CHAPTER-V
CHAPTER -V


The period from 1901 to 1947 in Assamese literature is very important as the Assamese society witnessed many social upheavals during this period including the different phases of the national movement for freedom like non-co-operation, civil disobedience and Quit India movement. Our nation became an independent and sovereign state with partition in 1947. Naturally, the urbanising and modernising forces got a favourable environment from the time of the independence.

The nationalistic feeling generated by the question of language during 19th century as seen in chapter four, broadened to merge into the all India nationalistic feelings during the freedom movement. People were very much enthusiastic in the beginning with this new environment after the departure of the colonial masters. Assam was made a separate province in 1912 with the Syhlet district of erstwhile East Bengal.

Economically, of course, the nation was reeling under the colonial rule till 1947. Though the tea and oil industry played a significant social roll in industrialisation and corresponding social values. With the establishment and development of new administrative centres began what we have described in detail in chapter two, the modern exodus to towns from villages for economic reasons. These social issues had far reaching impact on the fiction writers. The birth of the 'Awahan' under the patronage of Jamidar Nagendra Narayan Choudhury and with Dinanath Sarma as its editor in 1929 is an epoch-making incident in the history of Assamese literature. It was published from Calcutta like the 'Jonaki'. Modern Assamese literature owes much to Calcutta. The magazine offered ample scope to express the new-experiences and also responses to other issues through short stories and serial novels for the writers. Though traditional in form and content, Rajani Kanta
Borodoloi wrote a series of historical novels in this period. The 'Awahan' created a host of story writers and they expressed different ideas of the world literature, following the footsteps of Chekhov, Maupassant or Edgar Alan Poe with a new spirit. The 'Awahan', being born in Calcutta worked as a catalyst for this ferments. The on-going independence movement and anti-British activities also inspired many to write social novels with a mission. Daiba Chandra Talukdar, and Dandidhar Kalita, who were Congress workers, belong to this group. The educated people became aware of the women's right also in the light of social equality and new humanism. Lakshadhar Sarma, Munin Borkataki etc. in short stories and Chandraprava Saikiani, Dandi Kalita etc. in novel, raised this vital social question. As the age is basically romantic in nature, Rama Das and others expressed the ideal of romantic love of an urban society. Even political workers like Gauri Sankar Bhattacharya were under the influence of this new literary spirit spearheaded by the 'Awahan'. Before that, Lakshinath Bezbarua and Sarat Chandra Goswami laid the foundation stone of the new humanism and realism in Assamese stories in the first two decades of the 20th century. But, most of the writers could not make themselves free of the romantic ideals, even the rebel writers were romantic to some extent. The dominating spirit of the age was so. The birth of the 'Jayanti'. in 1943 brought a new change in literature with left-oriented ideas. Bhabananda Datta, Chakreswar Bhattacharya and Kamal Narayan Dev were the torch bearers of this new trend. The publication of some left minded essays in magazines created a new awareness. Though the World War II began and ended in this period, its impact was seen later in the Ramdhenu age in literature. Of course, the World War I influenced some story writes like Sarat Ch. Goswami, who wrote the famous story, "Nadaram". The man-woman relationship also underwent some changes, particularly among the middle class due to some urban values mentioned in Chapter two. Above all, the rising middle class dominated the literary movement and it
culminated in the pages of 'Jibonor bato' by Birinchi Kr. Barua, where the opportunistic middle class raised its ugly head with a view to dominating the Assamese society. In the following pages we shall attempt to find out some of the important urban values in the stories of L.N. Bezbarua, Sarat Chandra Goswami, Lakshidhar Sarma, Gauri Sankar Bhattacharya, and Rama Das and in the select novels of Daiba Chandra Talukdar, Chandraprava Saikiani and Birinchi Kr. Barua.

A : LAKSHINATH BEZBARUA

As shown in the last chapter, Lakshinath Bezbarua, the father of the Assamese short story wrote some stories in the early years of his career, which express limited urban consciousness and values. His later stories also make occasional references to the values imbibed from the city life experience of Calcutta. Here also, Bezbarua makes fun of the newly educated types with a view to reforming them. The hyper-westernised characters like Bhokendra Barua and Malak Guin Guin, who only paraded an external kind of modernity. In some stories he has shown the qualities of an urban society with modern consciousness as to the secularism, casteism in a limited way or liberal humanism. His later story books like Surabhi, Jonbiri and Kehokali have instances of such urban values.

A rising middle class society: The new middle class society offers scope for the spreading of an urban society and consciousness. Bezbarua has delineated such a society in some of his stories taking a form together. This rising middle class society was at the cross-roads as to the choice between the old traditional values and the new urban values after the introduction of the British rule in Assam. It is comprised of both the new educated class and the decaying aristocratic class. The British introduced a new social system that catered the needs of both the educated class and the erstwhile Ahom officers. So, they acquired the character of a Prismatic state as mentioned in chapter two in accordance to the plan of the colonial values.
Bezbarua has chosen his characters for his stories from both classes. He loved some of the traditional values, which were kept alive by the traditional aristocratic class. It includes the new mauzadars, mandal, Kanangos etc. created for collecting the land revenues for the British authority. They were, mostly, from the old landed gentry class. Bhempuria mauzadar, who became a mauzadar from a humble position in the govt. record room at Sibsagar, Sibaprasad, a belmetal mason, Sibnath Sarma Bharati, a primary school teacher etc. form this class in Bezbarua. Among the educated middle class we have Bhokendra Barua, a western educated student-turned-politician, Malak Guin Guin, an assistant school inspector, Seristadar sub deputy of Gomkorola', Dharmadhwaj Phoisala nabis, Ghantakarna Sarma, the head side assistant of Raikhong tea-garden, Deva Kumar, BL, a lawyer of Dibru in 'Mukti', the Scott-sahib in 'Bapiram', the businessmen working at Sambalpur etc. are the members of this educated middle class, most of the settled at towns. They represent mainly the new service class under the new British administration in Assam. When the administration system was reorganised and developed creating new employment opportunities, this class took advantage of it. They are very much loyal to the British officers, behaving like lackeys before them. But they turn tyrants in dealing common natives. A peculiar mentality is marked in them Bezbarua has identified their weaknesses and has attacked them for their pompous and pretentious nature. This rising middle class spread the modern values among the people, like devotion to official work or craze for English education. Even the mauzadars exhibited their interest adopting some new values. So, this middle class occupy the central position in the stories of Bezbarua.

**Liberal humanism:** Already, we have discussed that the Jonaki group of writers started the concept new liberal humanism as a part of romanticism in Assamese literature. Chandra Kr. Agarwal sings the glory of man in the highest form in 'Manab bandana', when he says that man is both God and the object of devotion,
hence there is none except man who should be worshipped. He gave a clarion call to work for humanity through his poems. Bezbarua, the leader of that literary movement was no exception. Inspired by this new idealism he created several stories to glorify it in Assamese short story. 'Bapiram' 'Bhadari', Fatema Bibi; Mukti etc. are the stories that highlight this new humanism, that he learnt from Bengali and English literature. In 'Bapiram', we see that Bapiram was a family servant in the house of Sidhai Khataniar for many years. He has become like a family member and devotes his life for the welfare of his master's family. This was witnessed even in the family of Bezbarua at that time, as Bezbarua's family had many servants who also lived like a family member. In the story after sidhai's death, his brother Bhudhar became his master. He arranged a marriage of his young beautiful sister, a widow, Tilaka with Mr. Scott, a middle aged manager of Dighaliting tea garden in his own interest Bapiram prevented it by attaching Mr. Scott one day, on his way to the bungalow. Bapiram had to undergo imprisonment for three year's for the offence. But he succeeded in saving Tilka. It is an expression of humanism as well as loyalty to his former father-like master Sidhai. The liberal humanism is expressed in the form of secularism also in the story 'Fatema Bibi'. The Muslim family showed the highest form of humanism by offering shelter to Nistarini Devi, who was later converted to Fatema bibi, when all the villagers closed their doors to her including her parents for allegedly taking a milk-item in the house of a Muslim family of the some village. It is ture that she was converted to their religion, but her life was saved by them at the deepest crisis of her life. They also risked their own life by offering shelter to a Hindu girl. This is the best example of humanity shown by an author before the creation of the story "Siraj" by Lakshidhar Sarma, known for its secular thoughts. In the story "Mukti", Bezbarua has attacked the inhuman schooling system and education imposed by the educated showing the new humanism in separate form, like today's over loaded school bag and
routine, it imposes an extra pressure on the children, which kills their natural development and spirit. He expressed his deep concern for the oppressed child Sukumar, who lived like a caged bird. Thus we see that, the author has expressed the sense of liberal humanism in some of his stories in different situations where he has expressed deep concern for the down trodden class of the society following the examples of Rabindranath Tagore and Sarat Chandra of Bengali literature.

The hypocrisy and individualistic thought of the new educated: It has been mentioned many times here and there that the new educated class in association with the alien rulers captured the lion's share of the new jobs and they have been going higher and higher in the upward mobility scale in society with the blessings of the British Authority in Assam. The 20 rupees scholarships offered by the education department were availed by many lower middle students also. Some of them after arriving in Calcutta forgot their root and developed negative urban values like hypocrisy and became blind imitators of the western culture. Infact, they cannot internalise the western values, so the half-digested modernism gave rise to hypocrisy and narrow individualism. The hypocrisy and aping evoke humour, but the author never spares those, who does it. One such story is "Bhokendra Barua" in three parts. Here we see that the son of a rural buffalo keeper Bhokonda has changed his name to Bhokendra Barua in Calcutta. He is so much under the spell of pseudo modernism that he is now ashamed of his origin. He writes a letter to his father where he suggests that his father's name should be changed from Gondhai Gowal to Gondheswar Barua and that of his mother from Jetuki to Jotikeswary. He wants his sister's name to be Bhramarini in lieu of present Bhurbhuri. He also suggests that his father should change his profession of a milkman, which he considers is not respectable. Bhokonda has only learnt the superficial values of a city life his showmanship proves it also had the same problem as described in his autobiography when he started to immitate an English gentleman.
He changed his dresses, hair-cut, glass and even took lesson in French. The difference is that Gandhiji learnt a good lesson from his experience and became a popular leader. But Bhokendra turned into a fraud and scheming politician like the wicked men of cities. He also informs his parents through the letter that following the example of Keats, Shelley and Rabindranath he has also written a book of poems. Whatever Bhokendra attempted to be was good, but he failed to internalize the modern values properly. He thought that he could become a modern man by showmanship only, even his father, has criticised him that his son has forgotten his root. Bezbarua has also exposed his false values making it a subject of satire. Bhaben, Barua, poet and critic observes, "The butts of the satire are the representatives of the conservative society, the hyper-westernised products of English education and hypocrites." In the next parts, we see Bhokendra, the politician. He failed in F.A. and later on married a girl from a rich family taking a substantial dowry. After spending the money lavishly in a year he turned into a wicked politician raising the issues of his community "Moran". The public fund that he collected for the welfare of his backward community was spent by him like his own money. He learnt only the negative urban values like corruption or hypocrisy there in Calcutta. His individualistic thought never gave way to public service. Bezbarua has made a scathing attack on his negative and superficial values creating humour and pathos. Apart from such students, some service-holders also became hyper-westernised and forgot the native culture totally. The "Malak Guin Guin" is being targetted for the same showy western culture by an Asst. Inspector of school. Like Bhokendra he also hails from a lower middle class family. After becoming an officer, he has developed a sense of neglect towards the rural life and people including his own family. When his younger brother, a cowherd called him as "Kakaideu" (dear elder brother), he was ashamed of it and asked his servant to beat him like stranger. His hypocrisy and selfish individualism has made him so
ruthless that his innocent father was sent back home like a stranger while he went to meet him in town’s residence. Bezbarua has commented against his behaviour through Malakhu’s father. “My son, you have learnt so many things, but your intelligence seems to be very confused by that of Calcutta.” This criticism is directed towards all such people of our society. So he has made fun of his hyper-westernised values. Nangaluchandra and Ghantakarna Sarma also get the same treatment from Bezbarua for their showy nature.

