Chapter – IV

THOMAS HARDY AND ASSAMESE REGIONAL NOVEL - A CONTEXTUAL COMPARISON
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4.1: REGIONALISM

In literature, regionalism refers to fiction or poetry that focuses on specific features— including characters, dialects, customs, history and topography— of a particular region. Since the region may be a reaction or reflection of the author’s own, there is often nostalgia and sentimentality in the writing. The regional novel, thus, is the novel depicting physical feature, life, customs, manners, history etc. of some particular region or locality; not necessarily a factual reporting or photographic reproduction, but a highly creative work of art. ‘The regional novel concentrates on a particular region of a nation being conscious of its characteristics which are unique to that region and differentiate it from other common motherland’.\(^1\) However, the selected region becomes a symbol of the world at large, a microcosm which reflects the great world beyond. The greatness of the regional novelist lies in the fact that he surmounts the bounds of his chosen region, and makes it universal in its appeal. That explains the continuing and world-wide popularity of regional novels.

Thomas Hardy being the most important of the regional novelists of England deserves more space and attention. His greatness as a regional novelist lies in his depiction of Wessex, the most elaborate study of landscape in the English literature. He has stressed in highlighting the conflict between man and nature, reconstructing the aspects of regionalism in English novel, depicting the nature and environment of the particular region, Wessex, and the people therein. His Wessex stretches

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His Wessex stretches from the English Channel in the South, to Cornwall in the West, and Oxford to the North. It is this limited region which forms the scenic background to each of his Wessex Novels. The same physical features—hills and dales, rivers, pastures, meadows, woodlands, and heaths—appear and reappear in all his works. There is hardly a corner of the region that is left unexplored by Hardy in his novels. "Wessex, one part of a small island, is his ground; and of Wessex, he takes one part in especial, the country of Dorset: he has rarely left it throughout fifteen books."\(^2\)

The major undertaking of Hardy was the firm establishment of his imaginative world of Wessex—geography, landscape, folk ways, agricultural pursuits, quaint peasantry—as a background of the drama of his main characters. Beginning with the slender idyll of Under the Greenwood Tree, he proceeded to the full-length pastoral of the sheep-country, Far from the Madding Crowd, and reached the height of his power in The Return of the Native and Tess of the D’Urbervilles. And his remarkable achievement had been in the settings and ways of life that had impressed his childish imagination, at his father’s cottage in a picturesque hamlet in Dorset. The somber beauty of the country and the quaintness of peasant ways and thought penetrated his spirit and become the very ground and substance of his imagination.

As a novelist, Hardy confines himself to one district of England, which he calls Wessex (the land of West Saxons). In fact, he gave this name to the district in which he was born and with which he was most intimately associated. He resurrected the old name of the locality, Wessex, which comprises Dorset, Wiltshire, Hampshire, parts of Berkshire and Somerset. There are certain natural and other features of the country within this boundary, which distinguish it from the northern and eastern district. The land abounds, with relics from the past—the

\(^2\) Johnson, Lionel: The Art of Thomas Hardy, p. 86
ancient Roman roads, walls, ruined amphitheatres, fortifications, burial vaults, mounds, the Stonehenge and altars of the ancient Britons. The surface of the earth is varied and undulating, valleys alternating with uplands, heath with deep woods, barns with luxuriant vegetation. The soil is chalky and white, and the principal occupation is agriculture.

It is rarely seen that a man of genius ties himself to his native place as closely as Hardy has done. What he has lost in variety of scenery, he has gained in accuracy of observation and sureness of touch. He was extremely successful in his observation of surrounding and reproducing it with his absolute imagination. “Hardy’s power not only absorbs minute details and changes in the world around him, but links them up with human personality with consummate skill. His ears are open to every slight sound, he sees (and makes us see) every delicate shade of colour, and he constantly creates the illusion in the reader’s mind that he is in the actual spot described.”

Hardy has the power of presenting beneath the familiar surface, and shows that in spite of his restricted field of observation human nature is not wanting in richness and variety. He presented the towns, villages, rivers, hills and valleys of his chosen region in a thinly veiled nomenclature, which any native of the place can identify with exactness. Thus, his Casterbridge is Dorchester, his Budmouth is Weymouth, his King’s Bere is Regis, his Wintoncester is Winchester, and so forth. Within this area every road is known to Hardy, every legend, every relic of antiquity, together with hosts of family histories and traditions. This is why Hardy’s novels are also known as Wessex novels. His range is limited within the four walls of his region, Wessex. In all his novels, the scenes and characters are taken from this region. Brought up in a peasant community, Hardy is superbly successful in drawing the portraits of the natives of Wessex with all their tests, habits, likes

3. Grimsditch, Herbert B: Character and Environment in the Novels of Thomas Hardy, p.41
and dislikes, joys and miseries. Every event of his novel, therefore, takes place in this region. In fact Hardy's soul and spirit got mingled with the soul and spirit of Wessex people. It is noted that Hardy's art is mainly built as a result of his deep and sympathetic understanding of the short and simple annals of the poor Wessex people- farmer-labourers, hay-trousers, dairy-maids and shepherds and shepherdesses.

As a regional novelist, the greatest strength of Hardy is his presentation of people and their customs dwelling in the region he selected. These people living in Wessex are soaked in tradition, the tradition of a primitive class rooted in the soil, which is their function to typify. One may in them find the spiritual history of countryside: Feudalism, Catholicism and Protestantism, law and education and tradition, changes in agriculture and commerce and tenure, in traffic and society and living, all these have worked a wrought upon these people. They are as eternal as the wood and field and heaths.

It is observed that these folk display their thoughts and humours most racially and richly, when their talk turns more upon the common emotions, birth and death, and two or three intermediate affairs of the moment. Their talk is shrewd, rude of an earthly and material savour. Hardy makes them talk in such a language as with a smatting of Wessex dialect. He makes his rustics speak in Wessex dialect because he thinks Wessex dialect is the passport to our intimacy with the Wessex folk. However, he makes but a spring use of the local words of Wessex dialect because he properly understands that too much of these words or an exact phonograph of Wessex dialect will spoil his works. So he contrives to reconcile the demands of truth with those of art in a way which brings Wessex before our eyes and the echo of its speech resounds in our ears.

The Wessex folk are far from the madding crowd; away from the confused commerce of towns, and tumult and turmoil of modernization, in which nature
plays a direct part with what influence upon soul and body. For crowds and multitudinous traffic, these men have innumerable society of natural things, trees and winds and waters; they find companionship in creatures of woodland and the fields; their hopes, fears, experiences, sciences, their faith and love, sorrow and hate, are nourished by the Mighty Mother Earth.

These Wessex folk, fast rooted in the soil, have mental immobility i.e., orthodoxy. Their religion is represented as ‘fetishistic’: a primitive superstition about places and things, persons and practices, of a pagan original, and only disguised under a Christian nomenclature. They entertain many superstitions. They are impregnated with legendary lore. They lead a calm and quiet life, in the lap of nature and are deeply affected by it.

Hardy has a great love to depict men and women of strength and stability of character, of somewhat pagan severity, grand in suffering, simple and resolute. His mastery in the art of characterization is seldom questioned. He is most successful and obviously writers with most enjoyment when deals with the characters and the place with which he is most familiar and which he studied most accurately. But his success as one of the greatest regional novelist lies on his portrayal of immortal characters drawn from the common and lower class men and women who are deeply rooted and affected by the locality they live in. In this regard Goodman rightly remarked – “He is not much interested in middle-class respectability, and not at ease with aristocracy. But his peasants are integral parts of the landscape in which they live and move: the characters and the scenery form one organic whole, and they are inseparable without infinite damage to both.”

The portrayal of the rustic characters, which forms one of the basic requirement of regional novel, with due importance to draw the conflict and the desired tragedy into the story is a great strength of Hardy.

The peasants of Thomas Hardy do not form a class apart from the characters in the Wessex novels, for almost by imperceptible gradation, the background or chorus of yokels is connected with the principal characters who are higher in social scale. Hardy has protested more than once against the cityman's view of undifferentiated 'Hodge'. In *Tess of D'Urbervilles* he remarks that 'these rustic are beings of many minds, being infinite in difference; some happy, many serene, a few depressed, one here or there bright even to genius, some stupid, others wanton, others austere.' "The importance of these people varies with the social strata in which the several stories are set. In *Under the Greenwood Tree* we are in the midst of them; in *The Woodlanders*, they play a great part; in *Far From the Madding Crowd* and still more in *The Mayor of Casterbridge* they serve rather as part of the background and as a sort of chorus that observes and comments upon events."\(^5\)

The peasants and rustics are part of the landscape. They are thoroughly at ease in their world. They lead unspeculative lives close to nature, never rebelling against circumstances. If they complain at all — and it is only the feeble among them that do so — it is usually of small physical ills of little moment. Hardy shows no concern for their 'social condition'. Often he seems to be out of sympathy with the advance of so-called education, believing that National Schools obliterate more of value than they give. He lays no stress on their poverty; in fact he declares that their misery has been much over-estimated. It is the rustic in the Wessex Novels who are happy, for the secret of happiness as is said in the *Woodlanders* lies in limiting the aspirations. They are quietists without being aware of the fact. Importantly they are necessarily unintelligent. Many are shrewd, some witty, nearly all unconsciously humourous.

\(^5\) Chew, Samuel C.; *Thomas Hardy: Poet and Novelist*, 1921
It is very obvious that it has been the nature; the immortal Wessex, its environment and the characters therein that has formed the background of Thomas Hardy’s novel giving it the Regional note. His love for nature and its relation or rather domination upon helpless human is the chief subject matter of his novels. Here to draw conclusion the lines of David Daiches can be repeated-

“Setting his character in that southern corner of England he named Wessex, a large agricultural region steeped in History and slow to emerge from the older rhythm of rural life and labor into the modern industrial world, he saw them as elemental figures whose passions were doomed to run the course that the human condition set for them, figures who, contemplated against a background of immemorial and indifferent nature, of the recurring procession of the seasons, and suggestive and mysterious relics of the human past-Roman remains, Stonehenge or less tangible relics such as lingering folks customs and superstitions- acted out their general tragic dramas with a dignity imposed on them by the simple fact of their having to endure the human lot.”

Hardy’s greatness as a regional novelist is beyond any question or doubt. He has acquired a thorough knowledge of his region. He has described the features of his Wessex, its man and manners, nature and topographic scenery with great accuracy and realism. Hardy has revealed the beauty and charm of Wessex to the reader’s eye and immortalized it. It must not be supposed that he inhabited a region with which none could compare in beauty, or that such spots exist nowhere else. What is true is that all these landscapes of meadow and wood, all these pictures of villages and rustic scenes are indebted for their existence and immortalization to Hardy. This wonderful observer discovered things which did

not exist for the ordinary eye. It is enough to travel in Wessex to be convinced that many a land become a realm changed with poetry and beauty, if only it finds the hand which will illuminate. Hardy is great in virtue of his penetrating and flexible interpretation of his native earth.

