CHAPTER-III
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RURAL BASE OF TRADITIONAL ASSAMESE LITERATURE.

Though this dissertation concentrates on the study of the urban values and their impact on Assamese fiction, we cannot leave aside the rural base of Assamese literature, particularly the traditional one. Assam is basically a rural state dominated by villages. Most of the writers in Assamese have a rural background. Naturally, the rural experience dominate their writing. The urban values or modern values in literature is not an air-borne incident — it has deep rooted connection with the ancient literature and life. Like all other literature of the ancient time of the world, Assamese literature also started its journey of creative ideas with oral literature. We have a very rich literary tradition starting from the oral literature and it is the mother of all literature in later periods recorded in letters. Since ancient days this form of literature had been living orally through generation after generation like the Indian tradition of the Mahabharata and the Ramayana. They speak about the beautiful nature of Assam, the ethos and pathos of the society of that time with their belief and superstition. They are called folk literature and they include the Bihu Songs, Ainam, Biyanam, Nichukoni geet. Dak's sayings. ballads. Jikir and Jhari, the rowing song, the folk tales etc. All these songs and stories are products of a society which was tribal and feudal in nature. It was basically an agricultural society with shifting cultivation and obsessed with excessive prayers. festivals. free life, magic and other superstitions. Chukapha, the first Ahom king united many such independent small kingdoms in to one state called Asom. In the middle age, we have the Bihu songs as an agricultural festival having the rythm of different activities of agriculture. The birth of Sankardev and Madhabdev in this period is an important event as these two Mahapurusas created a Vaisnavite tradition through
the introduction of "Ek Sarana Dharama". It was a golden age in the written Assamese literature also. Dr. S.N. Sarma critic and historian of Assamese literature comments, "No one can match the magnificent contribution of Sankardev in the fields of religion, social, fine arts and literature of Assam. He was a poet, social reformer, preacher, dramatist actor, musician and an absolute devotee ...... very soon he was able to create a renaissance in religion and literature."¹ His literature, which includes Ankianats, Kavyas, songs and translated works, are the fruits of his religious movement. Sankardev was a genius and he was a successful man both as a preacher and a creative writer. Madhabdev was also the worthy disciple of a worthy guru. Both of them were very close to the common followers. They lived in the rural places and were lovers of the simple rural life which they expressed in their works. Even in translation work like the "Bhagavata", Sankardev recreated the Assam's nature and her people. The age was a creative one like that of the Elizabethan age in English literature and even formulated the foundation of the modern Assamese prose and language as a whole. The religious belief of that time also found its expression. He wanted to express his high philosphical ideas through the common words of the people despite being master in Sanskrit. Dr. H. Gohain is pertinent in this respect. "An erudite Sanskrit scholar and an expert in scriptures, he composed poems for the bottom line people of the society for Shravana and Kirtana. This intention is far from personal fame or prestige. Those, who mistaken him to be God incarnate, they forget that these poor, illiterate and oppressed people filled his heart with their natural love, confidence and respect. This helped nurture his own talent also"²

This tradition of rural folk was further carried by Lakshinath Bezbarua and the group around the Jonaki and the Bijuli from a different point of view. The early modern literature, it is to be noted, did not part from the rural base and up to the world war-II, it was a dominant force in the Assamese literature with the
simultaneous development of modern literature. The war passed over the state like a tornado causing irreparable damages to the traditional values, which were the foundation of traditional literature. A tradition, whether rural or urban, ancient or modern cannot remain static. T.S. Eliot, the famous English poet and critic remarks, "What is termed as the past is, therefore, not a status-quo, it is constantly changing and developing. The past is and should be altered by the present as much as the present is directed by the past." Traditions are modified or updated in present.