**Secularism:** Bezbarua has collected different characters for his stories from all communities of Assam. The tribal or the Garos also find a place in his story, which make him a writer with modern outlook. But as to the secularism, a modern political consciousness, he has only one or two stories to his credit. One such story is 'Nistarini Devi or Fatema bibi' which we have discussed also in the liberal humanism section. She had to convert to Islam, where she managed a shelter. The limitation of Bezbarua’s secularism lies there. Perhaps, he had no such model before him like Siraj of Lakshidhar Sarma. Yet, during the first decade of the 20th century, Fatema’s words echo a sense of secularism. She has learnt a lot from the experience of life. "Sir, let me tell that our country has been dogged by caste system. In the name of caste one hates and other. In the name Hindu and Muslim, people of one religion neglects the other for which the country has gone to the dogs. In the eye of Allah, all people irrespective of religion and caste, are equal. In this world I was driven away from my parents; in the other world Allah will certainly give them back to me." Fatema has learnt through her experience that there is no difference at all among people in the eyes of God or Allah, it has been created by men only. She has learnt an all important value of secularism in the school of experience. It is a step forward the making of ‘Siraj’ by another secular writer Lakshidhar Sarma later after 20 years.
Women's right and dignity: 'Laliti Kakati', 'Madoi Malati', 'Patmugi', 'Seuti', Bhadari etc. are the stories, written by Bezbarua, emphasizing women's dignity and rights. In his time, the question of women's right was not a big social issue. He himself was in favour of a limited liberty of the women, what he has expressed in "Jarar deshat tinimah". Dr, Hiren Gohain Comments.

He got inspiration from Rabindranath and Sarat Chandra to write stories on this issue. In more than one story he has chosen male chauvinism, their betrayals and opportunism etc. as targets of attack. In most cases, his female characters endorse the male's view taking it as a social tradition. Only one or two have protested. One such story is Laliti Kakati, where the protagonist Laliti has protested against the male's chauvinism with some sort of determination. She informs the police officer, who has sent her back after severe physical touch that, "...... is it good to cane a small girl, coming from another family by marriage, like theieves or use her like the bullocks of a ploughing field ? In former days, people used to call women better half of men, or to call good wife sharing same principle. .......

Laliti has raised a vital social issue — the rights of the women. She is very much concerned about her rights. She cries that "We, the women are like the males, we are not the dolls or earthen pots or chappals of foot or cattle? The way you have deserted me, the same rights are also mine". Laliti is also very much angry with the laws of Manu's Samhita and other religious laws which accord the male power to exploit the women. She also thinks that apart from marriage, the females have many meaningful things to do. Without the help of the husbands, the women too can become independent if they have definite aims and purposes of life. It seems, Laliti's strength has come from her individuality and strong believe in God. That is the limitation of Bezabarua. Such kind of women's right's activist, who is not inheriting her strength of protest from society or
organized movement, are bound to lose in frustration. In spite of that, her statement is an important document for the cause of women's right in the early decades of 20th century. Bezbarua's other female characters are not so strong. In Madoimalati, we observe the sense of individualism, as she has married a simple post-man of low income against the wishes of her parents. The letter, that she has written at the time of elopement is a sign of her individuality. She becomes different from Padum Kunwari of Bezbarua or Lahori of Gohainbarua in this respect. She argues that if her parents do not accept her husband she is ready to sever the relationship with her parents for good. In another case earlier, she told one of her cousin that her father was very conservative. But one cannot be expected to be great within a single generation. That is, she has a critical mind for which she preferred personal happiness to the materialistic gain. Bezbarua has written one story, Patmugi in his last days of career as a story writer to expose the sexual exploitation of the males what Patmugi protests silently. Patmugi in the eponymous story asserts her individuality as woman after a series of experience. She was so much moved by her experience that ultimately she developed a sense of hatred against males. She confessed that within few days she saw many things, so learnt many. She no longer wanted that Brahmin husband, who deserted her. So she decided to drop the case. Dr, Prahlad Barua remarks, "These words of Patmugi was like the first mantradhwani of free women of new age". Of course, where there is a strong social awareness and women organised for their common problems, women will fight together with the male for their rights. But at that time there was not such a movement. Any way Patmugi also brings a wave of a new breeze of limited liberty to women to our society at that time. Beznarua's 'Laokhola' (The Skull) focusses on the suffering of the widow and their rights of remarriage. The story also tells how a widow became a fallen woman being a prey to the men's wiles.
**Rational outlook towards caste-system:** Bezbarua was brought up in an orthodox Brahmin family. Some of his feudal values were refined and some new modern values were acquired by him after his contact with western culture and the Bengali people in Calcutta. Like his limitation as to the women's right, he had some doubts regarding a caste-free society. The backward and the socio economic conditions under colonial rule of his time was not conducive to a revolutionary change in caste-system. Of course, Lakshidhar Sarma stands out distinctively in matters of caste in the 1930s. Bezbarua has expressed his rational outlook in casteism to some extent in "Dharmadhwaj PhoisalanaBis', 'Jatiramar Jat' and 'Rashid' (the receipt), but he is sceptical about this in "Bhoomkorola". In 'Jatiramar Jat' the lecture of Madhuram Neog to Madhuram Ukil is a clear example of the fight against casteism. Neog puts forward the argument of the original customs of the Aryans in order to attack the so-called high caste people. He says that Aryans ploughed lands themselves, ate meat of animals and drank 'Somrasa' (a kind of wine). Now their descendants, the high caste people condemn the people for such customs. This is a rational view on the validity of casteism in society.

**The corruption in the courts:** The new land laws created many problems for common people including the educated class in the 19th century. People did not understand the other civil laws also. The cases of litigation increased. This difficulty offered opportunities for some people to act as the middlemen like petition-writers and copiers, who exploited the illiterate masses. The experience of Patmugi in the story Patmugi is a case in point. In addition to the male's sexual exploitation, the greed for money for the middle men and lawyers forced her to leave the courts without filing a case. She was rendered penniless by their rapacity. At first the assistant of the lawyers extorted money showing this or that expenditure. The final blow is given by the lawyers, who demanded a big amounts as fees. There are so many people extorting money from the people this way. Bezbarua points out
also the corruption of public money as a negative urban value in the story "Bhokendra Barua" in addition to that of the courts. In 'Bhokendra Barua' we see Bhokendra, the politician has spent the public money like his own money, thereby indicating the presence of corruption among the political activists. But the court was the hub of corruption.

- *Other urban values*: In addition to the above mentioned examples of urban features, we have some other characteristics also, which need mention. In the colonial situation, a craze was created for jobs among the natives, but they got employment in lower grade jobs only. It is seen in the story 'Bapiram' that the English planters began to invest money in the gardens. Young men ran after jobs, particularly those who passed from English schools.\(^9\)

As to the life style, the western educated people put on jackets, pants, tie, shos etc. Bhokendra Barua and Malak Guin Guin, may be showy, but they put on these modern dresses and foot wares. Courtship before marriage is a western practice. It is also included in the Assamese short story as a prelude to marriage by Bezbarua in 'Pratham Darshanat Opoja Prem' (love at first sight). The hero started to go to his in-law's-house in order to meet his would be wife. He has given up the age-old customs in this respect and welcomed the new. He tried to practise courtship.\(^10\) The hero has expressed his willingness to perform inter-caste marriage with an Ahom girl also. Though Bozbarua is not clear about caste-system as discussed earlier or he has changed his views gradually he is quite democratic in case of inter-caste marriage, which is a modern value. Concern for individual rights is also a modern consciousness, which Bezbarua has welcomed in 'Ghantakarna Sarma'. Earlier people were not conscious about their rights. After he was dismissed from his job of Bormahari, that is from upper division clerk Ghantakarna Sarma, who became very rich by corruption, went by train to Calcutta
to petition to the Borsahib (perhaps the Manging Director). He, thus, appears to be a man fully conscious of his rights.

Thus we see that Bezbarua has written many stories based on new values that he acquired from a modern environment. He was in favour of the modernisation of traditional values rather than abandoning them. Moreover, some modern values were also acquired by him that were expressed by him in his stories. His contemporary, Sarat Chandra Goswami also followed him in some respects.

(B) SARAT CH. GOSWAMI

Sarat Ch. Goswami was an accomplished story writer of the pre-Awahan age, a contemporary of Bezbarau. He authored a number of short story collections, namely, 'Galpanjali' (1914), 'Moina' (1920), and 'Bajigar'. He generally wrote simple narratives. One of the founders of Assom Sahitya Sabha and its first general secretary, Sarat Ch. Goswami was a very competent organiser. He was industrious and open minded, a rare quality in a Gosain and a Govt. officer in those days. The social realism that was brought to Assamese stories by Lakshinath Bezbarua was widened by Goswami. His one story 'Ghunusa' is famous for its social criticism. Nadaram speaks the changed mentality of a soldier who went to foreign countries. So, there are modern and urban values also in his stories. In the following pages we shall discuss some of his stories, which express some modern and urban values.

Modern outlook and tolerance in Nadaram: Sarat Ch. Goswami's Nadaram is a realistic story. Nadaram, the soldier has undergone some changes as to the values related to married life. Nadaram's wife left him in favour of his neighbour, Bhatiram as both of them loved each other. At that time Nadaram was busy with war outside the country, perhaps during the World War I. After returning from the front, he discovered that his wife was living with Bhatiram. He filed a case in the court that
his wife has been taken away by Bhatiram. Nadaram in the beginning was upset as his wife Rupahi went to her childhood friend Bhatiram. But his experience in foreign countries made him realistic also. He had travelled to France, Egypt, Mesopotemia etc. in connection with war. His mental horizon had been widened, his outlook towards life was somewhat modernised and he developed an attitude of tolerance. When he came to know that his wife had gone to Bhatiram he felt injured. In his mind, he faced an internal war. But his new outlook won the war over his emotion. When the district magistrate gave the final verdict in favour of Nadaram, enabling him to regain his wife Rupahi and sending Bhatiram to the prison he did not accept the verdict. He said to the magistrate, "Your honour, what is the use of keeping her with me? After all she was not satisfied with me. Let her stay with Bhatiram."

The magistrate found it interesting. While asked why he, filed a suit then against her, Nadaram replied. "Honour has maintained the status of our king, your judgement has saved my respect too. I am now content to give up my claim."¹¹ Nadaram expressed himself to be a man of modern outlook when he said that when a girl is not satisfied with her husband what was the use of living together with such a girl? Sarat Chandra Goswami wrote his story in 1920. So, it is a quite modern outlook expressed by an army personnel in those days that he has allowed his wife to live with a different person in a semi-feudal society. He is above the male chauvinism in a male dominated society. He realised the importance of personal relationship in married life. Nadaram never wanted a mechanical married life. The district judge, an English man also praised him for his outlook.

**Social reformation : criticism of casteism and society :** Goswami was not a social reformer in literature like Bezbarua. But, as Goswami himself was against the civil practices of society when these stood against humanity expressed his serious concern over the matter. One such story is *Dekha Dekhi*. The writer has attempted to raise the problem of casteism in marriage. He has not made the
character rebels, only expresses the anger of characters, when they faced the casteist feelings for reviving obstruction to a proposed marriage. It is a love-story between Dharani and his friend Nabin's sister Parvati. Of course, they could not marry each other as Dharani belonged to Koch community, now an O.B.C. community. Parvati's family was a high-caste kayastha. So, the vallain of casteism stood on the way of their unity. But Navin who went to study with Dharani to Calcutta was influenced by the modern education and other values, which made him practical and a secular man. His reaction to his father in this respect bears mark of protest against casteism. He said to his father that in the college all human beings are equal, casteism is untrue, it is only expression of the vanity of clan's glory. He learnt these things in college, so he never thought that Dharani was a Koch boy and they were Kayasthas. On the other hand his father and his court's friend represent the casteist system of Assam. Goswami has expressed the anti-casteist feeling only at the mental level, he could not go against it.

