Chapter – VII

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It is obvious that a novelist draws his inspiration from the life itself. The knowledge he gathers and the experience he accumulates provide him his writing materials; and with his imaginary genius the novelist produce a great piece of art. A novel is ‘a personal, a direct impression of life’ as observed by Henry James. Ifor Evans defines it as ‘a narrative in prose, based on a story, in which the author may portray character, and life of the age, and analyze sentiment and passions, and relations of men and women to the environment, with a setting of writer’s own times, or the past’. It is palpably clear that novelist always aim to draw life and reveal human nature. This interest of an author’s depicting life resulted in the development of regional novel, which chiefly endeavor to establish physical existence of man in its social as well as natural environment of a particular place or location that is, in most cases, a rural background, away from the commotion of modern mechanical life.

The growth of regional novel can be traced everywhere in world literatures. The English and the Assamese literature, without exception, have their own trend of regional novel. These two trends have been discussed here in the form of contextual comparison, taking a few selected novelists and their novels, only to find out much similarities between them. The study has been framed in seven chapter divisions. A brief summing up of each chapter has been given here.

The first chapter attempts a general discussion on the nature of regional novel. It gives a brief idea of the growth of English regional novel asserting

1. James, Henry: The House of Fiction, p.29
2. Evans, Ifor: A Short History of English Literature, p.149
Thomas Hardy as one of the most prominent regional novelists of English literature. It is seen that the trend of regional novel started quite late by Maria Edgeworth with her *Castle Rackrent* (1800). Nevertheless, the same has been practiced and popularized by many novelists including Walter Scott, Bronte sisters, George Eliot, Thomas Hardy, Arnold Bennett and many more. It can also be observed that relatively few regional novels were published in the first half of the 19th century, but they grew in popularity during the late Victorian and Edwardian periods. Again during the 20th century such writing declined during both world wars, but gained new impetus from the 1950s onwards.

Among the regional novelists of English literature, Hardy gained utmost attention with his unique contribution to the genre. The genre achieved maturity in his works, set in a fictive Wessex, where an appreciation of both aesthetic and geological aspects of landscape complements a concern with agricultural and economic issues. The physical features of Wessex; its hills and dales, rivers, pastures, meadows, woodland and heaths appear and reappear in all his works. Hardy hardly left any part of the region unexplored. With the geography of Wessex Hardy explored its man and manners. This imparts his work a kind of scenic continuity and a touch of realism difficult to match in any fiction. This is the reason why Hardy is assessed as the master of the masters in the field of regional novel. Hardy’s greatness and popularity as a novelist has been discussed and criticized by many critics since his lifetime. Among them were Lionel Johnson, W. L. Phelps, D. H. Lawrence, H.C Duffin, David Cecil, Douglas Brown, Ian George, F. B. Pinion etc., who unanimously agreed Hardy’s greatness as a regional novelist affirming his claim as a novelist of ‘character of environment’.

The second chapter deals with Hardy’s background - the socio-economic and political situation of Hardy’s age; and their impacts on his novels. 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. As a sensitive man,
Hardy observed these changes and unveiled his impressions of life through his
creative art.

Hardy opted to choose his own district of England as the physical
background of his novel, which he called Wessex (the land of West Saxons). He
resurrected the old name of the locality, Wessex, which comprises Dorset,
Wiltshire, Hampshire, parts of Berkshire and Somerset. Hardy first used the term
‘Wessex’ in his Far from the Madding Crowd and gradually developed it into
different regions as South-, Mid-, Upper-, North-, Lower- and Outer Wessex.
The setting of Wessex along with its people and their customs and traditions
provided a solid background to Hardy’s Wessex novels. It is rarely seen that a
man of genius ties himself to his native place as closely as Hardy has done.

Discussing the major Wessex novels in brief, it is seen that Hardy basically
portrays life in rural background amidst the nature and being dominated by it.
Human life being reduced to a mere puppet in the hands of wild nature and
destiny is the chief theme of Hardy’s novel. He also explores the adverse effect
of industrialization and economic development: decline of religious ethics and
folk tradition, emotionless urbanization and the unraveling of universally held
moral codes. Hardy also discloses and criticizes the aristocratic hypocrisy of
social class, higher education and marriage institution.

