CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

Romantic revival in nineteenth century England was the reaction against a reason-dominated period. The sense of revolt involved in this reaction had endowed the English mind with a new inquisitiveness with which it had learnt to explore the unknown possibilities of the human intellect. Plasticity of Romanticism is a fruit of this inquisitiveness. But, Romanticism in Assamese literature was the conscious adaptation of an ideal that had already established itself in the world of thought, and as such, emergence of Romanticism here did not demand the exertion of mental faculties in the same way as in England. Yet, the Romanticists in Assam had to face the arduous exertion of the intellect in harmonizing two different traditions and also in harmonizing the past with the present.

"The late entry of Assam into the fold of British rule and the slow pace of English education in the province prevented a sudden exposure of the Assamese to Western ideas which could otherwise have taken the traditional society of Assam by storm".\(^1\) And this is the reason that the wave of the Renaissance that had swept over Assam, had left the traditional basis unshaken. But this exerted a negative

\(^1\) Tilottama Misra: Literature and Society in Assam, Omsons Publications, New Delhi, 1987, p. 185.
influence as well. The Indian mind is conditioned by a sense of permanence and thus wants, to some extent, in the power of translating the human potentialities into action which the Western mind had acquired through endless struggle with uncertainty. The faiths and beliefs, and struggles and aspirations of man of all time had found their place in English Romantic poetry.

...Indian Renaissance could reflect only the suppressed hopes and aspirations of a colonial middle class that could never aspire to the dreams of boundless individual freedom that characterised the English Renaissance. Assam's late entry into the colonial fold and her doubly subordinated position as a hinterland of Calcutta, made the limitations of the literary and social movement which has been called the Assam Renaissance, even more pronounced.  

Thus Assamese poetry found its fountain partially blocked in spite of an equally wide purview in the choice of subject-matter. It also could not achieve the fluidity natural to English Romantic poetry and acquired by Bengal because of the poets' commitment to preserve their identity with constant caution accompanied by a feeling of insecurity under the inimical attitude of the British rule. But the positive aspects of the traditional stability must not be overlooked.

2. Ibid., pp. 239-240.
...the strong bonds of tradition that were cherished by its prominent representatives gave it a distinctly nationalist character. It was because of this character that the Renaissance which took place in Assam during the nineteenth century and the early decades of the twentieth acquired certain distinctly local as well as broader pan-Indian hues despite the fact that it was originally inspired by Western ideas.³

It has already been said that Romanticism is a synthetic phenomenon. There is nothing peculiar about the process of synthesizing two or more cultures that had occurred in the late nineteenth and the early twentieth century literature of Assam. It seems to have a universal commonness. "Modern Assamese literature is a composite product of the humanistic tradition that flowed to India along with the British rule and the spiritual values, handed down to us from generation to generation".⁴ As has already been said, some of the prominent characteristics of English Romanticism were present in profusion in the ancient Sanskrit literature the perception of which generated a deep veneration and love for our own past. The present urged immediate adaptation. Moral commitment would not allow the pioneers of the new ideal to accept or reject any of them. Hence a whole hearted endeavour was made to create something

3. Ibid., p. 241.
4. Trailokyanath Goswami : 'Lakshminath Bezbaroa and the Assamese Literature in the Fourth Decade of the Twentieth Century' in Lakshminath Bezbaroa, the Sahityarathi of Assam, ed. Maheswar Neog, Gauhati University, 1972, p. 93.
new which naturally acquired the synthetic character. Whatever the positive or the negative qualities of the Renaissance may be, the Assamese Romantic poets could work out a perfect synthesis of all. Though the overwhelming bias of the Renaissance towards secularism is a well-established fact, most of the Assamese poets could maintain a uniformity between the old and the new tradition; and Lakshminath Bezbaroa had accomplished a marvel in this respect.