Equally remarkable is the fact that, any great writer cannot remain absolutely, aloof from the literary past of his nation. Again to quote Eliot, the poet who understand this presentness of the past also understands his responsibility as an artist and the great difficulties he has to face. Such an artist will also fully realise that he must inevitably be judged as an artist by the standard of the past." He says that all the modern poets are related with Dante or Homer. LNB represents the Assamese tradition, that goes back to oral literature, in late 19th and early 20th century in Assam. He also modernised the tradition accordingly. He developed his entire life to the services of Assamese literature through which the great flow of Vaisnavite creativity was continuing like an underground stream. To be precise, what Sankardev wanted to do in religion through literature and other cultural innovations, LNB and his associates achieved that through a magnificent and meaningful literary works for the building of a modern literature and society. The rural Assam got a different description at the expert's hand. It was a vigorous life full of experiences. It's needless to elaborate, his Vaisnavite tradition in the family, his social associations, his attachment to natural environment of different places of Assam, his knowledge of Assamese myths, legends, folk songs, ballads, folk tales, proverb, riddles and other rites and rituals endowed him an insight like Sankardev delve deep into the root of our tradition and cultural heritage and to express them in an artistic way. His autobiography, "Mor Jivan Sowaran" also
supports this. He revived the Mahapurusia tradition through his philosophical writing. His Seuti, Jagara Mandal or Dalimi perprapes from Assamese life. The natural scenery of Assam are also described in many works. After the world war II, many writers of Assam turned to express their new experience of the modern world. After independence, life became so complicated that the urban life caught the imagination of many writers. Yet we have a Birinchi Kr. Barua who has excellently and beautifully protrayed the Assamese rural life in his masterpiece "Jibonor batai" & "Seuji Patar Kahini." Both are set in the rural background of Assam, though the latter deals mostly with tea garden life. The rich Assamese rural life has been magically created in the novels upholding the rural base of the traditional literature. Dinanath Sarma and few writers wrote on the lives of peasantry like "Nadai", who are the sons of the soil. They were brought to the centre-stage as the peasants formed a strong base for the independence movement in Assam. Rajani Kanta Bordoloi insisted on the rural society of the Ahom days in the 20th century. The Assamese tradition was beautifully presented by him in an artistic manner. His Padumi Matimate, Rahdoi, Dayaram etc. are all typical characters from the Assamese rural society. He writes himself about Assamese culture this way that the hills and plains Assam attract him like Walter Scott, who was a lover of Scotland's nature. Moreover, the birds, beasts and their culture all attracts him. Moreover he looks back to the glories of the history of the Assamese people who inspire them for writing on Assam. The development of modern novels and short stories is the result of modern civilisation. So, the traditional values are giving way to new values. Moreover, some old values have been modified. To quote, Birendra Nath Dutta, we see that due to the British rule and world war-II coupled with India's newly earned freedom, Assam has witnessed a lot of changes in political, social, economical and cultural life. We may call it development and progress, but the local ethnic groups could not be benefitted by this He adds, "the
blind imitation of modern life style and material progress create a sense of negligence towards traditional values and in most of the newly independent countries that has been the case." This is the general trend in the colonial countries after independence. Yet some individual writers have written excellent books based on rural life and till development on rural values, e.g. sense of community. In the 1950s or 60s of 20th century we see this even done by an urban author like Saurav Kr. Chaliha. Syed Abdul Malik, Bhabendra Nath Saikia fave also written fictions on rural life. But mainly to offer an example, this rural tradition is beautifully presented up to the World war -II. After that, it lost its former strong base. Now let us examine the rural base of traditional Assamese literature, expressed through nature's description and the socio-economic, political and cultural life of the different oral of literature from up to the period of World war-II.

A. NATURE'S DESCRIPTION.

Assamese writers and people as said earlier have been living in a rich natural environment surrounded by rivers, ponds, the mountain and the deep green forest of trees and animals. Most of the population lived in the villages. The way Wordsworth and other romantic poets of England were inspired by the magnificence of nature's beauty, the rural folk of Assam were also inspired by the same of Assam. Raghunath Choudhury was enthralled by the same natural beauty of the birds which earned him the nick name 'The Bihogi Kobi' (The bird's poet). Assam had been a Nature's daughter since ancient day. The bio-diversity of Assam's flora and fauna seem to be reflection of all the ethnic groups with multi coloured customs and rituals. The beautiful and affectionate forest and agricultural field have always been a source of delight and resort to the rural folk. Even the capital of the state in the ancient times, Pragjyotishpur, which is present Guwahati, is situated in a fine landscape at the bosom of natural beauty of green mountains, the mighty river
Brahmaputra and so many natural things. The illiterate masses also get inspiration to compose songs and poems spontaneously being delighted at this grandeur of nature.

The way Wordswoth and other romantic poets of England are inspired by the magnificence of nature's beauty, the natural poets of Assam were also inspired by the same of Assam. Assam had been a "nature's daughter" since ancient days. It has been a subject of folk literature since when Assamese poets learnt to compose poetry in oral form. It is expressed spontaneously.

If we look at the Bihu songs, nature is best expressed there. Bihu is a festival of the spring-time in Assam. The nature puts on a new look in this season-new leaves and flowers on the trees are like new dresses. As this festival is basically one of agriculture based festivals, nature occupies a central position in it. The heart-beat of rural folk, born and brought up in the midst of nature has found its highest expression in these songs. They are, in many occasions, the glorification of Spring, the queen of all reasons. One song says, as the Dabua knife is required for skin removing of goats and Mit knife for the dares, oh the old people of village donot find any fault with us when we go on singing the songs of Bahag. The people's relationship with environment is recorded in Bihu songs. There are a no. of objects like the rivers and ponds, the agricultural fields, the sands of the Brahmaputra which are all gifts of nature in Assam. The people's relationship with environment is recorded in Bihu songs. The life and culture of a group of people, who are involved in cultivation are expressed through these songs. In one song, the Nahar flower captures the attention of the dancers. They sing, "This time the Bihu is flowery as it is the seasons of Nahars. We have a good no. of objects which are directly brought from nature and included in the songs. They are keteki charaye kate Saru suta (The bird keteki makes thread), Oure gachate mouye baha lole,
(The bee makes hive on the on tree), Bahare agate bahi bai achilo (I was playing a pipe on the top of the bamboo tree), Sali dhaki parile kon kuriha (The konkuriha birds cover the sali paddy crops) etc. I like the Bihu songs, in one Huchori, we have at lest one hundred references of different trees, flowers, house-hold, goods fruits, green vegetables, birds etc. Thus, we see the expression of Assam's nature in the Bihu songs. Similarly, the Nursery rhymes, Baramahi geet etc. are the oral poetry that also describe nature intimately. The nursery song, "Siyali e Nahibi rati" brings us to a village infested with foxes. The references of foxes and Marua flower in the song are examples of natural objects. Another rhyme "O sister moon" also express the nature's life in it. When they composed, the natural poets had the nature only in front of them. It was the root of their creativity. The Baramahi songs are found in different oral literature of India. In the songs, we find that girls or women remember their husbands who are in abroad. Or the merchants sing these songs remembering their wives, who have been left at home. S.N. Sarma writes that they are part of Indian tradition. It gives us the description of various seasons and months of Assam, which is full of natural objects. The human moods have been associated with change of seasons. The seasonal description is a part of nature. There are other forms of oral poetry like Bonghosa, lokgeet which also express the elements of nature through it. At last, we find that, the nature of Assam is the subjects of different oral poems in Assamese literature, which is a sign of the writer's involvement with traditional values. A Bihu song, a nursery rhymes, a Boramahi song or a lokgeet whatever it may be, these were always enriched with natural objects in order to express the human feelings.