Similar to those in Thomas Hardy, the Assamese regional novelists also very successfully presented their regions with its entire local colour. Nabakanta Baruah in his *Kapiliparia Sadhu* depicted his native land in the district of Nagaon by the bank of the famous Kapili river. Baruah tried his best to explore each and every corner of the small village through the childish adventure of the main character Rupai. However the novelist equally emphasised in depicting the city where Rupai stayed for his study at the lawyer’s house. Thereafter the novel illustrated the freedom struggle, Rupai’s joining into it, going to jail and thereafter returning to his own village inspired by Gandhian ideology. Once again the setting of the course of action for the rest of the novel was the small village by the bank of Kapili River. Nabakanta Baruah beautifully depicted the relation between man and nature in general and the mysterious relation between Kapili and its people in particular. The novelist described “*Kapili is the life-force of the people living by the bank of Kapili. Kapili is a living river and it is associated with their life and death.*” 7 The Kapili River played the same role that the Egdon Heath played in *The Return of the Native*. The people living by the Kapili River were just like her sons and daughters. The novel beautifully presented the mysterious relationship of mother and son between Kapili and Rupai.

Nirupama Borgohain’s *Sei Nadi Nirabadhi* explores the small village, called Simalia, by the bank of Pagladia in the district of Nalbari. This is not imaginary region. Rather, like Hardy’s Wessex, this is also a real place touched by the author’s creative imagination. The novelist herself revealed the fact that

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7. *Baruah, Nabakanta: Kapiliparia Sadhu, p. 3*
she took shelter in Simalia in her childhood and these memories of her old days found a creative form in the novel. This novel highlighted the life of the people living by the bank of Pagladia river. She is the cause of ‘will and woe’ for the people. She provides them with their livelihood and also ruined them by her devastating flood. Pagladia, becoming the life-force of that region, controlled her surrounding. The central figure Lakshmi was entirely ruled by the mighty force of Pagladia. Like Kapili in Kapiliparia Sadhu and Egdon Heath The Return of the Native, Pagladia too was the central figure of that novel; and all the characters and incidents move round it. The novel also provided apt description of those things which are still available on the scene. A brief visit to the location would encounter one with the Bhogibaba’s monastery, the arjun tree and the bakul tree therein, the Gangapukhuri and the high school near it. These real things still exist and can be witnessed in Sunseria village, next to Simalia village in the district of Nalbari.

Borgohain’s another novel Iparar Ghar Siparar Ghar presented the degradation of rural life under the impact of socio-economic changes after independence of India. The novelist took a small unknown village of Nalbari district as her setting and beautifully presented the pathos of the people living there in, giving a vivid detail of the area. He also brought the picture of the city to illustrate the difference between the city life and village life. Here again the Pagladia river played a very important role in the novel. The river, this time, did not dominate the scene like the previous novel; but it did serve as a link in the storyline, uniting all the incidents and happenings into an organic whole.

Silabhadra’s novels explore the details of the Gauripur region in the district of undivided Goalpara. Madhupur gave a detailed picture of the socio-economic and political scenario of Gauripur along with the difference between the wealthy

the wealthy landlords and the poor peasants; and the conflict aroused between them. *Ahatguri* is another fine depiction of the changing situation in the region; the influence of industrialization, the influence of urbanization is beautifully handled in the novel. This novel explained the unavoidable and quick transformation of a small village into a big town. In doing so, the novelist with his own experience, provided with the details of once existing Perperia village and the newly set up Ahatguri town. *Agamanir Ghat* also is a successful reflection of the social, political, economic and cultural aspects of the west Goalpara region. It was, as if the second episode of the author’s previous novel *Madhupur*. Written in an autobiographical style, this novel explored the physical locations of that region along with its inhabitants as well as the migrants who came there for work. ‘Silabhadra’s novels, as observed by Basanta Bhattacharjee, could make a kind of universal appeal, and this was done due to the author’s sensitive inspection of his region Madhupur.’

In all his novels, Silabhadra concentrated on analysing the true nature of the Gauripur region through the help of introducing various characters and installing various incidents. All this, being from his own experience, had been presented more realistically. He left no stone unturned to bring forth a true picture of the west part of the Goalpara district and present it in front of the world. In his own word:

“Our region in the west part of Assam is not seen anywhere in Assamese literature........my Madhupur, Agamani Ghat,...etc. are written on the backdrop of my own region...... Today some of the people from other parts of Assam have come to know about Dhuburi. They have known about Madhupur i.e. Gauripur. They have heard

9. Thakur, Nogen: *Exo Basaror Asamiya Upanyas*, P. 590, Basanta Bhattacharjee’s article* Silabhadrar Upanyas.}
of Agamani, Gangadhar, Gadadhar etc. I shall proudly say that I have had my contribution in this regard.\textsuperscript{10}

Truly speaking Gauripur has been the Wessex for Silabhadra. Silabhadra has done the same with Gauripur region what Hardy had done to popularise Wessex.

Mamoni Raisom Goswami’s ‘\textit{Dantal Hatir Uniye Khowa Howda}’ is another beautiful specimen of Assamese Regional novel. This novel depicted the limitation of woman’s life and their untold miseries bestowed by the traditional dogmatism; the devastated social system and its wasted human lives due to adverse affect of intoxicating \textit{Kaani}; and the decaying social values and the vanity of the wealthy-powerful-royal Brahmins of the Amranga Satra. Goswami selected the Amranga Satra of South Kamrup for her region. The geographical location that the novelist explored was a specific region that included, apart from Amranga Satra, Borihat, Sikarhat, Pat Haladhiya, Heradom, and the surrounding area of Jagalia. With a scenic description of this region, the novelist reflected in her novel the hopes and aspirations of the people living thereby. The novelist’s love for her region could be vividly experienced with the beautiful projection of the same. That might be the reason why Dr. Gyanendra Sarma Pathak compared Mamoni Raisom Goswami’s intimacy and affinity towards her region with that of Scott’s love towards Twida river and Morisus’ love towards Thames.\textsuperscript{11} It may be mentioned, without hesitation, that her love towards Jagalia region can be no less than Hardy’s love towards Wessex.

Similar to Thomas Hardy, the Assamese regional novelists had also shown their great strength in preserving the people and their customs dwelling in the regions they selected. The people presented in the Assamese regional novels

\textsuperscript{10} Borgohain, Homen (Edited) : Satsari, 2nd Year, Vol. III (1-15 Sept.2005) p.6 ; Bhabani Prasad Adhikari’s article : Katha Madhukar Silabhadrar Jiwan aru Sahitya Sadhana.

\textsuperscript{11} Sarma Pathak, Gyanendra: Sahitya Bithika, p.115
were simple, orthodox and deeply rooted to their soil. They were intertwined with their folk tradition and folk customs. Nabakanta Baruah’s *Kapiliparia Sadhu* is a fine example in this regard. Through this novel the novelist beautifully highlighted the way of preaching Vaishnavite cult among common people in Hinduism particularly in Nagaon region. The customary practices of Hindu disciple, obeying a religious Guru, the religious institutions like Satras and their systems etc. were discussed in the novel. The death rituals and the customary laws of death ceremony etc. were also find fine expression in the novel. Being a short and precise novel, all these customs and traditions were not discussed in an elaborate manner. Nevertheless, the novelist provided all necessary rituals of a hindu society, that prevailed in that region, with his poetic genius.

Nirupama Borgohain’s both the novels *Sei Nadi Nirabadhi* and *Iparar Ghar Siparar Ghar* provide a fine display of social customs practised by the people living by the bank of Pagladia in Nalbari district. The people living in this region were agriculture based; and hence most of them were not financially sound. But they were generous enough to carry gifts according to their might, whenever they visited their relatives and others. Carrying a gift became one of their social customs. The woman in that region did not go without ornaments. Even the poorest of the poor wore something even though it was a duplicate one. “*Having no ornaments in their neck and wrist was against their custom. Only widow don’t wear anything*”. Apart from these, practice of untouchability, considering widow marriage a social evil, domination on women by men in the name of tradition and custom etc. were shown very beautifully and elaborately in Borgohain’s novels. The novelists concentrated and tried to expose those social customs which exploited women in a male dominated society and deprived them from their due. On the whole all the novels were successful in presenting an

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12. Borgohain, Nirupama: *Sei Nadi Nirabadhi*, p. 29
an unveiled reality of the socio-economic environment and the life and living of the village people.

Regionalism in terms of social customs and systems were very much obvious in the novels of Silabhadra. The author in his novels presented a convincing realistic picture of the Gauripur region. His *Ahatguri* is a descriptive novel whereas *Madhupur* and *Agamani Ghat* were written in autobiographical style. The novelist's real life experience had peeped through his writings, as Silabhadra himself mentioned that he had been a product of the geographical environment and socio-economic situation of Gauripur region. That was the reason that the local customs and rituals, practice and believes, festivals and celebration etc. found beautiful expression in the novels. The power and tyranny of the landlords, the pride and vanity of the wealthy aristocrats, and the weakness of the poor peasants determined the social customs in the contemporary society. Silabhadra discussed the virtue and vice of the feudal system that became the custom of the age. The new progressive generations advanced into new light discarding the old system that the old generation could not take for granted and there arose the conflict which made the central theme of the novel. The poor and low class people accepted all injustice meted to them by the landlords as it was considered the tradition. However, things changed with time. Silabhadra beautifully highlighted that the age old customs and traditions which were orthodox and based on injustice were bound to change in the force of changing time.

Mamoni Raisom Goswami's *Dantal Hatir Uniye Khowa Howda* is another beautiful specimen of regional novel that may claim sublimity in upholding the traditions and customs of the South Kamrup region in its contemporary period. The novel highlighted the customary practices that prevailed in the Amranga Satra and its nearby areas. The high class Brahmins that ran the Satra exercised

exercised great power and enjoyed higher position in those days; and the poor and low caste peasants obeyed them and considered them their Gods. However the same customs and orthodox traditions suppressed the life of woman, basically the widows, too.

The rigidity of the customary practices and the sufferings of the common people due to them were beautifully depicted in the novel. The young girls kept at home without marriage is considered a sin, the widows could do nothing according to their will; they were devoid of all material pleasures. Ladies were not allowed to go out of boundaries etc. were the adverse affect of those contours, that robbed the woman out of their due. On the other hands the same tradition gave ample power and facilities to the man-folk, mainly the high class brahmin men. The greatest example is that the Satradhikar (the master of the Satra) was worshipped as a God, the cloths he stepped on was preserved as a pious cloth that was even used for curing disease. However, here again the novelist uphold her objection against those dogmatism and attempted to change them through the protest of the character like Giribala etc.

Festivals and rituals carry a very important significance to the folk life. Each region has their own customary believes with which are associated quite a many festivals and rituals. Presenting them became one of the main objectives of the regional novels. As it is available in Hardy’s Wessex novels, one can observe Assamese regional novels containing a rich description of festivals of the concerned regions.

