CHAPTER-VII
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THE GENERAL IMPACT OF URBANISATION ON FORMS OF ASSAMESE FICTION

The Assamese fiction is now more than one hundred years old. Since the publication of the first Assamese novel, 'Bhanumati', written by Padmanath Gohainbarua, it has undergone many changes as to the forms and contents. Before Gohainbarua, Lakshinath Bezbarua wrote the first Assamese short story which was published in the 'Jonaki'. Naturally, the introduction and uses of new techniques including a modern language are part of that great tradition of Assamese fiction. As mentioned in chapter two of this dissertation, the process of urbanisation and modernisation influenced the life-style and culture of people mostly living in the urban centres creating urban consciousness among a section of people. As part of that culture the Assamese fictions were also influenced a great deal as to its forms and contents. Moreover, the modern English, Continental and Bengali writers also influenced our writers in this respect. Sir Walter Scott, Thomas Hardy, Earnest Hemingway, Virginia Woof, James Joyce in English or Rabindranath Tagore, Sarat Chandra, Samaresh Bose, Gopal Halder etc. in Bengali were model writes to many Assamese fiction writers in the field of form and content. Before and after independence, we have seen some notable changes in this respect at different stages due to the above-mentioned influences. However, this dissertation has no scope to discuss those in detail, we shall discuss only the important and main formal features with the help of some select authors.

As Ian Watt mentions in his, 'The Rise fo the Novel' the modern novel owes its origin to the development of modern bourgois social order and consciousness. The development of sense of the self and its increasing problems with the development of modern industrial society, individualism as an ideology, the decline
of community life and its institution and the emergence of urban way of life, all of them led to the shaping of the novel in modern Europe sometimes during the eighteenth century. Many people would, however, regard Carvantes's 'Don Quixote' as an early masterpiece of modern fiction though it was written in the seventeenth century. The 'Industrial revolution' brought a significant change as to the form and content of the modern European fiction, more particularly the English novels. In the early modern period, the dominated trend both in content and form was realism, though traditional narrative techniques were used fairly frequently even in realist novels. For example, even realist writers often used their stories to drive a moral lesson. Further many characters continued to reflect the influence of tradition as idealised human beings. The plot also suffered at times from the assumption of 'Destiny' or 'Divine Will'. Thomas Hardy's 'Tess of the Durbervilles' is a good example in this respect. The samething is true of early modern Assamese novel, which at times resemble a moral fable. The novels, written during the 'Orunodoi' period are based on the themes of Christian ideals. 'Kaminikanta', 'Elokeshi Beisyā' and 'Phulmoni aru Kanina' are the three novels translated from Bengali. All the three novels are the mouthpieces of their Christian authors. Elokeshi was widowed at younger age, later she became a fallen women, at last she was rescued when she joined in Christianity. The propagandist plot destroys the beauty of the novel. Similarly, the novels upto the Second World war times also could not get rid of such inevitable influences of fate as to the contents. Birinchi Kumar Barua's 'Jibonor batat' is a milestone in the history of Assamese novel in the early 40s. The novelist has successfully delienated the picture of the Assamese rural life realistically in the novel. It is very much close to the real life. But, the influences of the fate on the Togor's life are inevitable in the story. The author could not go beyond that.
The traditional fiction did not follow a realist method. It was marked by dramatic emphasis on extraordinary events and passions, a didactic or allegorical intention, and idealised and stereo-type characters. Often, the influence of religious ideology on form and content in quite prominent. On the other hand, in modern fiction the tendency is to explore the objective and subjective side of reality. It surprises us only with the keenness of observation of the authors, his sense of new social forms and new forms of consciousness. However, we tend to see during this period, known as moderanism, a break with the classical realism. The late novel admits the play of forces outside of everyday reality. For examples, in the novels of D.H. Lawrence 'Nature' and 'Sex' dominate the themes and characters. They are as vital as fate of this novels of classical reality. Symbols used from time to time in some stories and novels as in those of Franz Kafka vary a sense of allegory, though we can't always say what the allegory stands for. His famous story 'The Meta morphosis' is a fine example in this respect. Characters also become unpredictable, complex, fragmented as in the industrial environment human beings try to cope with extremely collapsing situations. Though this phase of fiction comes in Assamese literature only in a weak form towards the end because of the slow pace of urbanisation and industrialisation in the state as stated in the earlier chapter, it can't be called insignificant. As the Assamese society was not so developed at that time from socio-economic and political point of view reeling under a hostile colonial rule, most of the fiction writers like L.N. Bezbarua, Padmanath Gohainbarua or Rajani Kanta Bordoloi had to look back to the Ahom's history for plots and characters. Of course, they showed a modern consciousness by attempting to create a nationalistic Assamese society. The different phases of the Indian struggle for freedom in Assam brought a new breeze of change attracting people in large number towards a national goal. But, the novelist or story writer of this time failed to portray the reality through their writings. Daiba Chandra
Talukdar and Dandinath Kalita, the leading novelists of that period, only succeeded in portraying a partial reality of that epoch-making event in Assam as they were obsessed themselves with Gandian philosophy and Congress ideals. It was delineated artistically only in 1970 by Birendra Kumar Bhattacharya through his 'Jnanpeeth' award winning novel, "Mrityunjoy". But, upto the early forties, the romantic ideals disturbed the realistic trend. No strong make characters were created during this period except Dinabandhu in Dandinath Kalita's 'Sadhana'. It reveals fact that the mass uprising during the non-cooperation and Civil disobedience movement that rocked the Assamese society for the first time could not be recorded realistically in any novel of that time due to the obsession factor of the novelists.