Each poet has his own concept of poetry in general; a careful study of the whole gamut of his creative works reveals it. The views common in the poets of a particular period determine the prominent characteristics and also the nature of that particular trend though it is really a difficult task to answer the question as to what poetry is or what it should be. Though the Romantic poets are very often accused of sentimentalism, indolence, and, at times, obscurity caused by excessive imagination, each of the English Romantic poets had, in fact, a very clear vision of the nature and purpose of poetry. The mostly accepted principle of poetry is that of Wordsworth—"all good poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings".5 It is also "the first and last of all knowledge"6 Shelley defined

6. Ibid., p. 16.
it as the "expression of the imagination".\textsuperscript{7} For him "A poem is the very image of life expressed in its eternal truth".\textsuperscript{8} Byron, in his \textit{Don Juan}, identified poetry with passion. Keats shared Wordsworth's view in his emphasis on imagination and spontaneity when he says that "If poetry comes not as naturally as leaves to a tree it had better not come at all".\textsuperscript{9} Arnold emphasized "poetic truth" and "poetic beauty". In spite of the apparent differences of their views, the Romantic poets were bound by some common norms they attributed to poetry like exercise of imagination, love of beauty and truth, spontaneity of expression, intensity of emotion, simplicity, and the like; and these they observed in their creations. The magnitude of views and their equally extended applications in English Romantic poetry cannot be expected in Assamese in equal term due to its limitations already discussed. Yet Assamese Romantic poetry was not founded on vague abstraction and, in truth, the poets had to be more alert because of their pronounced commitment.

Lakshminath Bezbaroa expressed his view of poetry clearly in his discussion of Assamese language and literature. He believed that poetry should possess subtlety

\textsuperscript{8} Ibid., p. 109.
of thought, freedom of expression and spontaneity. He also held that poetry should have universal appeal and it should be able to reflect the limitless infinite within the bounds of the finite. Like the English Romantic poets, he could follow his theory in his own poems very aptly. His 'Kavita' is a beautiful expression of his idea of what poetry is and this is quite in conformity with the views of the English Romantic poets. Ratnakanta Barkakati shared Bezbaroa's view in saying that true literature should always be free. He also advocated the subjective nature and universal appeal of poetry. Other Assamese poets also have expressed their views of poetry though their poems; (vide 'Kavita' by Durgeswar Sarma) and as can be expected, they are similar in nature, as the ideal itself was a conscious adoption. In its growth Romanticism in Assamese poetry had not involved individual exertion to the extent of English Romanticism. The Assamese poets followed set ideals and thus could not establish strong individual conviction above the common norms in the manner of the English Romantics. They showed their competence in giving local colour to borrowed traits and their poetry never gave any idea of incongruity.

11. Ibid., p. 1863.
Lakshminath Bezbaroa, Chandrakumar Agarwala and Hemchandra Goswami, the three persons ushering in the Romantic ideal into Assamese poetry had imported quite a few prominent characteristics of English Romanticism. A love for the glories of our past in Bezbaroa, humanism in Chandrakumar Agarwala and love in Hemchandra Goswami had opened a new horizon for the incipient Assamese Romantic poetry.

One salient feature of English Romanticism is the extraordinary exercise of imagination and it sanctioned such an all inclusive range to the mental faculty that it even included reality itself into its realm. "The Romantic poets believed in an ulterior reality and based their poetry on it, they found it in different ways and made different use of it." Thus the Romantics dreamt of a better and happier world to come on which to build "Utopias" of the future. But most of the Assamese Romantic poets, as inheritors of traditional Indian philosophy conceived of this happiness in a world beyond this world. Most of them evinced a pantheistic belief of Indian philosophy. Immortality of the soul, belief in rebirth, and fulfilment of unfulfilled desire in a world beyond—these form the burden of many poems of Chandrakumar Agarwala, Nalinibala Devi, Durgeswar Sarma and Ratnakanta Barkakati. These poets along with

Ambikagiri Roychoudhury proved themselves mystics and spiritualists though there is difference between the mysticism of Chandrakumar Agarwala and that of the others. Agarwala's intense love of beauty, combined with his innate density of thought, lent a mystic touch to his nature poems and also his transcendental poems. His object of mystic longing is beauty whereas other mystics yearned for the realization of God. In this respect, he is more akin to the English Romantic poets in comparison to the other Assamese poets. Shelley was also a mystic of beauty.

Though the realization of and union with the Supreme Power is the object of the Assamese mystics other than Chandrakumar Agarwala, like their English counterparts, they did not show indifference to terrestrial beauty in their absorption in the object of devotion. Even in a state of elevation they did not want in attachment to this world. While they based their philosophy on the Upanishads, they rejected their doctrine of illusion that negates the worth of this terrestrial world.