Rajanikanta Bordoloi’s Miri Jiori is very rich with the depictions of rituals and festivals of Miri tribe. Along with the traditional customs and rituals of the Miri tribe, the novel also upholds the description of festivals as well. Charag Puja, Narachiga Bihu, Aoi-nitam etc. were beautifully and elaborately discussed
with beautiful bihu songs, and the young miris celebrating it door to door in the village.

“Miri samajar deka-gabharue dhul-dagar pepa, gagana, taka, tal loi ghare ghare bihu mari takatu ba adhalitu gutaisil.”

Kapiliparia Sadhu also mentioned many rights-rituals and festivals of its society. Among them were Lalung Bihu (the bihu of the Tiwas), Mahjuj (bull fighting), Bhaona (Assames National Theatre) etc.

“Bohagar pratham dina lalung manuhar bihu arambha hai – gabharu hate nache. siparar dekahate jukai – gabharu hateu chinare”

However, a detailed description of these festivals were not to be found in the novel due to its preciseness. Nevertheless, the novelist, with limited words and space, succeeded in bringing forth a rich cultural heritage of the region.

Sei Nadi Nirabadhi provided a beautiful description of Astami Mela on the bank of Gangapukhuri and the sacrificial rights at the monastery of Kali Gusani (the Goddess of Kali). The novel also highlighted the rights and rituals related to the marriage institution. Iparar Ghar Siparar Ghar included a few folk songs of various activities confirming the regional nature of the novel.

Silabhadra’s Madhupur, Ahatguri, and Agamanir Ghat were not less than socio-economic documents of the Gauripur region. While giving an illustration of the social customs, the novelist also provided with vivid details of the major festivals and rituals of the region. Madhupur provided the detail of the Durga Puja which was conducted by the landlords. Naturally it was celebrated in a grand fashion to display the power and position of the wealthy class. Agamanir Ghat depicted Satya Thakur Puja, Charak Puja etc. Giving a pen picture of Charak

14. Bordoloi, Rajanikanta: Miri Jiori, p.10
15. Baruah, Nabakanta: Kapiliparia Sadhu, p.17
Puja, Silabhadra mentioned that it was observed to worship Shiva, the hindu deity. However this puja was restricted among low class Hindus who danced with madness and performed dangerous acts like walking on fire or thorns as a ritual of the puja.\footnote{Silabhadra: Agamanir Ghat, pp. 18-19}

Taking a rural background as the setting, the regional novels normally displays the life style of agriculture based people. They are poor, but happy enough to lead a harmonious life with the nature. Rajanikanta Bordoloi’s Miri Jiori depicted the beautiful cultivating land on the bank of Subansiri river, which provided the platform to Janki and Panei to fall in love which coin the cultural theme of the novel. Nabakanta Baruah’s Kapiliparia Sadhu too discussed the work culture of the poor cultivators who accepted the devastating flood of Kapili as a boon, as they were helpless in front of it. Nirupama Borgohain’s Sei Nadi Nirabadhi depicted the contrasting nature of Pagladia- one calm and quiet, the blessing to the peasants whereas the other wild and destructive, the curse for them. Nevertheless, the regional novels also highlighted the changes in agriculture pattern that occurred in those days. The influence of trade and commerce affected the simple life style of these poor peasants. The world war, industrial revolution, freedom struggle, India’s independence etc. brought noticeable changes in the life of the peasants. The materialistic approach of man motivated them to move to cities for better livelihood. Nirupama Borgohain’s \textit{Iparar Ghar Siparar Ghar} very boldly projected these issues. Tired of Pagladia’s destructions most of the people moved to cities for their livelihood. One who stayed back had been affected by the influence of urbanization. Silabhadra’s \textit{Madhupur} beautifully depicted the influence of education, trade and commerce which helped the new generation to get rid of all the atrocities of the landlords and wealthy class of the society. \textit{Ahatguri} displayed the changing scenario of a place from cultivation to commerce whereas \textit{Agamanir Ghat} was the tale of the poor daily workers. Just like Hardy,
the Assamese regional novels are also set in quiet landscape away from turmoil of the cities; but at the same time the novelists like Silabhadra, Nirupama Borgohain etc. tried to display the gradual influence of modernity and urbanization and spoiling the quietness of rural life.

As it is seen in the case of Hardy’s novel, the Assamese regional novels also presented man and woman of strength. They are too grand in suffering, resolute and simple. The folk presented in Assamese novels are far from the madding crowd, away from breezy commerce of city and deeply rooted in their traditional beliefs. These people entertained superstitions and legendary love. These orthodox beliefes and practices reveal the true nature of the folk psychology.  

Their presence in a novel may truly reflect the life style and social system of the region. In this sense the regional novels become the mirror of folk life. The folk life of Assam is packed with folk beliefs like—traditional customary practices, superstitions, belief in ghosts and spirits, dogmatism etc. Exploring these beliefs and incorporating them into their novels helped the novelists in presenting a true regional picture. Nabakanta Baruah’s *Kapiliparia Sadhu* exposed a life of folk beliefs and practices. The novel dealt with the folk belief that ghosts and spirits did not have shadow, they are afraid of metal like iron etc. The practicing of worship to trees and plants, to river and water etc. found place in Kapiliparia Sadhu. The belief that disease could be cured by the miracle of some religious Gurus etc. were nothing but a kind of superstition that grabbed the society.

Nirupama Borgohain’s novels also displayed and discussed the traditional beliefs that were associated with Pagladia river and its people. The people living by the bank of Pagladia pray and worship it like a living entity. The villagers did

18. Talukdar, Lipika : Asamiya aru Bangla Anchalik Upanyas, p.190
not take anything from the white soldiers thinking that the white disease would transmit to them.

Silabhadra also disclosed the traditional and superstitions folk beliefs that prevailed in this region at his period.

His novel depicted the social situation where women were deprived of education as it was considered fruitless. It was also believed that woman education may bring misfortune to the concerned woman or the family. On the death of a girl who was taught how to read, some local women commented

"Why won't she die? You have got her taught like a boy, that is also English. So tough education, how could a girl bear it!"\(^{19}\)

The superstitious villagers believed that the girl died due to her education. The novelist also disclosed the superstitious beliefs related to feast and festivals, rights and rituals. People throwing stones in a particular temple to get their wish fulfilled is one of such example.

These orthodox customs and superstitious believes revealed the true nature of the region and its people. Thus, discovering the respective region, exploring its geography, investigating the people and their customs etc. the Assamese regional novelists, in true sense, generate an atmosphere of regionalism.

### 4.2: NATURE PORTRAYAL

Nature has always exercised a fascinating influence on minds of regional novelist. It is the nature of the particular region that dominates the theme and scenes of a regional novel. And it is undoubtedly agreed that Hardy was very successful in his portrayal of nature. If word picture could be hung on a wall, a

\(^{19}\) Silabhadra : Madhupur, p. 46
great gallery could be filled with Hardy’s nature picture. He has a great liking for nature. He is in fact a worshipper of nature. Nature enters at his novels much more than it does in the works of other English novelist.

Hardy’s novels are rich in description and scene-painting from nature. In his portrayal of nature, Hardy combines the method of Wordsworth, Clare and Cowper. Following the former Hardy too is fond of presenting a broad sketch of mountain, lake and sunset sky etc. whereas he also concentrates on the details of his sketches, like the later, with loving patient accuracy.

Nature is ever present in his story. With an acute discriminating sense of an observer, Hardy records every impression of nature with attention and at the same time analytical zest. His ear for the sound of nature is both sensitive and highly trained. He has broad and comprehensive outlook that takes in the smaller creatures as well as the greater. His sympathy to the little creature, the way he tells as the frost came on “many a small birds went to bed supperless that night among the bare boughs” or with the advent of spring “birds began not to mind getting wet”. Though it appears to be playful and humourous but it often became charged with deep pathos, when the sorrows of animal world are shown to be not less than human one.

Hardy’s picture of Wessex is the most elaborate study of landscape in English literature. For one thing, it combines, as no other does, breadth and intimacy. We find an example of this combination in the passage which describes Eustacia’s lonely vigil on the night of the fifth of November:

“A tract of country unaltered from that sinister condition which made Caesar anxious every year to get clear of its glooms before the autumnal equinox, a kind of landscape and weather which leads travellers from the south to describe our island as Homer’s Cimmerian land, was not, on the face of it, friendly to women.
It might reasonably have been supposed that she was listening to the wind, which rose somewhat as the night advanced, and laid hold of the attention. The wind, which continued as unbroken ever.”

This passage shows an eye for the detail of the country-scene only possible to a man who had lived in it from earliest youth. Who else would realise that the wind made a different noise when it was blowing through hollow or heather or over bare stones, let alone be able to distinguish them? And his other senses were as informed as his ear. A page or two later, Hardy discriminates equally precisely the feel to the foot of path, of fern, and of heather. “To a walker”, he says, “practised in such places, the difference between impact on maiden herbage and on the crippled stalks of a slight footway perceptible through the thickest boot.” Yet this detail is made subordinate to a general picture. We are not shown the heath through a microscope. An eye for small facts is combined with an eye for the general scene. Indeed, some of his most memorable descriptions (like that of Norcombe Hill) embrace a still greater scope, and reveal their subject in relation to cosmic system. This scope is unique, and it gives Hardy’s vision of the natural world a unique force.

Hardy’s vision of nature dominates his scene. Nature was to him a symbol of those impersonal forces of fate with whom he shows mankind as being in conflict. In two of his novels, The Woodlanders and The Return of the Native, the setting is made to stand for the universe; and in all his successful works it has a symbolic value. Not a background, but an actor in the play, Nature is always present, the incarnation of a living force with a will and a purpose of its own, now and again taking and actual hand in the story (running Henchard’s crops, killing Giles), but more often standing aloof, the silent and ironic spectator of the...
human creatures who struggle on its surface. Nature always moves on its appointed course- waning to spring, yellowing to autumn, with recurrent punctuality, careless whether Tess dies or Anne finds her true love. Now and again the personality of Nature seems to step forward and with one tremendous gesture reduce the human beings in the story to insignificance:

With these words Yeobright went forth from the little dwelling. The pupils of his eyes, fixed steadfastly on blankness, were vaguely lit with an icy shine; his mouth had passed into the phase more or less imaginatively rendered in studies of Oedipus. The strange deeds were possible to his mood. But they were not possible to his situation. Instead of their being before him the pale face of Eustacia, and a masculine shape unknown, there is only the imperturbable countenance of the heath, which having defied the cataclysmic onsets of centuries, reduced to insignificance by its seamed and antique features the wildest turmoil of a single man.  

