

ENCYCLOPAEDIA OF

Assamese Literature



Raj Kumar Singh

Encyclopaedia
of
ASSAMESE LITERATURE

Volume 2

सदर्थ
REFERENCE



Dr. Raj Kumar Singh

Lecturer, Deptt. of English
MPS Science College, Muzaffarpur

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PREFACE

Assamese literature is the entire corpus of poetry, novels, short stories, documents etc. written in the Assamese language. It also includes such writings and popular ballads in the older forms of the language during its evolution to the contemporary form. The rich literary heritage of the Assamese language can be traced back to the 6th century in the Charyapada, where the earliest elements of the language can be discerned. The Charyapadas are often cited as the earliest example of Assamese literature. The Charyapadas are Buddhist songs composed in 8th-12th century. These writings bear similarities to Oriya and Bengali languages as well. The phonological and morphological traits of these songs bear very strong resemblance to Assamese some of which are extant.

After the Charyapadas, the period may again be split into (a) Pre-Vaishnavite and (b) Vaishnavite sub-periods. The earliest known Assamese writer is Hema da Charita". In the time of the King Saraswati, who wrote a small poem "Prahra Indranarayana (1350-1365) of Kamatapur the two poets Harihara Vipra and Kaviratna Saraswati composed *Asvamedha Parva* and *Jayadratha Vadha* respectively. Another poet named Rudra Kandali translated *Drona Parva* into Assamese. But the most well-known poet of the Pre-Vaishnavite sub period is Madhav Kandali, who rendered Valmiki's Ramayana into Assamese verse (Kotha Ramayana, 14th century) under the patronage of Mahamanikya, a Kachari king of Jayantapura.

In the middle period of the prose chronicles (*Buranji*) of the Ahom court. The Ahoms had brought with them an instinct for historical writings. In the Ahom court, historical chronicles were at first composed in their original Tibeto-Chinese language, but when the Ahom rulers adopted Assamese as the court language, historical chronicles began to be written in Assamese. From the beginning of the seventeenth century onwards, court chronicles were written in large numbers. These

chronicles or buranjis, as they were called by the Ahoms, broke away from the style of the religious writers. The language is essentially modern except for slight alterations in grammar and spelling. The modern Assamese period began with the publication of the Bible in Assamese prose by the American Baptist Missionaries in 1819. The currently prevalent standard Asamiya has its roots in the Sibsagar dialect of Eastern Assam. As mentioned in Bani Kanta Kakati's "Assamese, its Formation and Development" (1941, Published by Sree Khagendra Narayan Dutta Baruah, LBS Publications, G.N. Bordoloi Road, Gauhati-1, Assam, India)— "The Missionaries made Sibsagar in Eastern Assam the centre of their activities and used the dialect of Sibsagar for their literary purposes". The American Baptist Missionaries were the first to use this dialect in translating the Bible in 1813. These Missionaries established the first printing press in Sibsagar in 1836 and started using the local Asamiya dialect for writing purposes. In 1846 they started a monthly periodical called *Arunodoi*, and in 1848, Nathan Brown published the first book on Assamese Grammar. The Missionaries published the first Assamese-English Dictionary compiled by M. Bronson in 1867. One of the major contributions of the American Baptist Missionaries to the Assamese language is the reintroduction of Assamese as the official language in Assam. In 1848 missionary Nathan Brown published a treatise on the Assamese language. The period of modern literature began with the publication the Assamese journal *Jonaki* (1889), which introduced the short story form first by Laxminath Bezbarua. Thus began the *Jonaki* period of Assamese literature. In 1894 Rajanikanta Bordoloi published the first Assamese novel *Mirijiyori*. The modern Assamese literature has been enriched by the works of Jyoti Prasad Agarwalla, Hem Barua, Atul Chandra Hazarika, Nalini Bala Devi, Navakanta Barua, and others.

In recent years, the Assamese literature has made conspicuous progress in all its forms, mainly in fiction and poetry. The chapter on contained in this book acquaint the readers with the fluctuating scene of thematic concerns and technical experimentations in Assamese Literature. It is hoped that both the teachers and students will find them extremely useful. Even the general readers who are interested in literature in Assamese will find them intellectually stimulating.