In the story 'Ghunusa' we see that the poor women has lost all faith on the social system after undergoing a horrible experience through the death of her son, Maniram. All exploited her from village chief to the village quake. The chief declared his son a bastard on pressure from one person. Her son was suffering from an unknown disease, who was permanently bedridden at home. In the court, she lost all her land to her brother-in-law. The village kabiraj extracted the little property she had in the name of treatment of her son. Next, the priest snatched her one rupee coin received from a passer-by. At last, her son also died and she became mad. The author shows in the last part of the story Gunucha inflicting punishment on clay figures of Brahmans and prists. The author has expressed serious concern at the exploitation and hostility of the society towards a helpless poor woman. Through Ghunusa the author expresses his modern outlook.
It has been explained in the chapter two (political awareness section) that after 'Assam Association', the Assam Pradesh Congress Committee came into being in 1920 under the organisational hard work and the idealogical stand of the youth leaders of the congress like Chandranath Sarma, Lakshidhar Sarma, Tyagbeer Hem Chandra Barua and Omeo Kumar Das. Particularly Lakshidhar and his mentor in politics Chandranath Sarma carried the ogitational programmes in Assam during the non-cooperation movement. Lakshidhar Sarma, among other prominent youth leaders, made patriotism a motto of life for which his career was disrupted several times. They could contribute sound organisation ability to the beginning of Congress Party in Assam. Unlike his many senior colleagues in the party, he came out of the middle class mentality to some extent as he identified with common people. He was a very brilliant student and stood first in matriculation in the Brahmaputra valley. Though he married the daughter of a very aristocratic family, the family of Tarun Ram Phukan, he never gave up his mission in life. He was involved in trade union activities also. In a busy life of a political leader during the freedom movement, he found time to write stories following others. He was a very popular short story writers in the Awahan. Political awareness like contemporary politics of Congress, socialism etc, the women's right question, secular and democratic values etc. are the new values that he represents in his stories among three short story collections. 'Byarthatar Dan' alone places him among the distinguished story writers of the age. In addition to his short stories, he wrote plays, poems and essays also, which expresses his literary genius and ideology as well. Let's examine his urban values in his stories.
Political awareness: As L. Sarma was involved in active politics, naturally, his political ideas found expression in his stories 'Rabin', 'Parajoy' (The defeat), 'Padmarekha' etc. are the major short stories that highlight his political awareness. All the heroes of the stories inspired by a sense of patriotism. Referring to Lakshidhar Sarma's patriotism, Dr. Hiren Gohain writes, "Patriotism was the very essence of his life. The progress of history at that juncture carried the world towards his desired goal. If Assam dies we shall also die' - the speaker of this message of patriotism also declared in rising tone the message of humanity — Basuidhoiba kutumbakama". So his heroes are not parochial, they are devotees of world freed of exploitation. The hero of 'Robin', Robin is a supporter of independent movement. But, to him Swaraj is just not a political freedom, but a panacea for all social and economic problems including stopping of child marriage. In fact, the happiness of the young couple married as children is ruined by the death of the husband in an epidemic. The religion also instigales hatred among people. Untill and unless the tyranny of religion is stopped, we are not worthy of attaining swaraj. In fact, he wants to get rid of all social evils through Swaraj like untouchability, exploitation of religion etc. Rabin echoes the philosophy of Gandhiji. Lakshidhar Sarma was totally involved in freedom movement when this story was written in 1920. One or two of his later stories show he began to be critical of the Congress party and its movement during the post non co-operation period. 'Parajoy' and 'Padmarekha' fascinating stories which expose the contradictions that occured Congress during independence movement. The hero of 'Parajoy' is critical of the role of Congress in Assam. Mahesh, the hero is a Congress worker. He went to Calcutta to attend the Congress conference there hopefully, but returned in disgusted mood. He was frustrated and disgusted with the Congress. He cries that this Congress is totally middle class, a platform of the idle rich. I thought that except Mahanta Gandhi, there was none in Congress working for the welfare of
the poor. Moreover, there was nobody in the Cognress to speak for the Coolies."  

Ideology, unlike religion, is an urban development stories like 'Padmerekha', which shows the hero being attracted by the message of Mahatma Gandhi and Munna which shows ideological diversions within the Cognress party, have such an ideological background.

**Trade union activities and Socialism**: Prahlad Barua is of the opinion that Lakshidhar Sarma can be credited with raising the issue of socialism in Assamese short story for the first time. That is a correct observation. Gauri Sankar Bhattacharya and others followed him in the early forties. Lakshidhar Sarma was quite aware of the great Bolshevik Revolution of Russia and the growing social thought among the socialist in early 1930s. The above mentioned Mahesh of 'Parajoy' is also disgusted with the physical torture on the tea-garden labourers by the hired people of the owners and economic exploitation on them when he was at the Majuliting garden. Their sufferings forced him to be a trade unionist. He has contradictions in his mind in this respect as he belonged to the rich class. An M.Sc in chemistry, he finally joined the trade union movement and worked for them. In Bengal, he worked among the workers of Naihati Cloth Mill near Calcutta. He accepted the political philosophy of socialism. But his suicide is a matter of concern for the future of socialism at that time. He suffered from T.B. and ultimately stabbed himself to death. Dr. Hiren Gohain's comment in this respect is pertinent. "The tragic end of the socialist worker in this way suggests that the author might have been sceptical about the success of socialism inreality." Of course for the Assamese middle class leasership in the Cognress, the Communist form of Govt. in Assam in the 1930s was beyond imagination. But as Lakshidhar considered it a better system of Govt. and he himself was not hopeful of the performance of the Cognress, this idea of socialism in his party attracted him as a alternative by the middle class leadership. This is, clearly, an advanced political awareness expressed
in the Assamese stories in the 1930s. As a progressive worker of the Congress party, his concern for women's right was so sincere that he publicised his ideas through his literary works including the play 'Nirmala'. He is the only short story writer of the Awahan age, whose voice for the women's right is heard even in the tumult of the romantic stories. Dr. Hiren Gohain in the said preface of Sarma's collected writing has opined that his feminism is not blinded by hostility to male chauvinism. There was no model for such kind of creative works before him in Assamese, definitely he looked for to other literature like English or Bengali. The women characters of Sarma is the finest of its kind in Assamese literature. Homen Borgohain observes, "He placed humanism above religion; the dignity and rights of women above so-called chastity; the liberation of humanity was placed by him above all other ideals of life. In true sense, he was the maker of an age."\(^\text{17}\) Lakshidhar has explored the various aspects of women's right like the widow remarriage or fight against apathy of males toward females. So, this exploration from Rabin in 'Robin' to Lolita in 'Bidrohini' (The rebel) is a long way. The meek and silent widow of 'Robin' has turned into a fierce rebel like a wounded tigress in 'Bidrohini'. His contradiction with the problem, to say, is a healthy development of progressive outlook. Prahlad Barua has said, Lakshidhar Sarma's women characters have sought liberty and revolutionary consciousness through two ways — liberty from social binding and their emotion weaknesses.\(^\text{18}\)

In the first group, we have stories like the famous 'Bidrohini' 'Tinikhon sithi' (Three letters) etc. The fight for the women's right arises from some social problems like child-marriage, widow remarriage etc. In the story 'Robin' the hero, Robin has vehemently protested against the social injustices. The woman is suppressed and exploited. The young widow with a child kindled his fire of protest. She was a victim of a child marriage, whose husband, a 55 years old man who had died leaving her helpless. She became a mother of a child by a profligate male who
refused to marry her. She was excommunicated by society on a charge of adultery. Her parents also disowned her fearing the rage of society which led to her commit suicide Robin discussed the problem with his friend Mahendra and they came to the conclusion that the social and religious rules are inhuman and these led to the torments suffered by widows. The old traditional values were criticised by Robin openly. Both of them vowed to fight against the social evils like child marriage and widow remarriage. "We, two promise that we shall try to upkeep the best of the values of Hinduism as far as possible and as to the main sin of the society, the unmarried widow, we shall try to introduce widow remarriage."19 Moreover, Robin brought the orphaned child and decided to look after him. After Gunabhiram's play, 'Ramnabami', the issue of widow's remarriage has been raised in short story by Lakshidhar Sarma. This is a new element in the history of Assamese short story. But the meek widow of 'Robin' turns a rebel in 'Bidrohini' as Lalita. She is a rebel against a male dominated society. Lalita has turned into a mouth piece of the author, whose mission in life was the welfare of the people as a whole. In the story we see, Lalita was widowed at a tender age of 14 years only. She completed her first degree in Calcutta with the help of her parents and prepared herself to fight for the cause of widow remarriage and other rights of women against a hostile society. When she mothered an illegitimate child with Hema, her childhood day's friend, she got the opportunity she was looking for. Lalita in the social meeting said that it was a natural phenomenon in life. "If someone accepts the immensity of life, then he/she must rebel against the society when someone goes against the life. And change meant rebellion, we might call this change a rebellion leading life or persons towards truth. But, tomorrow the society itself was bound to glorify it with open voice."20 She also went to the extent that she was capable of looking after the child alone. All these days women were looking to the male for economic support, now they were not so dependent with the help of their labour, women
could rear children alone. Males are not more income generating than females. Lalita made it clear that she was not ready to accept the verdict of a male-dominated society. So, Lakshidhar Sarma's Lalita is quite different from Nabami of 'Ramanabami’, who killed herself in a similar situation. The author has carried the unfulfilled desire of Gunabiram's Navami of 19th century through Lalita. Her education in Calcutta encourage her to be so. His other story, 'Byarthatar Dgn' considered by many as the best story by Lakshidhar, both the self admiring beauty of Lily and her use of her beauty as a source of power, and the selfless devoted love of Lalit which at last beigns about her realisation that love is far superior to self glorification are products of urban society and consciousness. (The gift of failure) is the other kind of liberty seeking from the women characters themselves.

Secularism: The idea of secularism is also evident in the story of Sarma as he himself wanted to organise all people, irrespective of religion caste under the Congress Party during the freedom movement. Moreover, during communal riots in Calcutta in his student days, he took shelter in the house of a Muslim friend named Ismail. He himself was free from communal thought. 'Siraj’, one of the finest stories in Assamese on secularism is the result of such influences his personal life and his ideology. In Siraj, an elderly Muslim gives shelter to a pregnant Hindu women during a storm, and the women dies in child-bed. Later on the father of the illegitimate child comes to know of her origins from the elderly Muslim and brings her home. When the child grows up her father sends her to study in Calcutta where she becomes the beloved of Anil, where parents however refuse to sanction their marriage as Sita appears to be a child of unknown parantage. Siraj, at first was in dilemma as she was a Hindu girl. But what she said to Sitraj is a fine example of a noble and universal secular outlook. "The difference between the Hindus and the Muslim hasn't been created by the God. He is the Father of all. Only people have created the differences." Siraj has other instances of secular acts. He had even
stopped totally eating and rearing of chickens, which is a common practice of the rural Muslim in order not to injure her religion. He did it as Sita was a Hindu girl. When Sita was driven away by Anil's aunt because of, it was Siraj, the embodiment of humanism, who took her to his home despite such a past. So, Lakshidhar Sarma has written a perfect story communal harmony, where Hindus and Muslims found peace through recognition of a common humanity.

Passion for the magic city of Calcutta and urban values: All the heroes and heroines of Lakshidhar Sarma have a common interest in going to the magic city of Calcutta, the cultural capital of British India. All of them proceeded to Calcutta for higher education and they returned with new values of city life. The hero of 'Parajoy', Mahesh is a student of M.Sc in Calcutta. The bioscope, theatre etc. of Calcutta attract him besides his beloved Subrata. What politics he has learnt, it is from the social life of Calcutta. Some others learnt other new values. Like others, Jatin, the hero of 'Jinikhon Sithi' went to study in Calcutta university and he learnt there to recite the poems of Rabindranath Tagore. Some girls, who went to Calcutta for study e.g, Priolata in the story of the same name and Lalita of 'Bidrohini' who graduated from a Calcutta college. The hero of 'Padmarekha', Basanta was a border of Hardinge Hostel in Calcutta. Many Assamese student lived there in the 1930s and 40s. He studied M.A. and B.L. simultaneously. His father was a cultivator, Priolata's father a small businessman, yet both of them understood the importance of education in Calcutta. In fact, it was craze at that time to go to the magic city for study. All these characters and their supporting parents had good interest in learning new values, what they got in Calcutta.

Urban institutions: We have references of urban institutions in some of the stories of Lakshidhar Sarma. The urban society of Guwahati established the 'Harisabha' at panbazar in order to celebrate the Hindu festivals and other programmes. In
'Robin', Mahendra has requested his friend to go to Harisabha as on that day there is a public lecture on freedom there. Harisabha was a common platform for meeting also. In 'Padmamrka' the author has referred to the Assam club, Basanta visit the club every evening for playing bridge. These are the places for secondary association in a city. These places work also as the centres for doing community works in a city.