While Nalinibala Devi's poems profess humble submission, Ambikagiri Roychoudhury's poems establish that: "mysticism is not an intellectual theory; it is fundamentally an active, formative, creative, elevating and ennobling principle of life". Roychoudhury could extend

his vitality to any field of human thought. He could even endow his frustration with a new prospect. He found himself and Jatindranath Dowerah lost himself in frustrated love. "If Nalini Devi's poetry teaches us faith, Roychoudhury's instills courage into us". If unity is the essence of Nalinibala Devi, diversity is the essence of Roychoudhury.

The English Romantic poets glorified both the soul and the senses. Browning seems to be vindictive in establishing the love of this world and life, but is equally earnest about the greatness of the soul:

How good is man's life, the mere living! How fit to employ All the heart: and the soul and the senses, for ever in joy! 'Saul'

The extreme verges of soul and sense, as represented by Nalinibala Devi and Devakanta Barua respectively, seem to meet in Ambikagiri Roychoudhury.

Romantic poetry is based on love—love of man, love of nature, love of beauty, love of life and this world, and also the love of the world beyond, love of the past and also of the present and love of freedom. And this is true of Assamese poetry as well. Love of man had reached its culmination in Chandrakumar Agarwala. Yet exact counterparts of Simon Lee or the Leech Gatherer of Wordsworth are nowhere to

be found in Assamese poetry.

Nostalgia, another Romantic feature, is present in the poems of most of the Assamese poets with the exclusion of Ambikagiri Roychoudhury. Roychoudhury is not occupied with the past; he is, as is usual of a man of action and energy, a man of the present. On the other hand, nostalgia forms the essence of Raghunath Choudhary and Shailadhar Rajkhowa. Like in English poems, reminiscence of childhood is evident in Assamese poems of the time and is most conspicuous in Raghunath Choudhary.

Raghunath Choudhary, in his treatment and love of nature, almost attained the perfection of Wordsworth and Keats. The jovial mood and effusive nature of his poetry are indicative of the simplicity and spontaneity characteristic of Romantic poetry. Concept of nature in Assamese poetry is generally Wordsworthian and not of the critical type expressed in the poems of Tennyson and Arnold. Yet revelation of Nature as the "living essence" in the exact Wordsworthian sense, has not been achieved in Assamese poetry. In no Assamese poet's work nature performs any role in creating any complex psychological situation or mood as it did in Browning's poems.

The English Romantic poets, particularly Wordsworth, were keen in delineating the critical analysis of the
mental processes. This is not present in Assamese poetry though there are very minute observations of the different moods of the human mind and its reactions to the natural changes in the external world. In the manner of Keats, Raghunath Choudhary could transform the acute feeling of agony into thrills of joy in the bosom of nature.

In Wordsworth's poetry, "more perhaps than in that of any other man, we frequently find images and sentiments, which we have seen and felt a thousand times, without particularly reflecting on them, and which, when presented by him, flash upon us with all the delight and surprise of novelty". 16 This applies, very aptly, to the poems of Raghunath Choudhary.

For Byron, poetry is identical with passion:

Thus to their extreme verge the passions brought:
Dash into poetry, which is but passion.

'Don Juan'

Due to the limitations already discussed, Assamese poets could not glorify human passion in the same way that the English poets did. Yet Ambikagiri Roychoudhury's poems, both mystical and patriotic, almost overcame this limitation. It was because of their attachment to tradition that poets

like Byron and even Keats could not become favourite with the Assamese poets, though the influence of the latter, on most of them, is more than manifest. It was in the poems of the last Romantic poet Devakanta Barua only that human passion, in its real intensity, flashed brilliantly. Yet the Assamese poets more than made up this weakness with emotion heightened by the intensive nature of the national tradition. They often expressed contradictory emotions with equal intensity. This is most evident in Raghunath Choudhary. His poems are equally impressive in delineating both the moods of joviality and melancholy. Contradictory feelings are present in Jatindranath Dowerah also. Both his implorations to forget the past and remember the same evoke equal sympathy in the mind of the reader.

