine the significance of Bichang's character as a representation of education, rationality, scientific consciousness, and the desire for social reform within Tiprasa society.
6. To analyse the possibility of social transformation through education and rational consciousness, and to understand how 'Khong' presents these forces as means of challenging harmful superstitions and promoting social awareness.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study follows a qualitative and textual analytical method. The primary source of the research is Shyam Lal Debbarma's novel 'Khong' (1996), which has been read carefully to understand its themes, characters, social practices, and underlying ideas. The analysis is based mainly on a close reading of the text, with particular attention to education, scientific consciousness, rationality, social superstitions, and social transformation. The character of Bichang and relevant incidents in the novel have been examined in relation to these themes. The study interprets the textual evidence from the researcher's own reading and understanding of the novel to explore its representation of Tiprasa society and its social concerns.

COVER PAGE OF THE NOVEL KHONG

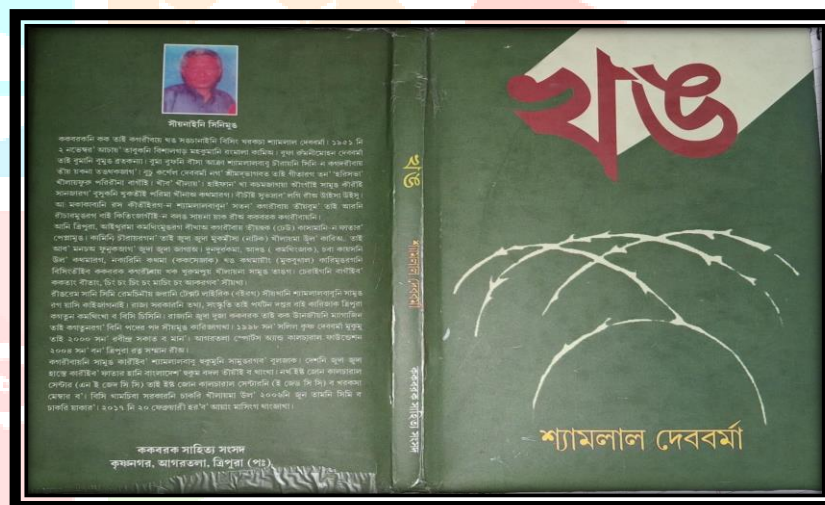


Figure 1: Cover page of Shyam Lal Debbarma's Khong
(Source: Author's collection)

THE NAMES OF SOME OF THE CHARACTERS IN THE NOVEL ARE GIVEN BELOW

Hero's family

Bigrai: The village Chokdiri (village headman) of Hachwk Kwpara. He does not leave the village and continues to live there.

Megmala: Bigrai's wife and the mother of Bichang.

Bichang: His real name is Birchandra Tripura. He holds a B.A. degree in Economics. Bigrai and Megmala have only one son, Bichang.

Heroin's family

Tungphula: Tungphula was a resident of Hachwk Kwpara village. He died after suffering from illness. He was the husband of Thatu Kumari and the father of Naithokti.

Thatu Kumari: She is the wife of Tungphula and the mother of Naithokti. After Tungphula's death, she leaves Hachwk Kwpara and moves to Gairing Kwpara village.

Naithokti: She is the only daughter of Tungphula and Thatu Kumari.

(Tungphula's Parents: Naithokti's paternal grandfather and grandmother died of illness)

- **Thatu Kumari's younger brother's family**

Santamoni: Santamoni is the younger brother of Thatu Kumari. He is a resident of Gairing Kwpara village. His wife's name is Kusumala, and he is the father of Sabitri.

Kusumala: Kusumala is the wife of Santamoni and the mother of Sabitri. She is the person who falsely labels Naithokti and Thatu Kumari as witches.

