CHAPTER V

THE LATER ROMANTIC POETS

The full-fledged flourish of Assamese Romantic poetry that was marked with the appearance of Raghunath Choudhary, lost its splendour after Nalinibala Devi, another luminary in the firmament of Assamese poetry. From about the beginning of the fourth decade of the present century, Assamese poetry began to evince a slackening of the Romantic spirit. The spirit of Romanticism came under the influence of the West; and the same Western influence also brought about another epoch in Assamese poetry. As Romantic poetry was being written, the Assamese society was also experiencing change because of rapid commercialization and urbanization of it. However, this process of commercialization and urbanization was not as rapid as in neighbouring Bengal. Yet, migration of ideas became now much easier than before. Life began to undergo inevitable changes resulting in the simultaneous change in the world of intellect. No cultural or literary trend can preserve its purity without reacting to the social and political change. Upto the beginning of the Second World War, this change was slow and so was the change in the corresponding literature. But that it was sure was evident from the clear symptoms of the limitations that the prevalent Romantic ideal had begun to suffer from. Critics have pointed out limitations in poets
right from the time which may be called the heyday of Romanticism even in poets like Jatindranath Dowerah and Ratnakanta Barkakati as has been shown in their respective places. But this was only sporadic up to the above mentioned date. The glow radiated by the intensity of Nalinibala Devi's poetry more than made up the lapses during the period between Raghunath Choudhary and herself. No Assamese Romantic poet after her could rise to the status of Raghunath Choudhary, Ambikagiri Roychoudhury and herself—not even Jatindranath Dowerah. Hence it seems justified to mark the end of the heyday of Assamese Romantic poetry after the full-flourishing of Nalinibala Devi's poetry.

Dimbeswar Neog (1899-1966):

Dimbeswar Neog is one of the Assamese Romantic poets whose poetry manifest direct influence of the English Romantic poets. Like Hiteswar Barbarua, he is also fond of quoting from English poets, and his quotations from Tennyson and Goethe as preludes to his Malika (The Garland, 1922) and Malati (Jasmine, 1927) respectively along with his translations prove his extensive study of English Romantic poetry. He has, to his credit, a number of beautiful translations set in our local colour from different English poets. His 'Tatini' (The River), 'Megh' (The Cloud), and 'Matri bhumi' (Motherland) in Thupitara (Galaxy, 1925) are translations from Tennyson's 'The Brook', Shelley's 'The
'Cloud' and Sir Walter Scott's 'Breathes There the Man, with Soul so Dead' respectively, while 'Ami Sat Bhai Bhani' (We are Seven Brothers and Sisters), 'Sariyahdara' (The Field of Mustard Plants), 'Jnanarthi' (The Scholar), 'Garavini' (The Proud One), and 'Bakuli' in Malati are Assamese renderings of Wordsworth's 'We are Seven', 'The Daffodils' Southey's 'The Scholar', Walter Scott's 'The Pride of Youth' and 'Lucy Gray' of Wordsworth in the same order. His Bihuwatî (The Bihu Dancer, 1929) poems are modelled on Tennyson's May Queen while the poem 'Skylarkaloi' (To a Skylark), annexed to the same, is a translation from Shelley's 'To a Skylark'. Like many English Romantics, he had expressed his feelings in the form of sonnet also. His Mukuta (The Pearls, 1932) is a collection of fourteen sonnets.

"Dimbeswar Neog's poems broadly divide themselves into two categories - youthful effusions and patriotic poems", and of them, the latter category of poems has ensured lasting fame for him.

Dimbeswar Neog is better known as a critic and a literary historian. Though not ranked equal with the prominent Assamese Romantic poets, his contribution to Assamese poetry with Malika, Thupitara, Malati, Indradhanu (The Rainbow, 1930), Mukuta, Swahide Karbala (Martyrs of Karbala, 1941), Asoma (Assam, 1947), Bichitra and Thapana (The

Altar, 1948), these nine collections of poems along with some songs and a few literary epics, is more than significant.

Dimbeswar Neog's poems suffer from lack of consistency in elevation of thought. The excellence of poems like 'Buranji Lekhak' (The Chronicler), 'Swargapuri' (The Kingdom of Heaven) and 'Shap-mukta' (One Freed from a Curse) is seldom present in his other poems excepting the translations.

Neog does not treat nature as an entity isolated from the realm of human thought and feeling. "Rigid adherence to rules of regularity and pre-conceived discipline often deprived Dimbeswar Neog's poetry of tangible emotional appeal". Any kind of restraint is an obstacle for the spontaneous flow demanded by true romantic poetry.