**Some negative urban values:** The harmful influences of city life are also frequently shown in such stories. The story writer cannot ignore such impact. Lakshidhar Sarma also uncludes some negative values of city life like alienation and extra-marginal relationship in two stories. His stories are specially conscious writing, so the impact of such values is not abundant except of few. In 'Bryorthar dan' Lily, the wife of a tea-planter is quite lonely at home. She cannot communicate with her husband properly. The ghost of loneliness always haunts her. In the industrial world, there are such problems as the husbands are always busy at work while leisured women pine away at home.

As to the extra-marital relationship there is only one instance. The story 'Munna' speaks of such a negative value. The 'Bapujee' of the story is an Assamese politician, who is married. At Shillong, he is fascinated by the beauty of a upcountry girl named Munna; her profession is signing on the street. She was staying with a friend. One day, finding no one in the room, Babujee made love to Munna. His intensity of love towards Munna is so deep that he went to Ranchi in order to meet her there. The story exposes the sexual immoralities of some politicians of his time. There are other urban values also in the short stories of Lakshidhar Sarma. They are, the modern sense of beauty and use of cosmetics, the new professions of an urban society, the crass self interest of the middle etc., which find expression
in his stories through different incidents and situations. Thus, we see that was utilised by Gauri Sankar Bhattacharya etc. in their stories later on.

(D) GAURI SANKAR BHATTACHARYA

Gauri Sankar Bhattacharya is better known as a politician and lawyer. During the early years of his life he learnt his first political lessons in Calcutta, at first a confirmed communist and later on, after the split of communist party in 1962 turned to democratic politics. His study period in Calcutta city brought him closer to many political thinkers and literary personalities of Bengal. He learnt the value of creative literature from his association with 'ASL Club' and 'Chaturanga club of Calcutta. Particularly, the 'Chaturanga Club' had eminent members like Humayan Kabir, Buddhadev Bose, Narahari Kabiraj etc. and as a curious student of literature Gauri Shankar used to visit the weekly sittings of the club where a group discussion was held on a certain subjects. It had very positive impact on him. Later on, as admitted by himself, he was inspired by late Dinanath Sarma, editor of the Awahan and Holiram Deka, story writer, for writing stories. As a result of that association, a number of good stories came out from his pen. The political aspects of that time also shine in his stories. It is mention-worthy that he was a communist M.L.A. in the second assembly of Assam. His stories are neglected by the historians of Assamese literature as his name is not found in the list of story-writers. Political awareness, unstability of some people, tolerance etc. are the new values found in histories.

The Political awareness vis-à-vis Socialistic ideas: In his early stories, published within 1941 to 1947, Bhattacharya emphasizes more on the political aspect of life. He was a follower of socialism and studied Marxism well. In the early years of the communist party in Assam he was a front-line leader and worked jointly with Jyoti Basu, who was the secretary of the Bengal unit of trade union under
CPI. Naturally, his political ideas entered in his story. One such story is 'Milan Sapon' (Dream of unity), where Kamal, the communist hero had to suffer imprisonment for his trade union activities among the tea garden labourers. Like Lakshidhar Sarma's hero, in the beginning of the story he debates on the equal rights of men with his beloved Anima. He opens his political awareness by saying that he does not know for what reasons some people, who are less intelligent, less energetic and worthless spend days in affluence, whereas some others are forced to take hypocritical jobs like singing or begging, even working the whole day without being able to manage a day's meal. Some people spend in thousands lavishly for luxury, while a section remain half-fed or starving for and want of a single paise only. The beggar begs door to door wholeday during rain or hot weather; he/she does not have a place to rest at night. They have to wet in rains or shiver in cold. In this Assam too, on one hand abundance of luxury, on the other, cry for cloth and food. Why is there such a difference? This is the basic question to the protagonist. The author draws our attention to a society sharply divided by two classes. The political awareness gradually increases as the story advances. "There is no scope for a static state in this dynamic world. In the past, one group of people captured both power and capital, now their posterity had no right to exploit the society for ever." The hero has expressed his Marxist ideology through the debate. "It was like that in the primitive days all were equal in economic status. Everybody worked and ate. Gradually, the intelligent, hard-working and economic people saved capital with the help of their intelligence and their inheritors are still enjoying it." This is clearly a speech based on Marxian dialectics. Kamal further consolidates his socialistic thought when he says that the capitalistic society was formed with the means of theft, dacoity, atrocities and murder. Even pirates like Drake, Cook was supported and sponsored by Elizabeth. The exploiting nature of the British empire was also a part of Capitalistic exploitation. Kamal in the same
story argues that the Indian trade was the monopoly of the British East India Company. They purchased all items from the market at low price and the same were sold to their subjects at high price. It created famine and poverty. Orissa witnessed such famine in the middle of the last century (19th Century) and more than ten lacs of souls died in the same. This type of thinking is clearly an expression of patriotism, which is aimed to criticise the colonial rule in India and it echoes the contemporary political thought. The author has expressed the sense of humanism also. Kamal in the jail, has sympathised with the fellow prisoners. He has said that they have become victim of economic condition. His beloved also became a follower of Kamal. When Kamal was in jail, she studied all the books of Marks, Angels, Gorky, Lenin and Stalin like Kamal. She also decided to be a life partner of Kamal despite her mother's unwillingness as Kamal belonged to a proletariat party. Kamal echoes the voice of the young communists of Assam during its early years. So the story expresses the progressive political awareness, which was the new at that time. In another story Premotkoio tibra the writer has shown the political awareness through Bimal. Bimal has questioned the state why the persons are victims of bad economic condition.

Democratic values: Ethnic question: Gauri Sankar Bhattacherya was a matured politician as to the social and political problems of Assam. He worked for the unity and harmony in Assam as it was inhabited by different ethnic groups. He was sure that only tolerance and equal rights of the different ethnic groups could accelerate the process of assimilation for an unified and greater Assam. This type of healthy and democratic thinking is found in one of his stories in particular, that is 'Bakali Guchowa Piyaj' (The peeled off Onion). Symbolically it represents the said thought of Bhattacharya. In the story, we find that the character of Bormedhi of a satra namely Naopeta, is busy for the proposed visit of a guru, Krishkanta Goswami Maharaj to the satra. The anti-tribal attitude of some people is expressed
through Bormedhi when he expressed his anger with one tribal of Medhogaon, a kachari accompanied by an immigrant Muslim as they visited the satra on that auspicious day. Bormedhi has expressed his anti-Muslim attitude also. But the opposite view is held by Goswami Maharaj. In the satra he declared to the great astonishment of Bormedhi that he could take meal at Bormedhi's home, that too with potato-onion fry. Usually no such religious guru take meal in a non-Brahim family, and taking onion in satra by a Goswami is beyond imagination. The wishes of guru should be fulfilled. But Goswami could not take onion as the cook in charge peeled off the onion to its axis, that is, he removed all the layers to the axis. In fact, it symbolises his attitude or majority people's attitude. It is a clear indication of the disintegration of the greater Assamese society comprised of different ethnic groups. Goswami echoes it, "Like the peeled off onion layers you are doing the same as to Assamese society. Your great guru (Perhaps Sankardev) built an unity of Brahmin, non-Brahmin or hill plain people and you are breaking this union like peeling the onion off its layers. You should try to be broad minded. In stead of throwing away the own people, try to bring them close." Goswami guru earlier noticed the behaviour of Bormedhi towards the Kachari man and the immigrant muslim. So he made a comparison with the onion. The hero of the story, it seems, echoes the message of Gopinath Bordoloi at political level and that of Sankardev at the socio-religious level. He has a positive attitude for assimilation of different groups. He has expressed his political maturity and fore-sightedness. Gauri Sankar Bhattacharya was perhaps influenced by Gandhian socialistic ideas as well as with communist ideals in this regard. He makes the reader think about the problem, which has broken the erst while Assamese society into pieces like a house of cards. So he comments, "The desired thing for a serious and socially conscious reader is the stipulation for thinking."
The unstable, alienated people of modern times: Bhattacharya has explored the different kinds of life, from the political to the personal in his few stories one of his best stories. 'Premokoio tibra', he has delineated a different individual life, which is not common at that time in Assam. The hero of the story is Bimal and he is totally a cynic loosing all good faith on humanity. He is unstable and alienated from all, who is leading a very mechanical and monotonous life. This kind of negative values, usually are to be found in an industrial society. As said earlier in chapter two, in the family section, alienation in Assam is found at the mental level only, it has not spread in our society as a social disease like the western country. In the story, we see Bimal has reasons to be unstable and alienated from society and family. He passed Matriculation in first division, a very good result in those days of the 1940s, but due to paucity of fund he could not pursue higher education. He had to seek jobs for living. He became a clerk in the Postal department. Gradually he became frustrated and restless when he saw that his former friends were well placed despite their bad result in matriculation. His classmate is a magistrate now, who had passed matriculation in third division. Another friend Sarat, who passed examination only with the help of tutors, now is the head of the district. All of them utilised the facilities offered by an urban life with help the their social position and bad means. The economic disparity among them had an impact as to their employment opportunities. He comes to the conclusion that the dreams of the poor, but brilliant students could not be fulfilled due to the economic disparity in society. The city life is full of competitions and corruption. The moneyed people can take opportunity of different situations. He is torn between revenge and frustration. He is now totally unstable and unhappy. "Sometimes his heart is kindled with big fire of revenge, sometimes at the bottom of frustration and tiredness. Contradictory feelings makes his mind quite unstable."28 As a result of his unstability born out of revenge motif and frustration, he is at last, alienated
from his family also, comprised of his wife and a daughter. Surprisingly, he adjusts himself in the family. Though he dislikes his wife, he is living together without seeking a divorce despite the vast differences of opinion between him and his wife. Perhaps, he believed in personal liberty or individualism, and so he lived a mechanical life. Earlier, he was alienated from the office or other people, and now he fails to communicate with his family members too. "He gets delight smashing the sweet relationship of the family life, little cruelties become the luxury of the day-today life. Nobody knows the thoughts of his mind, but everybody notices his external cruelties every moment. When his only daughter Champa hears his voice she automatically hides in the corner of the door. And his wife Ambika also dares not to talk freely with him. She feels a touch of embarrassment, disinterest and terror in his presence."29 This is really pathetic for the rest of the family. But Bimal is determined to continue this state of affair accepting the reality. Even he breaks the idol of his daughter what Ambika purchased secretly with her little savings. This anger, frustration, alienation and unstability of Bimal remind us the hero of 'Asanta Electron' by Saurabh Kr. Chaliha. So Bhattacharya's 'Premotkoio tibra' was a beginning this type of story. The hero of Asanta Electron 'and 'Premokoio tibra' have much similarities as to the views on economic and social injustices. But Bhattacharya has brought another urban quality in the story, that is the value of adjustability. This is how, Bhattacharya shoot to popularity by writing a single story in the early forties, which brought him closer to the literary world. Of course, his political awareness made more appearance in his stories than other urban values.

(E) RAMA DAS:

Rama Das was perhaps the best known author of romantic short stories in Assamese. He was also a trend-setter in the Awahan age in theme and technique.
L.N. Bezbarua pioneered some such stories and it reached its climax with the publication of Rama Das's first story collection, 'Barsa Jetiya name'. He was not a socially conscious writer, but he portrayed a very vivid picture of the secular way of life of the Shillong-based urban middle class and their various liaisons. Because of his good prosetyle and new love themes of the urban youths and girls, he became a popular story writer in literary in a age of short stories. Secondly, he was a bold writer as he dared to write stories on extra-marital love or pre-marital love candidly without regard for the social values. His first collection was followed by 'Jahnobi' and 'Achal taka'. As most of his stories are based on the city life experience, there are many urban values in them including the presence of an urban society with heterogeneous population. Let us explore some of them in the following pages.