Sabitri: Sabitri is the only daughter of Santamoni and Kusumala. Sabitri received her education only up to Class

- **While several village women were sitting together and chatting under the mango tree, they were engaged in searching for lice in the hair. The names of the women present were**

Thapari, Phulu's mother, Kosomti, Thaichukti's mother, Chinangti, Bwsate, Wanapha's wife, and Sunaton's mother-in-law.

- **The ascetics or monks (বৈরাগী or Vairagi) are**

Din Das, Sukumuchon, Korom Das, Mali Das, Rajong Joy Baba, Monu Das, Khor Das, Punno Das, Prasad Das, Mohonto Das, and Sunno Das.

- **When the Christians visited Din Das's house, those present were**

Monirai, Mihir, Mankhanya, and Rev. Suman Reang. At that time, during the quarrel, a child named Minu was also present. In addition, there was a woman who was engaged in cooking.

- **Male Characters**

The male characters mentioned in the novel include Birchang (Birchandra Tipra), Bigrai, Wanapha, Thumpwrai (Ochai), Chandramani, Kalachan, Tungphwra, Santamani, Makhan, the Bairagis (ascetics/monks), and the young boys/children.

- **Female Characters**

The female characters mentioned in the novel include Kusumala, Naithokti, Thatu Kumari, Megmala, Sabitri, Thapari, Phulu's mother, Kosomti, Thaichukti's mother, Chinangti, Bwsate, Wanapha's wife, Sunaton's mother-in-law, Ruhini, Phelani, Dongi Buri, Melati, Rainati, and others.

MAIN ANALYSIS/DISCUSSION

- **Social Background of Hachuk Kwpara and the Context of Superstition**

In Shyamlal Debbarma's 'Khong', Hachuk Kwpara and Gairing Kwpara are presented as two neighbouring villages separated by a field. The distance between the two villages was not very great. Hachuk Kwpara was an old and large village where people had lived for generations. The village was surrounded by abundant vegetation, large trees, and natural beauty. Therefore, Hachuk Kwpara was not merely a place of settlement; it was closely connected with the memories, emotions, family relationships, and long-established way of life of its inhabitants. Along with these features, the author also presents the simple nature, mutual affection, respect, sincerity, and warmth of the villagers. Their family and social relationships are also reflected through ordinary conversations, humour, and friendly interactions.

However, the social environment of Hachuk Kwpara was also marked by limited educational opportunities. There was no school in the village. On the other hand, a school was established in Gairing Kwpara as its population increased as a result of the movement and migration of people from Hachuk Kwpara. Since the two villages were not far apart, children from Hachuk Kwpara could attend the school at Gairing Kwpara. This educational background was significant in shaping the life of Bichang, or Birchandra Tripura. He studied at the school in Gairing Kwpara, later joined Umakanta School in Agartala, and subsequently pursued a Bachelor's degree in Economics at college. Through education, his intellectual outlook gradually expanded, enabling him to observe and understand the social problems of his community from a broader perspective.

Bichang's educational aspirations also reveal a conflict between modern aspirations and traditional social expectations. He wished to continue his higher studies by going to Kolkata to pursue an M.A. His parents, Megmala and Bigrai, however, wanted him to get married. Bichang preferred to continue his education rather than marry at that stage. A similar tension between tradition and change can be observed in an incident concerning his mother, Megmala, who was fond of the traditional drink Chuwak. Bichang stopped her from drinking it. Megmala hoped that when Bichang eventually brought a daughter-in-law home, she would prepare Chuwak in the traditional manner and that she would then be able to resume drinking it. This incident reflects

the persistence of traditional practices within the family, while Bichang's attitude represents a more conscious and change-oriented outlook.