Binandachandra Barua (1901-1994): Binandachandra Barua is aptly called the minstrel poet singing the glories of once prosperous Assam. His Shankhadhvani (Sound of a Conch, 1925), Pratidhvani (Echo, 1940) and Jayadhvani (Sound of Victory, 1974) are nice specimens of romantic enthusiasm. He is also known as the poet of sounds because of his unique sonorous style, and also because the titles of all his three collections of poems bear the word 'dhvani' or sound. His poems are mainly

patriotic with the exception of a few nature poems; and with their rising cadence and measured rhythm, they provide a charming reading rare in Assamese poetry.

Behind the patriotic zeal of Binandachandra Barua and his adoption of the general atmosphere of the time, we see more a poet nurtured by the spirit of the time than by any outside influence. However, there are evidences of his adaptation of some English poems. For example, there is clear shadow of Browning's 'Incident of the French Camp' on Barua's 'Agiathutir Bir' (The Hero of Agiathuti).

Despite all their competence, the appeal of his poems lies mainly on their sounds, rather than on their thought that lingers. Sameness of theme and rhythm, though they are very appealing, often tends to be monotonous, leaving his readers to dub his poetry verses rather than genuine Romantic poetry.

Atulchandra Hazarika (1903-1986):

Most prolific of the Assamese litterateurs, Atulchandra Hazarika has, to his credit, about thirty collections of poems published from Deepali (Festival of Light, 1938) to Sundarar Aradhana (Prayer for Beauty, 1985). The value of his contribution to Assamese poetry is undeniable; and yet his poetry cannot rise to the level of the poetry of Raghunath Choudhary, Ambikagiri Roychoudhury, and Nalinibala Devi. His unquestionable success in the drama
form of literature invites a study of him more as a dramatist than as a poet. His poems lack the spontaneity innate in the poems of the above mentioned stalwarts of Assamese Romantic poetry. Yet his poems like 'Devadasi' (The Temple Dancer), 'Balichar' (The Sandy Bank), 'Sonar Harina' (The Golden Deer) and 'Mor Puja' (My Worship) are hallmarks of Assamese poetry ensuring for the poet a place of importance in Assamese literature.

Like Raghunath Choudhary, Hazarika has a large number of poems on birds and flowers. The fact that his poems are strained becomes clear from a comparison of his poems like 'Dahikatara' (The Magpie Robin) and 'Golapar Katha' (Soliloquy of the Rose) with Raghunath Choudhary's poems on the same subjects. In Raghunath Choudhary's poems the charm of the bird's song could thrill all the air, the water, and the earth; it could conjure up and enliven the past - both far and near and, in fact, had a cosmic appeal. But in Hazarika's poem, the appeal of the bird's song remains limited in a personal level. Also Hazarika's attempt to create the mood of confusion at the departure of the bird, which was so effective both in Choudhary and Keats, does not seem to be successful. Like this poem, Hazarika's 'Golapar Katha' is also an adaptation from Choudhary's 'Golap' (The Rose). In spite of the use of same words deemed very effective in Choudhary's poem, Hazarika's
poem could not achieve the dignity and grace of the other. His poems are rich with diversity of subject-matter, but all his poems are not equally appealing.  

Like all Romantic poets, Hazarika shows a great interest in so-called insignificant objects. He is also moved by the beauty of nature and is inspired by the love of his own country. The most prominent characteristic of his poetry is patriotism; and he is at his best in the poems with this theme. 'Sharaighat' and 'Barishar Dak' (Call of the Rainy Season) are two of his best patriotic poems.

In Atul Hazarika's poems, influence of his predecessors like Raghunath Choudhary is more conspicuous than that of the English poets. Of the English Romantic poets, Wordsworth seems to attract his attention most. His love of nature is also uncritical like Wordsworth's. 'Nirala Dawani' (The Solitary Reaper) is a translation of Wordsworth's 'The Solitary Reaper'. Though not a translation, 'Seuti' reminds one of Wordsworth's 'Lucy' poems.

Like the English Romantic poets, Hazarika is also enchanted by the "unassuming Common-place of Nature" (To The Daisy : Wordsworth), and he is also, like Wordsworth, apt in giving "many a fond and idle name" (To the Daisy : Wordsworth).
Wordsworth) to known and unknown flowers as in 'Aparichita' (The Unfamiliar).

'Devadasi', one of Hazarika's widely read poems, expresses the romantic revolt of the individual to rise above the destined lot, though the aspiration of the vestal virgin is restricted with her hope to be merged with God who is, according to her, the source of all her suffering. It lacks the force that inspires man to translate his will into action, giving way to the tradition of resignation.

