INTRODUCTION

Romanticism, as it expressed itself in the Romantic Movement in England of the nineteenth century, was a revival of a spirit long neglected, and later even disparaged. It made its existence felt as a protest against the consciously followed ideal of rationality of the eighteenth century, recognising the predominance of human sentiment and emotion. But the Renaissance and the accompanying Romantic Movement in Assam during the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century did not emerge as any such reaction.

The fag-end of the Ahom reign, with its political unrest and internal conflicts, had been a time of tribulation for Assam. The devastations of the Burmese invasions obliterated whatever hope of stability was there for the Assamese people. Assam, that could once pride herself in being one of the earliest Indian provinces to possess a mature literature of her own, now came under the grip of a dark age. Under the traumatic experiences of the Burmese invasions, the fountain of all creative activities dried up.

Then according to the treaty of Yandabo in 1826, a very significant event in the history of the state, Assam came under the British rule. The British Government introduced Bengali as the medium of instruction in schools.
and also as the language of the court. This served as a death-blow to Assamese literature already in a moribund state. It was through the effort of the Christian Missionaries and some enthusiastic local youths that the language of Assam was finally redeemed and its literature revived through Orunodol, the literary organ of the Missionaries. But this revival of the Assamese literature can, by no stretch of imagination, be called a rejuvenation of the earlier literature that had flourished in the hands of the Vaishnav writers and also in the form of historical writings under the auspices of the Ahom kings. It, instead, began to imbibe the Western thought and outlook that were getting easy access with the spread of English education and acquired all the symptoms of the English Romantic literature that had attained the pinnacle of glory during the period of the nineteenth century in England.

Now, as has already been hinted at, the Romantic literature in Assam had nothing in common with the earlier literature of Assam, and had, instead, resembled to a great extent, Romanticism in English poetry. Romantic poetry in Assam is an entirely new import and is completely different from medieval Assamese poetry; and the perspectives of the Romantic Movement in Assam have their similarities more to the European, especially English Romantic Movement than to any earlier Indian Movement. How could this change in ideal
and spirit, and to a great extent: even in form, come? Through the influence of English literature of course. This present work is a humble effort to show the nature of this change — how, under what circumstances and to what extent Assamese poetry from 1889 till the end of the Second World War, had been influenced by English poetry. To study the various forms and contents of Assamese Romantic Poetry during the period concerned, as they emerged under the influence of English Romantic poetry, to find out to what extent Assamese Romantic poets like Lakshminath Bezbaroa, Chandrakumar Agarwala, Hemchandra Goswami, Raghunath Choudhary, Ambikagiri Roychoudhury, Jatindranath Dowerah, Nalinibala Devi, Ganesh Gogoi, Devakanta Barua and other poets were influenced by Western outlook of life, would be the object of this work. There have been some scattered essay-type works on the influence of Western Romanticism on Assamese poetry. Though we have Mahendra Bora's Ramanyasbad, a systematic and exclusive work on Western Romanticism, a systematic and exhaustive study of the influence of English Romantic literature on Assamese poetry has not yet been done. This work proposes to fill up this gap.

Now, what do we mean by influence? Influence is, as The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary defines it, "the exertion of action of which the operation is unseen, except in its effects, by one person or thing upon another." This I. C.T. Onions (ed.): The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary (1933), Oxford University Press, London, 1959.
exertion undergoes a process in producing the effects which are not imitations. Like original works, this process involves inspiration, and thus can acquire and evolve some characteristics of its own. We have accepted this concept of influence in this work for our study of the subject.

Romanticism in Assam is invariably associated with the Indian Renaissance or the new Indian awakening that had swept all India during the nineteenth century. "The term 'Renaissance' was first used in a specific European context, to describe the great era from about the fourteenth to the sixteenth centuries, when the entire socio-cultural atmosphere of Europe underwent a spectacular transformation". The Renaissance or re-awakening presupposes a preceding period of darkness compared to which the awakening appears all the more glorious and significant." The new wave of thought that had begun to flood the intellectual world of Assam during the nineteenth century after three decades of barrenness, also came to be called Renaissance in this light. The corresponding literary movement emerged as Romantic in nature. But this Renaissance in Assam was, in no way, an isolated event; it was the part of the pan-Indian awakening under the influence of Western thoughts and ideals the impact of which had worked out unprecedented change in

3. Ibid., p. 22.
almost all spheres of Indian life. There has been a tendency to show Renaissance in Assam during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as a revival of the golden age of Shankardev. Lakshminath Bezbaroa first used the term "Renaissance" in relation to the literature that had flourished during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries in Assam. But resignation and self-negation were the distinctive spirits of Shankardev's age like that of the medieval Christian poetry. Secularism and humanism being the two dominant characteristics of the nineteenth century Renaissance, this cannot be said to be a revival of the earlier age. Whatever may be the fact, an attempt has been made in this work to show Renaissance in Assam in its proper and wider Indian context.