The social condition of Hachuk Kwpara was further affected by illiteracy, economic difficulties, superstition, jealousy among people, and divisions associated with religious beliefs. An important incident illustrating the influence of superstition occurred about eighteen years earlier. A Ojha named Thumpwrai was brought to the village by an elderly man named Chandramani in order to determine the cause of the villagers' suffering and the repeated deaths occurring in the village. Through his rituals, mantras, and religious practices, the Ojha declared that the suffering and deaths were caused by an evil deity. He further warned that the villagers could no longer remain in Hachuk Kwpara and that if they continued to live there, everyone might die. His statement created fear, anxiety, disappointment, and uncertainty among the villagers. Consequently, most of the families decided to leave Hachuk Kwpara and move to Gairing Kwpara.

The impact of this belief can be seen in the decisions made by individual families. Naithokti's mother, Thatukumari, had already lost her husband, father-in-law, and mother-in-law a few months earlier. At that time, Naithokti, her youngest daughter, was only four months old. Fearing that she and her child might also become victims of the supposed evil deity, Thatukumari decided to leave Hachuk Kwpara. She chose to stay with her younger brother, Santamani, at his residence in Gairing Kwpara. Similarly, the deaths of Kalachan and his wife, along with the deaths of several other villagers, intensified the fear and uncertainty among the people. Thus, the statement of the Ojha gained greater influence over the collective decision of the villagers.

Nevertheless, not everyone was willing to leave Hachuk Kwpara. Bichang's father, Bigrai, strongly wished to remain in the village. His birthplace, old house, property, and long-standing memories were deeply connected with Hachuk Kwpara. Leaving his ancestral home and property and moving to another place was therefore difficult for him. At that time, Bichang himself was still very young. Another person named Wanapha also did not want to leave the village. Ultimately, only a few families around five or six decided to remain in Hachuk Kwpara. The situation thus reveals a conflict between fear of death created by superstition and the emotional attachment of people to their birthplace, homes, property, and memories.

The decision to leave or remain in the village also created disagreement among the villagers. Chandramani became angry with those who refused to leave. In his frustration, he expressed the view that people of the Kali Yuga would no longer acquire knowledge or understanding and that there was little point in trying to reason with them. He then left the meeting. His reaction reflects the tension between traditional belief and the emerging need for knowledge and rational understanding.

When Bichang later observes his society more consciously, he recognizes both its positive and negative aspects. On the one hand, he notices the simplicity, affection, respect, sincerity, and warmth of the villagers. On the other hand, he becomes aware of illiteracy, economic hardship, superstition, jealousy, religious divisions, and the harmful practice of labelling a person as a Daini. The treatment of Naithokti, the woman he loves, becomes particularly significant in this context. She is accused of being a Daini, and this belief creates an obstacle to Bichang's relationship with her, as her family does not readily accept their relationship. Consequently, Bichang faces the influence of superstition not only as an observer of social problems but also in his own personal life. The author also does not present village society entirely in negative terms. Through humorous conversations and family interactions surrounding Bichang, including jokes about when he would marry and the difficulty of finding a suitable bridegroom like him, Debbarma portrays the warmth, intimacy, and everyday happiness of rural social life. Thus, 'Khong' presents Hachuk Kwpara as a complex social space where tradition, natural beauty, simplicity, affection, social problems, superstition, and the desire for change exist side by side.

Therefore, the social background of Hachuk Kwpara provides an important foundation for understanding the central concerns of 'Khong'. The village represents both the positive aspects of traditional community life and the limitations created by illiteracy, economic difficulties, superstition, religious divisions, and blind belief. It is within this social environment that Bichang develops an educated and change-oriented outlook. Consequently, the background of Hachuk Kwpara becomes significant to the novel's larger discussion of education, scientific consciousness, rationality, and the possibility of social transformation.

▪ Superstitions and Blind Belief in ‘Khong’

Shyamlal Debbarma's 'Khong' presents a clear picture of various superstitions and blind beliefs prevalent in the social life of the Tiprasa community. The novel shows how natural calamities, illness, religious beliefs, and personal problems are often interpreted through traditional and supernatural explanations rather than through rational understanding.