After the World War II and independence, the forces of urbanisation and modernisation brought a change in the social and political life of Assam. The new urban consciousness and other social changes resulted in the birth and development of new contents and forms in Assamese fiction, in other words, all these forces reinforced the realist tendency in Assamese fiction as the writer is comparatively more liberated from constraining powers of tradition. The shift of focus upon the character is also the prime feature of the modern novel. The fiction writers from this time wanted to make the plots more realistic, so the art of story telling also emphasised more on other new techniques and characters. The place of fiction of incident' was taken over by the 'fiction of character'. Realistic approach to life gave birth to new characters hitherto unknown to the Assamese readers. As life and novel are related deeply to each other, it became an endeavour of the novelist to give a powerful portrayal of life through their literary works. A.H. Hudson remarks in this respect that, "The novel is concerned directly with life— with men and women, and their relationship with the thoughts and feelings, the passions and motives by which they are governed and impelled, with their joys and sorrows, their struggles, successes, failures. This type of new idea as to the technique of
characterisation was utilised by the fiction writers after the independence. Moreover, the modern fiction writers directed their interest to the inner working of the mind, that is the sub-conscious mind, which led them to the use of new techniques like the 'Stream of Consciousness' or 'Interior monologue'. These new techniques were used successfully by James Joyce and Virginia Woolf in English novels in 1920s and 30s. In this period some Assamese fiction writers also attempted to apply these techniques in their works, though the socio-economic reality was not as that of the Western countries. It was an endeavour as part of the realistic trend in Assamese fiction. After liberating themselves from the constraining powers of tradition, Birendra Kumar Bhattacharya and Bhabendra Nath Saikia during this phase of Assamese literature have used the realist method powerfully both in description and dialogue in their fictions. Characters become more rounded and the conversations, another technique used in fiction more lively and colourful. The dramatic quality is also found sometimes in their works. Birendra Kumar Bhattacharya, being a socialist, has successfully portrayed the political events of modern Assam realistically in "Rajpathe Ringiae" "Rangamegh", "Sataghni", "Iaruingam", "Pratipad" and "Mri tyunjoy". The marxist ideology, the labour strike in Digboi Oil Refinery, the extremist activity during the Quit India Movement, the Chinese attack in 1962 - all these political events, before and after the independence come to life again in the said novels. Moreover, his 'Rajpathe Ringiae" (1955) is based on a new technique, very much close to 'stream of consciousness' following the Western novels. Bhabendra Nath Saikia looks at the life of the middle-class and lower middle class people very closely selecting a particular situation with microscopic details. The story Grahan, (The eclipse) narrates the pathetic condition of an old man, who feels quite lonely after his retirement. As to the conversation, Birendra Kumar Bhattacharya has created a very dramatic and lively conversation with serious ideas in Iaruingam (1960). In
this political novel based on the insurgency problem of Naga Hills, Dideshelley, the leader of an underground outfit and Rishang, the leader of the India's struggle for freedom movement in Naga Hills are involved in the underground camp in a hot exchange of arguments regarding the two streams of liberation, which bears a significance till today.

"I've nothing to offer people. No other thing than liberty. What is the meaning of your liberty? tell me. Dideshelly began to laugh this time. Contracting his forehead he went on saying, I want a sovereign independent state where people understand after entry that what is the meaning of taking birth as Naga. I do not want to be Naga, Dideshelly. I want to be a man."³

It is a lively exchange of arguments, which brings forth the prime motif of the novel. But, both Saikia and Bhattacharya, even though they are informed by new urban values they still have a constructive idealism.