— Dr. Raj Kumar Singh

ASSAMESE POETS

Jyoti Prasad Agarwala

Jyoti Prasad Agarwala (1903-1953) was a playwright, songwriter, poet, writer and film maker from Assam. He is an Assamese cultural icon, deeply revered for his creative vision and output and is popularly called the *Rupkonwar* of Assamese culture. In fact, he is regarded as the founder of Assamese cinema for *Joymati* (1935). His birthday (January 17) is celebrated as *Silpi divas* (Artists' Day) in his honour.

Biography

Jyoti Prasad Agarwala was born on January 17, 1903 in an Agrawal family, to Paramananda Agarwala and Kiranmoyee Agarwala in Tamulbari Tea Estate. He is the nephew of another cultural icon, Chandra Kumar Agarwala. His forefather, Nabrangram Agarwala, had come to Assam in 1811 from the Marwar region in Rajasthan. After completing his studies in various schools in Assam and Calcutta (Kolkata), he matriculated in 1921. He went to Edinburgh in 1926 to study economics, but returned in 1930 before completing his course. On his way back, he spent seven months at the UFA studio in Germany learning film-making.

After his return to Assam, he continued his activities for Indian independence that had disrupted his studies earlier and in 1932 he was imprisoned for fifteen months. He established the Chitraban Studio at the Bholaguri Tea Estate and began filming the movie *Joymoti* around the end of 1933. This was the first film from Assam. The film, released in 1935, was based on a play by Laxminath Bezbarua about a heroic Ahom princess imprisoned and tortured by a repressive Ahom swargadeo.

In 1936 he married Devajani Bhuyan. In 1941 he participated in the freedom movement, and in 1942, he went underground to escape British repression. Toward the end of his life he moved from a romantic to a more radical vision, which was reflected in his works.

He died of cancer on January 17, 1951 at Tamulbari Tea Estate.

Works

Songs

Jyoti Prasad Agarwala had written around 300 songs, many of which he had set to music himself. Collectively, these songs are called *Jyoti xongit*.

Plays

- Sonit Kunwori
- Karengar Ligiri
- Rupalim
- Nimati Konya or Rupkonwar
- Sonpakhilee
- Khanikar
- Kanaklata
- Sundarknowar
- Lobhita

Film

Agarwala is lauded as the creator of Assamese cinema. In a period that saw the beginning of Indian Cinema, with the making of numerous mythological themed movies, Agarwala created a movie that was nationalistic in character.

- *Jyoti* (1935)
- *Indramalati* (1939)

Poems

- *Jyoti Raamaayon*-Poetry Collection
- *Luitor Paaror Agnixur*-Poetry Collection, 1971

Others

- Background of Assamese Architecture

Stamp

In honour of Agarwala's contributions to Assamese literature and film, the Government of Assam issued a commemorative stamp of Agarwala in 2004. It was pushed for by the AGP and approved by the Prime Minister of India in mid-2004.

Amulya Barua

Amulya Barua was a pioneer of modern Assamese poetry. He was born at Jorhat on June 30, 1922. In 1941, he passed matriculation examination from Jorhat Govt. High School with letter marks in Assamese and in 1945 he passed his B.A. examination from Jagannath Barooah College, Jorhat. Then he went to Kolkata for higher studies and admitted into the MA class of Calcutta University. But Amulya Barua was killed in the infamous communal violence of Bengal in 1946 along with many of his hostel mates at Raja Ram Narayan Street, Kolkata. His only collection of poems *Achina* (The Stranger) was published in 1964 after his death. Some of his famous poems include *Andhaaraor Hahakar* (The Tumult of Darkness), *Beishya* (The Prostitute), *Biplobi* (The Revolutionary) and *Kukur* (The Dog).

Nabakanta Barua

Nabakanta Barua, also known as **Ekhud Kokaideu**, (December 26, 1926-July 14, 2002) was a prominent Assamese novelist and poet.