The belief surrounding drought and the absence of rainfall is one such example. When drought creates hardship, scarcity, and difficulties in cultivation, some villagers consider it to be the result of the anger of the deity. For instance, believes that Udaipur's Mother, or Mother Tripureswari (god), is angry and has therefore caused such a situation. Similarly, an unusual sound in the sky is also interpreted by some villagers as a manifestation of the deity's anger. Such beliefs reveal the tendency to explain natural events through supernatural forces rather than through scientific reasoning.

The novel also depicts traditional beliefs concerning illness. Wanapini's wife refers to people suddenly losing consciousness and falling to the ground and suggests traditional remedies such as pouring water on the person and giving tamarind juice to restore consciousness. Such practices indicate the dependence on customary beliefs in the absence of scientific understanding.

An important example of blind belief appears in the incident involving the Ojha Thumpwra. About eighteen years earlier, following repeated illness and deaths in the village, the Ojha declared that an evil supernatural force was responsible and advised the villagers to leave 'Hachuk Kwpara'. Most of the villagers believed him and moved to 'Gairing Kwpara'. This incident demonstrates how fear and superstition could influence the collective decisions of an entire community.

Religious beliefs also create social divisions in the novel. During a reading of the Gita at Dindas's house, disagreements arise between Vaishnav and Christian youths. Mutual ridicule, insults, and religious prejudice gradually lead to conflict. Similarly, Naithokti and her mother are labelled as Daini because of a family dispute, and the accusation is spread among the villagers. The belief that Naithokti and her mother used Vashikaran (a form of supposed magical influence or hypnotize) to make Bichang fall deeply in love with Naithokti further illustrates the influence of supernatural beliefs on personal relationships.

The novel also presents the dangerous consequences of tantric practices. When Bichang becomes mentally distressed, three Ojhas perform various tantric rituals on him, including confining him inside a room and using burning materials as part of the ritual. The incident reveals how blind faith can lead not only to irrational thinking but also to harmful and inhuman treatment.

Thus, 'Khong' portrays superstition as a social problem affecting natural interpretation, health practices, religious relationships, personal life, and human behaviour. Through these incidents, Debbarma highlights the need for education, rational thinking, and scientific consciousness as alternatives to blind belief and harmful traditional practices.

▪ The Role of the Ojha and the Influence of Traditional Beliefs

In 'Khong', the role of the Ojha and the influence of traditional beliefs are presented in close relation to the social and cultural life of the Tiprasa community. The incident involving the Ojha Thumpwra shows how traditional beliefs could influence the thoughts and decisions of villagers. When illness, deaths, and suffering occurred in Hachuk Kwpara, the Ojha attributed them to an evil supernatural force and advised the villagers to leave the village. Believing his words, most of the villagers moved to Gairing Kwpara. However, traditional beliefs in Tiprasa society are not limited to superstition. 'Huk', or Jhum cultivation, has traditionally been closely connected with the life and culture of the Tiprasa people. It is not merely a means of livelihood but also an important part of their traditional way of life, beliefs, and cultural practices. Various beliefs concerning deities and supernatural forces, such as the great God, Thumnairok-Bonirok, and Hachukma, are associated with this traditional way of life. These beliefs have also contributed to the development and preservation of traditional folk narratives, including Kherampaini Kerang Kothoma, Mswai Bai Kerangni Kothoma, Sipingtwi-Mairungtwi, Nuwai, and other folk stories. In addition, the traditional Jhum-based way of life is reflected in Tiprasa cane and bamboo crafts, such as Kaseleng, Langa, Dingwra Japa, and Khuturuk, as well as in Jaduni songs, oral traditions, customs, and social practices. Thus, 'Khong' presents traditional beliefs in a broader cultural context: on the one hand, the influence of the Ojha reveals the power of superstition and supernatural explanations over social life; on the other hand, traditional beliefs connected with Jhum cultivation

have contributed to the preservation of the community's folk literature, artistic practices, songs, oral traditions, and cultural identity.