The new romantic love: Impact of romanticism: The growing urban middle class confined to their own world. They could indulge in different love relations as they liked irrespective of their married or unmaried status in the seclusion of Shillong. Rama Das, as described above, introduced a changed idea of love, where the rival was after the husband of the beloved! The new lovers were either young service holders or sons and daughters of them. The love was not to be found among the poor. Munin Borkataki also attempted to write such stories of romantic love, but he stumbled while going against the traditional values in love. Rama Das's new lovers are bold enough to disregard the social toboos. Praising the deep intensity of love in his stories Homen Borgahain comments that "The renaissance in Assamese literature reached its zenith in the 30s. It was expressed in the highest form in the poetry of Jatindra Nath Duara (Apon sur: 1933, Kathakabita 1936), and in the stories of Rama Das, like 'Barsa Jetiya name' it found its highest expression. The whole story is a manifesto of the new era"30 Rama Das has written many stories in this pattern, notables among them are 'Barsa Jetia name'
'Jahnabi', 'Durjogar Rati' and 'Atit'. In his famous story, 'Barsa Jetia name', we find that one young lecturer of a Shillong-based college has explored real love through many women since his student days. He had loved two different girls during his college days and the third one in his service life. The first one could not overcome her caste-prejudice; his short stint with a magistrate's daughter also ended at half-way as she only loved his physical look and secure job. The third one, a daughter of an aristocratic family of Shillong was also rejected by him because of her narrow and selfish nature. Jayanta failed to find natural love in all these cases. Finally, the young lecturer, who is a representative of a modern consciousness, found real and natural love in Chitra, who maintained her own dignity with a high sense of self respect. She is simple and not so beautiful. On that particular day, Jayanta realised that love was related to mental life also. He got the desired happiness he had been craving for all those days in the body and mind of Chitra, sister of his revolutionary friend Lohit. All the experiments on love by Jayanta gave a new turn to the theme of romantic love, which is quite new in Assamese society. The story 'Atit' presents a triangular love story involving an ex-lover and the husband of a lady living in Calcutta. She was writing letter to her former lover of the college days even after her marriage. At last she realised that her college day's love had no meaning as it was unrealistic for her at that time. Through a plan of her husband, she realised the true love of her husband. Her meaningless sentimentality to her former love was over. It was the new romantic love like the one of Jayanta in 'Barsa Jetia Name'. They are no longer sentimental vaguely. Such variation on the theme on romantic love, treated with both realism and tenderness, were evidently a product of urban sensibility.
A rising middle class society of heterogenous population with self interest:

The world of the heroes and heroines of the stories of Rama Das is the rising urban society of Assam, particularly of Shillong, that is to be found in a wider canvas in the novels of Padma Barkakati in the 50s of 20th century. Guwahati, being the cultural and commercial capital of Assam had also a similar society. Before independence the different kinds of service-holders and professionals began to settle at the urban centres of Assam as said in chapter two. They are highly educated, have passions for higher education and are economically sound, but most of them are motivated by only self interest. From this society, we have rebelious characters like Lalit, Subrata, Hema, Lalita, Robin etc. in the stories of Lakshidhar Sarma. Rama Das has also picked up many characters from his society, who are modern and allergic to physical labour. In 'Jibonor Erati' both Pradip and Kamal were educated in Calcutta and were in flourishing business as lawyer and doctor respectively. They are making money hand over fist and so are involved in hedonism. Biju's father is a Govt. high official and rich man and Raju's father is also a rich man. We meet both of them in 'Priti Upahar'. (The present of love) : Raju's father has big building at town and his mother has shares in a tea garden. Rajen has accepted the marriage proposal of Lakshi just out of greed for a big dowry, which Biju rejected on ideological ground. The selfish nature of urban middle class is exposed through these acts. The father of Dipika is a retired judge, Raibahadur Chaliha, who has settled in Shillong in a plot of land purchased at a very high price of thirteen thousands rupees from an English officers, Mr. Morgrand. His one son is in Shillong undergoing coaching for the ICS examination and another in Indian military as officer and the third one is working in a Bombay film company. His family itself offers an example of heterogeneous occupations in Assam. Tarun and Basanti are neighbours in Shillong, their father works in the same office as head clerks. Though they are not in a high position. Duara's son Tarun is also
influenced by the love of glitter of the urban middle class. He runs after Lily, a very modern girl of a rich family owing his love of glamour. At last he goes back to his neighbour's girl Basanti. They are all important characters in the story, 'Durjogar Rati'. The story, 'Achal tala' (The obsolete currency) brings to us a host of urban middle class people apart from the hero and the heroine. It is also example of a heterogeneous population of Shillong. The story informs that a lot of people, of varied class, of varied appearances and natures are standing in a queue for buying tickets of Post office. There are handsome English men, Marowaries with big belly, people from Syhlet with bad voices, urban probationers etc. in the queue. The English, the Marowaries, the Bengalies, the Biharis etc. along with the Assamese and the Anglo-Indian are the communities that form a very varied and vigorous urban population in Shillong. It is because of this heterogeneous population and occupations, we see that the Assamese urban society is undergoing changes in values.

A few breed of urban women vis-à-vis women's rights: In the beginning of this section we meet some boys and girls of an urban society, who were quite different from the small town and village boys and girls in matters of the hearts. Not only in love this new breed of Assamese women have other important urban characteristics also. Most of them are educated in the urban area's schools and colleges, even in Calcutta, they are quite aware of their rights regarding selection of life partner, thereby showing a quite transformed individualism nor found in 19th century literature. They are equally aware of other rights entitled to them but denied by the male-dominated society. Munin Borkataki has also delineated such type of new characters in his stories. Rama Das's new women are not socially conscious at all, offering a quite different picture from Lakshidhar Sarma's strong women, rather Das's girls are confined to their own class and culture. Their positive aspects are that they are well educated and active, and modern in some respect. But they
are not taught properly for the development of a healthy attitude towards life as a whole by their parents or husbands. The girls who received education in co-ed schools and colleges are Anjali, Arati and Bandana in 'Barsha Jetia name', Lily Chaliha in 'Durjogar Rati' Endrew Borbara in 'Achal taka', Upama in Setubandan, Dipti in 'Atit', 'Jahnabi' in Jahnabi etc. in one group and chirita in 'Barsha Jetia Name' and Basanti in 'Durjogar Rati' etc. in the other group. The second group of girls are very serious and they have a healthy attitude towards life which is absent in most cases of the first group. As described earlier Arati, Anjali and Bandana are well educated and belong to rich families. Anjali is very ambitious and has passed B.A. She is the daughter of a magistrate. Her values and attitude towards life are like this - "She belongs to such a light aristocratic family that she thinks of mean profit in love also. She dreams of a husband even while she is awake - who is a Robert Jailor in beauty, I.C.S. in service, and as to the economic condition he should be an heir to Rockefeller. This type of Beatrice girls always mention in conversation the burning love of Dante and Beatrice, recites the psycholocal love poem of Shelley, Byron and Browning in any place they like. But in real life, even at the deepest and most joyous moment of losing themselves in that lover's bosom, they dream of least one A.C.S., a modern drawing room decorated according to the latest fashion and if not anything else at least one VH car ......... "32 This is the demand of most of the girls of the first group as to their selection of life partners. They are totally guided by a self-centred hedonistic culture. They have other urban qualities also. They know horse-race, golf, motoring etc. and can purchase things themselves in the market. Badana was trained by an English governor in ball dance and 'At home'etiquette. Moreover these new girls are courageous which is rare in village girl. In 'Joubanar Bidroh' (The revolt of youth), Miss Aparna Chaliha of Scottish Churach College and one Mr. Dutta of Calcutta University were married in Calcutta without the permission of their
parents. They didn't listen to their parents. Jahnobi is the other name of Arati, who loved Pranab at first, but switched over to Pankaj, who is equally showy. This materialistic attitude in love is a reflection of hedonistic culture, what they have learnt from their respective families. Only Chitra and Dipti have shown some simplicity and healthy attitude in their love in the big urban society.

As to the women's right, Rama Das is not as conscious like Lakshidhar Sarma. He deals mainly with love-themes of the middle class society, where there is limited scope for asserting women's right. The new set of girls described above, are not like Lalita or Subrata of Lakshidhar Sarma. They care for their private rights only like moving freely in good dresses or sitting with new lovers each day. In a limited sense, Upama and Dipti raise the question of women's right as a whole. In the story 'Atit', Dipti is quite helpless when she knew that her husband was going to spend the night with his Bengali girl friend. She has become aware of the male-domination in the society through her weaknesses. Though her apprehension was proved wrong, yet her feeling of that particular moment bears the question of women's right. Upama in 'Setubandhan' has also experienced the same feeling as to her marriage. Unlike most of the new women of Das's stories, Upama had to marry according to her parents' wishes. She loved Nani, but was not allowed to marry him. Her parents fixed her marriage with Ajit, an oil engineer educated in U.K. She laments to Nani that she was not happy with Ajit. Admitting her lack of freedom in selection of a partner, she feels that "Our mind is the wonderful thing. We are made by society like water for taking any shape depending on the size of pots, the society thinks that way. Society never enquires whether we may have some independent tastes or demand." How the male's chauvinism destroyed the natural feelings of a woman is evident from her statement. Thus, we see that here and there Rama Das has portrayed one or two female characters who felt the limitation of the fair sex's
right in society due to the male domination in that society. But the other girls of the rich families enjoy somewhat greater freedom in this respect.

**Urban institutions:** The higher educational institutions are exclusively situated in the urban area. It has been mentioned several times that the heroes and heroines of Rama Das's stories are well educated who have received education in and outside the state, some of them are educated in foreign countries. The St. Edmund's College of Shillong, or Scotish Church College of Calcutta etc. are situated in urban centres. In addition to these institutions we see the activities of the literary organisations like ASL Club based in Calcutta in the story 'Joubanor Bidroh'. Miss Aparna Chaliha and Mr. Datta, both are in love attended the ASL club meeting regularry. In the same story, Nani, who also went to study in Scotish Church College for the attraction of co-education there, was also an active member. He tells that he worked very hard for the ASL club. He worked as a front-line worker in the organisation of meeting, in the collection of donations, in inviting people to the meetings and in the organisation of Bihu festival etc. for the club. The ASL club was a meeting point for all the Assamese people in Calcutta, particularly for the students. They learnt many new things there like lecturing at public place or discussion on literature. The author has given a very colourful description of the festival of X-mass in Calcutta in the story 'Atit'. It wears a festive look all through the days. We also see the change in the celebration of marriage party in the story 'Priti Upahar'. The marriage ceremony of Biju and Rajen is a splendid affair. The sound of crackers, of the English band and new concert make it a modern marriage. Moreover, the street are full of cars, horse etc in front of the marriage place. This kind of marriage is not traditional. These are the main urban institutions to be found in Rama Das's stories.
Extra marital relationship: In Munin Borkataki we meet a few characters who are involved in extra marital relationship, physically or mentally. Rama Das, as is the discussion above, has attempted to portray some bold characters trying to go against the socially established norms. The Shillong town, an alien station to a group of servicing people in govt. or semi govt. jobs and the solitary life of most of the people, who leave their family in the plain created a very conducive situation for promiscuties in the Khasi tribal society. Rama Das has capitalised on that situation for writing such stories of adultery. Some people learnt the negative urban values like adultery due to urbanisation. It was the result of the sense of individual liberty in an urban situation. But in reality they were not so open in this respect, particularly in urban places than Shillong. In most cases, the females are the victims. But Das has created some new women who are made and brought up in such an atmosphere of Hedonism that they get involved in extramarital relationship on their own, one such character is Sneha of 'Jibonor Erati', where she advocates for and practices a free sexual life even after marriage. Many people in the 1930s made a scathing attack on Das for allegedly writing obscene literature in 1936, when it was published the Awahan. Personally, he had to lose his private tuition too in a gentlemen's house for writing the story. The writer confesses that, after reading the story one of my uncles became so angry that he torn the Awahan into pieces. And he declared all that had I not been a son of my respected late father, he would not have expressed any sorrow for that.34 definitely it gave a great blow to the established social norm at that time. The story tells us that there is one class of heroine, who have adventurous sexual appetite despite being married to a rich man or any person with a comfortable living. Sneha is married to lawyer Pradip and they have three children also. She feels that she is yet to enjoy the life fully and her heart's longings are yet to be soothed. She is against the social norms in this respect.35 That mad longing for heart could not be suppressed by
conservative values or social norms. She understood the teaching of religion and education etc. but she never understood her ever hungry, unsatisfied nature. She is not afraid of the social tabbos - before and after her marriage. She continued her endless quest for love. After marriage she travelled in a DSP's car, named Mr. Haque for which the society wanted to boycott her. She has employed a young tutor to teach her when she was past forty. She has not cared for the society or for the people on her way to the satisfaction of her hearts's longings. Her ex-lover and Pradip's friend Dr. Kamal, who is also a married man, is an object of desire. She wants to fly like cotton in the sky of passion. That night both Sneha and Dr. Kamal had a torrid experience. That kind of character was to be in the Shillong urban society. In 'Barsa Jetia Name' Anjali is a married woman and Arati is going to be married, yet they have expressed their natural love for Jayanta, the young and handsome lecturer of St. Edmund's College. Their letters invite Jayanta to spend time with them in order to satisfy them. Anjali is knitting a pull-over for Jayanta and confesses that her life is still unfulfilled, even at the final moment of conjugal life. Such kind of women, who are not satisfied with their husband, are ready to be involving in adultery at any moment, whenever opportunity is provided secretly. They are more or less like Neela of 'Manor Dapon' by Padma Borkatoki. Upama in 'Setubandhan' returns to her former lover despite being married to an oil officer. Thus, we see that under the impact of city culture as a result of urbanisation some of the new women of Rama Das, portrayed in his stories, have no hesitation at all to breach the established social norms for gaining their lovers. The male character like Dr. Kamal is also a club member of that society.