Commenting on Hazarika's poetry, Hem Barua has said that: "he writes more like a man who has gone into a library of harnessed emotions than as one who has directly contacted nature or experienced life so as to reflect its spirit." Whatever weaknesses his poetry may suffer from, it establishes the fact that the Romantic spirit in Assam, now, could very well draw inspiration from its own poetic tradition.

Kamaleswar Chaliha (1904-1984):

A novelist and a biography writer of a smaller stature, Kamaleswar Chaliha has composed some Assamese poems as well. The poems of Gungun (Hum, 1930) and Chandita (In Rhythm, 1941) reveal behind them a sensitive and inquisitive mind characteristic of a Romantic poet. Like most of the

Romantic poets, he also cherishes an optimistic view of life. Like many of his contemporaries, he was more influenced by Rabindranath Tagore than the English Romantic poets in following the Romantic trend. His 'Sariyahani' (A Field of Mustard Plants) is a beautiful poem inspired by Wordsworth's 'The Daffodils'. This poem has successfully maintained the true Romantic spirit of Wordsworth's poem.

Anandachandra Barua (1906-1982):

As Jatindranath Dowerah's fame rests to a great extent on his translation of Khayam's Rubayat, Anandachandra Barua's fame also rests mainly on his translation of the poems of Hafiz. Apart from the collection of the translation from Hafiz, his other three collections are Parag (Pollen, 1933), Ranjan Rashmi (Coloured Ray, 1933), and Bakul Banar Kavita (Poetry of the Bakul Forest, 1975).

A great lover of life and the world, Baruah's poems are intensely romantic. The height of his imaginative power as well as his sensitive mind is evident from his poem 'Bhavi Priya' (The Would-be Beloved). In imaginative power, this poem can equal any successful poem in any poetry. Besides luxuriant imagination, we notice here a gracefulness of feeling.

Despite the many qualities seen in best Romantic poetry, Barua's poems often suffer from the lack of deep
insight and elevation of thought that go to the making of great poetry. The direct influence of English Romantic poetry is still less conspicuous in him than in his contemporary, Atulchandra Hazarika. Humanism is one of the salient Romantic features of his poetry. But his humanism does not radiate the vigour of Chandrakumar Agarwala; it is rather "a blend of aesthetic emotion with Sufi theory."  

Ganesh Chandra Gogoi (1910–1938):

With his Keatsean love of beauty and sensuous response to the appeal of sound and colour, Ganesh Chandra Gogoi showed the potentiality of a first-rate Romantic poet. Like Keats, he was also conscious of the transience of beautiful things; and yet his attachment to beauty was as unabated as that of the other poet. Again, like Keats, Gogoi liked to coin words and phrases which have been very conveniently used by his contemporaries and successors. He also shared Keats's destiny in the affair of love, and also in having a very short span of life. But as a Romantic poet, he was absolutely the child of his age. His widely read poem Papari (Petals, 1934) was not influenced by any English or Bengali or even any Assamese poet. Yet his poems, though they lack in diversity, manifest the Romantic spirit with their indulgence in sentiment and intensity of emotion.

Of Gogoi's three poetical works, *Papari*, *Swapnabhanga* (Breaking of the Dream, 1945) and *Rupjyoti* (The Glittering of Beauty, 1945), the first has attracted the widest range of readers. Through *Papari* he has contributed a new rhythm and a new style to Assamese poetry. "By their sincerity, emotional depth and effective diction his poems of 'love and separation have endeared him to a widening coterie of young admirers."^7

However, though in a sense a poetical heir to Jatindranath Dowerah, with all his sincerity and intensity, Gogoi, who died young, could not achieve the other's height. In the manner of the English Romantics, he tried to tranfuse hope and the spirit of struggle into Dowerah's passive melancholy, though in an abstract way. Yet, despite the strong protestations of his broken heart —

Milanar balibheta jadioba bhagi gol
Nai bhaga Sakhi mor pranayar bin,
Surar lahari Pat: nuthile nuthiba pare
Tarar spandan tar nahay bilin.

'Papari'

(The lyre of my love is still unbroken though the sand-bar of my love is washed away; though it may not be able to produce the waves of music, it will still retain the vibration of the strings)

he could not attain much substance. May be for his untimely
death, his attempt to rise above the level of a frustrated
sentimental lover, could not bear fruit, and he had to end
in sentimentalism. "Ganesh Gogoi shares much more than any
one else in the sustained prolongation of romantic sentimen-
talism".  