▪ **Education and the Development of Scientific Consciousness**

Education plays an important role in the development of scientific consciousness and rational thinking in Shyamlal Debbarma's 'Khong'. The character of Bichang, also known as Birchandra Tripura, represents the importance of education in bringing intellectual and social change to the Tiprasa community. He is an educated young man who has completed his B.A. in Economics. His educational background enables him to look at social practices and traditional beliefs from a rational and thoughtful perspective. Unlike many people around him, Bichang does not accept every traditional belief without questioning it. His attitude reflects the development of an educated and conscious mind.

Bichang does not reject religion as a whole. Rather, he respects different religious beliefs and wants people to live together with mutual respect. At the same time, he does not want his own religious identity and beliefs to be changed. This attitude indicates that education, as represented through Bichang, does not necessarily mean abandoning one's cultural or religious identity. Instead, it encourages individuals to distinguish between meaningful traditions and beliefs that may cause social harm. In this way, Bichang represents a balanced approach to tradition, religion, and rationality.

His concern is not limited to his own personal development. He wishes to see progress in society and encourages people to pursue education. He inspires others to understand the value of learning and motivates them to contribute to the welfare of their community. Through his words, ideas, and actions, he attempts to create awareness among the people and encourages them to move beyond ignorance, superstition, and irrational thinking.

Bichang therefore becomes an important representation of education and scientific consciousness in 'Khong'. His character suggests that education can broaden human understanding, strengthen rational thought, and develop a sense of social responsibility. Through Bichang, Debbarma presents education not merely as a means of obtaining academic qualifications but as a powerful instrument for individual awareness, social improvement, and progressive change in the Tiprasa community.

▪ **Bichang as a Symbol of Rationality and Social Awareness**

In Shyamlal Debbarma's 'Khong', Bichang emerges as a significant character who represents rationality, social awareness, and progressive thinking. He does not accept every traditional belief or social practice simply because it has been followed for a long time. Instead, he tries to examine such beliefs through reason and considers whether they are useful or harmful to society. His educated outlook enables him to question irrational practices and to think about the need for social improvement.

Bichang considers literature to be an important means of creating awareness among people. With this understanding, he takes an initiative to promote a Kokborok literary magazine and gives it the name Sampili. Although the question of script may create differences of opinion, Bichang considers the preservation and development of the Kokborok language and literature to be more important. His concern is that Kokborok should reach a wider section of people and should not gradually disappear. He believes that the development of a language is closely connected with the development of its literature. At a time when only a limited number of people were able to read and write, he also recognised that even if one person read the magazine, its contents could be shared with others orally. In this way, literature could become a means of spreading knowledge and social consciousness.

Bichang's rational outlook is also visible in his attitude towards unnecessary social and religious practices that create an economic burden on poor people. He questions the need for excessive expenditure on rituals performed at different stages of life, particularly after death, when money and various items may have to be given to religious functionaries. He considers such practices difficult for economically disadvantaged families to bear. Similarly, regarding marriage, he emphasizes mutual understanding, responsibility, and commitment rather than dependence on rituals or mantras. Through such ideas, he encourages the younger generation to evaluate social customs through reason.

Thus, Bichang's rationality extends beyond opposition to superstition. His efforts to promote Kokborok literature, encourage education, question unnecessary social practices, and inspire people to think critically establish him as a representative of social awareness and progressive change in 'Khong'. Through Bichang,

Debbarma suggests that literature and education can become powerful instruments for developing rational consciousness and transforming society.

▪ **The Representation of Daini Beliefs through Naithokti**

In Shyamlal Debbarma's 'Khong', the character of Naithokti provides an important representation of the social consequences of Daini (witch) beliefs. Naithokti is portrayed as a poor woman whose difficult social and family circumstances contribute to her being identified as a Daini. Instead of understanding her situation through reason and human sympathy, some members of the community accept rumours and traditional beliefs against her. The accusation gradually creates fear, suspicion, and social distance around her and her mother.