Romanticism recognizes the existence of man's volition and it turns out to be the literature of a period when man feels his life to be free. "The exploitation of literature as an index to personality first manifested itself in the early nineteenth century."5 Romanticism advocates faith in the natural rights and liberty of man and in his equality and fraternity. The strongest influence in


the dissemination of this attitude to life was that of the French Revolution. Influence of the French Revolution on English literature is more than evident. "The history of the French Revolution begins with a sermon and ends with a poem." While showing the nature and emergence of English Romanticism, an attempt has been made here to show also the relation between the French Revolution and the Romantic resurgence in England.

In their increasing sympathy for their fellow men and even for lower creatures, the Romanticists evinced an influence of the French Revolution. In response to Rousseau's call of "Back to Nature", they also turned out to be lovers of nature, even a part of nature. Sympathy for fellow human beings and birds and animals, and kinship with the natural objects found the greatest exponent in Wordsworth. Other English Romantic poets were equally ardent in their love of nature. Byron went so far as to identify himself with nature:

I live not in myself, but I become
Portion of that around me; and to me
High mountains are a feeling —
Are not the mountains, waves, and skies, a part
Of me and of my soul, as I of them?

'Child Harold,' Canto III.

Under the influence of such English Romantic poets, the Assamese Romantic poets of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries also proved themselves to be lovers of nature. An attempt has been made in this work to show the nature of this love of man and nature.

Growth of nationalism, one of the prominent Romantic features, owes much to the French Revolution. Not only in England but all over Europe, the French Revolution had helped the germination of cultural nationalism.

Spirit of nationalism was associated with Romanticism in Assam also. The concept of nationalism in India was not an age-old phenomenon. "This idea dawned upon the Indian horizon in the nineteenth century as an impact of and as a reaction to the British colonial rule in India."7 It was only during the later part of the nineteenth century that Assam came to feel herself as a part of India and it was as late as the early part of the twentieth century that she came to sympathize with the Indian nationalism that had developed itself as an all-India consciousness through the struggle for freedom from the imperialist rule. In spite of the awareness of the broader Indian nationalism, Assam, like the other provinces of India, did not lose her distinctive identity. These features of nationalism, along with the

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process of its growth and its role in Assamese poetry have been discussed in this work.

Whether in its recognition of the dignity of man, or in its recognition of the value of human sentiment or emotion, or in its love of nature, or its spirit of nationalism, or longing for the past, or yearning for mystic experience, Romanticism in Assamese poetry resembles English Romanticism. However, against the recognition and influence of Platonic mysticism in English Romantic poetry, mysticism in Assamese Romantic poetry, with most of the poets, came to be based on the Upanishads. The basic values of human life in India are traditionally based on the doctrines of the Upanishads. Though the wave of the Renaissance had violently shaken the Indian sensibility, it could not shake its firm-rooted spiritual structure. This was true of Assam as well. An effort has also been made here to show the reasons of this.

While the intense feeling of a mystic in the Western world may concern itself either with the life of this world or the yearning for the world beyond, in India it is almost always associated with the other world. The Upanishads uphold the quest after Brahman, the highest and the greatest. They also advocate spiritual craving for immortality. "Yet this desire for immortality is no mere desire for personal survival continuing the enjoyment of
pleasures under newer and happier conditions of life whether in this world or in heaven.\textsuperscript{8} Instead

This quest for immortality is identical with the quest of the highest self, the highest truth and reality, the highest Brahman. It is the perception and realisation of the inner spring of our life and inmost spirituality of man as he is within himself, beyond the range of sense and of discursive thought.\textsuperscript{9}

The Assamese poets added to their Romantic intensity by showing a parallel profound love for this terrestrial world, while at the same time, keeping constant to the Upanishadic philosophy. This fact has been registered in the most evident cases like that of Chandrakumar Agarwala and Nalinibala Devi though this applies to almost all the Assamese poets of the period varying in extent.