The third chapter attempts to discuss Assamese Regional Novels
highlighting its background, themes and technique. Assamese regional novel took
birth in the hands of Rajanikanta Bordoloi. His Miri Jiori (1894) began the
genre, which was followed by many; out of which the regional novels of
Rajanikanta Bordoloi, Nabakanta Baruah, Nirupama Bragohain, Silabhadra and
Mamoni Raisom Goswami were taken for discussion. A detail study on the
background of their novels reveals the fact that most of the Assamese regional novels centres round the setting of river. Subansiri in *Miri Jiori*, Kapili in *Kapiliparia Sadhu*, Pagaladiya in *Sei Nadi Nirabadhi* and *Iparar Ghar Siparar Ghar*, Gadadhar in *Agamanir Ghat*, Jagalia in *Dantal Hatir Unye Khowa Howda* prove this point. They all appeared as the life force of the respective novels as Wessex appeared in Hardy’s. Again, all the novels take rural setting as their background. The village areas, its simple peasants and their traditions, customs and lifestyle add to the background of these novels.

Assamese regional novels deal with a number of themes with the priority being given to human-nature relationship. The impact of modernization and influence of urbanization and their affects on rural life is beautifully displayed in these novels. The contemporary socio-economic and political scenarios like freedom struggle, Indian independence, impact of Second World War, industrial revolution etc. and their effects are also obvious. Human intimacy with nature, then-prevailing social dogmas’, common people’s psychology of facing life in all favourable and adverse situation, struggle for livelihood, social injustice, exploitation by the wealthy class, suppression of woman etc. are some of the themes seen in these novels.

A brief introduction of the technique of the Assamese regional novel is given in this chapter as the same has been elaborately discussed in the sixth chapter again in a comparative form with that of Thomas Hardy.

An integrated study of the second and the third chapter reveals the fact there are much common in English and Assamese regional novels in terms of their background and theme. Both Hardy and Assamese regional novelists have banked on rural background where nature plays a vital role in dominating the life of the characters. Nature-human harmony and struggle, disclosing the pathos of
The rustic, adverse effect of industrialization and urbanization, decay of folk tradition etc. are the common themes practiced by all the regional novelist.

The fourth chapter draws the similarities and differences between Hardy’s Wessex novels and Assamese regional novels. The chapter has been discussed in three sub-headings, namely (i) Regionalism, (ii) Nature portrayal and (iii) Vision of Life. The basic concept of regionalism can be noticed in all selected regional novels in their very selection of a particular region as the setting and background of their respective novels. Hardy’s range was strictly limited within the four walls of his region, Wessex. In all his novels, the scenes and characters were taken from this region. Similarly Rajanikanta Bordoloi’s Miri Jiori was set on a Mising village on the bank of Subonsiri in Lakshimpur, Nabakanta Baruah explored the west part of the Nagaon district, Nirupama Borgohain depicted the backward villages in Nalbari district, Silabhadra rediscovered Gauripur region of West Goalpara and Mamoni Raisom Goswami provided beautiful pen picture of Jagalia in South Kamrup. All these novelists are equally successful in upholding the concerned regions with their scenic beauty.

The regional novels are aided by their characters; native to the soil, rooted to the traditions. Brought up in a peasant community, Hardy was superbly successful in drawing the portraits of the natives of Wessex with all their tastes, habits, likes and dislikes, joys and miseries. Every event of his novel, therefore, took 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-thresher, dairy-maids and shepherds and shepherdesses. The Assamese regional novelist were equally successful in portraying their characters with their man and manners. The customs, traditions, dogmatism, rights, rituals, festivals and believes etc. are beautifully projected in
their novels. The novelists admired the simplicity and virtues of the regional folk that include the peasants, workers, daily labourers, shopkeepers etc. and sympathized with their sufferings and pain as well.

However, Wessex and its folk were more focused and more elaborately discussed in Hardy’s novels compared to that of the regions in Assamese literature; as Hardy explored the same land again and again rarely leaving a small part undetected throughout his fifteen books.