Biography

Early life and education

Nabakanta Barua was born December 26, 1926 in Diboru to Nilakanta Barua, a school inspector and later teacher, and Swarnalata Baruani. He had three brothers: Debakanta, Jibakanta, and Sibakanta. (Debakanta Barua also became a well-known Assamese poet, best known for poem collection *Sagor dekhisa*.) At first the family lived in upper Assam, then moved to Puranigudam and lastly lived in Nagaon town.

He started his education at a nearby school, then joined Govt. Mojolia school. In 1933 he was admitted to Nagaon Govt. boys in class 3, from there he completed his matriculation in 1941. After that he got admitted to Cotton College, but he lost two years due to illness. In 1943, he went to Shantinikaton (West Bengal). In 1947 he completed his B.A. with English honours and in 1953 M. A. from Aligarh Muslim University.

Career

He worked in Uttar Pradesh at Sokohabad at A.K collage, but the same year was transferred to Jorhat's Jagannath Barooah College. In 1954 he joined Cotton College and worked there until 1964. From 1964 to 1967 he worked at Assam Madhyamik Shiksha Parisod as an officer of English education. He again joined Cotton College, retiring as a vice principal in 1984.

He served as president of Assam Sahitya Sabha's Dhing Adhibashan in 1968 and presided over Asom Sahitya Sabha's Bishwanath Chariali convention in 1990.

Death and afterward

Nabakanta Barua died on July 14, 2002.

Published Works

Barua wrote most criticized and recited poems like "Polokh", "Monot porne Arundhati", "Norokot DonJuan", and "Crussot DonJuan".

Barua's contribution to Assamese art and literature includes 39 books in all: 11 poem collections, 5 novels, essays, short stories for children (*Xeali palegoi ratanpur*) and lyrics. Some of his works have been translated to different Indian languages.

In 1984, he published the Assamese magazine *Sirolu*, later republished as *Natun Sirolu*.

Awards

- 1974: Assam Prakashan Parisod Award, *Mur aru Prithibir*
- 1975: Sahitya Akademi Award to Assamese Writers, *Kokadeutar Har*
- 1976: Padma Bhushan, Literature & Education
- 1993: Assam Valley Literary Award

Homen Borgohain

Homen Borgohain (b. 1932 Assam) is a Indian writer, poet, critic, columnist and editor in Assamese language. He was awarded the 1978 Sahitya Akademi Award in Assamese language for his novel, *Pita Putra*.

Homen Borgohain is one of those few Asomiya writers whose works have attracted the attention of a wide number of readers and many acclaimed critics alike. He has carved a niche for himself in the domain

of Indian literature by the magic of his words and his refined and dignified personality. He is one of those rare artistes who has allowed the flow of life to find its own form in art.

Though he is a natural columnist, yet his multifaceted genius exhibits its prowess in the genres of novel, short story and poetry with equal aplomb. He is a prolific writer but that has in no way jeopardised his own artistic integrity. Writing for him is a deep ethical commitment. In spite of having rural roots, Borgohain's work shows a deep understanding about urban complexities. In the early phase of his life Borgohain led an almost bohemian existence and the reflection of that particular life can be visualised in many of his early stories.

Life, said Chaplin's clown in the film *Limelight*, is all about desire, and has nothing to do with our beliefs. Borgohain effectively brings to light the hidden cravings and desires of human beings struggling to articulate their feelings. His works light up the dark corners of the mind. Borgohain paints the life of the mind with breathtaking simplicity and there is a perfect blending between the subject matter and style. He may be called a lonely genius because no other Asomiya writer has attempted to depict life in the way Borgohain has successfully done. He can be called a true modernist in his attitude towards art and life. As Carl Jung remarked : "The man whom we can with justice call modern is solitary... Indeed, he is completely modern only when he has come to the very edge of the world, leaving behind him all that has been discarded and outgrown, and acknowledging that he stands before a void out of which all things may grow." For Borgohain, who does not believe in the concept of institutionalised religion and for whom no ideology can fulfil the spiritual void of human beings, the destiny of man is to undertake the perpetual search for meaning in an otherwise meaningless universe.