Nature plays a large part in Hardy’s novels than in those of any other English novelists. It is not just the background in his drama, but a leading character in it. Sometimes it exercises an active influence on the course of the event, more often it is a spiritual agent, colouring the mood and shaping the disposition of human beings. The huge bleak darkness of Egdon Heath dominates the lives of the characters in The Return of the Native, infusing into them its grandeur and its melancholy; the solitary wistfulness of the wood is the keynote of sentiment of the Woodlanders who lives among them. As its title suggests, the distinctive mark of the characters in Hardy’s second novel comes from the fact that they dwell under the greenwood tree. His most living characters are always natives of the countryside. Farmers and shepherds, thatchers and hedgers, they, most of

21. Ibid, p. 329
them, never stay beyond its borders. A few, indeed, go off for the fulfillment of
their aspiration, like Clym or Jude departed to seek fulfillment in higher sphere,
but they remain countrymen. However much they travel or educate themselves,
they bear the stump of field and village on every facet of their personality. Out of
their original environment they are aliens. Indeed, so far as the motives actuating
Hardy’s stories are not motives of rural life, they turn on the conflict between
rural circumstances and the aspirations of the rural individuals towards a more
refined existence. Jude longs to satisfy his desire for learning; Eustacia years for
the colour and luxury of life in Paris; Grace and Fancy hesitate to marry their
rustic sweethearts because a glimpse of the great world has their taste fastidious.

Nature has been used in several capacities by Thomas Hardy in his novels.
The influence of nature on humanity has been presented in different ways in his
novels. Nature influences the moods and actions of Hardy’s human characters.
To understand the self-sacrificing love of Mary South, one must realize the spell
of the brooding woods, the magic of the quiet, enduring tress whose life she
knew so well. The strange, unearthly feeling or early morning to Clara in proximity
to Tess; the tense, boring atmosphere while Gebrial Oak works to save Bathsheba’s
risks from burning- these and many other scenes show natural aspects working
on the mood of the persons and through them on the mood of the readers. The
influence of nature on human beings is best illustrated in *The Woodlanders, Far
From the Madding Crowd, The Mayor of Casterbridge* and *The Return of the
Native*.

Hardy’s love for nature and the earth is an intensely personal and local
one. He shows a profound feeling for the heaths and the pastures of Wessex.
This feeling has little common with the transcendental love of nature felt by
Wordsworth though it is reverse of Wordsworthian in its note of sadness and
fatality. Unlike Wordsworth Hardy found much in nature that was cruel and
antagonistic to man instead of any holy plan or healing power. As in Wordsworth there is certain pantheism to be declared in Hardy’s thought, a feeling that all things are children of Earth and bound up with her life; but with the novelist this does not lead to optimism or belief in the beneficence of nature. There is no Wordsworthian mysticism in Hardy’s portrayal of nature. He does not represent it as the incarnation of a spirit ‘that lives and moves through all things’. Mr. H. C. Duffin deals with the difference between these two great ones in nature lore by saying—“Hardy nowhere express the extreme inference ‘that every flower enjoys the air it breaths’. For the definite formulation and acceptance of that faith perhaps the more transcendent vision of the poet is required.”22

Hardy has more realistic observation of nature and emphasizes on the gloomy part of it which Wordsworth ignored. Like most of the nature lover, Hardy too loves the open life among the country solitudes, feels and conveys the beauty of nature’s external aspects. He admires the simple, rustic people who dwell far from towns. He too links up all life in one great family proceeding from the Mother Earth. But Hardy, at the same time, observes in nature other aspects too: cruelty, indifference and caprice. “On ‘nature’s holy plan’ and on ‘trailing cloud of glory’ Hardy pours out his scorn. Nature is beautiful, yes, but she is the hapless instrument of blind law, and, as such, he is much convinced of her non-morality as Huxley was.”23 For Hardy, Nature is the agent of cruelty and destruction. She has no sympathy for human beings. For him all the resourcefulness, beauty, charm, bewitching power of nature are for the destruction of man. Hardy thinks that nature is insensible to the feelings of man, and finds a sort of fiendish delight in slaying simple human beings. Edgon Heath is the terrible spot where many lives are crushed. The virginity of Tess is ravished by Alec in

22. Duffin, H.C.: Thomas Hardy: A Study of the Wessex Novels, p.56
23. Grimsditch, Herbert B: Character and Environment in the Novels of Thomas Hardy,
the very lap of nature and not a word of protest is heard against the act by nature. Hardy asks- "Darkness and silence ruled everywhere around. Above them rose the primeval yews and oaks of chase. About them stole the hopping rabbits and hares. But, might some say, where was Tess’ guardian angel? Where was the providence of her simple faith?" 24

To Hardy, man was simply a part of nature who was indifferent to his aspirations and went his way without caring much for it. Nature plays a great role in his novels. It is always present, the incarnation of a living force with a will and purpose of its own, now and again taking an actual hand in the story and sometimes standing aloof, the silent and ironic spectator of the human creatures who struggle on its surface. In two of his novels, The Woodlander and The Return of the Native, the setting is made to stand for the universe, and in all his novels it has a symbolic value. Such novels as Under the Greenwood Tree, The Woodlander and Far From the Madding Crowd etc. bear the sign manual of nature loving Hardy in their titles and the generous manner in which these novels fulfill the promise thus held needs no demonstrations. Hardy’s nature scenery shown to us at any point in a story will be found to have an emotional connection with the events happening at that moment. Hardy has reproduced atmospheric effect, and it is done quite successfully.

No other novelist can render the sights and smells of the countryside with such evocative sensuousness, or surround daily tasks with such intimate tenderness. No one before Hardy had made the landscape part of the story. 25 His Dorsetshire, for which he retained the old name of Wessex, is a land of memories, where the hills are crowned with Roman camps, and where barrows hide even more ancient remains. It is a very old pagan part of England:

"Civilisation was its enemy; and ever since the beginning of vegetarian its soil had worn the same antique brown dress, the natural and invariable garment of the particular formation. In its venerable one coat lay a certain vein of satire on human vanity in cloths.\textsuperscript{26}

The landscape is always there in the novels, sometimes grimly smiling, sometimes frankly menacing, outstretching the little span of human life by immemorial aeons and dwarfing into pathetic insignificance the human tragedies played out before it as on a stage.

With his intimate knowledge of natural phenomena, Hardy makes his readers feel, by his delicate and multifold allusiveness, the significance of the life of the countryside. The individuality of the damp and fragrant woods; the meaning of the wind’s voice, whether for storm or tranquility; the pre monitor of the tempest; the spirit of the heath at every hour of the day and night; above all, the mystic relation between the toiling peasants and the hills and valleys where they live and move and have their being.

Nature has always been a source of aspiration for the regional novelists. It plays a vital role in the Assamese regional novels too, as it is already seen in case of Wessex novel. As is the novels of Thomas Hardy, the Assamese regional novels also concentrate in a rich description of nature of the concerned regions highlighting its relation and influence on human beings.

Rajanikanta Bordoloi’s Miri Jiori upholds beautiful nature portrayal. The villages by the bank of Subansiri River, their beautiful and scenic natural beauty inspire the life of the Miri people. They consider the Subansiri river as their mother. The flow of this river through the hills and jungles of the region was beautifully portrayed by the novelist.

\textsuperscript{26. Hardy, Thomas: The Return of the Native, p. 14}
This extract is enough to exemplify Bordoloi’s art of nature portrayal. The novelist gave simple but attractive portrayal of the hills, dales, rivers and forest in the novel. The nature portrayal has nowhere been exaggerated in Miri Jiori. The novel beautifully shows how nature influence the life of people; mainly the Miri people in hills and valley by the bank of Subansiri. Living amidst nature, in the hills and jungles, the Miri tribe becomes fierce. They naturally developed the skills to face the natural calamities. The impact of nature makes them open minded. The nature girl Panei even didn’t hesitate to express her heartfelt love towards Janki.

"Janki tok moi bhal pao, tuk moi maram karu, saday tuk chakur agat dekhi thaku; moi tuloihe jam".

While portraying nature in Miri Jiori, the author gave top priority in portraying the Subansiri river, which is shown as the life force of the novel. Subansiri is the Goddess for the Miri people. It has served the same purpose in the novel that the Edgon Heath did in the Return of the Native. The river is the witness of the will and woe of the Miris. It is a character in the story of the novel. The Miris feel intimate with the river. They develop their villages by its bank; and live with her. The novel also depicts beautiful paddy fields of the Mising villages. The main love story of Janki and Panei also began in the beautiful green fields by the bank of Subansiri. The river and its beautiful nature helped blooming the love between these lovers and at the end home them after their death.

27. Bordoloi, Rajanikanta: Miri Jiori, p. 2
28. Ibid, p.27
29. Sarma, Satyendranath: Asamiya Upanyasar Bhumika, p.77
The human-nature relationship is beautifully portrayed in this novel. The tribal people living amidst nature give more value to its existence. They adore nature more; and the nature in return bestowed its blessings on them. The novelist made the human nature relationship more beautiful with gracious impact of the Subansiri river and its intimacy with simple Miri people.

"Aai Subansirir Asamiya manuhatkoi paharar para aha saral bhabar Miri manuh bilakar uparat chenh bechi....Subansiri aair sital pani nakhale sihatar piyah napalai. Aai Subansirir kulat saru saru nawat uthi umaliba napale Mirihatar manat rang nalage" 30

Nabakanta Baruah’s portrayal of nature is poetic and romantic as well. The beautiful and graceful river Kapili, its impact on the people living nearby, the green cultivating fields and surroundings etc. are beautifully depicted in his Kapiliparia Sadhu. The novel itself begins with a beautiful natural description of the Kapili river flowing down the valley from the Jayantia hills.


Being a poet novelist by nature, Nabakanta Baruah’s narration was very much musical, especially when it takes to the portrayal of nature. The novelist tries to provide a mysterious portrayal of nature, confirming the idea that nature is elegant, gracious and delightful; yet at the same time unpredictable, uncontrollable and beyond human understanding. It has a mysterious relationship and untold domination over human. Confirming nature-human relationship in the novel; famous critic Sisir Kumar Das writes, "This novel is a fine and sensitive

30. Bordoloi, Rajanikanta : Miri Jiori, p.3
31. Baruah, Nabakanta : Kapiliparia Sadhu, p.1
study of relation between man and nature in general and mysterious relationship of man and nature, symbolised by the river Kapili flowing through the Nagaon district in particular.³²

Nature has been portrayed as an agent with motherliness that home the people living amidst it. The villagers enjoy the natural beauty by the bank of Kapili. The river waters their green fields to grow paddy for their livelihood. Many a people go on fishing to lead their lives. Kapili is the source of attraction for everybody in the village. The beauty of Kapili even at night thrills everyone.

‘‘Taktakkare ranga juntu Kapilir bukut sumai goise.’’³³

Kapili is second mother to the hero of the novel. Rupai was found in Kapili; and though he was brought up by Dhir Singh, he always felt a kind of attraction towards Kapili. The river consoles him and solaces him. Even after knowing the truth that he was not the actual son of Dhir Singh, he jumped into Kapili trying to end up his life at the lap of his nature mother. Rupai fell in love with Sunpahi in the lap of nature, sustained it amidst nature and also calmly accepted the death of his Sunpahi at the end, considering that it was the will of his nature mother Kapili. Thus the character of Rupai becomes a mysterious one only because of his mysterious association with nature.