It is undoubtedly agreed that Hardy was very successful in his portrayal of nature. His picture of Wessex is the most elaborate study of landscape in English literature. Hardy’s love for nature and the earth was an intensely personal and local one. He showed a profound feeling for the heaths and pastures of Wessex. Nature is ever present in his story. Nature equally plays a vital role in the Assamese regional novel too. The beautiful scenery of Subansiri, the surroundings of Kapili, landscape of Pagladia and the countryside of Jagalia were made immortal in the respective novels.

Nature is just not the background of the discussed novels; it becomes a leading character in it. It exercises an active influence on the course of the event dominating the lives of the characters. It becomes an inseparable entity of the story, a life force of the novel. Egdon Heath in *The Return of the Native*, the Hintock wood in *The Woodlanders*, Kapili river in *Kapiliparia Sadhu*, Pagladia river in *Sei Nadi Nirabadhi* etc. are the best examples of this fact.

The most striking feature is that all the regional novelists have equally emphasized the gloomy part of nature. Apart from being beautiful and pleasant nature is an agent of cruelty and destruction. Egdan Heath is the very spot where many lives are crushed. Pagladia is the root cause of all suffering of Lakshmi and the other villagers, and so on.
In both Wessex and Assamese novels nature is eminently portrayed as a force that controls the fate of people accustomed to it. However, nature in Assamese novels plays a more vicious and treacherous part playing with human life, often taking it away. Nature inspires human in Hardy’s novel whereas it discourages humanity in Assamese regional novel; it is depicted nonresponsive to human existence in Assamese regional novel. In other words, Hardy describes Nature responding to the mood of man, whereas nature exalts at the cost of man according to Assamese novelists.

The vision of life for the regional novelist is essentially tragic. As a product of contemporary age Hardy and the Assamese novelists faced tremendous socio-economic and political turmoil. Hardy was influenced by scientific progress and Industrial Revolution whereas the Assamese novelists were influenced by the World War, freedom struggle, and adverse economy of Independent India. Hence the presentation of chaotic contemporary scenarios and their adverse effect on rural life made the novels tragic, gloomy and full of pessimism.

Hardy viewed life in a realistic manner. He did 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 is a boon. For him “happiness is but an occasional episode in the general drama of pain”. Hardy 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 trials and tribulations, sorrows and sufferings, pain and agony in its train. Hardy projected man’s helplessness in the face of circumstances. The Assamese regional novels are equally pessimistic in nature. Each novel shows that humans are the victim of chance or fate. The dogmatism and orthodoxy of contemporary social system added to the suffering
of individuals. Life is not beautiful. *Iparar Ghar Siparar Ghar, Madhupur, Agamanir Ghat, Nilakanthi Braza* etc. depicted the struggle for living in a hostile world. The Assamese regional novels proved that circumstances are more powerful than human beings. The discussed regional novels asserted that ‘tragedy always underlies comedy’.

The *fifth chapter* highlights the literary technique and art of characterisation of Thomas Hardy and Assamese regional novels. Naturally, use of technique varies for different writers. Being a product of late Victorian era, Thomas Hardy wrote in a conventional method, but with a modern outlook. His use of point of view was conventional for his time in literary history, which could also be described as a third person or omniscient point of view. Hardy used a third person narrative in almost all his Wessex novels. In spite of domination of characters, Hardy’s novels were not plotless. He was the follower of the old traditions. There was the superb blending of the idea with the character in Hardy’s novels. An architect by his early training, Hardy gave to his novels a design that is architectural. His deliberate use of symbols, metaphors etc. had helped him achieve his goal. Being a regional novelist, Hardy incorporated with the use of marvelous to highlight the orthodoxy and dogmatism of his Wessex. Hardy established the supremacy of nature and man’s yielding to it in his novels.

The Assamese novelists too successfully incorporated a variety of techniques in Assamese regional novels. Nabakanta Baruah’s *Kapiliparia Sadhu* was written in biographical style. Written in the traditional method, the novelist made ample use of symbols and imagery. In poetic language the novelist tried to disclose the mysteries of life. Nipupama Borgohain’s both the novels were written in a descriptive method. The novelist’s projecting Pagladia River as a character of the novel that controlled the fate of the region is a fine technique that resembles Thomas Hardy all the way. Silabhadra’s novels were more or less experimental.
His *Madhupur* and *Agamanir Ghat* were written in autobiographical method whereas *Ahatguri* had a third person narration. Silabhadra’s novels did not develop a well-knit plot. Instead he used a new technique of threading various episodes to build-up his storyline. Mamoni Raisom Goswami’s novels revealed human psychology, especially that of women. While doing so, the novelist employed Freud’s psychological theories by using dreams and other symbols.