Among the medieval poets, Madhabkandali and Sankardev have delineated nature in an artistic way. Kandali's Ramayana is full of natural objects and description. The Assam's nature has been recreated in the land of Ravana by the master artist. When he writes about a forest, he makes it a real forest of Assam
filled with familiar trees and birds with Assamese words. It is no wonder then, when we discover the nature of Assam in his description of the Ashoka forest. The artistic description of the silent beauty of the river Mandakini leads us automatically to the idea of an Assam’s river. In the Sundarakanda of Kandali’s *Ramayana*, there is an extensive description of the Ashoka forest, where he has made nature and Rama one. We find familiar trees, fruits birds etc. there in the Lanka. The book includes fruits like bel, coconut, dates, amla, papaya, orange, gourd, amora etc. which are found in abundance in the forest of Assam. As to the birds, the Apramadi Kabi has referred to the Chutia Salika while describing the pet birds in golden cages of the Lankan women. The local natural environment has been internalised by the master poet through his poetic style. The language of the translated work also was superb, which became a model for Sankardev in the next age.

In the late fifteenth century and early half of the sixteenth century, Assam was blessed with a great social reformer and poet, who launched the "Neo-Vaisnavite movement" in Assam and subsequently wrote a number of *Ankia nats* and poetical works in association with his great disciple Madhabdev, which brought the Assamese language and literature of medieval period to a dignified position. He was a multi-faceted personality like Leonardo de Vinci. He lived among the common people and so he knew their language and environment. The nature of Assam attracted him greatly what he expressed in his poetical works. In this respect Birinchi Kr. Barua observes that "It is true that from the nature's description he (Sankardev) wanted to extract 'iron' from the mine-like nature, yet such descriptions, being turned into beautiful pictures it has become part of good poetry like ornaments." With the help of the extracted iron the poet has composed wonderful poems looking at the extraordinary beauty of rivers, sea, forests, mountains, different seasons, birds, flowers etc. He finds the greatness and
magnificence of God in every objects. His portrayal of nature were more vivid and he applied appropriate and new words to express this feeling more than other poets of his time. The atmosphere was created for a particular feeling through the images of natural objects. His nature has different moods, sometimes it is beautiful, sometimes horrible, in other times, wonderful and meek. A natural and talented poet like Sankardev exploits nature in different ways to suit his purpose. As for example, in Haramohana and Gajendra Upakhyan the Dibya forest has been described with all its beauty and magnificence. The blooming parks, water tanks and melodious tunes of birds etc. form the description. We find in the description of the Dibya forest that the trees are heavy with flowers as if the branches are about to break. It is a embalmed forest as described by Keats in his poem 'Ode to Nightingale'. The scene of birds eating fruits makes it a real-life event. The cucklings of cuckoo accompanied by mild breeze bring to us the spring time nature in Assam. It reminds us of the melodious song of the nightingale. It enthralls everybody, so is the power of the Sankardev's description of natural beauty. Commenting on the description of this particular description of natural beauty in 'Haramohan', Dr. Hiren Gohain writes, "The easy and simple nature description of Bihu songs- Bonghosa and the expression of physical delight have been expressed through these lines in decent form."10 Though Sankardev has the motif of glorifying the magnificence of Lord Krishna through these poems, it also indicates the presence of a high sense of literary taste. In many poems of 'Kirtana' also Shankardeva as excelled as a poet of nature. His seasonal description of the autumn, the rainy season etc. have no match in Assamese poetry. Infact, Sankardev is in his best element in the poems of nature.

Nature in Post-middle age literature: The traditional literature of Assam after the medieval age also bears significance for its rural base. The nature has been, as part of rural base, described from new angle to suit the new forms of literature
like stories and novels, particularly Lakshinath Bezbarua and his group of 'Jonaki' following the romantic movement in Assam focusses on nature and tradition and glorify theme. Chandra Kumar Agarwala and Hem Chandra Goswami also contributed towards this movement equally and they exploited the new images of nature to suit the personal feelings on different occasions. The Sun-Moon-Stars became the theme of poetry in them, quite different from the middle age literature. It was the result of the contact with English literature and Bengali literature. Lakshinath directed the movement with a view to modifying the traditional values with the help of modernity.