As in the past, acquaintance of the Assamese writers with modern Bengali, English an European literature, as mentioned in the beginning of this section, help them to become familiar with narrative techniques, characterisation and other techniques more in tune with urban life and culture. Saurabh Kumar Chaliha introduces a method closely resembling the stream of consciousness. In fact, most of his stories in Asanta Electron (1962), Duparia (1963) and Ehat daba (1972) are influenced by this modern technique. Chaliha used it in his first story Asanta Electron as back as in 1950. Moreover, nostalgia, a typical tendency of modern urban consciousness which is disoriented by contemporary developments form a mood in his stories. So, some of the progonists or narrator of Chaliha's stories look for a calm and quiet city life in the tumult of noise and violence of cities. So, we have a sound sucking machine symbolically used in the story Awaj.

Prafulladutta Goswami, as described in Chapter VI, of this dissertation followed
this method in *Sesh Kot* (1948) and *Kecha Patar Kapani* (1952) claiming to be the first Assamese modern novel. Why is it closer to modern technique is evident from the statement of the author himself. He writes about the new hero Utpal that "He has no quality of a hero in a novel. So he does not do anything either spectacular or striking that moves the mind. There is no traditional type of beginning or ending of his (Utpal's) stories, it just continues." So his novels are without any traditional plot and Utpal is a modern hero. Another prominent story writer of the *Ramdhenu* age, Mohim Bora in is famous story, 'Kathanibarir Ghat' is obviously using a frame where the story teller does not confine himself to people he knows intimately. There is only change encountered between the ill-fated heroin and the author. Such casual encounters are more typical of an *uran* environment. He uses poetic symbolism in details, for example, the bruning vermilion on the forehead of the heroin becomes ambiquitous, suggesting both death and life and as darkness gathers, the mysteries of the night became suggestive of the uncertainties of human life in the ironies of fate. Thus, Bora makes a departure form classical realism by truning his narratives into poetry by desity of language. The symbols used by Prafulladatta Goswami also bear multiple meanings to indicate the complex and fragmented life of modern men. In his *Kecha pater Kapani* we find the analogy of the half-moon trembling in water. "Samukhat Astamir jon nachi thake. Batah Lagi pani kape dhour kharubilak jonakat lori phura sapar dare jilike. Oparat Saral gasar so-sowani". All the symbols of this passage of *Kecha patar kapana* express the youthfullness, restlesness and unsettled life of Utpal at the same time. It is mentionworthy that Birendra Kumar Bhattacharya consciously and successfully imitated the spared, stark and understated language of Hemingway. There is a much greater degree of intropection and subjectivity in the characters even in the works of Bhabendranath Saikia. Though the works of Homen Borgohain, written during this period, are not very matured, he also breaks new ground by trying to
assimilate new dimensions of experience in an urban environment. The fictions of Umakanta Sarma, like those of Prafulladatta Goswami, are marked by an overwhelming sense of drift, of fragmented society of loss of meaning in life represented by open-ended and relatively unstructured narrative sequence, over turning traditional expectation of rounded completeness of form. All the characters of *Uranta Magar Sa* belongs to the small towns with different professions this way. Some novelist like Dinanath Sarma has paid importance to the life of the peasants going against the general trend. *Nadai* is the result of such a new outlook of the author towards the peasantry.

It is only in the post war period that variety of prose style can be noticed in the Aassamese fictional writing. The journalistic type of language is marked in the novels of Padma Borkataki, or emotive language in the novels of Prafulladutta Goswami as a response to the modern consciousness. But, Saurabh Kumar Chaliha has evolved a sophisticated and witty language for his stories with no parallel in the famous Assamese story writers of this time. It is a new style of expression with English syntax, use of Bengali and Kamrupi words and showing little respect to the grammatical rules. He is very much precise and economic in matters of language. The complex city life finds an excellent medium through his language. His language appeals more to the brain than the heart. It is developed with the fine blending of mimensis and diegesis. Moreover, the use of Code-mixing make Chaliha's prose style quite different from other's prose-style. As for example, in *Ashanta Electron*, we have such examples like *Si bor eta drastic step lole; Show korar prakriti eta intellectual circlor lagat dinbor gol; Jelot C division khadya khab lagiche, Supplyir keraniya ei ajio bheti khai, on principle khai etc.* are the sentences full of Code-mixing. The underlined words are English words in Assamese sentence. Moreover, Chaliha also uses the long complex sentences like English syntax with a number of sub clauses. Sometimes he flouts the grammatical
rules also. For example, in Acchanna, we have such sentences like Taihot kono ethalojao bulijowa nai; Make jane aji sandhiya moi ahar katha achil buli janichile — where the the underlined words break the rules of nouns or tense. His excessive use of scientific words in the stories also make them quite a different language. The artistic use of kamrupi words in Hahichapma shows Chaliha's urban consciousness as to the treatment of a story relating to rural life. All these prove that Saurabh Kr. Chaliha uses a more urban form of language less bothered about purity of idiom with more daring use of syntax. The jumping words and sentences are the best form of syntax in order to express a complex and disordered city life.

REFERENCE AND NOTES

5. Ibid, P-112.