Though Borgohain has penned many controversial and thought provoking works like *Shubala*, *Pita Putra*, *Timirtirtha*, *Kushilab*, etc., yet the novels in which he most successfully scans the existence of man with all its complexities are *Astarag* and *Edinar Diary*. In *Astarag*, Borgohain shows us what it means to be alive in a world which is full of pain and suffering. The heartrending agony of old age is portrayed so vividly in the novel that the readers are drowned in a well of sympathy for both Dilip and his father. Borgohain strives to prove the truth that life is an indefinite reprieve from death and to be alive is to gradually

wither away. But this gradual erosion does not mean that man is to give up all attempts to live a happy life. Towards the very end of the book, Borgohain states a deeply felt reality of existence:

“Man will come and go but what will remain forever is this beautiful earth and the love of mortals for this mysterious life. Man will live forever in the midst of this love.”

Borgohain's language is urbane and the tone is that of an understated irony towards life and death. In *Edinar Diary*, Borgohain goes one step forward and tries to understand the essence of existence with a philosopher's profound quest for truth. Borgohain is a widely read man and the gems of his erudition are scattered throughout the pages of the book which help us to come to terms with our existence in a better way. The sense of alienation, despair, boredom all find manifestations in that particular work and we close the book with an enhanced understanding of our existence. As one character, Aditya Baruah says towards the end of the novel – “Life must be having a meaning; I will endeavour to find out that meaning from today”.

He wrote all the novels after doing a great research. Some of his novels itself contains a part of his life. *Pita Putra*, *Astarag*, *Saudar puteke* *Nao Meli jai* are such examples. Borgohain's entire artistic career consists of this search for meaning.

- Books published
- 2007 *Santanukulanandan* (Novel) Purabi Bormudoi
- 2006 *Cheneh Jorir Ganthi* (Short Stories) Atulananda Goswami
- 2005 *Mouna Ounth Mukhar Hriday* (Novel) Yeshe Dorje Thongchi
- 2004 *Manuh Anukule* (Poetry) Hirendra Nath Dutta
- 2003 *Anek Manuh Anek Thai Aru Nirjanata* (Poetry) Bireswar Barua
- 2002 *Mahat Oitiiya* (Criticism) Nalinidhar Bhattacharyya
- 2001 *Edhani Mahir Hanhi* (Novel) Mahim Bora
- 2000 *Baghe Tapur Rati* (Short stories) Apurba Sarma
- 1999 *Biponna Samay* (Novel) Medini Choudhury
- 1998 *Asirbadar Rang* (Novel) Arun Sarma
- 1997 *Andharat Nijar Mukh* (Short stories) Nagen Saikia
- 1996 *Abhijatri* (Novel) Nirupama Borgohain
- 1995 *Maharathi* (Novel) Chandra Prasad Saikia

- 1994 Madhupur Bahudur (Short stories) Sheelbhadra (Rabati Mohan Datta Choudhury)
- 1993 Mor Je Kiman Hepah (Poetry) Keshav Mahanta
- 1992 Shaichar Pathar Manuh (Poetry) Hiren Bhattacharjya
- 1991 Brahmaputra Ityadi Padya (Poetry) Ajit Barua
- 1990 Snehaddevir Ekuki Galpa (Short stories) *Sneha Devi
- 1989 Asamiya Jatiya Jivanata Mahapurushiya Parampara (Literary criticism) Hiren Gohian
- 1988 Patal Bahirabi (Novel) Lakshminandan Bora
- 1987 Aan Ejan (Poetry) Harekrishna Deka
- 1986 Benudhar Sarma (Biography) Tirthanath Sarma
- 1985 Krishna Kanta Handiqui Rachna-Sambhar (Literary criticism) *Krishnakanta Handiqui
- 1984 Jangam (Novel) *Devendra Nath Acharya
- 1983 Sudirgha Din Aru Ritu (Poetry) Nirmalprabha Bardoloi
- 1982 Mamare Dhara Tarowal Aru Dukhan Upanyasa (Novel) Indira Goswami (Mamoni Raisom Goswami)
- 1981 Kavita (Poetry) Nilamani Phookan (Jr.)
- 1980 Prithibir Asukh (Short stories) Jogesh Das
- 1979 Sonali Jahaj (Poetry) Bhaben Barua
- 1978 Pita Putra (Novel) Homen Borgohain
- 1977 Bakul Banar Kavita (Poetry) Anand Chandra Barua
- 1976 Srinkhal (Short stories) Bhabendra Nath Saikia
- 1975 Kaka Deutar Har (Novel) Navakanta Barua
- 1974 Golam (Short stories) Saurabh Kumar Chaliha
- 1972 Aghari Atmar Kahini (Novel) Syed Abdul Malik
- 1970 Mahatmar Pora Rupkonarloi (Reminiscences) Lakshminath Phookan
- 1969 Manchalekha (Study of Assamese theatre) Atul Chandra Hazarika
- 1968 Alakananda (Poetry) Nalinibala Devi
- 1967 Adhunik Galpa Sahitya (Literary criticism) Trailokyanath Goswami
- 1966 Bedanar Ulka (Poetry) Ambikagiri Roychoudhuri