Bezbarua was passionately in love with nature and its objects in Assam right from his childhood. In 'Kripabor Baruar will' (The will of Kripabar Barua), Bezbarua records all the natural objects of Assam, which he considers to the valuable property of Assam — from the river Brahmaputra to the sands of the rivers. Fishes, beast, birds, seeds, Kamakhya hills, Basistha hills and its streams, mountains, all coloured butterflies the paddy fields, the other crops, flowers etc. are enlisted systematically from nature in his note. He had two things in his mind while depicting nature in his work. At first a sense of patriotism inspired him to write of the natural landscape of Assam and secondly, the spirit of the age, the romantic ideals. Here we shall give one or two examples of his description of nature, how he responded to nature in a different manner. Bezbarua's imagination of nature is at its best in the description of Dalimi, an idealised Naga girl, specially created in the drama 'Joymati' The romantic imagination of Bezbarua has made Dalimi — a mental idol of his literature. She was dancing like a coloured butterfly from flower to flower, like flowers she is beautiful and fresh. She is like "Lucy", the imaginative idol of Wordsworth, who was brought up by nature herself like her own daughter in the midst of nature lending nature's beauty and qualities. The Lucy of Bezbarua is no way inferior. In the drama, in Act III, Sc ii, Gadapani
speaks of her this way. "Dalimi, tell me whether you are a Moina bird flying in the sky or wild flowers blooming in mountains? Whether you are the daughter of the mountain or some seafairy, the daughter of Brahmaputra? Or you are all the natural beauties of this mountains together? You are running after the butterflies playing with them, the butterflies are also playing with you. They are exchanging their heart's talk with you. You are flying with the birds also, they also consider you as their companion. You are sleeping on the grass, the grass is embracing you to get happiness. You are encircling the creeper, and the creeper does the same. The blooming flowers are also taking with you, they understand you, smiles and reply your queries. What the running stream is talking, you understand. Dalimi, for you trees and creepers, rivers, grass all are living creatures, all are yours kin and heart's friend'.

This is nature and her objects as seen by Bezbarua in his drama Joymati. She is herself a setting in the drama for the creation of Naga hills. These natural objects around Dalimi what Bezbarua inherited from the natural descriptions of Sankardev and his experience of childhood. The natural objects talk to Dalimi like living creatures, but they are getting rid of "Krishna Consciousness". This is different. Through his poems also he attempts to insist on natural objects following the ideals of romanticism. The poetic sensibilities of English romantic poets, what he read in the Polgrave's *Golden Treasury* refined his sensibilities as disclosed by him in his autobiography, "*Mor Jivan Sowaran*". It was used in his poems. Moreover, following tradition of oral literature like Bihugeet, Borjeet and ballads, he wrote the best of his nature’s poem, a new response to the oral literature.

Malati phulil Seuti phulil
Keteki ga-muri dile,
Suriya kuliye gal kapai gai
Bananir batori dile.14
This is a poem on the advent of spring seasons called 'Basanta'. The meter is very similar to the Bihu songs described in the previous sub section. The wild flowers like Malati, Seuit, keteki, Juti, Bakul, Padum, Karabi, Madar etc. are in full bloom to indicate the coming of the spring, which is a reason of flowers. The language is very simple and close to spoken Assamese. Nature occupies a central position in most of his poems. Like him Chandra Kumar Agarwala revived the oral tradition of ballad through the poem like 'Tezimola', "Bonkunwari" and "Jolkunwari" etc. In other poems like "Choy Rhitu", "Bihu", "Bale napowa Sudarshan", "Priyatamar Soudarya" etc. he has established a relationship between man and nature like Wordsworth. Bezbarua also attempted artificial ballads like "Dhanbor and Ratani."

Bezbarua's poems bear no central significance,15 but he became a very successful story writer and essayist. His stories also bear the elements of nature. In "Nakou", he has given detailed description of the nature at the time of "Dol Utsav". The Palas tree is flaming red with its flower. It is the noon-time environment of a spring time.16 There are other stories also having natural elements. His writings, this way establishes a relationship with nature, the tradition he carried further with a mission.

The other romantic poets of Bezbarua's time, who emphasize on the delineation of nature following their counterparts in English and Bengali literature are Chandra Kr. Agarwala and Hem Chandra Goswami. Chandra Kr. Agarwala wrote the first romantic poem in Assamese poetry, called "Bonunwari" in the first volume of 'Joniaki'. It is purely a description of natural beauty surrounded by different flowers and trees — a queen of nature. Later, he expressed the beautiful nature and its problem through the poem 'Tezimola'. Tezimola has been represented by a Lily, or a lemon tree in midst of other natural objects. The poet has added an extra dimension in his nature poem by linking it to the human ethos. He expresses his doubt that the life of Tezimola is not safe at the hands of man. His earlier
poems, all collected in one book named "Pratima" has included nature poems like Jolkunwari, Niyar etc. The mustard-oil seed's field full of yellow flowers, the whispering bhoomoras flying around flowers and the pearl-like dew drop etc. are picked up by the poet to express the romantic feelings. All the twenty five poems in 'Pratima' has references to natural objects. The ordinary objects of nature have been imposed extraordinariness in his poems. Hem Chandra Goswami also followed Chandra Kumar and Bezbarua. He wrote even sonnet in Assamese. His 'Priyotomar Soundarya' is the first sonnet in Assamese. 'Kako aru hiya Nibilao', 'Kakati', "Dhara para' etc. are the romantic poems with images and picture of nature, which were compiled in one book called 'Phular Chaki'. The flowers, stars and the songs of the romantic poems also make appearance in his poems. The modern romantic poets were all lover of Assam's nature and they consolidated the tradition of Assamese poems having its root in nature.