The novel further shows how superstition can enter personal relationships. Naithokti's relationship with Bichang is also viewed through a supernatural explanation. Some people believe that Naithokti and her mother have used *moni* that means *Vashikaran*, or supposed magical influence, to make Bichang deeply attracted to her. Such an interpretation reflects the tendency to explain an individual's feelings and choices through supernatural beliefs rather than through natural human emotions.

Through Naithokti's experience, Debbarma exposes the injustice caused by such beliefs. The Daini label does not merely describe a superstition; it becomes a means of social exclusion and humiliation. Naithokti's character therefore demonstrates how irrational beliefs can damage human dignity, relationships, and social harmony. The episode strengthens the novel's broader argument for education, rational thinking, and scientific consciousness as necessary means of challenging harmful superstitions.

▪ **Social Conflicts, Exclusion and Inhuman Treatment**

Shyamlal Debbarma's 'Khong' presents various forms of social conflict, exclusion, and inhuman treatment within Tiprasa society. The novel shows how illiteracy, superstition, religious intolerance, and mutual distrust can create divisions among people. In Hachuk Kwpara, the villagers' fear of illness and death becomes intensified by the Ojha's supernatural explanation. Believing that an evil supernatural force is responsible for their suffering, most of the villagers leave the village. This incident demonstrates how blind belief can influence the collective decisions and social life of a community.

Religious differences also become a source of conflict in the novel. During the reading of the Gita at Dindas's house, disagreements between Vaishnav and Christian youths gradually develop into mutual insults and confrontation. Through this incident, the novelist highlights the negative consequences of religious intolerance and the absence of mutual understanding.

The experience of Naithokti and her mother provides another important example of social exclusion and inhuman treatment. They are labelled as Daini because of their difficult social and family circumstances, and rumours are spread about them without rational consideration. The belief that Naithokti and her mother used *Vashikaran* to influence Bichang's feelings further reflects the harmful effects of superstition. Through these incidents, 'Khong' emphasizes the importance of education, rationality, tolerance, and human values in reducing social conflict and promoting a more humane society.

▪ **Education as a Means of Social Reform**

In Shyamlal Debbarma's 'Khong', education is presented as an important means of social reform. Education provides individuals with the ability to understand life and society through reason, reality, and independent thinking. It enables people to examine traditional beliefs and social practices instead of accepting them blindly. In this context, the character of Bichang becomes particularly significant, as he represents education, scientific consciousness, and rational thinking.

For Bichang, education is not merely a means of acquiring academic qualifications or achieving personal success. He believes that education should contribute to the intellectual development and welfare of society. Therefore, he encourages people to pursue education and attempts to create awareness among them. He also gives importance to economic development, as he understands that education and awareness can help improve the social and economic condition of the people.

At the same time, Bichang does not want social progress to result in the loss of cultural identity. He emphasizes the importance of preserving and developing the Kokborok language, literature, traditions, and cultural values.

His interest in promoting Kokborok literature reflects his belief that education, rational thinking, and cultural consciousness should develop together.

Thus, Bichang's objective is not limited to his own advancement. He works for the welfare of society and seeks to challenge harmful superstitions and unnecessary social practices. Through his character, 'Khong' suggests that education, scientific consciousness, rationality, cultural awareness, and human values can collectively become powerful forces for social reform and the overall development of the Tiprasa community.

▪ **From Superstition to Rationality: The Possibility of Social Transformation**

Shyamlal Debbarma's 'Khong' presents the possibility of moving from a superstition-based society towards rational and socially conscious thinking. The villagers of Hachuk Kwpara are influenced by supernatural explanations of illness, death, natural events, and social problems. The Ojha's words create fear among the villagers and lead most of them to leave their ancestral village. Similarly, the labelling of Naithokti and her mother as Daini, religious conflicts, and beliefs in Vashikaran reveal the harmful influence of irrational thinking.