Gogoi is a true Romantic in his style; it is as
simple and as passionate as that of Jatindranath Dowerah.
Lyrical intensity of his love poems seems to excel even that
of Ratnakanta Barkakati. There is nothing transcendental or
spiritual in his poems. Like most of the English Romantic
poets, he is basically a poet of this world. But his love
of man could not extend itself much beyond egotism. His
poems also want in the "intellectual animation" of English
Romantic poetry.

Though love is the basic concern of Ganesh Gogoi's
poetry, another Romantic feature in it is patriotism. He has
a section of patriotic poems including 'Trayodash Shatikar
Sonar Asom' (The Golden Assam of the Thirteenth Century) and
'Jaya'. His patriotic feeling expresses itself in his retros-
pection of the glorious past of Assam and ends in a national
spirit.

9. Ibid., p. 177.
Though nature has not been given any separate treatment in his poems, the different objects of nature have played an important role in Gogoi's poetry. In the manner of poets like Wordsworth, Shelley and Tennyson, he wants nature to sympathize with his emotions.¹⁰ He also, like the English Romantics, believed that nature has some purpose behind her creations and plays a vital role in moulding man's creative power:

Seidina bhabichilo ei sudha ruprashi
Prakritiye ababate dhali diya nai,
Yarei anurup manuhe kariba shristi
Ei viswa-bimohini chanekike chai.

(I was thinking the other day that nature has not flooded the earth with beauty for nothing. She has done so so that man may create for himself after that world-enchanting example).

Devakanta Barua (1914):

Devakanta Barua, the last but not the least romantic of the Assamese poets, had introduced into Assamese poetry a completely new trend which, however, never came to be followed by others with equal success. With his unique style, hitherto unfamiliar in Assamese poetry, and the dazzling flash of freedom of idea and expression rare in it, he will always be regarded as unique in Assamese Romantic

Devakanta Barua is the first to introduce dramatic monologue into Assamese poetry after the style of Robert Browning. But his kind of dramatic monologue cannot be said to be the exact adaptation of Browning's form in the sense that dramatic conflict of ideas or characters is not present in Barua's poems. It also does not exactly conform to the interior monologue or stream of consciousness adapted by James Joyce, Virginia Woolf and Dorothy Richardson to describe the flow of thoughts of the waking mind. Interior monologue, or stream of consciousness is diffuse and diverse whereas Barua's monologues are concentric and of single consciousness. Hence his monologues can better be called Browningesque dramatic lyric. His poems delineate the perplexity of a deeply inquisitive and sensitive mind under the symptomatic impact of Romantic decadence with an ultimate impression of having braved the same with a rare masculine strength.

Besides the form, Browning's influence is discernible on Barua's philosophy as well. Barua is a poet who has deftly blended his epicurian sensibility with deep philosophical reflection. Like Browning he also believes that human life is controlled by destiny and it is almost always destiny that triumphs against man's strivings in life. Yet, like Browning again, this outlook of the role of
destiny in human life has not subdued the poet's spirit so as to turn him into a pessimist. For him the earth is beautiful despite man's destined lot to suffer; and life is worth-living however much man may be confronted with failure in his struggle for achievement. Such unconditional love of life is a very prominent aspect of English Romantic poetry. For Barua, as for the English poets, the ultimate truth is the exertion of abilities:

Shristir dinare para Niyatir sate hera manuhar
Sangram akshay,
Ami tare smriti-stambha sonwarao manuhar birjya aru
Niyatir jay.

'Devadasi' (The Temple Dancer)

(From the very day of creation man has been entangled in the struggle against destiny; we are the monuments to proclaim man's ability and Fate's triumph).

Fate is active all the time with endless power and yet:

This world is no blot for us,
Nor blank; it means intensely and means good:

'A Grammarian's Funeral':
Browning

Like in Browning, the realization of "the petty done, the undone vast" is there in many poems of Devakanta Barua —
'Aprakash' (Unrevealed)

(Insignificant is the ability of expression as against the limitlessness of emotions).

In the development of his thought, the influence of D.H. Lawrence and Thomas Hardy also cannot be overlooked.

There is similarity between Browning and Devakanta Barua in the treatment of nature as well. Man and his psyche are the primary concern of both the poets. Like Browning, Barua also did not write poems merely descriptive of nature; the role of nature always being subordinate to human interest. Though a very keen observer of nature, Barua, like the other, is concerned with the same only as far as its description proves effective to the study of man and serves as a background of the human drama.