The English Romantics explored the most sensitive and intimate regions of human thought, made the rigidity of the earlier language to capitulate; they had nothing to stultify. This was true of Assamese Romantic poets as well. In their hands the Assamese language acquired a new pliancy suited for the expression of intensely emotional and

\textsuperscript{9} Ibid., pp.37-38.
personal feelings. With their ever-inclusive tendencies and emphasis on subjective perception, they, like their English counterparts, could and did, catch the fleeting moods of the human mind with all their vividness and variety, and expressed them in the form of images which could claim novelty.

Now, what is this image and what is its use in poetry? "... the image is, in Wyndham Lewis's phrase, the 'primary pigment' of poetry". Pater used the term "vision" for image.

Most commonly, imagery is used to signify figurative language, especially the vehicles of metaphors and similes. Recent criticism, and especially the new criticism, has gone far beyond older criticism in stressing imagery, in this sense, as the essential component in poetry, and as a major clue to poetic meaning, structure, and effect.

Abrams, in his The Mirror and the Lamp, has quoted Hazlitt's words about the image asserting that an instant satisfaction to the thought can be derived only from the perfect coincidence of the image and the words with the feelings we have. And this condition was fulfilled by the Assamese Romantic poets in their use of imagery also. But

however much they could borrow from English poetry in other aspects, they showed originality in the use of imagery. Their images were mostly racy; and this was most conspicuous in Raghunath Chowdhary. Their treatment even of the common images like those of bird and flower was such that they gave the impression of belonging to their own soil. Chandrakumar Agarwala's 'Niyar' (The Dew-drop), one of the earliest specimens of the Romantic sensibility in Assamese, is, in reality, a sequence of such images:

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\begin{align*}
\text{Mukuta maniti pahit jilike} \\
\text{Phatik panit dhowa,} \\
\text{Nishar tara eti sarihe ache} \\
\text{Saragat topani joa.}
\end{align*}
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'Niyar'

(The bead of pearl shines on the petal as if it has been washed in crystal water; in brightness it also resembles the fallen star asleep in heaven).

In this first stanza of the poem, the images of the pearl washed in crystal water, and also of the star, asleep in heaven and dropped down on the earth unaware, are indigenous not in subject matters but in outlook. My object being here to show English influence, it is felt that the work will lose little if this aspect of English Romantic poetry is not brought in greater detail. Of course, Western influence on the use of symbols in poets like Jatindranath Dowerah is duly shown.
Though the present work has been intended to keep confined to the Assamese poetry that came out between 1889 and 1945, frequent allusions have been made to poetry outside this period whenever necessary. For example, without an assessment of the poetical works of Bholanath Das (1858-1936) and Kamalakanta Bhattacharyya (1854-1936), a proper study of Assamese Romantic poetry will be incomplete. These poets can indeed be regarded as the precursors of Assamese Romanticism. Almost all the poets of the period mentioned had their poetic genius developed before the Second World War and they also had completed their creative works by this time though some of them were published later. Even Nalinibala Devi, one of the most prominent poets of the heyday of Romantic poetry in Assam, had only one collection of poems Sandhiyar Sur (Music of the Sunset, 1928), published before 1945. And it will be very inconvenient to base the study of any poet on only a portion of the work where we see his or her flowering of genius. The same applies to two other votaries of Assamese Romantic Poetry, Ambikagiri Roychoudhury and Jatindranath Dowerah. A study of the poetical achievements of these two poets with an exclusion of the former's Anubhuti (Feelings, 1958), and Bedanar Ulka (The Meteor of Sorrow, 1964), and the latter's Banphul (The Wild Flower, 1952) is an absurdity.

Reference to Lakshminath Bezbaroa's prose-works has been made occasionally considering their importance in the
incipient literature though no allusion has been made to the prose works of other poets. Belonging to the early period and possessing versatile talent, Lakshminath Bezbaroa had to play his role in the heralding of the Romantic ideals in which his prose works had played no less an important role than his poetry. However, a few of them reveal behind them a mental make-up which was rather different from that of a Romanticist's. Dante (1265-1321) had linked the Roman past with the world of Christianity, and through him, both found a path into the modern age. In the same manner, Lakshminath Bezbaroa had linked the great Vaishnav period to the period of the Renaissance, a synthesis of which had worked out the undreamt of possibility of a new horizon in Assamese literature.