However, Nabakanta Baruah has not confined himself in portraying the beautiful and agile side of the nature. The mystery of nature also lies in its dark side. Kapili is fragile, pleasant, stunning and gorgeous in one hand while tough, deceitful, destructive, furious on the other hand. The rage of Kapili destroys the peaceful life of its people creating human tragedy. The flooded Kapili brings misfortune and unfinished tragedy to the poor peasants living thereby.

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32. Das, Sisir Kumar : History of Indian Literature, 1911-1956, p. 843
33. Baruah, Nabakanta : Kapiliparia Sadhu, p.76
The river Kapili controls the course of action in the novel. It controls the life of the people. It takes away life and property by overflowing during the flood. It destroys green fields, ruins the fruit of hard toil by the poor peasants and leads them to misfortune and misery. The novelist, here, is of the viewpoint that nature does not always respond to human need. It quite sometimes rebel as if it takes a kind of pleasure at the suffering of the human world. The holy plant of nature sometimes turn so cruel that the human world shatters with pain and agony; and the nature takes delight in it.

Nature plays a vital role in the novels of Nirupama Borgohain too. Her *Sei Nadi Nirabadhi* and *Iparar Ghar Siparar Ghar* are set in the beautiful natural backdrop of the region by the bank of Pagladia river. Her first novel *Sei Nadi Nirabadhi* begins with a beautiful description of the river Pagladia in the following words:

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"Pagladia noir panit ratipuwar rod pari, dhau bur jilmilaise.
Naikhanar thik sumajate ubhali pari thaka banh-jupat panir sute
badha puwat kal kal sabda eta uthise."
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34. Borgohain, Nirupama: *Sei Nadi Nirabadhi*, p.1

However, the romantic description of nature doesn’t sustain for long in the novel. Soon nature shows its other side- rude, destructive and non-responsive to human world. The novel begins with the beauty of nature; but ends with the depiction of nature as a vital force of demolition.

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"Tar pachat sunya dristire samukhar bhayankar no khonoloi chai
murar chulibur ajuri tani si abyakta artanadat gumari uthii."
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35. Ibid, p. 302

Nature, in the novel as it is shown, is the source of joy and peace. It is seen as a mysterious agent. The heroine of the novel, Lakshmi, is the product of
nature—simple and wild, easygoing but mysterious like the Pagladia itself. It is calm and quiet at a time, but unpredictable. Dipu enjoys the natural beauty of Pagladia and its surroundings. The beauty of nature takes a romantic description in this novel. The beauty of Pagladia river at the time of evening, under a moonlit sky gives an elegant nature portrayal in the novel.

"Akasat junak uthil. Panit junakar tirbirani..... chariophale khula pathar, junakat ujwal akash patharar sipare digantat milise; gaonlia ratir atut stabdhata aru junak pari jiliki thaka Pagladia noikhanar ei sokalubure tar manat ek abdhut ek aparthiv soundarjyatar anubhutit dubi jai." 36

But it is not always so. Nature has a contrasting aspect. It is destructive, an agent of annihilation. Like Thomas Hardy, Nirupama Borgohain also didn’t consider nature only as a romantic agent. There is also a gloomy part of the nature. Highlighting the Pagladia river as the agent of nature, the author described how it became the cause of sorrow and misfortune. The nature that had provided space for happy play way for the villagers, but it again destroyed everything. The author depicted the mysterious and aggressive nature of Pagladia.


The beautiful nature has ceased to be so any more. It has stopped showing sympathy to mankind. The Pagladia foamed with flood. The elegant and delightful

36. Borgohain, Nirupama: Sei Nadi Nirabadhi, p. 27.
37. Ibid, p. 65
river suddenly turns to be the terminator of human happiness. It destroys the beautiful paddy field, kills lives robbing a poor woman of her motherhood. This dark aspect of nature was never seen by Wordsworth. But Hardy saw it; so was Nirupama Borgohain:

"Bijuli chamaki uthil, aru tar puharat, Dipue dekhile, tar samukhat ekhan bishal samudra, era samudra, eikhon ketiau tar parichita Pagladia noi haba nuware, ketiau nuware....... pagla noi khanar garjanat kan jen tal mari jaba khuje. Tathapi sei unmatta garjanar sabda neochi Dipu jen khub manujugare aan eta sabda sunar chesta kariba dharile. Ekmatra putrahara ejani bidhaba jananir hiya bhaga artanadar dhwani."  

Thus showing the devastating power of nature, the novelist established once again, like Hardy, that nature controls the future of human race. It is destiny in many occasions. Humans are just mere puppets in the hands of mighty nature.

Borgohain’s other novel *Iparar Ghar Siparar Ghar* too portrays both the aspects of nature in a complete realistic manner. The novel in one hand gives a striking and graceful nature portrayal of green fields, forest, birds, clean sky and the elegant river Pagladia flowing thereby:

"Diganta bistrita hoi thaka gaonr seuja dhanar pathar, upar parantar akasar byapti, bananir shyamaliya, saru saru noir aru tar parar nirjanata gabhirtam kari tula daukar karun mat, bah-tamul-narikalar ghan seuja samaruh, charair madhur kal kakali...."  

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38. Borgohain, Nirupama: *Sei Nadi Nirabadhi*, p.300
With this beautiful nature, the novelist associate the village life, the peaceful and quiet life in such a beautiful natural scene is adorable to the villagers. They enjoy each moment of the day amidst nature.

"Dukmukalir nijan noir ghat, tupani bhagi utha kal-kakalir bahire kunu bhanga nakara stabdha samayar hriday khan mathit kari tuliba para dhyan gambhirata Anjalir adhut bhal laga."\(^{40}\)

However this scenic natural beauty is not enjoyable all the time. The same nature brings misfortune for those happy people in the form of flood, drought and famine. The nature didn’t support the poor inhabitants of the region who were mainly agriculture based. As a result, the poor village dwellers had to move to the city for their livelihood.

Silabhadra’s novels *Madhupur, Ahatguri* and *Agamanir Ghat* deal with the contemporary social changes, under the influence of urbanisation and modernisation. This might be the reason a kind of graceful nature portrayal is difficult to find here. The novel describes the decay and demolition of natural beauty with the advancement of machine age, under the influence of urbanization and commercialisation.

Silbhadora’s novel *Madhupur* is set on the titled location in Gauripur. Putting up the theme of conflict between the landlords and the peasants, the novel brings home the portrayal of the wide paddy lands, green fields, and the peasants working there. ‘*Madhupur*’ is a novel that concentrates more on the socio-economic changes of the Perperia village into *Madhupur* town. As a matter of fact, in this novel, picture of road construction along with the development of the trade and commerce is found instead of beautiful nature. In fact, an artificial natural beauty-man made it is, is attempted to portray in this novel. A scene, instead of trees,

\(^{40}\) Borgohain, Nirupama : *Iparar Ghar Siparar Ghar*, p. 92
novel. A scene, instead of trees, fields, birds, sky etc. is created out of houses, buildings, business establishment, industries etc. However, the novelist didn’t forget to bring forth a beautiful portrayal of Gangadhar river along with its gravel road by its bank, which very soon became replaced by the national highway:


*Agamanir Ghat* is another beautiful novel by Silabhadra set on the backdrop of ‘Agamani Ghat’ by the bank of Gadhadhar river in west Goalpara. Once again one can’t see a pure description of nature in this novel as it deals with the environment of urbanization. However the novelist draws a beautiful picture of Agamani Ghat at night, as if it is a place of some other magic imaginative world.


Mamoni Raisam Goswami’s *Dantal Hatir Unye Khowa Howda* is another masterpiece with excellent nature portrayal. Goswami’s language and style was poetic; and hence her portrayal of nature seems to be essential romantic. *Dantal Hatir Unye Khowa Howda* is set on the beautiful natural

41. Silabhadra: *Ahatguri*, p. 1
42. Silabhadra: *Agamanir Ghat*, p. 13
location of Amranga Satra and its surroundings. The huge landscape of green field amplify its beauty in presence of Jagalia river. This was the place of peace and happiness; of enjoyment for the novelist in her childhood days. She left no stone unturned to draw an amplified nature portrayal of the landscape of Jagalia. The beauty of Jagalia amidst the greenery is worth witnessing and experiencing through the pen of Goswami:

‘Souwa Jagalia. Seujia reshamar kapurar majat jen kuchi-muchi sumai ase edal nila sap’.  

This one line description of Jagalia establishes Mamoni Raisam Goswami’s excellences in nature portrayal. Her economic language with all passion and sensuous vigor makes her nature portrayal more beautiful. Goswami never gives a straight forward description in her novel. Her illusionary details and poetic description denotes a kind of esthetic beauty in her nature portrayal. Her depiction of beautiful Jagalia, as if, turns to be a poem:


Again the description of rain coming down to the landscape of Jagalia is worth mentioning in this context:

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43. Goswami, Mamoni Raisam: Dantal Hatir Unye Khowa Howda, p.305
44 Ibid, p.21
"Dhap dhap sabda kari Jagaliar balit barasunar dangar tupal paribbaloi dharile. Jen kunu marubhumir bukure edal tejaswi sena aguwai goise."

The falling of raindrop on the landscape of Jagalia brings another natural illusion of a scenic desert. The novelist also provides a beautiful portrayal of the moon, the sky, the landscape, the birds-trees etc.:

"Junakar puhare ei petromaxor puharaku mlan karise... Balur barir pach phale korobat budhhai kaji nemu phulise. Ei phular ek atyanta manuram gundha soudishe subashit kari tulise."

Mamoni Raisom Goswami was so fascinated by the nature and its beauty of Jagalia that she brings it again and again in her description. She even draws quite many similes, comparing the beauty of Jagalia with other situations. For example:

"Jen Jagaliar muga barania ghula panit duti bhagaruwa surya dub goise." 47

"Jagaliar dhaur bukut khanda-bikhanda hoi para chandramar tukurar dare tair dehar nirdista angga samuh spasta hoi uthil." 48

Here, two different natural scenery of Jagalia are drawn to illustrate Iliman’s pain due to failure in her love and Giribala’s physical charm respectively. Similarly other objects of nature are also brought very frequently in form of simile, metaphor, symbols etc.

46. Goswami, Mamoni Raisom: Dantal Hatir Unye Khowa Howda, p.176
47. Ibid, p.27
48. Ibid, p.272
Goswami's portrayal of nature is elegant, unconventional and very much poetic. She is, to much extent, similar to Hardy in her description of the landscape of Jagalia.

It is noticed that nature is equally fascinated and important to the regional novelist- whether it is Thomas Hardy or the discussed Assamese novelist. The novelist draws great nature pictures to explore the scenic beauty of the regions of their interest and to establish its relation with human world. Hardy and the Assamese novelist projected nature as the most integral and unseparable component in human life; who live amidst it. The pictorial depiction of natural elements like the hills, rivers, landscape form the real setting which helps the novels to add in its regional aspect.