_Urban style of life_: The urban life brought about behavioural change of the people. As to the values of comfortable living we see that the dress and food habit and table manners hard changed at that time for the city people. Though some urban man showed no change in mental outlook, yet they were in competition with others.
as to the outward things. So, we have mentions of taking a Lipton brand tea, a
sliced bread with jam, poached eggs at breakfast and one banana or apple or a golla
as the items of evening tiffin by Tarun Duara and Dipika. Cakes are ordered from
Morello—a new confectioner and baker. Reference to lunch and dinner by
Assamese youth is found in 'Relar Romance'. In 'Achal taka' there are a lot of
new things relating to table manners. The hero has invited minnie to his rented
house in Shillong. They take tea in a garden. They use tea-pot and Blackloid cup
and eat Gueleties cream roll together. Semolina and Chinese grass are two new
items in 'Setubandhan'. As to the dress we see that Minnie Andrews puts on a
new embroidered silk dress with blouse and foot wear of matching colour. It's
quite new dress. The new cloth stores of Shillong provided new designs of dresses.
Bezbarua might scold the use of Bengali sarees by the Assamese women in his
autobiography, but Dipika puts on a new Georgette saree in Parsi style with black
goggles. Anjali and Apu knew to knit sweaters. Jayanta puts on new coat with
kerchief and flower.

Among the other new items, the pleasure trip to Calcutta as in 'Relor
Romance' in order to spend X-mas holidays there is a new thing for entertainment.
Most of the planters spend their X-mas holidays upto New Year's day in Calcutta.
Tarun Duara wants to travel with Dipika in a motor car for enjoying with his lady
love. The dating system also appeared in Assamese stories. Tarun proposes to see
a film with Dipika at the in Kelvin Hall in 'Durgagar Rati'. The habit of book
reading is also found in 'Relor Romance'. The new symbols of love expression
also mark the progress of Assamese stories. "Barsa Jetia name" mentions a Bengali
poem by "Rabi Thakur and another by a Maitheli poet. Bandana expresses her
romantic mood this way. Jayanta himself recites the poem of Shelley in his room
before going out in that rainy day. Satyen in 'Ruddha Jouban' has fallen a victim
of seeing too many films like an addict. He writes a letter to his beloved inside a
text-book, which surprises his beloved also. The bad impact of city life is seen in 'Joubanar Bidroh' where Aparna and Mr. Datta die of starvation at last due to want of money as they married each other before finding any jobs. In 'Joubonor Erati' we see a change in education system by introducing a tutor, which is a new thing in our schools. Thus, we see that Rama Das has supplied reflected many new characteristics of urban life and sensibility in the characters of his story.

The character to be found in Rama Das's stories are not only smart in appearance and dress, but are also sophisticated urban types. Their conversation is polite, tactful and at times ironic. In sensibility they are more introverted while keeping to the outer social court.

(F) MUNIN BORKATAKI

Like his contemporary story writers, Munin Borkataki also began his career of writer as a short story writer through the journals like the Awahan and Bordoichila. He tried his hard in poetry and drama, but with little success, became a critic later on. One will find hardly a story writer like Munin Borkataki who glitters in history of Assamese short story with only eleven stories, all all fashioned in his own style. He was more a voracious reader than a writer and his opinion on writing as a form is best expressed in a personal essay 'Confession', the first of its kind in Assamese literature written as back as in the 1930s and published in the Awahan. Because of its peculiar characteristics, his eleven stories still remain memorable. He was a modern writer insisting more on man-woman relationship from a different angle in an overwhelmingly romantic age of literature. Feminism, political awareness, the modern agonies of a love torn man, the question of prostitution or extramarital relationship arising out of an developing urban society are the modern themes related to his stories. Jogendra Narayan Bhuyan, editor of his collected works, "Tridhara" remarks. "......... when our stories were
compartmentalised, with no effort of internalising the ideas of foreign literature except through some blind imitation, at that time Munin Borkataki brought a current of modernity to the Assamese short stories."³⁸

**Political awareness**: From his writings it is clear that Borkataki has not said much about politics in his writings. He was an introvert, busy with his study. But as his time was marked by the upheavals of freedom struggle and other movement, he could not evade the influence of those epoch-making incident of Indian history. Gandhiji made the historic 'Dandi March' in 1930 to break the new salt laws. He wanted some disciplined soldiers who were ready to sacrifice their lives for their country smilingly. In spite of his warming such activists became violent. Borkataki gives an example of that violence of the freedom movement in his story 'Bidrohi' (The rebel). We see that two patriots namely Mafiz and Mansur had been in parison for long ten years after were charged with murder. In the story we find, "They are prisoners, They rebelled for their motherland, for their homeland. They had already spent long ten years in jail. Both of them are politically conscious. They are happy to face death sentence sometime they feel sad, but the thought of their sacrifice for their country brighten their faces. Both Mafiz and Mansur remind us of the sacrifice of Khudhiram, who was also hanged. The author has echoed similar patriotism in his one act play 'Janmabhumiikoi Gariyasi'.

**Changed views of love and conflict with traditional values**: Most of the eleven stories of Borkataki have chosen conflicting views on love as a central theme. The sense of individualism is explicit in these stories, where unlike contemporary romantic stories, he dares to go through a kind of modern suffering as observed by Homen Borgohain.³⁹ Moreover, it involves experiments with different kinds of reactions through the love torn persons. It is a new kind of romantic stories imbued with intellectual content. Again to quote Homen Borgohain, "The man-woman
relations with more than one possibilities and the reactions of the male lovers towards it have been examined by him in many stories. Of course, in this respect his male lovers always dominated the process. The reactions and sufferings, arose out of a changed view on love due to social development and his own observation could be witnessed in 'Joy ne Parajay' (Win or Defeat), 'Tai aru moi' (She and I), 'Pap ne bhul' (sin or error) etc. The names of the stories itself indicate an expected debate on human relationship. In 'Bina' the hero, Palas loves secretly his cousin Bina. But he could not disclose it owing to the influence of social morality. When Bina dies his suffering increases. Perhaps Bina had also felt the same love for him. He thought that his disclosure might mark him as a morally degraded man in society. So he couldn’t do it. Palas is torn between traditional values and the demand of love and finally undergoes endless suffering. He debates in his mind and suffers. So, it remains a personal problem. All these days he loved one girl Lily. But he could not express it. It had so big impact that he changed his life-style. His innocent wife is serving him day out and day in. He was comparing his wife, Akoni all these days with Lily, a sophisticated girl. But ignoring her own needs his wife was waiting upon him like a selfless nurse. Tarin realised the significance of mutual love through the services and sacrifice of his wife. Tarin rediscovered the simple and rustic beauty of his wife through her eyes, which is the ultimate beauty of love. So, Tarin’s life is a journey from the adoration of external beauty to the realisation of the nobility of love. But his ordeal of love has taught him to free himself of all male chauvinism. He tells his wife to select some one as her partner after his death marking his final understanding of mutual love. Thus, through the pangs of life, Tarun has rediscovered the real beauty of love. Some other stories also expresses such love and polemics as a theme.
Women's liberty: In the stories of Lahshidhar Sarma the question of women's right got the highest importance in the Awahan era. Munin Borkataki has expressed this modern value in a restricted way. J.N. Bhuyan in this respect comments, "of course, we cannot put him in the same place as Lakshidhar Sarma in this respect." In his story called 'Joy ne Parajoy' Borkataki records his support for women's liberty. In the story, Ananta, a college teacher lives happily with his educated wife Lily—they wish to be like twin stars in the sky in order to perpetuate their happiness. But when Lily succumbs to a sudden mental disorder she is sent to the mental hospital for treatment. Ananta remains evergreen and after few months he weds Charu, a beautiful girl. But, the narrator of the story favours Lily, who has been undergoing treatment at Tezpur mental hospital. The author comments expressing the sympathy for women, "Not deprived of life's happiness; Ananta remains unaffected. Why will he suffer? The males are the first child of God ..............

The language is ironical and exposes very well the character of male's chauvinism. Again in the same ironical tone, the author, has brought the issue of women's exploitation, through one letter from Lily, who is improving gradually. The women are a negligible commodity, now happy with this life. She cries against Ananta's behaviour. After recovering from her illness she again relapsed into silence being shocked at the behaviour of her husband. It was a case of total betrayal. Ananta never waited till her recovery. The man, who wanted to be the stars of the sky with his wife, is now sunk in the earth's mud through his second marriage. The author has expressed similar sympathies as to the prostitutes also in 'Tai aru moi'.

Secular thought: Borkataki has proved his secular outlook through some character of his stories. In 'Bidrohi' we have a picture of communal harmony brought about the Gandhiji's freedom movement, where all the Hindus and Muslims took part
actively. The spirit of secular activities is visible through the characters of Mafiz and Mansur. It has been discussed in the political awareness sections. Choosing two characters from the Muslim community as the freedom fighters ready to make the ultimate sacrifice at the call of Gandhiji in the story itself upholds the patriotism of the minority community. It speaks highly of the broad minded outlook of the author. Moreover, the poet in 'Soponsudha' also belongs to the same religion, whose name is poet Hafiz. The name of the city where Hafiz lived is Shiraj, another Islamic name with beautiful mosques. Mention of Biblical references like Noah's arc and Great deluge also mark the author as a secular man. Having been born and brought up in a Brahmin family, the author's references to Islamic characters or Biblical analogies are a striking evidence of his mental emancipation.

**Extramarital relationship:** Like other writers of his age, Borkakati has also attempted to find characters having the negative urban values like extramarital relationship, but in most cases, he is far behind Rama Das. 'Pap ne bhul' and 'Niyamor bandh aru Pranar tan' (The binding of rule and the pull of heart) are two stories, where this kind of values are found. Borkataki's heroes and heroines stumble here and there while carrying on the extramarital relationship. They want to go to their lovers secretly. Mr. Kakati in 'Pap ne bhul' establishes such a relationship with a beautiful and cultured widow, Reba. He visits her secretly without the knowledge of his wife. One day he was caught red handed by his wife while embracing Reba. He could not continue the affair further. Of course, Mr. Kakati wishes to be a lover secretly. He is afraid of the society. So there is a tension in him regarding this issue. Mr. Kakati was always suffering from a tension between traditional values and his new love in this respect. He is not like Mr. Kamal of Rama Das. The urban middle class of Shillong and Guwahati offers such cases of extra marital relationship due to the middle class suppression in sex life or social taboos. Munin Borkakati also seems to feel this in a low degree. Another
story 'Niyamor bandha aru pranar tan' is also an example of extramarital relationship. The hero of the story is totally in different to his wife Renu as he loves another woman Munu, whom he loved earlier. Now they are living like husband and wife. His wife could not bear it and she committed suicide. The indifferent attitude of the hero towards his wife, which was triggered off by an extramarital relationship killed his wife. The name of the story indicates, there is a tension between social rules and the passions of the body.