In spite of all its love of simplicity, Romanticism is synthetic in nature, and as such abounds in contradiction. Shaking off the yoke of religious imposition, the Renaissance period, with its secular humanism, provided the intellectual faculty with a new rational attitude to things. Romanticism, though it had emerged in England as a reaction against the rational insipidity of the Classical period, as a form of the Renaissance in Assam, welcomed the same. This became most evident in the extensive personality of Lakshminath Bezbaroa.
Whatever influence the external events like the French Revolution might exert on its growth and emergence, the nineteenth century Romantic Movement in England was basically a literary movement. In glorifying the individual and the self, Romanticism also exulted in personal feelings and emotions which are best expressed through poetry. Thus poetry became the choicest medium of expression in this period. The Romanticists cherished a common faith in poetry, and it was this faith that bound together poets with polar differences like Wordsworth and Shelley. Thus Romanticism came to be essentially poetic. In the same way, the Assamese poets, with all their varied passions, moods, and sentiments, thoughts and feelings, composed exquisite poems and excelled particularly in lyric. In Chandrakumar Agarwala’s rhythmic verses, a note of sympathy for the common people began to resound, but not in the likeness of the political consciousness roused by the French Revolution in Wordsworth, Shelley and Byron. It has been my endeavour here to examine the similarities as well as the differences between English Romantic poetry and its Assamese counterpart in this respect.

Now, there is the aspect of satire also in Assamese poetry of our chosen period which rather creates a jarring effect in the mind of the reader. "Satire is the literary art of diminishing a subject by making it ridiculous and
evoking towards it: attitudes of amusement, contempt, indignation or scorn. It is mainly a feature of the Restoration and the eighteenth century that followed in England. With its naive simplicity and unsophisticated emotions, English Romanticism had little to do with satire. But Assamese poets like Dandinath Kalita (1890-1950) and Chandradhar Barua (1874-1961) wrote satirical poetry in the Romantic period. Such poets have been kept outside the purview of this work. Lakshminath Bezbaroa had also composed a number of satirical poems; but the real trait of his poetry was Romantic in nature.

Mafijuddin Ahmed Hazarika (1870-1958), another poet who also poses a problem, cannot be called a mystic, though he is a spiritualist. His contribution to Assamese poetry cannot be disputed, yet his poems do not show either the intensity of emotion or the subtlety of imagination essential for true Romantic poetry. As such his poems have not been taken into account in my work. Some poems of Durgeswar Sarma also betray this nature; yet he has been given a separate treatment because of the section of his intensely Romantic poems.

Though the present work aims to assess the influence of the English poets only, occasional reference to the great master-poets of Romanticism like Goethe has also been made.

This proposed work has been divided into six chapters including the conclusion. The first chapter has been intended to focus on the conception of English Romanticism in the context of European Romanticism and its origin and its characteristics. It is not the purpose of this study to defend Romanticism against the charge of its negative aspects like sentimentalism, indolence, irrationalism, indulgence of excessive imagination and emotion and the like; but I have tried to show some other facets of these accusations as are evident from facts. Jacques Barzun, with his book *Classic, Romantic and Modern* has been my inspiration in this approach. The other four chapters include discussion on the Assamese Romantic poetry in its various phases and characteristics.

The influence of English Romantic poetry on the Assamese poets has been both direct and indirect. Whereas direct influence has been the result of the study of English poetry by the Assamese poets, indirect influence has been caused by the reading of Romantic poetry in Assamese or other Indian languages of the poets who have been influenced by English Romantic poetry. Attempt has been made here to show both kinds of influences distinctly.

Approach to Assamese Romantic poetry here has not been from the point of view of form or type of poetry. Poets are discussed individually on the basis of chronology; and
only in discussion of a poet's romantic poetry showing English influence, the form of the poems comes for discussion. It is only thus that the sonnet form comes for discussion in the context of Hemchandra Goswami, or the epic form in the context of Hiteswar Barbarua.

Instead of using English translations of the Assamese poems in verse form as quotations, original poems have been used in this work to illustrate the views as translations are feared to be inadequate to retain the original sense, fervour or grace. English translations have been provided with all quotations in Assamese.

English translations of the titles of the books or poems have been provided only once — wherever they are first introduced.

As has been earlier stated, order of discussions of Assamese poets has been chronological here and no distinction has been made between major poets and minor poets in the discussion. It is all because, sometimes a minor poet becomes more important in the discussion of influence as even a major poet may not evince Western influence worth some discussion. However, in the course of discussion of a poet, some remark is generally passed about his or her general status or position as a poet.