A common observation among all regional novelists is that, though they are fascinated and keenly inspired in the nature portrayal in their novel, they are not entirely romantic in its presentation. It is already mentioned that Hardy didn’t always believe in Nature’s ‘holy plan’. In spite of observing the beauty of nature, Hardy always explored its gloomy and dark side. The same attitude to nature can be seen in the novels of Assamese novelist. Kapiliparia Sadhu, Sei Nadi Nirabadhi, Iparar Ghar Siparar Ghar, Dantal Hatir Unye Khowa Howda show clearly that nature doesn’t always console human world, it instead becomes the cause of misfortune as well.

Nature and the natural elements become the inseparable part in the cause of regional novel. Without its presence, the novel can’t progress with its happenings, as the nature turns to a character in it controlling the rest. For example, as Egdon Heath is to the Return of the Native, so is Kapili to Kapiliparia Sadhu,
Pagladia to Sei Nadi Nirabadhi, Jagalia to Dantal Hatir Uniye Khowa Howda, Gangadhar to Agamanir Ghat and Subansiri to Miri Jiori.

Hardy’s concept of ‘man’ being simply a part of nature is again justified by the Assamese regional novels. The nature marks as the destiny of human life. Hardy’s Wessex controlled the life of its inhabitants. They can’t get away of it when they live in it. Even the Assamese novels too prove the same point that man is just a puppet in the hands of destiny, which is the nature itself in regional novel. However a distinction can be made in terms that Hardy’s nature responded the mood of man. It influences the moods and action of Hardy’s human character; and then becomes a mere witness to their actions. The influence of nature can best be seen in Hardy’s Wessex novel. But nowhere in Hardy’s novel, nature is depicted as the cause of utter suffering as it is seen in case of Assamese novel. The Assamese regional novels depicted the devastated village life under the influence of natural disaster like flood, droughts and famine. It is, as if, nature very pleasingly harass human world. It shows no sympathy towards life. The fury of nature can be obviously seen in the novels like Sei Nadi Nirabadhi etc. In Hardy’s novel, nature is indifferent to human aspiration; whereas in Assamese novel, nature crush down human desire and ambitions. Nature responds to the mood of man in Hardy’s novels. On the other hand, nature is seen rejoicing at the cost of human suffering in Assamese regional novels.

Above all, the regional novel establishes a kind of mysterious relationship between man and nature. It is seen in case of Clym and Egdon; Rupai and Kapili, Lakshmi and Pagladia, and so on.

4.3: VISION OF LIFE
Hardy was primarily an artist, and as an artist it was his ambition to present his impression of life in a detached and objective manner. He never favoured the idea of being called a philosopher though philosophic ideas are found scattered in all his novels. He did not follow any preconceived pattern of philosophy that could be related to any particular school of thought. He was happy if he was called an artist and impressionist, recording his impressions of life in his novels. Hardy, in fact, considered a novel as a work of impression rather than philosophy. In the preface to *Tess of D’Urbervilles* he says, “A novel is an impression, not an argument. A tale-teller writes down how the things of the world strike him without any intentions whatever”.  

Hardy’s novels are impressions that the novelist gathered from life.

Hardy was profoundly influenced by his age and his environment. The saying ‘a man is what he is made’ is very much true of Hardy. His was the age when science and Industrial Revolution were making their influence felt. During the time of Hardy, revolutionary changes took place in England. Some of these changes have been summed up by G.A. Sambrook in his book ‘Introduction to the English life’ in the Nineteenth Century. In the first half of nineteenth century, according to G.A. Sambrook, the English nation adapted itself to revolutionary changes which gave great wealth and power to one section of the community, while labouring class were near starvation. The state of unemployment, misery and want which resulted from the Napoleonic Wars was aggravated due to changes in agricultural methods, and large scale enclosure. Price fluctuation and serious unemployment followed. The hardship and the sufferings of the working class encouraged suspicion and distrust, which were formatted into despair and resentment. Violence and crime were rampant. They reached a climax in the ‘Hungry Forties’. It was no wonder that people living in such condition were

50. Hardy, Thomas: *Tess of D’Urbervilles*, preface
51. Hardy, F. E.: *The Life of Thomas Hardy*, p.321
ignorant and vicious. Hardy's own native district Dorset was also greatly affected. In his letter to Sir Rider Haggard, Hardy gave an account of the condition in about 1850 or 1855. As a child, he knew a sheep-keeping boy who, to his great horror, died of want, and the contents of his stomach at the autopsy were nothing but raw turnip. The agricultural labourers of the southern district including Dorset seldom saw meat; and bread and cheese became their staple food. As a result of Napoleonic war the factory wages went high, but the farm wages went down, while the prices of bread became exorbitant. And there was thus the danger of sheer starvation among the agricultural labourers.

These conditions were really disturbing for a sensitive soul. "The Industrial Revolution was in the process of destroying old agricultural England; the population was shifting; the old ties which had united the small communities of the past were breaking bit by bit." Along with the disintegration of the old social and economic structure went the disintegration of ideas. The thoughtful people began to attack the vast and obvious social abuses. The Biblical criticism as well as the materialistic thought of Spencer and Buckle started shaking. "Eighteenth century rationalism has united with the new romantic spirit of rebellion against convention, to shake the fundamental basis of belief- religious, social, political- which the people of old England had unquestionably accepted. Since the beginning of the century, leaders of thought were more often than not, unorthodox. The mental atmosphere of the reflective minds tends to be overcast by clouds of doubts." On the other hand science was becoming prominent. Darwinian Theory of Evaluation through the book The Origin of Species came and it struck a smashing blow at all religious and ideal interpretation of the universe, which coloured Hardy's thoughts and considerably modified his way of looking at life and its problems.

52. Cecil, David: Hardy -- the Novelist, p.2
53. Ibid, p.21
As a product of rural England Hardy belong to the world that was passing. It was hallowed for him by every childish sentiment; but unfortunately it was beginning to crumble before his eyes. To his great regret Hardy noticed that old habits were being discontinued day by day. The old stories and songs were being forgotten every moment, the families settled up in certain places for generations were being uprooted every year. In such a state life seemed burdened with unbearable possibilities. The disintegration seemed to have affected Hardy all the more. Instinctively Hardy had a reverence for Christianity. But he was not a mystic. Influenced of Darwin, Mill and Huxley, in the passing of time, has helped Hardy in shaping his fatalistic notion or his tragic view of life. Hardy finds very little hope for man in the world. Naturally his philosophy began to appear profoundly gloomy. “The universe was a huge impersonal mechanism, directed by some automatic principle of life unknown, pursuing its mysterious end, and utterly indifferently to the feelings of mortals.”

Thus Hardy’s pessimistic attitude is not at all difficult to understand, if we remember that he was living in an age of sudden scientific development and a rapid change in the old accepted values. “Hardy’s pessimism arose from the contemporary scientific outlook, which left no place for Providence for Christian ideas of a God of Love. The universe spelt indifference to man, and reduced him to a level of significance little higher than that of other species. Cruelty, disease, and suffering were the consequence of the general struggle for survival.”

His pessimism, for which he is too often blamed, is indeed an outcome of the impression that he received of village’s life, in his early life. There was plenty of tragedy in the life of the poverty-stricken Wessex folk. Dependent and ignorant, exposed alike to the oppressions of the social system and the caprice of weather and ‘The President of Immortals’, at every moment of their life the

54. Cecil, David: Hardy – the Novelist, p.24
55. Pinion, F. B.: A Hardy Companion, p.179
people among whom Hardy lived and was brought up, were made conscious of man’s helplessness in the face of circumstances. So he happened to entertain a perverse view of God and His way. For him chance in its purely malevolent aspect enters human life and spoils it, brings trails and tribulations, sorrows and sufferings, pain and agony in its train. Hardy projects man’s helplessness in the face of circumstances. He believes that circumstances are more powerful than human beings. He was born pessimist as he always said ‘tragedy always underlies comedy’.

Several other influences, apart from this, worked effectively in the formation of Hardy’s impression about life. His physical ill-health, the morbidity of his temper and his general inclination towards the funeral side of things determined his melancholy and pessimistic outlook and impression about life. To quote Baker, “All his life he had a weakness for gruesome incidents, grim legends, creepy stories, accounts of spells, omens, ghost, murders, suicides and the like. He was always jotting down such things in his diary, and would visit the scene to find out all he could about some sinister event and enjoy its full flavour. He never seems to have a missed a funeral, at least of anyone distinguished or of his own kin, and is full of reminiscences of those melancholy festivals.”

Hardy approaches life and its varied vision, casting aside the romantic and the roseate views. He views life in a realistic manner. He does not look at life through the many coloured glass of romance or of fancy, but in the spirit of a detached observer accepting without any dismay what life really unfold to him. Hence Hardy’s philosophy of life is essentially tragic. His vision of life is neither attractive nor glamorous. He thinks life by no means a boon. For him “happiness is but an occasional episode in the general drama of pain”. He hates life immensely. His attitude to life is melancholic and depressive. In the words of Goodman- “He

does indeed see and present the humourous and attractive sides of his country people, but his prevailing mood is one of melancholy, inspired by the uselessness of their efforts to steer their lives against current of circumstances which they do not understand and which are far stronger than they.”

The movement of Hardy’s plots is often compared to that of the Greek tragedies. He has been considered the British Homar of pessimism. He is quite aware of the ills of life. He presumes that “tragedy always underlies comedy”. “Laughter”, he says again, “can only come through forgetfulness”. In the last sentence of *Tess of D’Urbervilles*, Hardy observes: “Justice was done, and the President of Immortals had ended his sport with Tess.” The fact is that Hardy has seen this world full of struggle, writhing in pain and agony. He does not find success, happiness, hopefulness and ruddy optimism among the people he witnessed. He came across desire, dejection, failure, frustration in human life. He notices plenty of tragedy. Whatever he actually saw and noticed, he presented in his novels.

Hardy’s attitudes towards life is pessimistic and gloomy in the sense that almost in all his tragic novels like *Tess of D’Urbervilles*, *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, *Jude the Obscure* and *The Return of the Native* we find pictures full of despair and dejection, of hopes unfulfilled, and plans uncarried out. Man proves feeble before chance, fate or destiny. Man is a helpless creature, a mere puppet in the hands of destiny or fate. Man in Hardy’s world does not enjoy Free Will. The keen eyes of fate are always looking intently on his activities with a view to intervening as and when it so likes. Man is not free to choose the type of life he wants to live. Obstacles and hindrance swarm on his path of life, and they thwart all his hopes and aspirations, though man wages a futile battle against the odds so created. It appears that man in his world has no individual life of their

own and they are controlled by fate. Fate controls them both from outside and from within. In the other words it means that fate interferes in the lives of men through some external happening. For example, Newson in The Mayor of Chasterbridge appears just at the time when Henchard most needed the help of his step-daughter Elizabeth Jane. Newson claims back Elizabeth and Henchard feels greater loneliness, which led him to desperate within the character as well. It is just a matter of fate that Jude with his intellectual aspirations also had a high degree of sensuousness, which led to his misfortune. The noted Hardy critic David Cecil says, “A struggle between the men on the one hand, on the other, an omnipotent and indifferent Fate- that is Hardy’s interpretation of the human situation.”