*Nature in Birinchi Kumar Barua:* As a turning point in the history of Assamese novel, the epoch making Assamese novel, "Jibonor Batat" will be discussed in chapter IV to focus on the conflict between the traditional values and the new modern values. Birinchi Barua's masterpiece is basically a traditional novel focussing on the rural life of Assam. He was a fore-runner in the study of folklore in Assam. No wonder, he chose to study the problems of Assamese rural society in the line of traditional study. He, himself speaks, "The present day fiction writers have turned their eyes on those who are neglected by society, and try to assess their unique social value. One of such novels on the rural life of Assam is Jibonor Batat. (on the Higway of life.)" So, this is, undoubtedly a novel based on traditional life of the rural people. Obviously, nature will capture a place there. The story centres round an Assamese girl called Togor, whose tragic life, full of sorrows and sufferings make everybody sad. She is neek, but active. Through her life, the novelist explores the traditional Assamese society with all its beliefs and
superstitions, gossipings, agricultural life, *Kirtan-Dasam* dominated religious life etc. The modern life also appears momentarily, but as a contrast to the dominant rural life. The novelist has created necessary atmosphere for the rural description and episodes. The nature, what we get in the novel is the ever-green nature of Assam’s village life. Like his predecessors, the novelist is at work to describe nature. Sometimes it is used to show the mood of the characters and sometimes, the natural objects are used to create a particular rural situation. The readers are really amused to read the descriptions of the seasons — summer, rainy, autumn, hemanta, winter and spring. The story of the novel advances amidst such beautiful natural description. The season of winter opens the season in the book — when Kamalakanta comes to the village with friend Krishnadatta for attending a marriage ceremony. A lovely winter is created through words. The crows are shouting on the Banian trees. The birds are shrieking in the plum of the field. Kamalakanta sees that the fog is disappearing gradually like smoke. The tall betelnut trees, the Bhaluka bamboos in rows etc. are seen gradually. The images of bound morning with the crows and other birds making hue and cry make one feel cold. It is really winter there. The contrast of seasons is easily palpable. Like the Barmahi geet, the season has been utilised in order to express certain mood or situation. The opposite feeling is experienced in the description of Bohag season at the time of spring. With the coming of the Bohag Bihu, the trees and creepers awake after experiencing sunlight and rain. The Ajar tree puts on the Kapou flowers and attract the girls. The Sonaru puts on golden buds all of a sudden at night. Modar also puts on a colour. The Nahar at the gate becomes silvery. The Madoi-malati on the Nahar tree becomes red. The Swallos starts to sing in the morning. The cuckoos in the branches of the mango tree dances from this branch to that. The Sakhiyati bird also calls his friend in a positive tune creating eagerness in the hearts of the village themselves. All these natural objects bring to us the picture of Bohag
month. The birds and trees and the flowers are objects of Assam. The author has left no stone unturned to include the natural objects in order to give a proper atmosphere. Anyone can see the wonderful energy of the rural folk that has come out through the natural description in the novel — the arrival of the month of Bohag, the busy agricultural field, the seasons' description — all express the beautiful nature of Assam.

The authors of his time also portray the natural objects in their writing. Rajani Bordoloi has also expressed the high land and low land of Assam like Scotland in his novels. But here only some of the prominent authors have been discussed to the nature's description. Some of them will be discussed in the rural socio-economic life, in the following pages.

8. SOCIO-CULTURAL LIFE IN TRADITIONAL LITERATURE:

Socio-economic and cultural life in Kandali: The modern writers of Assamese literature owe much to the rich traditions, whose base has been built by the illiterate rural poets, Madhab Kandali and his contemporaries and above all, the great Sankar-Madhab and the other Vaisnav poets upto the middle age. This solid beginning lighted the traditional road to Assamese literature. Madhab Kandali, as said in the earlier section of natural description, created a history by choosing a language of the people and depicting the rural social life. Comments Dr. Maheswar Neog, "Madhab Kandali's Ramayana creates a delight in our mind by its realistic life style, beautiful and nice persons." 20

The great poet before Sankardev writes in his Ramayana that the society was a hierarchical society with rigid casteism. The Brahmans and the Sudras, the Hariyas, the Dhoobas lived in those days. The Brahmans and the Skhatriyas, usually, received very high respects from other castes. The poet himself was a believer in
that system as the description indicates. He was not a socially conscious poet like Shankardeva on the basis of his description it can be fairly deduced that the following people were in Assam with various livelihood in the rural areas Vaisyas, Kayasthas, Nata, Bhata, Teli, Tanti, Thathari (maker of metallic vessels), Sonari (goldsmith), Kamar (blacksmith), Sankhari (artisans, who made things of cownch shells), Chamor Sutiyar (carpenter), Dhoba (washerman) and Kumar (potter). The presence of so many castes in the villages as well in the capital speaks of the presence of traditional people with traditional professions. It was also a caste- ridden society; the lower castes like Nata, Bhata, Hari, Potter etc. were not given honour in society. Rama abuses Ravana in Ramayana as Nata.

There was economic exploitation also in such society where monarchy is all in all. In the name of religion also they were exploited. Kandali and his contemporaries also inform us about the agricultural life of society. Most people were poor peasants. The means of cultivation was ploughing the land. From the Ramayana, it is seen that even the kings ploughed land. It is believable only in Satya Yuga, not in the feudal society. In Kandali's Ramayana, there is a simile that for the fear of death even tigers ploughed the land. In the Sankardev's time the Bhuyan's improved the cultivation system. The professions, the people and the casteism, all these together prove that the rural society at that time were only ruled under monarchy. They had the belief that the king is the representative of God on earth, thereby showing that it was a very simple and straight rural society.