Like Browning again, Barua can add new dimension to human frustration. Like the former, he is also prone to make the transient moment the eternity, and this is best expressed in 'Kalang Parat' (By the River Kalang) and 'Ranga Eti Karabir Phul' (A Red Oleander). Browning evolved a unique concept of love, and so does Devakanta Barua, though in quite a different sense. Barua's departure from the ordinary concept of love consists in breaking away from the traditional Indian belief in either renunciation or
rejection of physical love.

The strongest Romantic characteristic in Devakanta Barua's poems is humanism. His poems sing the glory of man both in success and failure. For him the temple dancer in 'Devadasi' is "a specimen of exploited and trampled humanity".\(^{11}\) The poem is an inspiration to rise and resist. Struggle and strife are inevitably associated with man's life and a broken heart is a much worthier object than a comfortable life of resignation and slavery. Such love of freedom and glorification of the human mind are evident in many English Romantic poets, especially in the Victorian Browning. In fact, Barua is a poet of the human mind and intellect. Like Browning's, his central concern is human psychology. Each of his love poems "raises a different psychological question".\(^ {12}\)

In his use of diction, Barua has been influenced by the art of Rossetti and Swinburne.\(^ {13}\) "In dignity of poise and conception, Barua's *Tilottama* with its Swinburneian sweep is seldom surpassed; from the point of abstract thought, *Urvasi Bidai* can be closely associated with it."\(^ {14}\)

With all the excellences of a pure Romantic poet, Devakanta Barua yet betrays symptoms of a new ideal in his

12. Ibid., pp. 131-132.
13. Ibid., p. 133.
expression of social consciousness and patriotic feelings. The social consciousness of a purely Romantic poet in 'Devadasi' absorbed new ideas and tendencies, and its expression in 'Lachit Barphukan', though an excellent poem in itself, more than exposed the moribund state of Romanticism in Assamese poetry. The patriotic enthusiasm of the last two lines, in the true Romantic vein—

Akau ebar shunoa tomar ran-ahban-bani,
Akau ebar rangi kali maro Luitar boga pani.

'Lachit Barphukan' (Let your war-cry be sounded once again; once again we are ready to die for our motherland reddening the silver water of the river Brahmaputra)

is overshadowed by the sense of irony throughout the poem which has little to do with Romantic subtlety and simplicity.

In subject-matter, attitude, technique, and ideas, Devakanta Barua has carved a new path for himself as is revealed in his poem 'Ami Duar Mukali Karo' (We Open the Doors) which is also given the credit of opening the door of a new trend in Modern Assamese poetry. The captivating new style of expressing ideas in the form of dramatic lyric, the spontaneity of rhythm, the rebellious conception of human passion, uncontaminated by any idea of cynicism, the
intellectual variety of the poems, and the poise of a supper artist in expressing moments both of union and separation, have made 'Sagar Dekhicha' (Have You Seen the Sea, 1945), his only collection of poems and the last landmark of Assamese Romantic poetry, one of the glorious monuments of the same.

Other poets of the period:

Umesh Chandra Choudhary (1898-1953), Daivachandra Talukdar (1901-1968) and Jyotiprasad Agarwala's (1903-1950) names can be mentioned among the poets of the period who had contributed to Assamese Romantic poetry. Except Daivachandra Talukdar, the other two are chiefly known as song-composers.

The salient Romantic elements in Umeshchandra Choudhary's poems are treatment of love and patriotic feelings. His Mandakini (The Divine River) "is a collection of graceful love poems—love of the earthly-kind".\textsuperscript{15} The clarity of thought and spontaneity of expression in his patriotic poems also reveal his Romantic nature.

Romantic influence of Daivachandra Talukdar can be traced in his adoption of ballad form. His 'Kunhimala' (1923) is a ballad influenced by Wordsworth's 'Ruth'. Like the English Romantic poets, he also loved simplicity of both subject-matter and expression.

\textsuperscript{15} Birinchi Kumar Barua: \textit{op.cit.}, p. 136.
Jyotiprasad Agarwala's poetry manifest his longing for the country's freedom from foreign rule, his love of his motherland, and his anticipation of a just and progressive social order.

A revolutionary as a poet, Jyotiprasad Agarwala had contributed to almost all the branches of Assamese literature. An aesthetic in spirit, he could and did conjure up a literature that could boast of the wealth of the past as well as the present. His poems reveal a Romanticist's ideal based on strong realism. Like those of the other poets stirred by the enthusiasm of India's struggle for independence, his poems are also imbued with ardent patriotic zeal. Parallel to his exaltation and eloquence, he had, like Ambikagiri Roychoudhury, a peculiar tender aspect revealed in a portion of his song compositions. Of course the Romantic ideal in him has been influenced more by the spirit of the time than by the reading of English Romantic poetry.