Hardy’s world was a glorious one, no doubt. Hardy loved his people. But he hated life intensely. He never thinks it worth living. He perceives it in the grip of cruel blind and oppressive Unknown Will. Everywhere in his novels human beings appear to be crushed by this power which is indifferent, callous and hostile to man. He considers that gods are opposed to human beings and it is their pleasure that men and women should suffer, and meet with hard knocks and blows in life. He upholds the Greek view of life according to which the gods are cruel and heartless and kill men for their sport. Hardy presents with firm conviction the working of a sinister intelligence on the affairs of human beings, and reiterates with a firm force what Shakespeare had stated- ‘like flies to the wanton boys, are we to the gods; they kill us for their sport’. Hardy even fails to uphold and justify Browning’s observation ‘God’s in his heaven, All’s right with the world’; rather, in Tess of D’Urbervilles, he controvert the former to criticize God and his wise dispensation of the Universe, and makes on of his characters to remark- God’s not in the Heaven / All’s wrong with the world.

58. Cecil, David: Hardy the Novelist, p. 26
The picture of life in Hardy’s novels is thus gloomy and pessimistic. The gloomy view of world is most strikingly expressed in his novel *Tess of the D’Urbervilles*. Referring to the numerous children of the poor and feckless Durbeyfields, Hardy complains that children are born where they are not wanted. On the other hand children are forced into the world without their having been asked “if they wished for life on any terms, much less if they wished for it on any such hard conditions as were involved in being of the shiftless house of Durbeyfield.” They are described as “passengers in Durbeyfield ship”, as “little captive under hatches compelled to sail wherever the Durbeyfield household chose to sail; into difficulty, disaster, starvation, disease, degradation or death.” Hardy does not find happiness in human life. He winds up the story of Tess with the remark that life is a sport of gods with mortals. In his *The Mayor of Chasterbridge*, he makes the pregnant observation through the mouth of Elizabeth Jane, “Life is a brief transit through a sorry world and hardly calls for effusiveness. Happiness is but the occasional episode in a general drama of pain. ..... ..... Life and its surroundings are tragical rather than comical and though one could be gay on occasion, moments of gaiety are interludes and no part of the actual drama.” Striking the keynote of Hardy’s general impression and attitude towards life, Duffin remarks- “Take it as you will, accept or reject, like or dislike his opinion, a hundred times expressed and everywhere implied is, that life is a lost, inglorious and bloody battle, a wide deep sea of mystery with but a very few flowering island, a gift so powerful that it were almost a wise man’s part to refuse it altogether.”

Hardy can be truly called a pessimistic because his outlook is gloomy and depressing through and through. His attitude towards life is undoubtedly pessimistic and gloomy that holds no hope for human beings. But his pessimism is not depressing for he exhorts us to struggle and fight against the decrees of fate.

59. Duffin, H.C.; Thomas Hardy: A Study of the Wessex Novels
and cruel destiny, rather than make a weak surrender to the majesty of sinister and malignant power governing the universe. Hardy is of the view that it is man’s lot to suffer and meet with defeat and dejection in his life, but in spite of this inevitable fate, man should strive and struggle and fight against untoward circumstances that may come in his life. He should go down fighting in a brave and heroic spirit. This attitude towards life is presented in The Mayor of Casterbridge, where the Mayor fights against the decrees of fate throughout his life though he ultimately meets his tragic end.

Hardy should be called an artist with different philosophy of life. His vision of life is essentially tragic though he was not, in fact, an unmitigated pessimist. If we note certain elements of pessimism in Hardy’s novels, it is pessimism of a very different kind. Along with the dark side there is a bright and sunny side as well in his philosophy. He is certainly not a pessimist - misanthrope like Hobbes who thinks man essentially a beast, mean, abject, detestable and an odious creature. He is a pessimist like a classical writer who considers man merely a puppet in the hands of Mighty Fate. His attitude to life is tragic rather than pessimist. Simply Hardy is more gloomy than they are. He always sees and finds Fate unjust, cruel, blind and jealous of happiness of mankind. He considers the ways of that Unknown Will immoral, unjust and condemnable.

Hardy, himself, did not like to be dubbed as pessimist. He himself advocates, a meliorist rather than a pessimist. Hardy seems to have winced at the suggestion of pessimism in his thought. He has answered the charge to pessimism in the following words—‘People call me a pessimist, and if pessimism to think, with Sophocles, that not to have been born is best, then I do not reject the designation.’ He made his view very clear in a conversation he held with William Archer in 1904, ‘‘... I believe, indeed, that a good deal of robusting, swaggering optimism of recent literature is at bottom cowardly and insincere ...’’

60. Pinion, F. B.: A Hardy Companion, p.178
my pessimism, if pessimism it be, does not involve the assumption that the world is going to the dogs .... On the contrary, my practical philosophy is distinctly meliorist. Here equally significant is the quotation from Galsworthy which Hardy kept on the framed photograph of its author: "the Optimist appears to be one who cannot bear the world as it is, and is forced by his nature to picture it as it ought to be; and the pessimist one who can not only bear the world as it is, but loves it well enough to draw it faithfully." 

Hardy’s philosophy of life is not for intellectual cowards and invalids. His pessimism will be depressing to those who are morally and intellectually incapable of standing shocks in life. Hardy is not complacent in his attitude. He does not supinely give way to cheap optimistic feelings that ‘somehow good will be at final goal of ill’. He is a sturdy realist who takes life at its face value, and what actually is the state of affairs in the world. He considers it simply wish-fulfillment to indulge in cheap optimism, when the force of evil, sadness and despair overpower us on all sides. It is foolish and unwise for anyone to be an optimist when he sees the conditions of life in a realistic and faithful light. Such is the realistic vision unfold by Hardy’s novels. He is pessimist, but his pessimism is more satisfying than optimism. Hardy’s philosophy and sturdy realism will enable human being to drive away day-dreaming and come to the realities of a hard and stern world. He bringa us home to view life realistically as it is without expecting too much from the world.

The vision of life of the Assamese regional novelists too gets reflected beautifully and vividly in their respective novels. Their vision of life gets determined by their attitudes towards life which was influenced equally by the contemporary socio-political events, social systems and their own outlook towards

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61. Pinion, F. B.: A Hardy Companion, p.179
it. However, a common touch of pessimism always prevails in all Assamese regional novels which is almost similar to that of Hardy’s.

Rajanikanta Bordoloi’s Miri Jiori was written in 1894, prior to the world wars or Indian independence. This might be the reason that his novel didn’t deal with the socio-economic concern of the author. On the other hand, Bordoloi being a true worshiper of mankind, concentrated on the feelings of nationalism and brotherhood. Depicting the human nature relationship in general and the Miri people and Subansiri in particular, the author also presented the sense of assimilation of tribal and non-tribal, of hills and plains in forming the general Assamese race. The author’s philosophy of equality, posterity and brotherhood is projected through the unity among the people. Bordoloi also made a noble attempt of providing the women equal right and high esteem, which was not a normal practice of those days.

Bordoloi’s vision of life is, that like Thomas Hardy, essentially tragic. He, through his novel, argues that life is a boon, but not always devoid of hardship. His protagonist Janki and Panei enjoys the beauty of their love amidst nature. But life brings them tremendous obstacles and they met a kind of tragic death at the end. The couple fought all hardship bravely, but at last had to surrender to their destiny, confirming Hardian idea that “Life is not at all beautiful.”

Nabakanta Baruah’s *Kapiliparia Sadhu* is written on the backdrop of a small hindu Assamese village in the middle Assam. Being a poet by nature, Baruah depicted the simple living human crowd without any ambiguity of life. The author’s love for simplicity and unity in mankind is obvious in his novel. Baruah loves human, he loves the world and considers it a place worth living. This simple vision of life of the author is illustrated by famous critic Dr. Sailen Bharali in the following words:
"Baruah’s philosophy of life which he expresses through his poetry can also be seen in his novels. It is the philosophy of humanity, of mankind, of love. He loves the world, he respects human. His vision of life is to accept the same in a simplified manner without much ambiguity. For him, hope of humanity lies with those who lead a simple, peaceful and natural life.”

As a writer of contemporary period, Nabakanta Baruah was influenced by the freedom struggle of India, which united all Indians and gave them the guts to fight for one cause. This very fact is beautifully incorporated in the novel by Rupai’s joining the movement, going to jail, meeting Tilak Gosai and inspired by Gandhian thoughts.

Nabakanta Baruah was a great preacher of humanity and brotherhood. He propagates his vision of life through the Gandhian philosophy. Through the action of Tilak Gosai’s refusal of preaching Rupai and advising him to carry on with his own work, the author expresses his own philosophy of equality and brotherhood. Tilak Gosai’s taking to physical labour against his Brahmin tradition is Baruah’s own concept of ‘dignity of labour’.

Kapiliparia Sadhu also reveals the mystery of human life. Life is never simple, though expected so. It is full of mystery that is controlled by fate and destiny. Coincidence and Chances, similar to that in Hardy’s, have the power to determine the fate of an individual in this novel. Rupai being found in Kapili by Sunpahi in flood, discovering the truth of his identity are the matter of chances that changed the course of his life. This shows that man is a mere puppet of his fate. He has no power to shape his own life. One rather submits to the willfulness

63. Baruah Nabakanta : Kapiliparia Sadhu, p.47
of destiny. This ultimate truth revealed in the novel makes the author’s vision of life essentially tragic. The Kapiliparia Sadhu very beautifully portray the pain and suffering of the poor village dwellers. Kapili’s flood destroys their life and property. But these people accept it quietly as they do understand that they have no power to resist or change their destiny:


Nabakanta Baruah draws the pathetic plight of the people of Nagaon. People die in land and water; due to disease and starvation. But they are just helpless in front of the mighty force of nature.

Nirupama Borgohain’s *Sei Nadi Nirabadhi* and *Iparar Ghar Siparar Ghar* have presented a gloomy picture of life. As a writer of post-independent era, Nirupama Borgohain had undergone the socio-economic crisis of the independent India. The world war had influenced the mind of the tiny author that she herself mentioned in her autobiography *Biswa and Sangsayar Majedi*. Borgohain, when a child, went to her ancestral village to get rid of the adverse affect of Second World War. There she saw the pathetic condition of the people living by the bank of Pagladia, which was reflected in her novels. It is obvious that her own impression of life has been well exposed in her novels. She has seen simplicity in the village life. But the changing scenario of modernity and

64. Baruah, Nabakanta : Kapiliparia Sadhu, p.1
65. Borgohain, Nirupama : Sei Nadi Nirabadhi, preface
urbanization has installed perfidy in it. Commercialization has brought curse to the sustaining virtues in rural life.