Socio-cultural life in Vaisnavite literature: Sankardev is the representative writer of the spirit of Vaisnavite literature in Assam. Like the natural description, the poet and social reformer has collected many facts from the prevailing social system, which he manipulated in his writings. As said earlier, he was very much close to the people, so he understood their sorrows and happiness. He was far ahead of his time, so he introduced many democratic values in his religion. Moreover, he
had brought the currents of all India tradition to the Brahmaputra. We get a fine rural life in his writings, but he was not free from limitations for the backward social atmosphere and his upbringing. As he was a very keen observer and a good writer, he had been successful in the depiction of rural life. Let us begin with a Borgeet, which Dr. Banikanta Kakati says, "Noble song" "Tezare Kamalapati" (get up, the husband of Kamala), where we have a calm and quiet village morning with all the images of a dawn and it brings peace to everybody. The Borgeet reads, the night is gone and it is light everywhere. The sun has come out of the darkness. The lotuses have bloomed and the Bhomoras are murmuring on the lotuses. The women of Brajadham are milking cows taking your name. Dam, Sudam are calling your name and even Boloram has left the bed. The king of Braja. Nandaraja has gone to the cattle’s place and the cowherds also going to tend cattle. So. the husband of Kamala get up and taking milk, cream, flute go to tend the cattle.

All these images described in simple language bring to us a village morning. The rural folk donot go to the industries in the morning, the poet has included only those images which are related with rural life and it makes the description lively and convincing. Really, before the coming of the machines, the morning was like that in Brajadham everywhere.

The other important rural atmosphere that we find in Sankardev is the Assamese life and custom as expressed in Rukmini Harana Kavya. It is full of poetical exuberence and elaborate description, colloquialisms and idiomatic expressions. The poet envisages an Assamese way of life, social manners and customs, especially those connected with marriage are narrated in original manner. The king Bhismok’s family is also a traditional Assamese family with kins and kinships. It is comprised of father, mother, daughter, daughter-in-law, brother-in-laws, servants etc. -- living together in a joint family. Bhismok and his wife
Sashiprabha are the chief members of the family. In Bezbarua's language Sashiprobha's talk is very much like that of bride's mother. There are many angry sons like Rukma. Sumalini, the maid servant upbrings the Bhismok's daughter like a mother. The concern that has been exhibited by Sashiprabha and Bhismok for their daughter's marriage is common to all guardians with marriageable daughter. The meeting and discussion of the two mothers, Sashiprabha and Daibaki is a natural scene in Assamese society. It is quite natural for a mother to feel sad and express her pain while parting from her daughter at the time of marriage and she implores Daibaki to guide her daughter with affection. It is still in practice in Assamese society. As to Madhabdev, he also draws the same picture in *Adi Ramayana* where king Janaka is found there requesting king Dasaratha and queen Kausalya to look after Sita with the affection they showed to their daughter — Another Assamese ideal woman has been portrayed by Sankardev in *Kirtan Ghosa's* "Boli Chalana". Boli's wife, Bidyabali is an embodiment of all virtues — loyalty to husband, solidarity with him at the time of crisis, and above all, the hospitality towards guests. When Boli donated his kingdoms to Bamana, she exhibited extreme patience like that of a working woman. In the same book, Rukmini was decorated like an Assamese bride following the Assamese tradition bathing in holy water, use of oil, powder, turmeric, mekhela—chadar of silk, flower on hair, sandalwood on forehead and various ornaments etc. were witnessed. The marriage songs Uruli etc. remind us of a traditional Assamese marriage. The total marriage scene evokes the Assamese tradition which has been shared by Sankardev. The master artist was quite familiar with such rituals in his own family.

Among the other traditional values of rural society, available in the writings of Sankardev is the caste-system. In *Kirtaghosa*, he has mentioned about thirty six castes without naming.24 Again he has mentioned thirty four castes25 which include vaisya, washerman, gardender, chandal etc. Similarly, Madhabdev also
refers to such castes in his works. Sankardev believed the division of caste like other prominent men of his age as the result of Karmafala and act of past life. Dr. Iliren Gohain, an authority on Sankardev studies remarks, "Sankardev has never said that the casteism is unjustified or irrational. He has rebelled against that. That means, like many supporters he should not be labelled as socialist revolutionary. But he has not accepted the static condition of society. He has shown all low-caste born prople the path of attaining highest glory and commanding respect." His early life's work 'Bhakti Pradip' illustrates that one Bishnu-devotee Chandalini, a low-caste born woman has earned praise from Narada. An untouchable woman has been honoured by Narada — that is clearly an indication of Sankar's democratic values. He had accepted a democratic and liberal attitude in admitting new 'Bhakats' in his new Vaisnavite religion. Moreover, he was critical of the Brahmins also. So, within his limitation, though he didnot declare openly a war against casteism, he wanted to build the foundation of a nation with all virtues.