In contrast, Bichang represents education, scientific consciousness, rationality, and social awareness. He encourages people to pursue education, question harmful practices, and judge social customs through reason and practical understanding. At the same time, he values Kokborok language, literature, and cultural identity. His efforts demonstrate that progress does not require abandoning one's cultural roots. Thus, 'Khong' suggests that education, rational thinking, scientific consciousness, cultural awareness, and human values can gradually challenge superstition and create the possibility of positive social transformation in the Tiprasa community.

GENRE AND LITERARY CHARACTER OF KHONG

Shyamlal Debbarma's Khong (1996) is primarily a social novel that reflects social realism and reformist thought. The novel portrays the customs, superstitions, social conflicts, religious intolerance, and changing consciousness of Tiprasa society. The villagers' dependence on supernatural explanations and the social exclusion of Naithokti reveal the harmful effects of superstition. In contrast, Bichang's educated, rational, and scientifically conscious outlook emphasizes education, social awareness, reform, and positive change. His interest in Kokborok language and literature also reflects cultural consciousness. Thus, Khong combines social reality, rational thought, reformist ideas, and cultural consciousness in its representation of Tiprasa society.

FINDINGS

- The study finds that education plays an important role in developing social awareness, independent thinking, and social responsibility in the community.
- The novel shows that lack of education can strengthen superstition, blind belief, and irrational thinking, thereby affecting the social life and decisions of people.
- Scientific consciousness and rational thinking help individuals examine traditional beliefs and social practices through reason and practical understanding.
- The incident involving the Ojha demonstrates that belief in supernatural explanations can create fear and social instability, even influencing people to leave their ancestral village.
- The portrayal of Naithokti and her mother reveals the social exclusion, humiliation, and inhuman treatment associated with Daini beliefs.
- The novel also indicates that religious intolerance and mutual distrust can create conflict and weaken social harmony within the community.
- Bichang represents education, rationality, scientific consciousness, and social awareness, and his character reflects the possibility of positive change through an educated mind.
- The study finds that education, for Bichang, is not limited to personal achievement; rather, it should contribute to the welfare, awareness, and overall development of society.
- The novel gives importance to Kokborok language and literature as means of education, social awareness, and preservation of cultural identity.
- Overall, 'Khong' suggests that education, rationality, scientific consciousness, human values, and cultural awareness can work together to challenge harmful superstitions and promote positive social transformation in Tiprasa society.

CONCLUSION

Shyamlal Debbarma's 'Khong' (1996) presents a meaningful picture of Tiprasa society and its social, cultural, and intellectual concerns. The study shows that education occupies an important position in the development of individual awareness and social progress. The novel also reveals how illiteracy, superstition, blind belief, religious intolerance, and harmful social practices can influence people's lives and create fear, conflict, exclusion, and social instability.

The character of Bichang represents an emerging consciousness based on education, rationality, scientific thinking, and social responsibility. His ideas demonstrate that education should not remain limited to personal achievement but should contribute to the welfare and development of the wider community. His efforts to encourage education, question irrational practices, and promote Kokborok literature further indicate the connection between knowledge, language, culture, and social awareness.

The experiences of the villagers of Hachuk Kwpara and the portrayal of Naithokti illustrate the damaging effects of superstition and irrational social judgement. At the same time, the novel does not reject tradition or cultural identity as a whole. Rather, it suggests the need to distinguish between valuable cultural practices and beliefs that may cause social harm.

Therefore, 'Khong' can be understood as a literary representation of the transition from superstition and blind belief towards education, rationality, scientific consciousness, and social awareness. The study concludes that education and critical thinking can play a significant role in challenging harmful superstitions while preserving language, culture, and meaningful traditions. Through this perspective, Debbarma's novel conveys a broader message about the possibility of positive social transformation and the intellectual and cultural development of the Tiprasa community.

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