**Prostitution**: Another negative values of the disorganised social life in an urban society is the profession of prostitution. Borkakati has explored the life of a prostitute in one of his stories 'Tai aru Moi'. The story was published in the *Jayanti*, the progressive magazine of the Assam's left intellectuals of the early forties. The story is based on the reaction of the hero to the never-ending suffering of a prostitute. The hero accepts the profession of prostitute, who is visited by big men of society, after a hot debate in his mind. The author introduced the subject of prostitution for the first time, which is socially proscribed and the *Jayanti* showed an extraordinary courage in publishing such a story based on a prostitute. The author has argued that prostitution is a necessary evil in society. She is not being a hypocrite. Her profession is to earn her livelihood somehow. She earns a lot and purchases her cloth and other materials. "............... you are earning your livelihood by applying your physical labour, the thieves and the dacoits are doing the same thing, she is also doing that. Finding no way for earning a livelihood or taking opportunities of the weaknesses of some people like you, she is earning her livelihood by selling her body."\(^{43}\) It proves that her profession is like Bernard Shaw's Mr. Warren's profession and it is run and looked after by the big bosses of society. The story also reminds us the famous poem 'Besya' (The prostitute) written by Amulya Barua in the early forties. It reflects not only an urban problem, also a social recognition for the oppressed women. There are laws in society to prevent
such practices, but the law makers are the customers and so she is running a roaring business. The author has raised the urban problem of open prostitution and also voices a criticism with a sympathy towards them. The prostitution have gained some dignity through the debate in the mind of the narrator-hero.

**DAIBA CHANDRA TALUKDAR:**

Being born and brought up in a business family in Guwahati, Daiba Chandra Talukdar was a supporter of struggle for Indian independence since his student days. He was influenced by the social reform and self reliance activities of Gandhiji. Daiba Chandra and Dandinath Kalita belong to the second group of Assamese novelists who insisted more on social reform through their works. Daiba Chandra has written about sixteen novels on such topics relating to social reform and patriotism. Notable among them are 'Adarshapeeth', (The ideal seat), 'Apurna' (The unfulfilled), 'Agneyagiri' (The Volcano). Eminent critic of Assamese literature Dr. S.N. Sarma observes about this novels, "In the novels of Talukdar the urge for reform is more prominent than satire or humour. On one hand, he has seen the corruptions and degradations of society and on the other he has also viewed the better potentialities of society. Satire and hatred have not prevailed over his writings, rather he has thought for a new ideal society removing those bad practices and blind conservations looking at them with sympathy."44 That is why we meet a host of characters, who are revolutionaries in his novels. They also aim at the reformation of the society and are politically aware. This purpose of his novels destroys the aesthetic beauty of the novels. So, he is representative novelist of this period with a purpose of reform.
**Social reformation**: Talukdar's deep involvement in the freedom struggle and reformative activities undertaken by 'Gandhiji, encouraged him to make his novel purposive. At the call of Gandhiji, he could not sit idle and transformed his own experience in the field of social work into artistic form. His goals of social reformation as expressed in the novels are broadly of two types - the fight one against the worst social evil, the widow's suffering and a relentless fight against opium-eating.

As to the former, we have a very persuasive picture of widow's remarriage, a continuous struggle right from the Gunabhiram's days, in his novel 'Agneyogiri' published in 1924. The hero of the novel a high, spirited boy, Kanak noticed the sufferings of the widows since his childhood days as he lost his father in his early childhood. He was compelled to come to his maternal uncle's house to study in school. A neighbour's daughter named Aikon was his friend. She later on became a widow as her husband died without getting proper medical treatment. Aikon returned to her father's house and lived happily till her father's death. Kanak observed that Aikon was not happy. In his anxiety for her welfare he kept Aikon with him daring hostile social criticism. He bore in silence the social criticism for Aikon's sake. But, Aikon's brother Moni could not tolerate the ill words of the people and so he came to take Aikon back to their home. After a lot of alterations, Kanak allowed her to return to her parental home, but at the time of farewell he embraced her publicity ignoring the social restrictions. The volcano of revolt against a social evil erupted this way. The plot of the novel has been weakened for insisting more on the revolt. The author was desperate that the plight of women symbolised by widowhood was an evil of society and it should be eliminated.

The second reform which the author selected as his theme is an old issue in Assam- the opium-eating. It is deeper than the former problem as it involves the
future of a generation. In Assam following the social upheavals of the 19th century, Assamese people earned the name 'Kani khowa Asomiya', (the opium-eating Assamese). It crippled the social and family life. So, Talukdar included this problem in his agenda of social reformation through literature. In 'Apurna', a social novel based on some of the freedom struggle of India, brings this problem as part of the constructive programme of the freedom fighters. When Premadhar, the hero comes to know from Purnima, his beloved that the money that he gave to her has been spent by her opium-eating father, who is known in the locality as 'Janmi kaniya' (opium-eater Janmi), he feels disgusted. He could not stand the sight of people taking opium from his boyhood days and after the start of non-cooperation movement it had become an issue of the movement. Premadhar reacts sharply. He cries to Janmi, "As soon as the rascals like Janmi can be sent away, society will be better, with the disappearance of people like you the future generations will get rid of this poison. You have ruined the country, have made the nations into opium addicts. It is a great sin to help you, even giving a penny." Like a volunteer of the Cogress he scolds Janmi vehemently. It is a new political consciousness in order to get rid of this problem.Janmi and Gadhadhar are the two opium-addicts who were pauperised selling all their immovable properties except the ancestral house. These people get involved in all sorts of disputes, use obscenities and clamour for money in the family. So, Premadhar decided to fight against this social evil. The author also has added a good lecture on the problem like an eassay on opium-eating by the protagonist Premadhar in chapter one of the book, which is a formal blemish. It was serialised in the Awahan during 1931-32 period, when the whole country was on the road demanding freedom. Naturally the novel served a purpose in Assam at that time. When the problem of opium-eating was more acute. Premadhar, like Kanak in 'Agneyogiri', turned a rebel against this social problem.
**Self reliance movement : Independent farms :** It hardly needs to reiterate Daiba Talukdar was a very strong supporters of India's struggle for independence in Assam in the early years and he once attended one All India student's meet as a student leader from Assam. Naturally, the Gandhian ideology influence him tremendously. As part of the Swaraj, Gandhijee insisted on self reliance and so he gave a clarion call to boycott the foreign goods. In Assam also it became popular and people started to weave and use the handloom items as a mark of support of this movement. On the other hand, Assamese people had no capital to start any manufacturing industry in a big way challenging the British capital in Assam. So the popularity of agricultural farms increased. We have instances of the self-reliance movement in the novels of Talukdar. The novel *Apurna' is loaded with such ideals of Gandhism, where the hero, Premadhar is a spokesman of such ideals. Premadhar, the educated youth and son of a rich mauzadar opted for starting independent farms in stead of hankering after government service. Under the influence of the Gandhian ideology, he looks for a weaving centre and commercial sericultural farm together in order to be an independent patriot. Kartik, the second hero of the Novel who received his education in England also believed in self reliance. He wants to take up farming in order to develop the province of Assam. So, a sense of sub-nationalism also inspires this highly educated youth. Premadhar also reminds us the self-reliance activity of Ambikagiri Roychoudhury making the issue real, who wanted to be an independent businessman by petty business and was as strong advocate of self-reliance. For Premadhar his love for Swadeshi ideals is like service of God "Prema's temple was near his study room. In this temple there are the spinning wheel, thread, cotton, different kinds of Muga-seed Edi-seed, etc............".46 So he has started all- from spinning to weaving. It is not a superfluous activity. It's a part of a political consciousness. A principle has been translated into reality. Another novel, *'Adarshapeeth', serialised in the Awahan in
1939-40, too, echoes the same principle. The protagonist of the novel, Sridhar is a worshipper of the principle of self-reliance. He has trained the boys in his school in animal husbandry and adult education also, a part of swaraj movement. Not only that, he taught the art of blacksmithy, carpentry and others trades in addition. He also starts a model farm cultivated by his own students. Even a village widow named Parvati has been employed in his farm. According to Sridhar, after school and college education one has to depend on govt. service, but he believes in independent business like cottage industries. It is a sign of industrious nature. In the novel, *Dhuwali kuwali* (Fog-bound) Daibaki Ukil insists on that independence of the youth. He advises the college students that, "our prime duty, now, is to expand education in the villages. If people can work together, production will increase in agriculture, people will earn livelihood by weaving clothes and at the leisure time will read the *Gita* or the *Bhagawata* etc...." Daibaki Ukil himself is a hard-working man and he appreciates those, who are interested in hard-work irrespective of caste and religion. Following the Gandhiji's model he has also established one Ashram providing many opportunities to work in the traditional forms.

**Political awareness: A dream for Assam's development:** Without any doubt, Daiba Chandra has proved his obsession with Gandhian philosophy in his novels, even at the cost of artistic quality. In fact the 1930s and 40s were the peak years of the Indian struggle for independence, spreading to every corner of the country. Along with the sense of broad nationalism, the author has created some characters, who are equally lovers of Assam, that is to say they are equally imbued with a sense of sub-nationalism like Gopinath Bordoloi who fought for keeping Assam out of Groups prepared by the Cabinet Mission. The above described heroes of different novels are inspired by Gandhiji. The broad sense of nationalism has made them anxious for the development of Assam also. One character was educated
abroad, so he had his own plan for such development. 'Apurna' supports the national movement with ample examples. The second hero of the book is all concerned for the development of Assam. He is not a boy who forgets his motherland after studying abroad. He has one or two theories developed by himself for his state's progress. One point in this respect to make is the problem created by massive immigration, which worries Kartik most. The unabated immigration from the erstwhile East Bengal created a big problem in Assam for the indigenous people. These are very poor people. They settled in the reserved forests. It was a hot a political issue before independence as seen in the political awareness section of Chapter two. In Apurna, Kartik also expresses his concern for this problem. The novelist includes one incident to show the growing strength of the immigrants there in the novel. One village girl, Champa was lifted by four immigrant Muslims. Kartik witnessed it and seeing the boldness of the immigrants in his own home while abducting the girl, he became actually conscious of the problem. He rescued the girl fighting with them. This is a symbolical fight between the immigrants and the natives. The author who is also a supporter of the issue comments that, "......

The head of the Assamese is down. As the atrocities of the alien people have made the Assamese people strangers in their own home, the liberty of the Assamese women also will now perish. A sense of subjugation prevails over the villages and the roads throughout Assam....... This way how many Mymensinghias have made the Assamese people non-resident people in their own home after looting the villages and destroying the dignity of the women."48 It is an exaggerated description of the problem no doubt, but it expresses the novelist's deep concern for Assam. Most of the political leaders after independence also were in favour of immigration as it turned into a vote bank for them. But the issue has been raised by the novelist only for the sense of patriotism. But it was not discussed from all sides.
Through the character of Kartik in 'Apurna' the novelist has expressed his plan for a modern Assam with the synthesis of tradition and modernity. The character is not sufficiently alive; he works as the mouthpiece of the freedom fighter author. The first and last stanza of the novel is about a dream of Assam by Kartik, who is ready to sacrifice everything for Assam. He says to Hema, the professor’s daughter that he has brought a panacea for Assam after travelling a lot in the West. "Even though we do not have much to live on, we should try to stand on our own by establishing more educational institutions of our own and own universities with the funds, if necessary from loans. That university should produce youths, who are workers, prudent and strong in mental, physical and spiritual power in stead of the present lot of life-less weaklings with no knowledge and fearing danger every moment. He should not hope for jobs till last, rather he should acquire energy in order to be self-dependent". 49 This is what Kartik plans for Assam. He has an urban outlook compared to Premadhar as he insists more on education, that too, establishment of a university with multiple opportunities for self-reliance. It is a modern idea. So his plan is clearly an example of Assamese sub-nationalism. But he was not sufficiently strong and revolutionary as the situation demanded in a colonial rule. Joi Bolia, a mad-character also highlights the synthesis between the tradition and modernity. Kalpa is an educated youth, assisted by Daibaki Ukil in his study in the novel 'Apurna'. He discusses many things with Daibaki Ukil regarding Assam. From their discussion it comes out that in the early part of 20th century the new generation of educated youth like Kalpa began to be impressed by the efficacy of the modern capitalistic economy of the West. Kalpa, who stays at Daibaki lawyer’s house and whose education expenses are borne by the lawyer thinks that the best way to cause economic development of the country is to make all people rich by adopting scientific means of production. Kalpa speaks about the tardy growth of capital from the development of industry.
in Assam. The Assamese people were apathetic to business and industry. These people did not know how to start an industry with the available local resources. The only profession preferred by Assamese people was service. Kalpa also thinks of Assam's progress like Kartik. These examples show the increased political awareness of the people of Assam with the increasing influences of urban values and urban atmosphere.