The playing of the cowherds at Gokul is a clear instance of a rural picture. The cowherds under the leadership of Krishna tend the cows and steal butter from the nearby houses in Sishuleela. Madhabdev has written a Jhumura, an one act play on this butter-stealing and quarrelling of the cowherds. It is a quite rural picture of the Assamese society and these plays are natural. The language of the rural people has also been collected and used by the Vaisnavite poets. The use of conversational easy style loaded with idioms and phrases is an important characteristic of the Vainavite poets. Kandali and Sankardev used Assamese proverbs of the society also. Though the Brajabuli is an artificial language, its style and words are very close to rural folk's language. So, they understood it when it was read to them for Shrabana. They are like, Kandali's Hastiro Pichale Pawa, Sajjanaro bure nawa, burhar hatat chengeli, Sankardev's Salagram matite Natik deya peera, guwalir bhaye kone mundiyache, Akashi Sarag mathat paril
mukhmat haril etc. This proverbial style was utilised by the Vaisnavite poets effectively for their purpose. The colloquial language was polished and exploited by them. Such a language and style always remind the rural folk. This is how Sankardev and other Vaisnavite poets attempted to draw an Assamese life in their writing which passed to the successive generations.

**Socio-economic, cultural life is in Jonaki age:** Lakshinath Bezbarua had a vigorous life. He excelled both in traditional and modern way of life. Like natural descriptions, he also created a lot of characters and settings which are collected from the rich heritage of Assam. His characters of the stories and essays are Seuti, Malati, patmugi, Surabhi, Bhadari, Jagara mandal etc. rural simple people. They are very much loyal to their husbands and society. They also love their bad husbands due to simplicity. Bhadari has excused her husband despite she was stabbed on her arms by her husband. patmugi was like a lotus born in mud. Her life is also full of miseries like a rural deserted woman. The whole Assamese tradition has been listed by him in his essay "Milaramar Atmajivani" as said earlier. His ballads of Dhanbari and Ratani, Ratanir Bejar etc. are examples of the Assamese rural life. The simple love story of the rural youths have been described there. The 'Asom Sangeet', BinBaragi etc. shows his love for the past Assam. It is a tradition of patriotism. His essays also illustrates the Assamese tradition of rural culture. Through the satirical essays, Bezbarua has criticised the Assamese society and people for the decadence of rural life and some precious traditional values. For example, in his essay, 'Bihu' with a deep concern for the festival he has discussed the position of the national festival through an allegorical quarrel between First wife and Second Wife. The author's view in regard to the festival of Bihu is modern. He has advised the Assamese people not to look upon the old but precious tradition with contempt. It leds to the loss of national consciousness. Rather they should be modified with
new ideas in tune with modern time. This type of critical consciousness gained through modern education is abundant in the satirical writings of Bezbarua.

Another important author of the Jonaki age is the "Emperor of Assamese novel", Rajani Kanta Bordoloi. Basically Bordoloi, a contemporary of Bezbarua, has portrayed the rural character in his novels. As he was imbued by a sense of patriotism, the Assamese festivals, fairs etc. got importance in his novels. He was an ardent lover of Assamese folk life and he wrote all these. Dr. Sailen Bharali, critic of his novels, comments, "The picture of ancient Assamese picture is reflected in the novels of Bordoloi. The customs, rituals, religious fairs and festivals of the society are scattered in his work. Here and there, such descriptions are exaggerated."

We find a detailed description of Dol Utsab, which is a part of Assamese culture, in Monomati, Bihu festival in Rangilee, description of Deodhani dance in Radha-kukminir ran, descriptions of different ethnic groups, temples of Guwahati and other places, Durga Pujah and above all the Vainavite faith in Rohdoi Ligiree etc. and many more. He gave a solid foundation of Assamese way of living with rural based characters and their straight forward mind. He loved Assam's folk life so much that leaving all aesthetic and technical questions, he has included essay-type description of the festivals of Assam in his novels. In Rangilee, his writes an essay in a chapter called "Asomiyar Bihu ki ?28 (what is Assam's Bihu). As these festivals were backdrop of his novels, he wanted to clarify those traditions in detail to all readers, and he understood himself. About Miri culture, which is a part of wide Assamese culture, he wrote the novel Miri Jiyoree. The life and culture of the people of hills and plains Miris are discussed in detail. He wrote even one monograph on the ethnic group of Miri in the Awahan. It is right that he destroyed the beauty of novel, but it records the folk-life base of a modern literary genre like novel. All the three Bihus are described in Rongilee. The Durga pujah finds a place in Rahdoi Ligree. Borpela's Dol Utsav is narrated in Monomati.
The people with simplicity also make them true villagers. Monomati, Padumi, Rangilee, Ponoi, Rahdoi, Satram, Lakshikanta etc. are simple rural people with simple virtues. They are very straight also. The friendly relationship of mutual help is also observed among them. There are many other traditional values in his novels. The eloping couples had to receive punishment as "fine" after submitting to the society. There was casteism at that time. People irrespective of castes and creed lived like a community. The tobacco eating, betel-nut etc. are parts of rural folk which is expressed by Bordoloi. The satras of Assam and their rules and regulations are also expressed in Manomati. So, his novels are like the history of the different ethnic groups depicting the traditional life totally.

Socio-economic life in Birinchi Kumar Barua: Barua's "Jibonor batat" is a landmark in the history of Assamese novel, which is basically a traditional novel for its subject matter and treatment as said by critic David Daiches as the meaning of a traditional novel is public, that easily understandable by one and all. The easily understandable incidents in a colonial state should invariably be related with the dominating life style of the majority of the people, that is the agricultural society. Barua's other novel 'Seuji Patar Kahini' is based on the tea-garden's life and labourers. Bina Barua has made no mistake in depicting the story rural society through a well told story.