- 1964 Asamar Lok-Sanskriti (Study in Folk culture) *Birinchi Kumar Barua
 - 1961 Iyaruigam (Novel) Birendra Kumar Bhattacharyya
 - 1960 Kangrechar Kachiyali Ra'dat (Reminiscences) Benudhar Sarma
 - 1955 Bana Phul (Poetry) Jatindranath Dowerah
- (No awards in 1956,1957,1958,1959,1962,1963,1965,1971 and 1973)

Atul Chandra Hazarika

Atul Chandra Hazarika (1903-1986) was a prominent Assamese litterateur from Assam. He excelled as a poet, dramatist, children story writer and translator. He was bestowed the epithet "Sahitycharjya" by Oxom Xahitya Xabha, the premier literary organization of Assam.

Life and Literary Works

Born on the 9th September, 1903, in the state of Assam of India, Atul Hazarika, obtained his M.A. degree from Calcutta University and started his service life as teacher of Assamese literature. He retired as a professor and head of the department of Assamese in Cotton College, Guwahati, Assam. Atul Hazarika was author of more than one hundred books in Assamese. In nineteen thirties he authored a record number of Assamese dramas to give a new lease of life to the Assamese stage. During the same time he became a household name as a young poet-"Dipalir Kobi". He also authored many story books for children. Some of his adaptations of western classics like "Grimor Xadhu", Andersonor Xadhu" became very popular. He was also compiler and editor of works of great as well as many lesser known writers of Assamese. He compiled and edited several works of Sahityarathi Lakhinath BezBaruah and at the same time he collected and published in "Moroha Phoolor Koroni" works of many talented but lesser known writers who died in their early years. Atul Hazarika was also one of those pioneers who were responsible for giving a new face to Bihu-the national festival of Assam. He was associated with the founding committee, which organized for the first time Bihu on stage at a city pavilion in Guwahati some sixty years back. Atul Hazarika was also a great literary worker and as a general secretary, he was responsible for giving a new lease of life to Oxom Xahitya Xabha in the fifties. He became the President of this apex literary organization of Assamese language in 1959.

Awards

Hazarika was awarded Sahitya Akademi Award in 1969 for his magnum opus, *Monchalekha*, which traced five hundred years of Assamese drama and stage. He was also awarded Padma Shri by Government of India in 1971.

Hem Barua

Hem Barua (1915-1977) was a prominent Assamese poet and politician from undivided Assam.

Biography

Born on the 22nd April, 1915, at Tezpur, Hem Barua obtained his M.A. degree from Calcutta University in 1938 and joined the J.B. College, Jorhat, in 1941 as lecturer in Assamese and English. He left it next year during the Quit India Movement and was imprisoned in 1943. On his release, he joined the B. Barua College, Guwahati, and later became its Principal.

Works**Literature**

Shri Hem Barua was the author of several books. He was the President of the Assam Sahitya Sabha on 1972 and was regarded as one of the pioneers of modern literary movement in Assam.

- *Modern Assamese Poetry*, published by Kavita, 1960

Politics

Shri Hem Barua left the Congress in 1948 and became a member of the Socialist party. Later he was elected to the National Executive of the P.S.P. He was a member of the Lok Sabha from 1957 to December 1970.