Whether for their philosophy or for their simplicity and familiarity, Wordsworth's 'Lucy' and Shelley's 'Love's philosophy' had enchanted the Assamese Romantic poets from the early period to the period of decline. Lakshminath Bezbaroa, Durgeswar Sarma, Suryakumar Bhuyan and Atulchandra Hazarika were fascinated by the 'Lucy' poems, particularly the second and the fourth in the series for which they had rendered them into Assamese. 'Love's Philosophy' had also equal attraction for the Assamese poets. Lakshminath Bezbaroa, Durgeswar Sarma, Sinhadatta Deva Adhikari and Ratnakanta Barkakati contributed to Assamese poetry with translations of this
beautiful poem. In the same manner Wordsworth's 'The Daffodils' inspired one exquisite poem by each of Chandrakumar Agarwala, Dimbeswar Neog and Kamaleswar Chaliha— as it has been already pointed out.

It has already been mentioned that the translations by the Assamese poets were from their heart in such a manner that they had achieved the status of the original. It was because the import of the Romantic ideal into Assamese was based in the form of real influence mostly and hardly in the form of imitation. Imitation is an uninspired mechanical work. Both Socrates and Aristotle defined poetry as imitation. But the term "imitation" carried a significance, in their dialogues, different from and wider than in the modern context. Their theory was supported by Locke later on. As has been mentioned in the first chapter, the Romanticists rejected Locke's analogy of the mind as a mirror that reflects the external objects. Their analogy for the mind is the lamp, "a radiant projector which makes a contribution to the objects it perceives".17 In their adoption of the Romantic ideal from English the Assamese Romantic poets proved themselves true followers of the same in this light as well.

Another analogy of the thinking mind used by the English Romantics is the Aeolian lyre. Both Wordsworth and

Shelly used this analogy "as a construct for the mind in perception as well as for the poetic mind in composition". The Assamese poets had used the 'Bin' for this image, very effective use of which is evident in the two poems under the same title, 'Bin-Boragi', by Lakshminath Bezbaroa and by Chandrakumar Agarwala.

One of the factors that had worked behind the Assamese poets' wonderful accomplishment in uniting the old and the new is freedom of expression. It was Raghunath Choudhary who had retained the influence of the great Classical poets like Kalidas and yet had given a unique shape to modern lyric with his consciousness of the new tradition formed by the English influence.

Most of the English Romantic poets, Blake and Shelley being the prominent two among them, conceived the role of the poet as a prophet or a seer. Chandrakumar Agarwala evinced profound faith in such a role of the poet. Lakshminath Bezbaroa, Hemchandra Goswami, Hiteswar Barbarua, Ambikagiri Roychoudhury and even Nalinibala Devi shared such belief.

Jatindranath Dowerah, Nalinibala Devi and Ratnakanta Barkakati with their self-absorption and love of isolation, represented the intensely personal note that had begun to resound in Assamese poetry in the second phase of

18. Ibid., p. 61.
the post-Jonaki era. The germination of the image of a solitary man all through English Romantic poetry was inherent, in fact, in its two more precisely defined features, individualism and subjectivism. Idea of the poet's estrangement is most prominent in Pater and W.B. Yeats. For Pater "the estranged morality of artists is the only genuine kind". W.B. Yeats conceived the poet as the antithesis of the man of action and Jatindranath Dowerah responded to this Yeatsian formula best.

As has been mentioned in the fourth chapter, the political and social set-up, during the time of the emergence of Romanticism in, or rather migration of it into Assam, did not encourage the pursuit of pure aestheticism. Thus Romanticism in Assam could not evolve into any complicated form like aesthetic Romanticism in English poetry.

Though the chief inspiration behind Assamese Romantic poetry was nature in her wide expanse in the vastly rural and agricultural Assam, it was humanism with which it had marked its life-span; it achieved its perfection in Chandrakumar Agarwala, the greatest humanist in Assamese poetry and ended with Devakanta Barua, another great humanist. With the publication of the magazine Jayanti under the editorship of Chakreswar Bhattacharyya and Kamal

20. Ibid., p. 25.
Narayan Dev from the year 1943, a new age in Assamese literature was heralded; and with that, Romanticism in Assamese poetry came to be regarded as a mode of poetry of the past.\footnote{Gobinda Prasad Sarna: 'The Progressive Movement in Assamese Literature' in Contribution of Writers to Indian Freedom Movement, ed. N.V. Krishna Warrior, Indian Writers Union, Arunapuram, Kerala, 1985.}