Nirupama Borgohain’s approach to life is very much realistic. Casting aside the romantic views, she depicts life as it is in real sense- impulsive, full of annoyance and obstacles. Borgohain has not seen the life through the glass of romance. Like a detached observer, the writer unfolds what life preserve for everyone. Her Lakshmi was a carefree girl - wild, fanciful, happy in association with nature. But this happiness did not prevail longer. Soon in the second half of the Sei Nadi Nirabadhi, the same Lakshmi is shown in a complete different mood. She is now a widow, mother of a child, grim, pale, unhappy. Circumstances compel her to become so. Her carefree life is gone. Now she is bound by social customs that has been determined to her by her fate. Her tragedy reached its pinnacle when she lost her child in the wild flood of Pagladia.

Nirupama Borgohain’s gloomy vision of life is firmly established in her second novel Iparar Ghar Siparar Ghar. This novel is believed to be elevated to the level of a classical tragedy, due to the profound grief experienced by its protagonist Pateswari in particular, and thereby of humankind in general. This ‘general drama of pain’ affirms Borgohain’s vision of life that is essentially Hardian. ‘Tragedy always underlies comedy’ is persuaded by the novelist in her novel.

Borgohain’s picture of life is gloomy and pessimistic. She has seen no hope for her people. Her depiction of poor villagers- poverty stricken and starving prove this point. People in Iparar Ghar Siparar Ghar fail to sustain an honest and healthy living in the region depicted. Flood, famine shattered their life and the rapidly changing economic strategy didn’t help them live in peace. They become strangers in their own land. People migrate to the city in search of two square meals. The influence of industrialization and commercialization shattered rural
economy. The rural life faced an adverse condition. This socio-economic tragic situation is beautifully portrayed in Nirupama Borgohain’s novels.

Borgohain’s Pateswari is often compared with Hardy’s Tess who for no fault of her own suffers her whole life, becoming the victim of hostile circumstances which is not under her control. Through this character, the novelist projects her own vision of life which is essentially tragic and pessimistic. Pateswari elopes with her lover only to be rejected and deserted by him. She took shelter in a woman hostel just to gather the worst experience of her life. She marries Chajun as if to have offered herself to other men. Her return to village after her husband’s death is also not happy at all. The real struggle for survival begins here. But she has been bold and courageous enough to guard herself now. This pathetic life of Pateswari by no means illustrates that life is a boon and worth living. There could be no more misfortune for an Indian woman to have been compelled by her own husband to share her chastity with other men. But this is life. It compels human to accept whatever comes their way. They have no choice. They are helpless in front of situation, in the hands of destiny.

Borgohain has presented her concept of loneliness and isolated life in her novels. Her own personal life being such, Nirupama Borgohain upholds the idea of solitary of human life. It is essentially a philosophic attitude to life that one has to face life all alone in true sense. Lakshmi in Sei Nadi Nirabadhi gains the company of Dipu only for a few moments. Thereafter she leads a lonely life of widowhood. Pateswari has none whom she could call her near and dear. The one who loved her betrayed her. Everybody wants her beautiful body; once the beauty is gone, no one bothered about her. Thus alienation and loneliness has become a central matter in the author’s vision of life, which in turn makes it really pessimistic and hopeless.
Silabhadra in his novels projected a world he was passing by. He was the product of a twentieth century world which was tremendously influenced by industrialization and commercialization. On the other hand the World War, Indian Independence, rise of modernism etc. also influenced his creative soul. He witnessed the economic progress in society on one hand while on the other he observed the demolition of age old customs, rituals, virtues and beliefs. All these incidents and components shaped his philosophy of life which is revealed in his novels *Madhupur*, *Ahatguri* and *Agamanir Ghat*.

In *Madhupur*, Silabhadra exposed the hypocrisy of the wealthy class as well as the misery of the poor peasants. Silabhadra cries for the workers and lower class of people and advocates their rise with the advancement of new economic progress. The novelist unfolds the tragedy of the upper class, who are no more capable of maintaining the pace of social changes. Life is not all the same for all throughout. Time changes for all; and the one who keeps pace with it only may succeed in life.

*Ahatguri* shows the impact of commercialization on the virtues of rural life. With the advancement of trade and commerce, *Ahatguri* witnesses only material prospects. Roads constructed, new buildings, establishment, shops, offices were set up. But there were no spiritual gain. People lost their happiness and charm of life. The society gets divided into two distinguished section—the rich and the poor. And the life of the poor, who live on begging, is the source of tragedy in the novel. Nilambar, the protagonist, remain lonely as his all known faces disappears from his old Perperia village:

"The local people immediately sold their land. Some were confiscated by the Government. Other bought by various people. The native dwellers migrated to somewhere else, selling their own"

66. Silabhadra : *Madhupur*, p.46
land here. Some went to interior villages. After all there was not
a single family in the Mandal Chuburi. "66

The new Madhupur is full of strangers. Nobody knows the other one. People live an alienated life in an urban city. Though Nilambar’s hard work and honesty helped him to confirm his existence in Ahatguri, the fact is that no one bothers his honesty now. Being busy with a mechanical life of keeping up pace, he lost his familiar life. Thus Silabhadra shows that industrialization and urbanization is in the process of destroying the beauty and charm of rural life.

Agamanir Ghat presents the same attitude of life. Here the novelist depicts the picture of poor workers and their miserable life. Silabhadra whole heartedly supported the progressive living style of people in the modern era, but at the same time he laments on the destroyed humanity which occurred due to the rise of material prospect.

Mamoni Raisom Goswami is one of the most comprehensive writers of modern Assamese literature. She has explored social injustice in all her writings, especially when it comes to the injustice done to women; Goswami is excellent in her creation. Her novels establish that life is full of injustice, oppression and obstructions; and these become the main themes of her writings. Hence wherever she has seen injustice and inequality she has raised her voice against it. The novelist sympathizes those oppressed ones and this sympathy denotes a profound sense of tragedy to her novels:

"Naribadi lekhika Dr. Mamoni Raisom Goswamiye upanyas rachanar jariate shramik, nari aru artajanar prati teur hridayar aseem sahanubhuti pradarshan kari uchit bicharar babe kalam astrare pratibad janaise. Phalat teur man sukabhibhut hoi parise."67

Goswami’s *Dantal Hatir Unye Khowa Howda* and *Nilakanthi Braza* reveal her vision of life clearly, which is tragic, pessimistic but full of humanitarian. In both the novels, Goswami portrays the tragic life of women, especially that of Hindu widows. The age old customs and unreasonable traditional values don’t allow a young widow to live the share of her life. They are deprived of all facilities and enjoyment. Happiness seems to be a strange feeling in their lives. In a male dominated social tradition, the women are helpless. But the novelist couldn’t appreciate their traditional values and hence, made a rebel through the characters of Giribala and Saudamini.

Both Giribala and Saudamini seem to be the novelist’s mouthpiece in revealing her own philosophy of life. She is not ready to accept and follow the wane out practices. Discarding all social orthodox custom, Giribala mixes with Mark Chahab, goes with him to the villages to find manuscripts. She even dares to spend a night with Mark Chahab, whom she loved dearly. However, Giribala ended up her life at the end submitting herself to the fate. This rebellious character has turned out to be a mere puppet at the hands of destiny.

Saudamini, in *Nilakanthi Braza* too makes a rebel by not following the rules for the Radheswamies, as she has seen their wretched life. She protested in front of her mother saying that she is an independent soul. She couldn’t sacrifice her life like a prophet for the benefits of others:

> "Moi mahioshi nahau je tumalukar dare janakalyanmulak kam kari moi mur gutei jivan atibahit kariba parim. Moi swadhin, moi kaku bhoi nakaru.....!" 68

Again the same Saudamini, in spite of availing the chance of being united with her Christian beloved, commits suicide. The novelist herself revealed that a tendency to suicide operate many a times in her own life. This might be the

68. Goswami, Mamoni Raisom : *Nilakantha Braza*, p.54
reason why her rebellious characters took to suicide. Whatsoever, with this the author undoubtedly disclose her pessimistic view of life.

Goswami’s tragic vision of life prevails throughout her novels. The suffering of the peasants, their falling to the intoxication of kaani that brings their destruction etc. are essentially tragic description. In *Dantal Hatir Unye Khowa Howda*, we see tragedy of many other characters; Durga, Ilimani, Indranath—all these characters live life with untold tragedies in their life. The pathetic plight of the Radheswamies in *Nilakanthi Braza* is unexplainable. Goswami’s novels reveal the fact that human is mere slave to circumstances. None can defy it. The novelist, no doubt created some strong characters who challenged their fate and tried to make their own destiny. However at the end all of them surrendered in the ‘general drama of pain’.

A close discussion of the Wessex novels and the Assamese regional novels reveals that the discussed novelists were profoundly influenced by their contemporary socio-economic and political environment. They all practised social realism in their creations. Their novels were the impression of their own life; and all of them have seen life closely, from a realistic viewpoint. Hardy as well as the Assamese regional novelists don’t have a romantic fascination towards life. For them, life is not a bed of roses; rather it is full of will and woes. The regional novelists attempt to depict life with all its simplicity in a rural background amidst the mighty power of nature. But at the same time, the adverse influence of industrialisation, urbanization and commercialisation shattering the simplicity of rural life is portrayed very realistically.

Hardy and the Assamese novelists have seen life as it is. Obviously, that tragedy always underlies comedy is well understood and well established in their novels. The most common vision of life that can be seen in all regional novels is
essentially tragic. Hardy and the discussed Assamese novelists examine the untold sufferings of human life.

Hardy discussed his characters as helpless creatures. Life is powerless in front of its destiny. The same vision of life can also been in the Assamese regional novels. Nabakanta Baruah and Nirupama Borgohain’s novels project human helplessness in the hands of mighty nature. Mamoni Raisom Goswami and Silabhadra’s novels discuss human vulnerability amidst man made customs and circumstances. Due to this portrayal of human despair and disaster, most of Harddy’s Wessex novels and the discussed novels of Nabakanta Baruah, Nirupama Borgohain, Mamoni Raisom Goswami’s novels attain the level of classical tragedies.

This gloomy and tragic vision of life made Hardy a pessimist, which he is always alleged off. It is because Hardy discussed the dark side of life, and he has done it without showing sympathy to life. The Assamese novelists have done the same. Lakshmi and Pateswari’s whole life suffering and getting no reward till the end, Saudamini and Giribala’s suicide to assert their rebel against social dogmatism expose those writers pessimism.

It is seen that the discussed novelists try to provide their impression that it is mere folly to seek happiness at the hands of destiny or providence. Man can only learn to face adversity in a heroic manner. Abandoned by God, treated with scorn by nature, man lies helpless at the mercy of those unkind doomsters-accident, chance and fate. The novelists, through their novels, urge humans to face their destiny bravely.