Hardy’s creative power is best exhibited in the portrayal of characters. We have Jude Fawley, Gabriel Oak, Angel Clare, Michael Henchard, Clym Yeobright, and Giles Winterbore who are some of the male characters. They make deep impression on the minds of the readers. Among the male characters, there are unforgettable secondary characters such as, Boldwood, Farfrae, Philloston, Troy, Alec d’Urberville and Jocelyn Pustin. They are the finest examples of human weaknesses and virtues. Forgoing all male, one may still have a gallery of everlasting delight in Hardy’s females- Tess, Sue, Bathsheba, Elizabeth Jane, Grace and Marty. Hardy showed wonderful grasp of womanly ‘nature’ in them. Each character of Hardy belonged to earth. They are lifelike, packed with all human emotions- good, bad, virtuous and with selfish desires and motives. The Assamese regional novels too introduced some of the great characters drawn from the soil. Rupai, Sunpahi, Tilak Gosai, Dipu, Laxmi, Pateswari, Indranath, Giribala, Durga, SaruGosani, Saoudamini etc. Like that in Hardy, these characters are drawn from the respective regions confirming to their native colour. Nabakanta Baruah’s Rupai reminds Hardy’s Clym whereas Nirupama Borgohain’s Pateswari resembles Tess. The rebel seen in Giribala or Saudamini can also be found in the characters of Hardy. The Assamese regional novels seemed to give more emphasis on developing women characters as it is seen in case of Hardy. With the exception of Silabhadra who concentrated on profile characters, both English and Assamese regional novels successfully developed their characters.
The *sixth chapter* attempts to discuss the style and expression of the novels. Style is as essential for a prose writer as passion for a poet. Hardy’s style is essentially of the philosophic type. There is simplicity in his style. His words are the simplest, appropriate, well-chosen and well consorted by the scholar’s discrimination. It might not be called brilliant or agile, but it gives a comfortable sense of dealing with reality. Similar type of simple but significant style can be seen in all the discussed Assamese regional novels. The simple style and expression of Assamese novels creates a general effect of gravity and deliberation too. A tragic style also predominates the Wessex and Assamese regional novels. *The Mayor of Casterbridge, Jude the Obscure, Tess of D’Urbervilles, Sei Nadi Nirabadhi, Iparar Ghar Siparar Ghar, Nilakanthi Braza* etc. are good examples of this.

Another dominant style that can be seen in most of the novels of Hardy and some of the Assamese novels is the ‘the pastoral style’ that reflect the prose of a poet. This type of style predominates in Hardy’s *Far from the Madding Crowd, The Woodlanders, Tess of D’Urbervilles* and *The Return of the Native*. Nabakanta Baruah’s *Kapiliparia Sadhu* is purely a pastoral Assamese novel while *Sei Nadi Nirabadhi, Dantal Hatri Uniye Khowa Howda* etc. do carry a pastoral touch.

The use of Wessex dialect made Hardy’s novel unique. Hardy did not consider the dialect of his native Wessex to be inferior to Standard English. However, he uses it with the touch of a master hand. He makes but a sparing use of the local words of Wessex dialect because he rightly understands that a phonograph of Wessex dialect will spoil the dialogues. He successfully 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 into our ears. He also made use of local proverbs, idioms, folksongs etc. to bring out the true picture of the Wessex.
region. The discussed Assamese novels also made ample use of local dialects of their concerned regions. Borgohain used Nalbaria dialect, Silabhadra the Goalparia whereas Goswami incorporated Kamrupia variety. Use of local language and expression along with standard Assamese helped the novels to attain the status of typical regional novels.

The above study reveals that the Wessex novels and Assamese regional novels share much in common. It is seen, as a whole, that inspite of geographical, social, economic and cultural differences the regional novels, be it be English or Assamese, make a kind of universal appeal as it chiefly deals with humanity. And the human emotions, feelings, pain and pleasure are universal devoid of national or geographical boundaries.