*The beak of the morhen is red where a
Pinch of pigment is longwise laid,
O my father, my father
Do not send me far. (Jibonor batat, P-1)*

The novel starts with this lokgeet and there are other three lokgeets as prologue to the three books making the story a traditional one of the rural-based society. The lokgeet also symbolises the tragic life of Togor, the heroine of the...
novel. In addition to Togor, there are many other rural characters in the novel. They are namely Jetuki, Pavoi, Mandakini, Mauzadarini etc. who represent the simple rural women with precious values. They are very much active, hard-working, conscious to chastity, simple and straight and are endowed with the quality of hospitality. The house of Mauzadar reflects the dying feudal culture of the Ahoms. The males are also rural except one or two like Kamalakanta, Raibahadur etc. Most of the people are dependent on agriculture in the Marangi area. Only Dharani, Dr. Golap, Kamalakanta, Raibahdur are engaged in non-agricultural occupation. The peasants struggle hard for a living. Their economic condition is very deplorable. The quantity of land of each cultivator is less in the Nagaon area after the division of land. Yet, the peasants are busy with harvesting. There is a harvesting scene. Paddy and Paddy. Paddy is at the courtyard, at the granary, at the drawing room. The fields, the houses, the inside-outside everywhere is only paddy. The grasshoppers jump here and there at the smell of the ripe paddy. Male or female and boys and girls, nobody has time to take rest. The harvesting, carrying the bundles of paddy plant and beaten them to bring out the seeds etc. make them busy all. The boys and girls are bright with delight, a new dream for savings in the eyes. This scenery of harvesting is a very good rural picture. But Togor is not safe at all in this society also. This society is also very cruel, particularly the affluent class. Hiren Gohain, who has discussed the novel in a systematic way remarks, "Like nature, the society is also a cruel master. This society gives birth to the narrow mindedness, mean jealousy, and the habit to assault the helpless." There is no leader in such society to lead the oppressed people for economic and cultural freedom. Kamalakanta is the product of that society.

Barua has also brought in the novel the traditional influences of the Vaisnavite religion on the rural folk. At the time of distress, it has offered them a resort of consolation. Togor, the main character of the novel learns to tolerate all
the atrocities of life, despite being honest and sincere. This sense of tolerance, 

duty and ethics of the rural society owe much to the Vaisnabite culture. The people 
also believe that by the knowledge of the religious books, they know everything. 
Mauzadarani says, "what will the learn our rural girls after studying English? 
What is important to know or to learn has in our Holy scriptures." 

Bapuram Bora, father of Togor has one old copy of the Ramayana in his own home. She 
also reads it. At the Dharani's home, she has made a small temple near the kitchen, 
a picture of Lord Krishna is there on the pedestal and in one Sarai, there is a 
Kirtanaghosa. She lights lamp there in the evening and recites ghosa. For 
somebody's illness or after seeing a bad dream, she offers prasad there. 

She recalls the ghosa on Prahlad when she had to face police atrocities as Dharani was 
anti-British. This way we see, many more villagers are taking resort to the 
Mahapurusia ways of soothing one's dejected mind. This is a very strong basis of 
the rural life literature in Assamese.

The gossipings are very much common among the rural women. It is a part 
of their daily life. Sometime, some aged female beggars spread such things among 
the women folk when their husbands are out in the work. Naduki, Pamila and 
Jhupi — all these women are indulged in spreading gossips against Togor. 
Regarding Dharani-Togor relation before marriage, Naduki and Padumi find out 
the gossip that Togor had done abortion also before marriage, which is false. 
Birinchi Barua knew the rural Assamese society to the marrow of the bone, So he 
could successfully make gossipings a part of the novel. Mauzdarani and Ahini also 
joined the procession. Such kind of things also show the position of women in a 

male-dominated society. The father of Togor, Bapuram Bora wanted to maintain 
his social position by sending Togor to anyone's house whether he is worthy or 
unworthy for her. He is strong believer of Manu's Samhita. He advises that girls 
are motivated for sex only. Religion or education can temporarily obstruct it.
Females are helpless in such a society as they are not at liberty from the traditional point of view, to choose their own life partners. Bhaben Barua says that she has been crippled by the economic scarcity, envy, superstition and fatalism despite being very rich in rural values. Thus, we see the traditional literature of Assam has always been based on the rural society of Assam. It has inherited its vitality and colour from the virgin soil of the villages.

REFERENCES AND NOTES

4. Ibid, P-83.
5. Dutta, Birendranath. : *Byakt, Sanskriti Etyadi*, P-73
6. Bahag is the first month of Assamese calendar. It is spring time in Assam.
8. One act play, based on the life and activity of Lord Krishna devised and developed by Sakardev in order to propagate the Vaisnavite faith in Assam in 16th Century.
12. Ibid, P-1151.
24. Kirtan Ghosa, v-75.
29. ————, Manomati, P-165, Sahitya Prakash.
31. Barua, Bina : Jibonor batat, P-86.
33. Barua, Bina : Ibid, Chapter-V, Bk-1
34. Barua, Bina : Ibid, bk III, Chapter-V.