**Liberal humanism:** One of the main characters in *Duwali Kuwali* Daibiki lawyer is directly influenced by the ideals of liberal humanism and sense of equality. He is a rich man, a well established lawyer but unlike many people of his time was a secular person with no feelings of casteism. His own daughter Bina has been married to Nomal., a low-caste assistant under him with his blessings. His mental horizon is widened by modern education and he could not show disrespect to his education. The sense of liberal humanism in his nature, prompted him to keep Kalpa, a poor man's boy for study and Padumi, the orphaned daughter of Kerpai in his house despite being a prosperous lawyer and rich man. At last, he has opened one Ashram following the teachings of Gandhiji for the oppressed people of society, where his own daughter Bina has found a home. Apart from liberal humanism, he also represents the gradual emergence of the idea of individual freedom among the educated Assamese, with ideas of free choice in occupation.

Thus it is seen that, Daiba Talukdar tried his level best to propagate and held one ideology of the Assamese people. It was a modern political consciousness, for which, the above mentioned heroes fought. Basically, Talukdar has brought out the political awareness in the novel as a product and part of the country-wide movement for national liberation. The movement embraced the whole country but its leaders were largely product of an urban environment.
Chandraprabha Saikiani was the first organiser and secretary of Assam Pradesh Mahila Samity. Right from her girlhood days she had been fighting for the cause of women's education and other rights. She was a freedom fighter. Apart from her active political and social life she wrote a number of books which includes novels and stories. But, only one novel called 'Pitri bhitha' (The ancestral plinths, 1937) stands out clearly, to some extent as a good novel for its theme and fervent language. It is based on personal life. Dr. Govinda Prasad Sarma has said that is was written as a protest against the limited rights of women shown by Dandidhar Kalita in his novel 'Sadhana'. Like her personal life the novel also explores different modern values like women's rights and education and selfishness of the middle class.

**Women's education:** Chandra Prabha was a lady of extraordinary courage and she herself established a primary school in a remote village like Daisingri, her birth place in her girlhood days, so her rural parents had no problem in sending their daughters to school in early decade of 20th century. That passion for giving education to woman is marked in the novel through the character of Mandar Chamua, father of Madhabi, the heroine of the said novel. Mandar Chamua was a rich man and was loved by his rayyats for his kindheart and generocity. This man imbued with a sense of humanism, sent his daughter Madhabi without paying any heed to social criticism. He is a modern man. When someone made a passing comment regarding the education of his daughter he replied with arguments without losing his temper. He says, "........you donot know anything. Uneducated women at home means absence of the goddess Lakshi. The beauty of mankind at lies in education. When women are educated, the beauty of women is nurtured by the great beauty of the world. This is an extraordinary statement from a rural gentleman of the 1930s.
Women's right: Madhabi's character is a new voice from a female writer in the field of women's right. By 1930s Lakshidhar Sarma created his revolutionary women character Lalita. Madhabi is not as strong as Lalita. Yet she faces a different problem with courage and determination. Her father Chamua was a very kind and loose man in management of his riots. Due to his liberal attitude to employees, he suffered a huge loss as he could not collect the land taxes properly. So, he was compelled to take a loan of rupees one lac from Lalit Das by mortgaging his property and bank's share. Chamua died all of a sudden and Lalit Das demanded the land, houses etc. from Madhabi. Madhabi refused to handover the rights of their ancestral properties particularly the land with the house. In a patriarchial type of society daughters have no right regarding father's property. But Madhabi has accepted all the burden of loan and other responsibilities including supporting her mother. She also refused to marry. When Lalit asked finally ask her to vacate the plot of land with the house, Madhabi turns it down. Going against the tradition, she has tried to clear the outstanding loan amount approaching some sources. Her lover Madhab, who is studying in Calcutta was also urged by her to help repay the loan. But he said that after the completion of his study he would do it with his own income. So, finding no way out Madhabi tries to collect money in order to save her ancestral plinth through marriage. Lalit Das was putting more and more pressure before going to the court. On one occasion she replies with dignity "Shall I leave the ancestral plinth for the reason that I am in debt? As there is no male child, the girl will take the responsibility. Could it I abandon the honour of the family and the ancestral hearts plinth?" She is sticks to her principle of maintaining family's prestige. Madhabi proves to be a worthy daughter of a worthy father by her statement. At last, when Lalit files a suit against her, Madhabi manages to collect rupees one lac from forefather's one time assistant Damodar, whom she offered to marry for his timely help in her distress. This is the limitation of the character of
Madhabi. The author has understood her helplessness as a woman in an otherwise hostile world. But she has suppressed her personal emotion by discarding Madhab, her beloved from childhood days. She is pragmatic on that particular point. Madhabi also wanted to slap him when she discovered his weak personality. An attempt by a lady to slap a male person is the first incident of such kind in the Assamese novels. Dr. Gobinda Prasad Sarma, critic of Assamese novel has rightly observed it. At last Madhabi returned to her original lover Madhab, who was suffering from tuberculosis, after a very bad time abroad. Madhabi also went through an ordeal. Finally, both of them died. But Madhabi clearly stands out as a fighter for the right of women in a male dominated society.

**The selfishness of the middle class:** Both father and son of the novel, that is Lalit Das and Madhab represent the selfish middle class in the novel. Lalit had a family relation with Mandar Chamua during the latter's prosperous days. He was a friend in prosperity. When Chamua was facing a deep crisis due to his own liberal attitude towards rayyats, Lalit took advantage of the situation. A kind person Chamua was forced to mortgage all his immovable properties and bank deposits to Lalit just for rupees one lac. He has acted like a typical money-lender, devoid of any sympathy. The exploiter Lalit has captured most of his properties except the house of residence. His worthy son Madhab, educated in Calcutta has represented the same nature. His future wife was in deep trouble due to continuous threats from Lalit Das to vacate the residence but Madhab is indifferent. He has not taken any step to stop his father's aggression. He wants to repay the loan after the completion of his study. After Calcutta, he goes for further studies. He also wants to keep Madhabi waiting for the marriage for an indefinite period. His callousness towards a great problem of the hour speaks of his selfish middle class mentality. He is badly exposed at that moment, though Madhabi's marriage was a great blow to him.
During the early forties, Assam like other provinces of India was agog with Quit India movement. There was a great upsurge of patriotic spirit among the Congress workers inspiring many others to fight for the cause of liberty against the alien rulers. Though 'Jibonor batat' is basically a novel based on the traditional Assamese society, the changes brought by colonial rule in Assamese society are also expressed in the novel. Why Birinchi Barua, as said by Dr. Hiren Gohain in his thought provoking discussion on Jibonor batat could not create a militant like the stature of Kushal Kunwar or like Birendra Kumar Bhattacharjee's Mrityunjoy's Mahada Gosain is important. Perhaps, he was more interested in highlighting traditional character as he himself was a folkorist. His middle class back ground also may be the other contributing factor. Anyway, in the tumult of a movement for freedom, the society was witnessing some major changes and modernity was slowly raising its head. Let us see the little changes of that society in the novel.

The individistic and selfish middle class sans humanity: The rise of a self centred middle class society is the staple of all modern literature. It came a little late to Assam. In 'Jibonor batat', the novelist has made a sharp contrast with the dominant traditional life by delineating the new middle class characters and their behaviours. Kamalakanta is the representative of that class. It is needless to mention that the tragic life story of a charming village damsel, Togor is the result of the exploitation by that middle-don. The beginning of her suffering started when Kamalakanta, the civil service aspirant mercilessly betrayed her. The ladder of upward mobility in society was more important to him than keeping promise of marriage with Togor. So, he married Raibahadur Pratap Hazarika's daughter, Suprabha, a modern girl, which helped him obtain a job in the provincial civil service. The dream of service made him forget his commitment to Togor. Birinchi
Barua as a member of middle class could well understand the psychology of Kamalakanta. Since the days of Dhekial Phukan they were also very much loyal to the British authority. Manik Hazarika is no exception as he is also a Raibahadur, an honour conferred by British authority. There are some Liliputians also of that class. Sonaram Mandal never feels guilty when he supplies helpless village girls to official from the town. Deni Patar, the shopkeeper is also cool when he helps the Marowari merchants to fleece the poor peasants. The new class in *Jibonor batat*, except Dr. Golap the psysician and Dharani are busy in pursuing personal happiness and prosperity. They are like parasites on the toiling masses, hence not productive. Dr. Hiren Gohain has analysed the middle class mentality objectively. He comments on their working nature that "The creative enter-prunership that mark the Western capitalism at the moment of its birth was totally lacking among such money-mongers. Their chief cultural contribution is hyporcrasy and betrayal."52 Kamalakanta is the epitone of this class.

*Political awareness: From petition to movement:* Without making a mouthpiece of the national movement for freedom, the great struggle of the Indians in the 1940s has been utilized by the author very effectively and without destroying the artistic beauty of the work. Daiba Chandra Talukdar or Dandinath Kalita could not make a proper balance like Barua for which their works became proganda pieces for the freedom struggle programmes. It is a great success for Brinchi Barua. How the Congress-led freedom movement spread to the villages of the country is witnessed in his novel. The author had in mind the youth leaders of the Congress party of 1920s and 30s when he created the character of Dharani. Dharani knew the poor economic condition of the villagers intimately. The marowari money-lendrs's exploitation of Thagiram, the Sanaram Mandal's supply of poor village women to the town's rich man etc. are the heart-breaking experience of Dharani that led him to the establishment of one 'relief fund' in the village in order to
provide rice, ..........., etc. It is a great social service by a politically conscious man. His political consciousness is again evident when he prepares a petition to the district administration for reducing the peasants of their land taxes. He collects the signature of the peasants there. The colonial bureaucrats did not pay any attention to the petition. Provoked by such experiences, he joined the Indian national struggle for freedom at the call of Gandhiji. He actively participated in the non-cooperation movement. He hoped to solve the local problems of the people through the national movement. The villagers also became volunteers under the leasership of Dharani in Raha area of Nagaon district. "Day and night, in the market or on the way only 'Bande mataram', 'Mahatma Gandhi Ki Joy', 'Bharat mata ki joy' etc. were heard rocking the villages around. The villagers, who have been unconscious over the years together now became aware at this inspiring call. In every look and corner of the villages the movement of boycotting foreign goods and setting ablaze of foreign goods started to spread like wild fire" No doubt Dharani from the underground organised and inspired those unlettered people and so they came in group when Togor was arrested to put pressure on Dharani. But, as shown in the beginning, the kind-hearted Dharani was not made of sterner stuff. The strain fold on his health. Perhaps the author could not understand the tremendous power of the people or his middle class mentality did not allow Dharani to grow into a revolutionary, who surrenders to the police after his wife's arrest. Anyway, it created a sensation among the people who learnt to fight against an unknown alien force, thereby indicating the growing political awareness of the freedom struggle in a rural area. The people also gave a tough fight against the opium-eating under the leadership of Dharani. They were also involved in spinning probrammes and boycotted foreign goods too as part of the ongoing Swaraj movement then. This is a clean indication that the author delineated the illiterate
masses of Raha area as a group of people who are motivated by the leaders like Dharani for the contemporary political issues

**Some other values:** The novel mainly focusses on the traditional values, though the fate was against the persons representing such values. We have discussed it in chapter three. But, as the novel is a conflict between the two ways of living, it also includes some modern values. That the traditional values are facing a tough fight is clear through some incidents. Kamalakanta's father and mother contradict each other as to the selection of the bride for Kamalakanta representing the conflict between the traditional and modern values. His father, Mahikanta is interested in the marriage with Raibahadur’s daughter keeping in view the aspiration for upward mobility, on the other hand his mother can’t bear the idea of deserting Togor. She comments that even the enemy also shouldn’t be treated like this. But, greedy Mahikanta like his ambitious son knows well that only Raibahadur Hazarika could assure a civil servant’s job for his son. Thus, the urban people with their self-centred motive can play with the future of people. Apart from hankering after a white-collar job, Kamalakanta has set a new record in society as to the selection of bride. He presented a ring to Togor in the beginning of the novel secretly by going against the established social norm. Suprabha is a modern girl like heroines of Rama Das of the Awahan age, interested in modern clothes and finery and she leaves her children in the care of her servants. She is interested in music also. She sings a Rabinstra Sangit in the bath room, which the authors quotes in full. This also indicates an emergent urban sensibility among the middle class of the period. Clash between traditional values and modern awareness is also made in the novel. Tagor's suppressed sexual urges shock her in a dream during her widowhood even when she repulses the advances of a depraved adventures.
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